



Learning from the local

The Newtown Neighbourhood Project Final Report

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Executive Summary

The Newtown Neighbourhood Project (NNP) was delivered by West Kent Extra, the community development arm of West Kent Housing Association (West Kent), and Real Strategies Ltd, with research and evaluation support by the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), Goldsmiths University of London. The project was funded by the Housing Corporation under their Innovation and Good Practice Programme 2006/2007.

The research area, Newtown (Hopefields Ward)¹, sits on the southern outskirts of London. It is an area with a specific history that includes long associations with Traveller and Gypsy communities in Kent. Significant numbers of people of Gypsy/Traveller origins now live in housing in two wards in the area. Gypsy/Traveller people in this area have been living in houses, in some instances for several generations, and many are intermarried with the local non-Gypsy/Traveller population. This situation presented particular research questions and challenges as well as a great many learning opportunities.

The NNP is an action research project. This means that it aims for both research outcomes (creating knowledge) and practical outcomes (*creating change*), and it attempts to involve a range of 'stakeholders', each with their own perspectives on, and agendas for, the project.

This report sets out the project's geographical and **strategic and policy context** and its **main findings** and **recommendations** and offers suggestions for promising practice. Local Issues are discussed in relation to wider policy debates around community cohesion,

community development and neighbourhood improvement. We anticipate that it will be useful reading for a range of audiences including policy-makers, community development professionals, housing professionals, action researchers, those working with Gypsy/Roma people and Travellers of Irish heritage and those working with white working class communities, as well as academics in these fields.

The Newtown Neighbourhood Project aimed to:

- Bring agencies and local people together to improve the neighbourhood of Hopefields in Newtown through a participatory action research and community/neighbourhood development approach.
- Begin to improve neighbourhood relations in Newtown.

In so doing, the aim was to:

- Better understand inter-relations between residents, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin and non-Traveller residents in the Newtown area.
- Build on existing models of neighbourhood action planning developed by West Kent and West Kent Extra with Real Strategies Ltd.
- Identify ways of accessing and engaging residents, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin.
- Explore the neighbourhood-level impact of current professional practice around the inclusion of people, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin.
- Disseminate lessons on the above.

¹ The name of the ward in which the research took place has been changed in order to ensure some anonymity.

The project presented an opportunity to assess the value of current models of neighbourhood community development in bringing local people together and to assess the more general value of taking a participative neighbourhood approach to social cohesion. The project was carried out through the *Neighbourhood Know How* participative action research model that is discussed in full in section 4 of the findings.

Setting the scene: Policy context

A range of policy agendas comes together in the question of the *neighbourhood*, which is increasingly framed as the key site of policy intervention and the primary location of belonging and citizenship. Simultaneously, the ways in which neighbourhoods are governed, managed and planned is changing too, with Registered Social Landlords expected to take on an increased role as anchor organisations with the possible 'know how' to work with residents and build inclusion. This opens up not only new possibilities for resident engagement, but also new questions of practice.

Methodology: What the project did

The NNP was in two phases.

Phase 1 was a '*finding out*' phase that included:

- Desk research: Background information was gathered in a number of ways, including via a media review of representations of the locality.
- Street research: The project team conducted informal interviews at street level.
- Agency audit: The project team interviewed local agencies.
- Visual methods: Young people were engaged via arts sessions.
- Peer research: Residents were trained in doing research and went on to survey other

residents about neighbourhood concerns and priorities for improvement.

Phase 2 was an '*action*' phase using reflective practice with residents and agencies as a tool for community and service development and neighbourhood change. Each of these phases offered lessons that are summarised below.

1. Learning from the local: Neighbourhood improvement and neighbourhood management

Neighbourhood improvement requires identifying common ground amongst residents and bringing together 'agency-down' and 'resident-up' interests, as well as cross-agency and intra-community shared agendas. Transparency is important to the success of this approach since an intervention must be seen to be doing this; it is an issue of transparency in practice. Both agencies and residents need a great deal of encouragement and support to stay involved in the neighbourhood planning and improvement process. Housing associations can act as 'community anchors' and bring together the many elements of neighbourhood renewal. They are in an advantageous position to bring about neighbourhood renewal as they have a natural concern with a variety of neighbourhood issues. Importantly, in residents' eyes they are a natural link between 'the home' (private) and 'the neighbourhood' (public) spheres. They are therefore ideally placed to access and involve residents.

Key finding:

Housing associations are particularly well placed to lead, or be key partners in, neighbourhood-based community development work, bringing together both a strategic outlook and on-the-ground knowledge.

Recommendations:

For local authorities, local strategic partnerships and neighbourhood-level strategic bodies:

Work with both residents and agencies to identify a shared agenda for change through an interactive research process leading to informed, 'fair' actions that bring tangible change.

For housing sector organisations:

Where there are no existing 'anchor organisations' in neighbourhoods, social landlords may be well placed to take on this role, acting as an interface between residents and agencies to deliver change based on a shared vision and anchoring local community activity in a sustainable way.

Promising practices:

Exercises which the project found to be effective, particularly in Phase 2 of the project, included:

- Involving residents in identifying their own and other residents' priorities for change in the neighbourhood.
- Involving agencies, through an audit process, in identifying their priorities for change in the neighbourhood.
- Briefing agencies on emerging resident priorities and working with the agencies to identify deliverable 'quick wins' that also led into a strategic approach to change.
- Encouraging agencies to come together to share local intelligence and good practice.
- Facilitating involvement activities that help residents understand how agencies work and how neighbourhood improvement can be delivered in practical terms.
- Finding alternatives to carrying out the majority of resident involvement through meetings. For example, involving residents in

practical aspects of project delivery, visiting key resident contacts in their homes and setting up enjoyable, arts-based activities.

2. Diverse neighbourhoods, cohesive communities: Cohesion and interrelations between people

Shared public spaces and residential areas have been identified by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) as one of the key spheres where a focus on interaction can help build cohesion. The housing sector and agencies that have a neighbourhood focus play vital roles in building community cohesion. Rather than starting to bring people together through a recognition of 'identities' or 'communities of interest', we set out to ask questions about the neighbourhood. As the neighbourhood represents 'common ground', its improvement is the measure by which many residents assess the meaning and success of agency activity. The project dealt with issues of interrelation and cohesion as they emerged from this process. However, this focus on place must be seen as a tool, a starting point, and not as the final word in building cohesion. Thus the project moved from a focus on place and common ground to the possibility of safely talking about different groups in the community and the need to recognise and reach them.

Key finding:

Taking a focus on what people have in common - a shared future - as a starting point is more effective as a tool for community cohesion than starting with a focus on different identities and problems. Once this common ground has been identified, the issue of exclusions, differences and inequalities can begin to be raised, targeted and monitored.

Recommendations:*For agencies:*

Develop community cohesion interventions that avoid contributing to tensions, while acknowledging that there are inequalities within neighbourhoods and between neighbours. In order to do this, take up opportunities or initiate activities that focus on shared neighbourhood concerns.

Work sensitively with specific ethnic groups (in relation to and recognising other ethnic and social groups in the community), avoiding 'clumsy multiculturalism' which can perpetuate differences amongst those whom it often seeks to bring together.

Promising practices:

Examples of how the project worked to sustain the focus on place rather than on difference and which could be replicated in other areas, included:

- Avoiding the use of labels (i.e. not badging activities with titles that associate them with a particular group in the neighbourhood). For example, the project was never badged locally as a 'Gypsy/Traveller project', but as a 'local project'.
- Avoiding focusing on problems. Rather than always focusing on what was wrong with the area, the project focused on solutions and changes for the better. This avoids getting caught up in the cycle of stigmatisation and blame whereby interventions to improve an area can perpetuate the image of the area as 'deprived' and problematic.
- Beginning to reclaim the area's history was useful. We celebrated the positive aspects of the area and its story, drawing on narratives of place. This helped generate good news stories about the area and thus contributed to a positive shared future.
- Integrating images of local landmarks and

objects that had meaning for different sections of the neighbourhood in publicity was a subtle way in which the project depicted inclusive and common ground.

- Repeated use of the words "your neighbourhood" helped establish common ground.
- Using researched common neighbourhood issues and resident researchers to determine service improvement and project ideas - in a way that was transparent and seen to be fair - was important to establishing common ground.

3. Working with diversity: including Gypsy/Traveller origin residents in neighbourhood work

3.1 Ethnic monitoring of service provision

Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage are identified as ethnic groups and covered by the Race Relations Acts as minority ethnic communities. These communities are, therefore, subject to legal rights and protections. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities frequently experience social exclusion and discrimination. Monitoring the use of service ethnicity, including by those of Gypsy/Traveller origin, and other social characteristics is key to ensuring that equitable, quality neighbourhood delivery gets off the ground. Alongside this, there need to be imaginative and locally meaningful strategies for encouraging declaration. Agencies have a crucial role in taking an inclusive approach to Gypsy/Traveller clients in order to encourage declaration, monitor service take up and develop services accordingly.

Key finding:

There is a lack of robust and joined-up data around Gypsy/Traveller origin populations. Under-declaration has a major impact on the

ability of services to plan and target provision for these populations and for research to present an accurate picture of conditions on the ground. The solution is developing and implementing inventive means of data collection and correlation.

Recommendations:

For national bodies:

Promote the inclusion by local services of ethnic monitoring categories for Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage.

Provide guidance on encouraging declaration from these groups.

For agencies:

Adopt ethnic monitoring categories for Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage while working with other agencies to develop locally meaningful sub-categories where relevant.

Develop locally tailored strategies for encouraging declaration from these groups.

Promising practices:

Monitoring service take-up in order to develop services that take into account those of Gypsy/Traveller origin will need a range of monitoring activity and adaptations such as:

- Building trust on the ground.
- Staff awareness raising and training on the relevance and subtleties of service monitoring and development.
- Finding ways to ensure that verbal declarations to housing staff find their way into formal monitoring information so that it can inform service developments.
- Giving consideration to locally informed and tailored monitoring categories.
- Using imaginative, verbally-based monitoring methods.
- Piloting sensitive ways of actively

encouraging declaration.

In the housing sector, the following practices could be adopted:

- Having positive images and references to Gypsy/Traveller residents at housing offices in order to encourage declaration.
- Adopting a respectful, open and accepting attitude that will encourage declaration.
- Ensuring that the Current housing situation section of housing register application forms includes caravans in order to open up discussions that could result in declaration.
- Giving sensitive explanations of why ethnicity is monitored to encourage declaration.

3.2 Agency practice with housed residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin

Key findings:

People of Gypsy/Traveller origin are often housed in areas already experiencing a lack of resources, which has the potential to exacerbate community cohesion issues. Newly-housed Travellers face particular issues for community development work.

Recommendations:

For national bodies:

Adequately fund housing and community development providers to develop strategies for including Gypsy/Traveller populations in neighbourhoods, based on principles of common ground and visible fairness set out in section 2.

Explore the possibility of supporting the piloting of neighbourhood-based mentoring networks in neighbourhoods where there are groups that may require support in sustaining tenancies.

Welcome packs for newly-housed residents that do not rely on the written word (e.g. are DVD-based) and specifically respond to the needs of Gypsy/Traveller residents moving from sites should be piloted in estates to which residents are moved. These will also be useful for other groups with verbally-based culture and/or restricted written communication skills.

Fund training on specific Gypsy/Traveller-origin residents' housing issues, ideally delivered by experienced housing practitioners alongside residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin. This may again lead the way for similar material helpful to other groups.

For agencies:

Integrate work with residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin in neighbourhood work, involving residents in developing strategies that include them.

Develop locally-meaningful strategies for countering stigmatisation and involve local residents, including those from stigmatised populations and those from majority populations.

Promising practice:

Involving those residents commonly known as 'hard to reach' around whom services have not been designed in the past requires imaginative approaches. These might include:

- Personal visits rather than invitations to meetings and communications by letter.
- Taking time to talk on streets and use local networks.
- Working closely with housing officers who are able to identify recently-housed residents.
- Contact through already involved Gypsy/Traveller origin residents or residents that have good relationships with their Gypsy/Traveller origin neighbours.

Issues for housing providers

The project also had some specific findings related to housing, particularly for bodies that are providing settled homes for people of Gypsy/Traveller origin. It investigated the challenges that the move to housing brings. Much of this should be considered best housing practice, offering residents with other specific needs better service and access.

Promising practices:

With new tenants:

- Ethnicity should be sensitively monitored and declaration encouraged at this stage.
- Encourage declaration by giving a sensitive explanation of why ethnicity is monitored.
- Be aware of, and identify, potential literacy and numeracy problems and aim to tackle these with imaginative methods of providing tenancy information, such as on DVD.
- Have a section on nomination and other housing forms that asks: "If not the tenant, who completed this form?" This could help identify literacy problems.
- Complete the initial benefit application at sign up.
- Talk through tenancy agreements and termination procedures and check understanding before handing over the keys.
- Ensure that staff are aware of potentially differing lifestyles and what these might mean in terms of honouring the tenancy agreement:
 - Support may be required with bills, benefits and accessing a range of financial and support services
 - Consider animal and livestock policies (including issues around breeding animals), hard standing requirements (more than one vehicle), and outbuildings as these may be issues requiring special discussion
 - Consider providing clearly outlined payment contracts

- The need to notify the association if going away for a period of time may require a special mention
- Introductory tenancies and regular home visits will allow both parties to explore and review the success of settling into the home and neighbourhood.
- Welcome packs might facilitate this process.

Sustaining tenancies

- Use face-to-face contact rather than writing. If written correspondence is necessary, hand deliver it to the tenant in person.
- Develop strong delivery relationships with relevant support agencies and staff (e.g. Traveller support projects, CAB, neighbourhood workers, schools), so that referrals are done in person rather than relying on the prospective tenant to make contact themselves.
- Links with the education authority may be valuable. The Education Achievement Service and the local primary school were held in high regard by local people of Gypsy/Traveller origins in Newtown. Research elsewhere suggests this is often the case with Traveller Education Services.
- Consider establishing Gypsy/Traveller peer mentoring in neighbourhoods for those that are unfamiliar with a location or who have just moved in from a site. Be aware that inter and intra family relationships may sometimes affect who a Gypsy/Traveller resident is prepared to be mentored by.
- Ensure that tenant representatives in neighbourhoods with housed Gypsy/Traveller populations have awareness of Gypsy/Traveller needs and are public advocates for the group.
- Be aware that those of Gypsy/Traveller

origins may be less likely to report on issues of antisocial behaviour and harassment, being more used to 'sorting' such issues themselves.

Published materials

- Those of Gypsy/Traveller origins should be recognised in standard association documentation e.g.: diversity statement, antisocial behaviour policies, service standards, tenants' handbook etc.
- Encourage positive news stories and use of images that positively portray, and/or mean something to, Gypsy/Traveller residents. This should be done in a manner that encourages neighbourhood cohesion and takes account of local interrelations between Gypsy/Traveller and other groups of residents (see section 2).
- Take account of the fact that paper-based resident information is not the most effective way of reaching those of Gypsy/Traveller origin. Verbal interaction is likely to work better.

4. Participation and participative action research

Key findings:

The project built on innovative methods of action research to develop a powerful, effective model entitled *Neighbourhood Know How*. This provides a framework for neighbourhood engagement and improvement. It integrates participative research, community development and strategic neighbourhood improvement.

Integrating participatory research with adults and young people worked well in breaking down inter-generational barriers and supporting the civic development of young people.

Recommendations:

For action research projects in neighbourhoods:

Innovative methods, such as visual methods, are well-suited to neighbourhood work with adults and young people of diverse working class origins.

Research can be a valuable engagement tool because it involves meeting people 'on their own terms' and on their home territory.

Involving residents as researchers is useful to engagement and cohesion. In deciding upon research samples based on local demographic information, residents are encouraged 'as researchers' to make reasoned decisions about who to reach in the neighbourhood, in what proportion and how.

In order to sustain resident engagement, swift and transparent translation of research findings into action is required. This requires genuine commitment to the neighbourhood from key partners.

Getting research translated into action is easier if the research team works closely with the agency or agencies ultimately responsible for taking action. This provides continuity and sustainability after the research period has ended, so residents experience a seamless transition between the action research process and neighbourhood improvement.

Participative and inclusive working is helped by documents that try to reflect action agreed by agencies rather than simply telling people what to do.

Producing a *researched neighbourhood findings* document that emphasises common

neighbourhood concerns is a fair and systematic way of bringing residents and agencies together to work on building a shared, neighbourhood future. This can be used as a script for neighbourhood action.

Promising practices:

The key ingredients for the project's engagement success, in this context, were based on the way it fostered a community development ethos, rather than taking an academic or consultancy approach. Those ingredients were:

- Valuing residents' own experiences, including designing practice based on their experience and view.
- Developing a user-friendly style for building trust, including personalised invitations and thank you letters to participants.
- Using imaginative and enjoyable methods of gaining people's views, including visual methods such as drawing, video and photography.
- Demonstrating a commitment to positive change in the neighbourhood.

Linking neighbourhood research and practice with Gypsy/Traveller populations requires *particular* efforts in terms of gaining access and trust. Essential practices here included:

- 'Snowballing' via local contacts and trusted agency staff.
- Working through organisations that are known to be seen in a favourable light (e.g. the primary school in this instance, Traveller Education Services in many areas).
- Being prepared to conduct research in local people's homes.
- Taking the extra time necessary to reach people.

Some of the factors that enabled a positive

relationship with the agencies that could make a difference were:

- The project delivery team acting in an extremely professional way with providers, working to understand both mainstream agency culture and resident culture and thereby finding a way to bridge the two.
- Seeking to develop, in partnership, achievable, realistic and researched neighbourhood improvements that aligned agencies' resources with residents' priorities.
- Finding ways that agencies could get a sense of ownership over the project - for instance by developing reporting mechanisms that respected agency priorities and existing structures.
- Showing agencies how they could benefit from involvement in the project, rather than simply asking them to do things for the residents.
- Using pilot activities to understand agency processes, such as with the 'alley days'.
- In addition, the fact that a housing provider was leading the project - working in its role as a community anchor - may have been a source of reassurance for agency partners.

The Newtown Neighbourhood Project

This is the final report of the Newtown Neighbourhood Project (NNP). It sets out the project's strategic context and identifies the project's successes, findings and recommendations. Issues for the local area of Newtown are discussed in relation to wider policy debates around community cohesion and community development. We anticipate that it will be useful reading for a range of audiences including policy-makers, community development professionals, housing professionals, action researchers, those working with Gypsy/Roma people and Travellers of Irish heritage, those working with white working class communities and academics in these fields.

The NNP was delivered by West Kent Extra (the community development arm of West Kent, which owns a considerable amount of housing in the area) and Real Strategies Ltd (a community development specialist), with research and evaluation support by the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), Goldsmiths University of London.

This report was written by Alison Rooke and Ben Gidley (CUCR), with considerable input from Sue Lelliott and contributions from Debbie Humphry of Real Strategies Ltd and Genette Allen of West Kent Housing. Additional research was provided by Emma Jackson and Martin Myers (CUCR), and Imogen Slater and Ros Young (Real Strategies Ltd).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Project Management Team and Advisory Group for their valuable input into this report. Their names are listed in Appendix 2. Most of all, we

would like to thank the residents and workers in Newtown who gave their time and energy to participate in the project in all sorts of ways. Without them, the project would not have been possible. We are grateful for this.

A special thank you goes out to West Kent Tenant Representatives. Their practical support was invaluable to many aspects of the project.

Background

The project took place in the Hopefields area of Newtown. The NNP was funded by the Housing Corporation under their Innovation and Good Practice Programme 2006/2007. It built on an earlier scoping study carried out in 2004 when West Kent's Neighbourhood Management Team secured a grant from the association to fund research that would benefit Travellers in the district. The Neighbourhood Management Team commissioned West Kent Extra (the community development arm of West Kent) and Real Strategies Ltd to conduct a small scoping exercise to ascertain how funds set aside for residents of Gypsy/Traveller origins could best be allocated. Our research area was one of the locations included in this scoping exercise.

During the study, a local school-based *You and Your Neighbourhood* mixed focus group involving nine pupils (aged 13 to 14) of Gypsy/Traveller and white English origins (see Terminology section on page 15), revealed very strong feelings about vandalism and community safety in the area. Issues emerged around neighbourhood interrelations and what people were permitted and not permitted to say. In light of this and other neighbourhood, housing and agency data, the scoping study proposed that:

Local people [those of Gypsy/Traveller origins, white English and other social groups] could be engaged in participative [neighbourhood] practice that permits exploration of their neighbourhood and help introduce activities that they feel would improve it.² (see Terminology section on page 15)

This led to a bid to the Housing Corporation to fund the NNP.

Newtown Neighbourhood Project aims

The project aimed to:

- Bring agencies and local people together to improve the neighbourhood of Hopefields in Newtown through a participatory action research *and* community/neighbourhood development approach.
- Begin to improve neighbourhood relations in Newtown.

And in so doing:

- Better understand inter-relations between residents, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin and non-Traveller residents in the Newtown area.
- Build on existing models of neighbourhood action planning developed by West Kent and West Kent Extra with Real Strategies Ltd.
- Identify ways of accessing and engaging residents, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin.
- Explore the neighbourhood-level impact of current professional practice around the inclusion of people, including those of Gypsy/Traveller origin.
- Disseminate lessons on the above.

In summary, the project presented an

opportunity to assess the value of current models of community and neighbourhood development in bringing local people together. It also permitted a more general assessment of the value of taking a participative neighbourhood approach to social cohesion work. This was done by involving a wide range of residents in researching their area and by engaging local agencies in adapting and creating services and/or projects to meet the needs of local people better. The project was carried out through the *Neighbourhood Know How* participative action research model, as we will describe in Section 4 of the Findings. This means *actively involving residents and partner agencies in the project's design and direction*.

We feel that the lessons about the process are almost as important as our other findings, and we have given significant space in the report to describing our model and its strengths and weaknesses. These include boxes in the text on '*promising practices*'. We use this term, rather than 'good practice', to respect the fact that different local situations are very specific: practitioners are urged to consider these practices and reflect on their applicability in their locales, rather than simply see these as 'off the shelf' good practice models to be mimicked.

The evaluation

The majority of the work described in this report was carried out by a delivery team led by Real Strategies Ltd and including staff from West Kent and West Kent Extra. Alongside the delivery of the project, there was a major evaluation strand. The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths. The

² Real Strategies Ltd and West Kent Extra (2004) p.16.

evaluation ran alongside and was embedded in the whole project, in the spirit of action research and participatory evaluation.

The evaluation provided an opportunity for the project team to reflect on the significance of the project findings, to collate existing knowledge and gain intelligence on the local context and to reflect on their practice in an on-going way, continuously folding the learning back into the project delivery. The evaluation team also established an Advisory Group comprising community development experts and practitioners, national policy-makers and academics, which supported this process of reflection by informing the team of policy developments and by supporting the analysis of the learning as it emerged (see Appendix 2). This participatory evaluation model fitted the participatory ethos of the project as a whole.³

The evaluation research team:

- Attended most meetings of the delivery partnership.
- Regularly debriefed members of the delivery team and wider partnership about their learning.
- Audited all the documentary material produced by the delivery team, including surveys and notes of semi-structured interviews.
- Advised on research methods, including peer research training.
- Attended many of the public events the project organised.

One member of the evaluation team was also part of the initial scoping study in 2004.

Note on terminology and ethics

The ethical stakes of doing participatory or action-oriented research are high, as will be discussed in section 4 of this report. This project has presented particular ethical challenges because of the sensitivity of the matters addressed. For example, the project encountered the ways in which people live in relationship to working class and Gypsy/Traveller identities - including those who do not declare ethnic identities to their neighbours or to service providers. The project was also working in a location that had been stigmatised over many years, presenting further ethical dilemmas. The project therefore needed to investigate these issues without perpetuating them via language use.

For this reason, we have been very careful in this report in our use of terminology. Census data records 98% of the population as being 'white British'.⁴ However, residents and workers in the area generally believe that a considerable number of residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin live there too, and that there are complex, long-term links between 'white British' and Gypsy/Traveller origin residents, with both groups intermarrying and inter-relating over generations.

In places in this report, we use the term 'white English' to refer to the majority ethnicity of the area. This was the way residents often chose to describe themselves, was consequently translated to the survey's ethnicity section and was then most commonly selected by respondents (76% of those surveyed).

We recognise that, the terms 'Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish heritage' are generally

³ Our approach could be characterised as 'ethnographic evaluation', along the lines described in Fetterman 2005.

⁴ See Appendix 3 for census data on the area, and Methodology section for a break-down of who the project reached.

used nationally.⁵ However, we use the term 'of Gypsy/Traveller origin' to refer to those residents, including first, second, and third generation people of sole or mixed Gypsy/Traveller heritage and including some who have been living in housing for several generations. Again, these were the terms that were most frequently responded to in survey work. When we refer to people of Gypsy/Traveller origin in this report, we are including those of Roma/Gypsy origin, as well as those of Irish Traveller origin, of which there are reported to be fewer in this location.⁶

Note on the ethics of giving voice

Residents' voices are absent from this report. In order to include their voices, the project would have had to use transcripts of accurately-recorded research encounters. This would in turn have required thorough informed consent, i.e. the full agreement of participants to the recording, transcription and subsequent use of their words, as well as their understanding of the uses to which it might be put. However, this proved difficult:

- Because much of the research was based on what we are calling 'street work' (research based out and about on the street, as described more fully below) and mixed community meetings, rather than one-to-one interviews, taping would have been inappropriate to the style of engagement.

- When there were one-to-one interviews, some participants, especially in the early phase of the research, were unwilling to be taped, and it would have been against the spirit of the project to have insisted on this. With those participants who consented to being taped, the focus of gaining access and consent was generating useful data for developing solutions to local problems, rather than addressing a national audience.
- Much of the material that emerged in these interviews was very personal and very sensitive. Because the community is fairly small and tight-knit, it would have been difficult to draw on it without leaving participants at risk of being identifiable, even if anonymised.

However, working with residents, the research team is now in dialogue with the interviewees on ways of drawing on this data for a separate confidential report to our funders.

Setting the scene: policy context

A range of policy agendas come together in the question of the neighbourhood. In debates around neighbourhood management, 'double devolution', community cohesion, antisocial behaviour and active citizenship, the neighbourhood is framed as the key site of policy intervention and the primary location of belonging and citizenship.⁷ Social problems are increasingly posed as problems of

⁵ See, for example, School Census Preparation and Guidance (Primary) Guidance 2008 v 1.3, p.22 (<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/datacollections/sc2008/>); PLASC faqs <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/faqs/763517/>

⁶ Of the residents of declared Gypsy/Traveller origin reached by the research team, two out of fifteen declared Gypsy/Traveller origin residents interviewed described themselves as Irish Travellers, while one out of sixteen surveyed did. The Education Achievement Service verbally reported similarly low figures.

⁷ For example, recent policy interventions include the DCLG's Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper, the Together We Can initiative, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood renewal, the 'Respect' agenda and associated neighbourhood policing programme, the Commission for Cohesion and Integration's Shared Futures report, and the 'Duty to Involve', introduced in the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. See also Mayo and Rooke 2006.

location, with discourses around localised cultures of poverty on Britain's 'sink estates'.⁸

Simultaneously, the ways in which neighbourhoods are governed, managed and planned is changing too, with Registered Social Landlords expected to take on an increased role as anchor organisations with the possible 'know how' to work with residents and build inclusion.⁹ This opens up new possibilities for resident engagement, but also new questions of practice.

It raises questions such as: What does it mean to focus on communities of place as our communities become increasingly diverse? What does it mean to designate particular populations, such as those of Gypsy/Traveller origins, as 'hard to reach' in these new regimes of governance? How should agencies respond to these new imperatives? How should researchers be engaging with this practice? How can residents be empowered to respond to these agendas, without their own agendas being lost? What are the dangers of empowering communities in this way, when minority concerns (including the concerns of invisible minorities, like housed Gypsies or new European migrants) can be marginalised?

Nationally, there are several documents guiding practitioners about what could happen to improve neighbourhoods and local participation - e.g. localising government, involving local people and establishing community anchors.¹⁰ In order to have meaning, such guidance will need to be rooted in neighbourhood practice, drawing on how participative neighbourhood practice can be realised on the ground. The NNP is one example of 'on the ground' practice with lots

of promising '*hows*' to offer. This report sets these out.

Setting the scene: the local context

Newtown lies to the south of London on the boundaries of the London boroughs of Bromley to the west and Bexley to the east. It lies 20 miles from central London and is close to the M25 motorway.

Historically, Newtown has had a key role as a transport interchange. It sits on a main route from London to the continent and as an eighteenth century turnpike road has long been a fruit picking and market gardening route. Although the village of Newtown (now called Newtown Village) has existed for many centuries, modern Newtown grew up around a railway junction built in 1862. The area grew significantly after this as the swift route to London prompted local employment including the transportation of local goods from local market gardens to the city, horticultural industries such as jam factories and health care based on the comparative freshness of the air 20 miles from London. The area later benefited from a growing number of commuters living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century villas around the town. The rapid growth of the population led to a demand for decent housing. In the 1930s, social housing began to be built and three roads marked the beginnings of what is known as the Hopefields Estate. These roads were bordered by the A20, farmland and market gardens.¹¹

Within Newtown, the NNP focused in the Hopefields neighbourhood, an area that is generally coterminous with the ward of

⁸ Dorling et al 2007, Levitas 1998, Skeggs 2005, Tonkiss 2000.

⁹ For example, housing associations have launched iN Business for Neighbourhood, while the Young Foundation's Good Neighbours report in 2007 set out an agenda for the role of housing providers in neighbourhood governance and development.

¹⁰ For example, DCLG Unlocking the talent of our communities 5 March 2008, DCLG Strong and Prosperous Communities. The Local Government White Paper, the Together We Can initiative, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood renewal, the 'Respect' agenda, iN Business for Neighbourhood, and the Young Foundation's Good Neighbours report 2007

¹¹ Bull 2004

Hopefields. The Hopefields estate comprises pre- and post-war social and private housing within five to 10 minutes' walking distance of Newtown Town Centre. Properties range from those first built in the 1930s to more recent in-fill private and social housing. The southern part of the estate has a greater density of social housing within it. West Kent manages these properties.

Newtown's particular history includes long associations with Traveller and Gypsy communities.¹² The specifics of why so many people of Gypsy/Traveller origin live in Newtown are not known, but it is possibly linked to the nature of the agricultural and railway work (some residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin have referred to these activities in the course of the research). Today, those of Gypsy/Traveller origin are reported by some local agency staff to be the largest ethnic minority in Newtown. Local residents include first, second and third generations of housed Gypsy/Travellers. It is not uncommon for those of non-Gypsy/Traveller origin to have married into families of Gypsy/Traveller origins and vice versa. Agencies and local people report that the majority of those of Gypsy/Traveller origins are from Romany Gypsy decent, although the research team has located some people of Irish Traveller heritage residing locally too.

The wards the project focused on are revealed in the 2001 census as being significantly more 'deprived' than elsewhere in the district. They have a young population with low levels of qualifications, high levels of long-term illness, poor health, unpaid care and unemployment, and low levels of car ownership (see Appendix 3 for a fuller profile).

At the start of the project there was no existing resident infrastructure (such as a tenants' and residents' association) and

agencies reported that they saw the area as one where it was difficult to get people involved.

The town's reputation, location and history make it a valuable and specific research location. Although the area is not special in terms of its location - ostensibly a commuter belt town on the hinterlands of London - it is unusual in its ethnic mix - its high numbers of housed Travellers of several generations - and its history. The NNP, therefore, holds particular lessons for participatory action research, community development and community cohesion and for an understanding of contemporary class politics. In the next section we will set out some of the early findings of the project, while later sections will set out some wider learning in terms of these wider issues.

Methodology: What the project did

The project was in two phases: Phase 1, a '*Finding Out*' phase, which ran from October 2006 to July 2007, and Phase 2, an '*Action*' phase using action research as a tool for community and service development and neighbourhood change, which ran from August 2007 to March 2008.

Phase 1

In Phase 1, a project management group consisting of key local agencies, tenant representatives and stakeholders informed the direction of the project and linked it into local agencies and partnership work. Research in Phase 1 fell into two, overlapping periods: (a) *exploratory work* to understand the area, and (b) *surveys and interviews* to drill down further into these issues.

a. Exploratory work (October to December 2007)

The exploratory period of the project aimed to:

¹² Evans 2004

- Build community relationships, trust and momentum
- Snowball project information
- Locate key resident contacts
- Begin to get a 'neighbourhood picture' from engaged adults, young people, agencies and statistics
- Inform a December/early January review with the project group
- Assist with formulating street work and further research phases

It consisted of the following elements:

Demographics

This was desk- and field-based research with residents and agencies. The research team gathered and analysed ward and super output level statistics. The outcomes of this search are found at Appendix 3.

Agency audit

An agency audit included 13 semi-structured interviews with 17 delivery staff from local agencies identified by the project management group. We were interested in contacting locally-based organisations and delivery staff with first-hand knowledge of the area. These covered a span of service delivery and included those in the fields of: health, community safety, debt advice, mediation, education, housing and local government. These agencies can be found listed at appendix 1.

Agencies were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. This took the form of discussion following the headings on a standard interview sheet. It looked at issues relating to agency and staff: function, activity in Hopefields, data and monitoring, partnership work, service plans and ideas and interest in project involvement. Discussions

were recorded in writing and then checked with the agency for accuracy.

Informal contact with agencies also resulted from attendance at a variety of events and meetings such as West Kent Police's Operation General II roadshow and Newtown People First (a local district council led town-wide strategic partnership group).

This phase of the project resulted in interviews or meetings with 25 agencies and more than 30 staff. At this stage five agencies expressed an interest in becoming actively involved in the project.

Residents

This element of the exploratory period focused on how residents experienced their area in terms of 'people' and 'place'.

Before commencing fieldwork, a meeting was held with the local West Kent Tenant Representatives. This was extremely useful in terms of identifying locations where residents could be reached and determining how residents were likely to perceive and judge the project, and therefore how it should be locally promoted. Tenant Representative support was also invaluable in terms of gaining initial access to residents. At this meeting we were advised that:

- Residents will question why money is being spent on 'finding out' and are likely to prefer to see it spent on improving things.
- It will be unlikely to get residents involved as it has been tried before and people do not want to get involved.¹³

As a result of this advice, the team drafted a project information flyer for use with residents. This simply stated that the project

¹³ Agreed notes of Tenant Representative Meeting, October 2006.

welcomed residents' views in order to inform West Kent's ambition to improve the location with agencies and residents. This emphasised the neighbourhood improvement ('place') aspects of the project and did not allude to community interrelations ('people') aspects of the project. This was because work with agencies and representatives had revealed that to single out particular social groups at this stage (e.g. white English or those of Gypsy/Traveller origins) would have resulted in the work being viewed by residents as being 'unfair'.

Exploratory research work with residents occurred through contact at youth and community groups and community venues. The reason for initially reaching people via these methods was that the project began at the same time as West Kent Police were conducting a door-to-door community safety survey and raising their profile as part of their newly launched 'Operation General II'. It was agreed with the police (who sat on the project management group) that at this stage of the project it was not advisable for this research to be identified with any particular agency. All exploratory activities focused on the topics and issues residents raised when asked about their experiences and what they liked and disliked about the area.

We also had informal discussions with 17 adult residents at community and public venues. In such instances the informal nature of the contact made it inappropriate to use participant sheets, although a researcher noted that many more women (15) than men (two) were either willing to chat or were present at such venues. Informal discussions led to six informal interviews in residents' homes. These were recorded in writing and participants asked to complete participant sheets.

Throughout this phase those contacted received a selection of the following (as appropriate): Personalised reminder letters, friendly thank you letters including personalised comments, session records, Christmas cards and photographs of the activity in which they took part. This courteous and friendly approach worked well in terms of later engagement.

Young people

Imaginative research and engagement techniques were particularly important in reaching young people. They included night-time photographic walk-about, neighbourhood painting and mapping workshops and focus group work. Session participants were asked to provide information sheets that gave their gender, age, ethnic origin, postcode and views of the session. The participant sheet system did not work particularly well. At the end of the session young people often left in a rush with forms being discarded or partially completed. Researchers instead orally collected and recorded information on age, gender and postcode during sessions and noted any information pertaining to ethnicity that arose out of sessions. Given the manner in which certain issues surrounding ethnic origins 'came out' during sessions, the team felt that asking participants direct questions about ethnic origin at this stage would not necessarily have produced accurate information since participants with links to Gypsy/Traveller origins might not have felt able to declare them. Four young people did declare themselves as being of mixed white English/British and Gypsy/Traveller origin at this stage. They were in a small group with friends and relatives that they knew well.

Table 1: Young people at sessions:

Age range	Number
8 -10 years	27
11-13 years	5
14 years	4
Not known	5
Total	41

Gender	Number
Male	3
Female	38
Total	41

Area of Residence	Number
Research target area	26 (63%)
Neighbouring ward and town centre	14 (34%)
Further afield	1 (3%)
Total	41

Learning from the exploratory period

The exploratory period of the research flagged up issues that informed further project practice:

- Concerted efforts would be required to gain contact with males and those of declared Gypsy/Traveller origins (or to bring about situations in which Traveller origin would be further declared).
- The reputation of the area should be enhanced by the project and the project should guard against contributing to stigmatisation.
- Residents were being successfully engaged via the research process and the neighbourhood was proving to be a meaningful and unifying focus.
- Tensions (often only privately expressed) did exist between certain families and various sections of the

community and any practice should work towards alleviating these.

- Residents were going to judge the success of the project on the extent to which responsive neighbourhood action could be seen to have occurred.

b. Surveys and interviews

The next period of the project began with a series of resident research group meetings. The team facilitated residents in designing and targeting surveys and interviews, some of which were to be done by resident researchers themselves. This phase of the project resulted in a further 186 residents being reached in the following ways:

Table 2: Residents reached in Phase 1 surveys and interviews

Survey	113 (of which 109 were usable)
Interviews	23
Resident meetings	32 people and 58 attendances
Informal unrecorded discussions	18 of various ages
Total	186

By the end of the project the research team had contacted 238 residents. A breakdown of these is outlined on the following pages.

A group of 15 local adult and young residents was recruited and trained. The training adapted, and added to, materials provided by CUCR and focused on: The stages involved in neighbourhood research; knowing who lives in the neighbourhood (demographic information); looking at who we had reached via exploratory work; looking at who now needed to be targeted; how and where we should reach them; techniques involved in survey work;

listening skills and what it means to be a researcher.¹⁴

The fast-paced sessions involved role play, discussion and exercises on devising survey strategy. Handouts were used to support activity. Most importantly they involved discussions on who resided in the neighbourhood and how they should be reached. This naturally involved conversations on black minority ethnic (BME), older and male residents, as well as reaching those of Gypsy/Traveller origins. The sessions established research sample targets for survey and interview.

A further planning session resulted in residents commenting on neighbourhood survey design. The survey aimed to gather information on how people viewed their town and neighbourhood and interacted with people within it, as well as exploring ideas for improvement and interest in getting involved in the project. An interview and survey delivery plan was then drawn up. The plan identified the types of people we would aim to reach and where.

As residents and agencies noted that the location housed a good number of residents of Gypsy/Traveller origins and that there was a growing number of black African residents moving into the area, targets for reaching these groups were set by the group. It was not possible to base all targets on 'hard data'. For example, data available for those of Gypsy/Traveller origins (LEA Achievement Service and housing association census data) was known to be an 'under count' when compared with levels of verbal declarations and common local knowledge (see section 3.1). In such instances, the project set what

lead partners and residents felt to be 'fair and achievable' targets. The project aimed to reach at least 15 respondents of declared Gypsy/Traveller origins and in the event reached 16.

The residents decided that as they believed black and minority ethnic (BME) groups had an increased presence in the location, the project would target a slightly higher number than recorded in the census (3%). However, as BME groups represent a diverse set of people (as do all social categories), the project team was aware that this target was more about 'being fair' than about revealing in-depth practice information.

Resident input was clearly identified in the survey plan. Of the 15 trainees, nine sustained their involvement to become resident researchers who assisted with designing and carrying out a local survey and locating residents for interview.¹⁵ Surveys were carried out in a range of public spaces, including the streets in the town centre, at supermarkets and in and outside local post office and shops.

A Real Strategies Ltd researcher conducted a further 23 individual resident interviews. These were more structured and targeted than those conducted during the exploratory phase. The interviews allowed for flexible, resident-led discussion but also had set questions, including those that focused on what residents thought of the neighbourhood, how they came to the neighbourhood and what they thought of community relations. Confidentiality was assured and consent was negotiated orally as it was felt that producing a written agreement form at this stage might deter involvement. The researcher asked to be allowed to tape the interview to add her

¹⁴ These materials adapted the Local Knowledge for Local Solutions Neighbourhood Research Toolkit described below in Section 4.

¹⁵ Copies of the questionnaire are available

memory but said the material would not be released outside the purposes of neighbourhood research. All except four (all residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin) agreed to be recorded. Where the interviews were not recorded, detailed notes were made, by agreement with the interviewees. The interviews were offered in a place that suited the respondent; all chose their own home. Friends and relations of respondents were welcome; when they did attend some joined in and were interviewed as well.

During the survey and interview period it became clear that we were still not reaching adequate numbers of males and those of Gypsy/Traveller origins. It was clear that our current survey plans presented difficulties with regard to reaching those of Gypsy/Traveller origins in that they required people to declare ethnicity in public. With resident agreement we extended our deadlines and made sustained efforts to locate those of Gypsy/Traveller origins via our resident research team taking surveys into people's homes. We also involved residents and local agencies in assisting us with reaching those of Gypsy/Traveller origins for interview. This resulted in more focus on individual interviews than was initially envisaged. We also made special efforts to contact men, who also often have lower representation in community projects.¹⁶

Table 3: Residents reached in Phase 1 survey by declared ethnicity.

Ethnic origins	Number declared
White, English	83
White, Traveller	7
Traveller	1
White, Gypsy	3
White, Gypsy/Irish and other	2

White, Irish Traveller	1
White, Traveller and English	1
White, Gypsy and English	1
White UK other	2
White, Irish	2
Black British Caribbean	2
Black British African	3
Asian	1
Total	109

Of the 23 residents who were interviewed in depth during the exploratory and further research phases, a good proportion (15) was of Gypsy/Traveller origin. The team felt that it was fair to reach more of this group by this means in order to learn more about community interrelations and in recognition that this group's view may be heard less frequently than that of other groups.

Table 3b: In-depth interview respondents

GENDER	
Male	7
Female	16
ETHNIC ORIGIN	
Gypsy/Traveller origin residents	15
White English residents	8
GYPSY/TRAVELLER ORIGINS	
Gypsy/Traveller origin residents of Roma/Gypsy origin (spread across generations)	12
Gypsy/Traveller origin residents of Irish Traveller heritage	2
Gypsy/Traveller origin residents of English Traveller (fairground) heritage	1
AGES	
12-15	1
16-24	3
25-44	11
45-59	1
60+	7

¹⁶ Mayo 2005, Gidley and Collymore 2004

Table 4 - Newtown Neighbourhood Project - People Reached by Gender and Age

Category	% in ward population as per census 2001	Overall percentage reached by project (of 238)
Females	52%	73% (174)
Males	48%	27% (64)
8-15	12%	31% (73)
16-24	9.8%	6% (14)
25-44	29%	50% (119)
45-59	16%	
60+	21%	13% (30)

Note that due to rounding individual figures may not agree with the totals.

Table 5 - Newtown Neighbourhood Project - People Reached by Ethnicity

Category	% in population in Hopefields Ward (census 2001)	Overall percentage known to be reached (of 238)
Black - Asian, Caribbean or African	3%	3% (7)
Gypsy/ Traveller*	No census category	14% (33)
Irish Traveller*		
Gypsy/ Traveller mixed with other ethnic origin*		
Irish Traveller mixed with other ethnic origin*		
White English White Irish White UK other		83% (196)

*Note: In the survey and in-depth interviews

we opted for monitoring ethnicity in terms that local people identified themselves, either during interview or in the first phase of the research. It is felt that during both phases of the work there will have been local people of Gypsy/Traveller origins who did not declare such origins, either because they did not want to or because they felt it no longer applied to them.

Concluding Phase 1

This research work culminated in an easily readable neighbourhood report that charted neighbourhood findings: Newtown Neighbourhood Action Project Findings. This emphasised those issues of place, people and process of common neighbourhood concern. They included things to do for young people, the area's green spaces, residents' preference for face-to-face contact from agencies and residents liking the area because of the other people in it.

People

Many of the local people taking part see 'community' as being about family and friends. Strong, local, often large family networks and tight friendship circles exist. Most residents know their neighbours. There was a strong interest in local history. Other interests included music and films (40%), swimming (40%) keeping animals (38%), reading (27%) and learning (21%).

Place

This identified the services that people used. The library was the service most commonly identified as being used, although this was more popular with the over-25s. Residents identified a preference for practically and vocationally-oriented learning opportunities.

The survey also revealed some negative perceptions of the area amongst residents; 89% of people surveyed stated that there were bad things about living in Newtown whereas 72% said there were good things about it. The good things residents appreciated were the people, local facilities and a rural feel. The top three issues identified by residents were young people's presence on the street, litter and antisocial behaviour. Youth was a theme for all age groups, from parents and children who wanted more activities through to adults who associated young people with crime. The state of local green spaces and alleys was also a concern.

Of those surveyed, 43% said they had been the victim of crime or bullying in the past two years. Young people were much more likely to have experienced this.

Process

There was a sense that local services were provided to people rather than engaging them. Residents felt that officials did not spend time in the area and that there were limited opportunities to feed back to agencies on services.

Research findings pertaining to agency practices, partnership working, community differences and interrelations have been shared with agencies and informed the wider lessons that are shared in this report. The findings have included those that emerged when surveys were analysed by ethnic origin. Because they were more in-depth than originally envisaged, the interviews provided more data than could be analysed in the project's timescale. Extra funding has now been secured to allow this analysis to be carried out.

The research proved to be a valuable way of engaging different types of local people in an area where people had a reputation for being difficult to engage. The delivery team focused on young people as well as adults and worked with young people alongside adults during the survey and interview phase of the work. This also worked well.¹⁷

Phase 2

In Phase 2 the project shifted from research to an exploration with local people and individual agencies of the neighbourhood/service improvements required to make a difference. The goal during this phase was to agree an action plan or forward strategy. This involved training local people and agencies in engagement, recruitment and the other skills required to fulfil the action plan, sharing researched information and understanding and opening up a conversation between local people and agencies that could lead to new community activity, a community improvement plan and a wide variety of local people involved. Some of the main activities in Phase 2 were:

"Once Upon a Newtown" film project

Creative workshops offered an opportunity to engage young people in positive and creative recreational activities such as drama and social research. As a result of this work, six young people worked with a film producer, the West Kent Extra youth worker and Real Strategies Ltd to conceive, research and make a short film entitled "Once upon a Newtown". The film explored the young people's knowledge of Newtown in the past (its market gardening history) and Newtown in the present. This has been used as a 'show reel' in order to raise funds for a longer length film.

¹⁷ Hetherington et al 2007 note that most community cohesion, engagement and participation work has focused on adults or children, and rarely includes young people.

The film was screened at a community premiere held at the end of 2007 in Newtown. As well as the screening, this event also included several performances by young people from Hopefields. The event was well attended by more than 100 agencies, West Kent and West Kent Extra staff, Kent Police and local dignitaries, as well as young people and local families; it was also covered in the local press. Following on from this project there was considerable wider interest in the research area: 19 local young people who wished to get involved in film and performance workshops attended a follow-up introductory meeting and 40 young people will be attending training workshops.

Alley Days

Local residents, students from local schools and key local agencies have been involved in local environmental improvements such as cleaning up litter from alleyways on the estate. Following on from this, Kent Probation Service repainted the fences to cover graffiti. Unfortunately the newly-painted fencing was vandalised overnight with new graffiti and tags. These were quickly reported to the police. It is important to note that these activities have been talked about a lot by residents and created a significant amount of interest in environmental work.

This work has dovetailed with an initiative by ENCAMS, a government-funded environmental campaigns charity that also runs the *Keep Britain Tidy* campaign, the *Blue Flag* beaches and *Tidy Towns* schemes. As part of their Cleaner Safer Greener programme, ENCAMS works with residents and agencies to create a shared approach to addressing the social, economic and physical factors that have a direct impact on environmental quality and

antisocial behaviour in areas. To date ENCAMS has run two workshops in Newtown, one for agencies and one for residents. These aim to develop a model of service level agreements for agencies. Because ENCAMS are well known and well regarded by local authorities, their status brought local authorities on board in a way that an approach from the housing association alone might not have done. One feature of this work is the production of a well-designed card that shows local residents who to go to for different environmental problems - an example of a very user-friendly, practical approach that fits well with the *Neighbourhood Know How* model.

Community Warden

The Hopefields estate is now being regularly patrolled by the local community safety warden. Local residents took her on a tour of the area at the start of this work in order to introduce her to the locality. Residents and the warden then continue to work together, producing a leaflet to publicise her role.

Turn on to learning

The project revealed latent demand for post-16 education and training in the location. As residents felt that it would be difficult to get local adults involved in learning, a focus group was held to explore this issue. The residents developed a learning charter, identifying what they felt they needed from educational provision. The aim of this activity was to identify local learning needs and take these suggestions to education providers.

The focus group was also useful in that it resulted in an IT workshop being developed around the creation of a newsletter. In order to

keep up the project's momentum, West Kent supplied some starter sessions, although the association recognises that in the longer-term an education provider would be best placed to develop such work. The research has also revealed gaps in learning planning and delivery. Education agencies subsequently expressed an interest in looking at how these gaps can be filled in partnership.

Public relations

One of the key aspects of Phase 2 that runs through all of the above points is the importance of publicity and public relations. All the above activities have been well publicised, covered by the local press and written up in West Kent's own publicity. This 'good news' is a central aspect of changing perceptions of the Hopefields area amongst residents, agencies and beyond. Indeed this publicity has been important in getting agencies to sign up to the project.

Crucially, however, residents themselves have been involved in this, supported by West Kent to work with a private sector expert and learn how PR works. This is an important part of the project's forward strategy; if the ability to influence wider public perceptions of the area is embedded in the area, then the cycle of negative reputation around the area can be broken.

Neighbourhood co-ordinator post

Along with the activity-based work described above, the project led West Kent to put in place the staffing structures needed to make the work sustainable. A neighbourhood co-ordinator will start work part time in April 2008, focusing on developing neighbourhood planning in areas where West Kent has a

substantial amount of housing stock. In Newtown, the neighbourhood co-ordinator will be able to sustain the outreach that was built up during the project and channel the residents involved into areas of activity designed to ensure that the connections and actions that have been established through NNP will be sustained beyond the life of the project.

Local agencies currently rely primarily on traditional forms of communicating with residents such as posters, leaflets etc. It is, though, recognised by agencies that this neighbourhood co-ordinator role will provide a collective outreach resource that can sustain the 'on the street' and 'face-to-face' style of operating with residents that has been shown to be effective throughout the project.

FINDINGS

1. Learning from the local: Neighbourhood improvement and neighbourhood management

Key finding:

Housing associations are particularly well placed to lead, or be key partners in, neighbourhood-based community development work, bringing together both a strategic outlook and on-the-ground knowledge.

Recommendations:

For local authorities, local strategic partnerships and neighbourhood-level strategic bodies:

Work with both residents and agencies to identify a shared agenda for change through an interactive research process leading to informed, 'fair' actions that bring tangible change.

For housing sector organisations:

Where there are no existing 'anchor organisations' in neighbourhoods, social landlords may be well placed to take on this role, acting as an interface between residents and agencies to deliver change based on a shared vision and anchoring local community activity in a sustainable way.

Current policy agendas identify the neighbourhood as a key site of social intervention.¹⁸ As the Civic Renewal Unit's *Firm Foundations* said: "At neighbourhood or parish level, local action planning provides a useful starting point for drawing people together and creating a shared agenda for action. It can often lead to, or strengthen, a

partnership or network, or it can result in the development of a community anchor organisation. Community development support can help activities and networks to reach all the groups in a neighbourhood, including rather than excluding people". (2004:27). Similarly, the Department for Communities and Local Government has stated that: "Communities need strategic leadership to help bring together local partners to improve the services citizens receive and local quality of life. Issues such as community safety, health, or community cohesion require local authorities to align services provided by a number of agencies in their area". (2006:10). 'Neighbourhood management', 'neighbourhood planning' and 'neighbourhood improvement' are some of the terms used to describe this sort of activity.

As discussed in the next section, the delivery team found that, as a starting point for such interventions, it is effective to proceed by identifying what constitutes 'common ground' in a neighbourhood. As well as identifying common ground amongst residents, it also means overlapping 'agency-down' and 'resident-up' interests, as well as cross-agency and intra-community shared agendas. Crucially, it is essential that the intervention is seen to be doing this; this is an issue of transparency in practice. The NNP found that it is not merely residents who need a great deal of encouragement and support to stay involved in the neighbourhood planning and improvement process; the same is true for agencies.

Housing associations are ideally placed to bring together agencies and residents to work on researched neighbourhood improvement.

¹⁸ These include Firm Foundations (p.27), Take Part, the Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper, the Together We Can initiative, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the 'Respect' agenda, IN Business for Neighbourhood, and the Young Foundation's Good Neighbours report.

Housing associations have a natural concern with a variety of neighbourhood issues. Importantly, in residents' eyes they are a natural link between 'the home' (private) and 'the neighbourhood' (public) spheres. That makes them ideally placed to access and involve residents. The housing sector has direct contact with residents, it has data, it necessarily relates to different agencies and it straddles different sectors and agendas.¹⁹ In this project, for example, the housing officers' and tenant representatives' knowledge and insight into the location, its people and its history proved invaluable in working with residents, while the association's credibility and organisational links to local partnerships facilitated agency buy-in.

As the National Housing Federation has said: "The new agenda offers housing associations a great opportunity to act as 'community anchors', bringing together the many elements of neighbourhood renewal". (2006:1). Especially in areas with weaker community sector structures, such as outer city and rural communities, housing associations and other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) may serve as 'anchor organisations' through which residents can be involved, in a sustainable way, in improving their own communities. As Firm Foundations argues: "Strong, sustainable community-based organisations can provide a crucial focus and support for community development and change in their neighbourhood or community. We are calling them 'community anchor organisations' because of the solid foundation they give to a wide variety of self-help and capacity building activities in local communities, and because of their roots within their communities". (2004: 19).

Being an anchor organisation does not mean an RSL has to be a dominant leader, but that it needs a clear understanding of its role in the community and its relation to the web of agencies. The NNP, led by an RSL and focused on a housing neighbourhood, provides lessons for good practice in this arena.

Transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2: Maintaining momentum

The original plan had been to take the findings from Phase 1 back to both residents and agencies in order jointly to develop strategies for action in Phase 2. However, residents were impatient to see change and there was a danger of losing momentum during the slow process of jointly developing and sharing the ownership of an action strategy with local agencies. This meant that the project delivery team (Real Strategies Ltd and West Kent) rapidly identified quick wins that could be delivered to address the issues raised by residents in Phase 1. The quick wins were identified as exercises that would have two dimensions; (a) they would immediately deliver improvements that people could feel, while (b) they would also kick-start a strategic approach from agencies. They were discrete, containable projects that were conceived as pilots or experiments.

As an example, the Alley Days delivered quick results in terms of improving the physical environment while embedding knowledge amongst active residents of what it actually takes to make a difference (in terms of negotiating different agency procedures, identifying who is responsible for the management of land, planning, identifying different statutory responsibilities etc). Through this process residents started to learn how to work with agencies, while agencies

¹⁹ Young Foundation (2007)

were confronted with the expressed needs of residents. Because the alleys were discrete, containable sites, they were ideal for 'testing the waters' in relation to what could be achieved, as opposed to starting with the larger green spaces in the area. Crucial to these quick wins (which enabled immediate improvements and opened up the possibility of a strategic, joined up approach) was showing the relevant agencies that there was something in it for them and that they had some stake in taking part. All of these activities were delivered in a way that was participative and collaborative, with West Kent Extra and Real Strategies Ltd working to bring agencies and residents together in neighbourhood work that addressed local people's priorities.

Promising practices:

Exercises which the project found to be effective, particularly in the project's Phase 2, included:

- Involving residents in identifying their own and other residents' priorities for change in the neighbourhood.
- Involving agencies, through an agency audit process, in identifying their priorities for change in the neighbourhood.
- Briefing agencies on emerging resident priorities and working with the agencies to identify deliverable 'quick wins' that also led into a strategic approach to change.
- Encouraging agencies to come together to share local intelligence and good practice.
- Facilitating involvement activities that helped residents understand how agencies work and how practical neighbourhood improvement can be delivered.
- Finding alternatives to expecting the majority of resident involvement to happen in meetings, for example by involving residents

in practical aspects of project delivery, visiting key residents in their homes and organising enjoyable, arts-based activities.

2. Diverse neighbourhoods, cohesive communities: Cohesion and interrelations between people

Key finding:

Taking a focus on what people have in common - a shared future - is more effective as a starting point for community cohesion than starting with a focus on different identities and problems. Once this common ground has been identified, the issue of exclusions, differences and inequalities can begin to be safely raised, targeted and monitored.

Recommendations:

For agencies:

Develop community cohesion interventions that avoid contributing to tensions while acknowledging that there are inequalities within neighbourhoods and between neighbours. Do this by taking up opportunities or initiating activities that focus on shared neighbourhood concerns.

Work with specific ethnic groups should be carried out with sensitivity (in relation to and recognising other ethnic and social groups in the community), avoiding 'clumsy multiculturalism' that can perpetuate differences amongst those whom it seeks to bring together.

There has been considerable policy debate around the notions of social or community 'cohesion' and 'integration'. These terms have been used in a variety of ways in a variety of

contexts. They have featured heavily in social policy discourse since 2001, when a series of reports began to be published in the wake of the urban disturbances in the Northern mill towns that summer, notably the Denham Report (Denham 2001), the Ouseley Report (Ouseley 2001) and the Cattle Report (Cattle 2005), which all promoted a shift from thinking about cultural diversity in terms of multiculturalism (differences between cultures) to thinking about it in terms of cohesion (commonality between people).

Some versions of the cohesion agenda promote an extremely strong version of cohesion and integration, which come close to recommending assimilation - "the expectation that newcomers to a country will, over time, assimilate the norms of that society and blend in with those already there". (Rattansi 2004).²⁰ However, other versions are more open, stressing common bonds across differences, rather than the disappearance of differences. For example, the Government's Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) offers a new definition of cohesion, which we use in this report:

"An integrated and cohesive community is one where:

- *There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country*
- *There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place - people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in turn*
- *Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to*

services and treatment

- *There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny*
- *There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common*
- *There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods."*

Shared public spaces and residential areas have been identified by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion as one of the key spheres in which a focus on interaction can help build cohesion. Housing neighbourhoods are crucial, and therefore the housing sector and other agencies that have a neighbourhood focus play vital roles in building community cohesion. When interventions are aimed at building community cohesion in an area, they often take the issue of the separate communities present in the area (and their separate identities) as their starting point. For example, projects are explicitly presented at bringing the local black or minority ethnic population (often imagined as a 'community', e.g. 'the Asian community' or 'the Muslim community') together with the majority white British population (again, imagined as a distinct 'community'). This assumes that people's primary identification is with their ethnic or cultural difference and encourages residents to focus on the differences which separate them, differences

²⁰ See also Back et al 2002

that can become highly politicised and racialised in 'deprived' communities where people are effectively competing for scarce resources.²¹

In Newtown, there had been little work around community relations between people of Gypsy/Traveller origin and other residents. There had been some school-based work, introducing pupils to Romany culture by, for instance, bringing a traditional horse-drawn Gypsy caravan to the school. Here, the emphasis was on celebrating cultural identity. Similarly, an exhibition on 'Romany Roots' was anecdotally said to have encouraged residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin to visit the local library, although it was not well attended by other residents.

In contrast, the NNP did not start from the assumption that there was 'a' Gypsy/Traveller community in the area, or 'a' white British community alongside it; we knew there were people of Gypsy/Traveller origin in the area, but we did not make any assumptions about there being a (homogenous, separate, identifiable) Traveller 'community'. Rather, we set out to ask questions about the neighbourhood itself in a way that was designed to see whether or not these issues emerged. They did indeed emerge, but in surprising ways. It was clear, for example, that the Gypsy Traveller origin population was heterogeneous and included people married into non-Gypsy/Traveller origin families, and vice versa; it included people known by their neighbours to be of Gypsy/Traveller origin and people who weren't. The situation was considerably more complex than we had anticipated.

The project employed an imaginative touch

when attempting to be inclusive and engage people from Gypsy/Traveller origins. So, for example, publicity material used imagery that resonated for people with Gypsy/Traveller origins (e.g. photographs that young people took of an ornamental cart horse in a window) without explicitly drawing attention to the Gypsy/Traveller dimensions of the research. These are images with different meanings to different people. In this way it was not explicitly aimed at Gypsy/Traveller people; it was likely, though, that they would be symbolically significant to them without being obviously about Gypsy/Traveller people. It is worth noting here that the project's ability to do this sort of thing was dependent on the local knowledge built up through Phase 1: i.e. learning what symbols or images would resonate with local people, and particularly with the 'hardest to reach' - what we describe in section 4 as an ethnographic sensibility.

Our conclusion is that, if neighbourhood work in areas with diverse populations is done carefully, without starting from separate identities, but instead starting with place, it can provide an opportunity to engage residents and meet their needs and build cohesion. In this way, inequalities between different sections of the community can be addressed without generating more tension. Thus the focus on place allows equality and fairness to be given centre stage and then allows issues of difference to be opened up safely.

This approach avoids two conundrums common in cohesion work; the 'we are all the same' approach and the 'we are all different' approach. The 'we are all the same' approach has the danger of ignoring not just the differences between people, but, crucially, the

²¹ Anastasio et al 2000, Amit 2002, Mayo 2000, Sennett 1992, 2002, Young 1990, 1997, 2000

inequalities between them - different levels of access to services, for example. The 'we are all different' approach, described by Hewitt (1997) as 'clumsy multiculturalism', has the danger of making some residents (usually white British residents) feel less valued or less favoured, thus potentially contributing to renewed tension.²²

The delivery team found that by starting with a focus on what all the sections of the population have in common - in this case the neighbourhood- offers an opportunity for people to find common ground outside their social identity. This echoes the findings of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which identifies that "we need to set out a new understanding of integration and cohesion - one that responds to local complexity and that reinforces a sense of common purpose across communities." (2007: 37).

Promising practices:

Examples of how the project worked to sustain the focus on place rather than on differences and which could be replicated in other areas, included:

- Avoiding the use of labels (i.e. not badging activities with titles that associate them with a particular group in the neighbourhood). For example, the project was never badged locally as a 'Gypsy/Traveller project', but as a 'local project'.
- Avoiding focusing on problems. Rather than always focusing on what was wrong with the area, the project focused on solutions and changes for the better. This avoids getting caught up in the cycle of stigmatisation and blame whereby interventions to improve an area can perpetuate the image of the area as 'deprived' and problematic.

- Beginning to reclaim the area's history was useful. We celebrated the positive aspects of the area and its story, drawing on narratives of place. This helped generate good news stories about the area and thus contribute to a positive shared future.
- Integrating images of local landmarks and objects that had meaning for different sections of the neighbourhood in publicity was a subtle way in which the project depicted inclusive and common ground.
- Repeated use of the words "your neighbourhood" assisted with establishing common ground
- Using researched common neighbourhood issues and resident researchers to determine service improvement and project ideas - in a way that was transparent and seen to be fair - was important to establishing common ground.

However, this focus on place must be seen as a tool, a starting point, and not as the final word in building cohesion. Thus the project moved from a focus on place and common ground to the possibility of talking safely about difference; we are not arguing for repressing difference in favour of place.

Indeed, once a level of cohesion and common purpose had been built through this focus on place, the delivery team was able to start talking about differences and inequalities but in a way that avoided contributing to racialisation or blame. This can be seen in the way that, during the 'finding out' phase, residents were able to start looking at exclusions and inequalities in the area based on the foundation of shared ground built up during that phase. Here, participative neighbourhood research proved to be a valuable way of bringing residents together,

²² Hewitt 2005, Dench et al 2006

enabling them to work collaboratively on matters including but, crucially, moving beyond their own immediate needs and concerns. For example, as part of a research training session, the project used a workshop on local demographics as a way of getting residents to identify a sample that represented the local population. This opened up the issue of fairness and representation in a non-divisive way, as residents themselves identified the need to include all sections of the community in the project. Residents even suggested that certain minority communities needed to be over-represented in the research sample because although their numerical presence was small they constituted a significant perspective that needed to be heard in the research. Thus a focus on what people have in common was an engagement tool rather than an end point. Once common ground has been created it is possible to monitor who might be being excluded in a subtle but visibly fair and transparent way, on an ongoing basis.

Although these issues are specific to the research area, they have implications in other areas where large numbers of people of Gypsy/Traveller origin have been housed alongside white British people, areas where new migrants are settling and areas experiencing other sorts of diversity.

3. Working with diversity: including Gypsy/Traveller origin residents in neighbourhood work

3.1 Ethnic monitoring of service provision

Key finding:

There is a lack of robust and joined-up data around Gypsy/Traveller origin populations.

Under-declaration has a major impact on the ability of services to plan and target provision for these populations and for research to present an accurate picture of conditions on the ground. The solution is to develop and implement inventive methods of data collection and correlation.

Recommendation:

For national bodies:

Promote the inclusion by local services of ethnic monitoring categories for Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage.

Provide guidance on encouraging declaration from these groups.

For agencies:

Adopt ethnic monitoring categories for Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage while working with other agencies to develop locally meaningful sub-categories where relevant.

Develop locally tailored strategies for encouraging declaration from these groups.

Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage are identified as ethnic groups and covered by the Race Relations Acts as minority ethnic communities. These communities are, therefore, subject to legal rights and protections. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities frequently experience social exclusion and discrimination. Monitoring the use of service ethnicity, including by those of Gypsy/Traveller origin, and other social characteristics is key to ensuring that equitable, quality neighbourhood delivery gets off the ground. Alongside this, there need to be imaginative and locally meaningful strategies for encouraging declaration. Agencies have a crucial role in taking an inclusive approach to Gypsy/Traveller clients in

order to encourage declaration, monitor service take up and develop services accordingly.

It was clear from the agency audit and initial scoping work with residents that in the Newtown area, and particularly in Hopefields, people of Gypsy/Traveller origin make up a significant percentage of the population. Gypsies and Travellers have a long association with Kent due to historical agricultural links within the area. Based upon national estimates of the total Gypsy/Traveller population, which range from 100,000 to 350,000 (see Bhopal 2004), it can be estimated that there are a total of 9,600 Gypsy Travellers residing in Kent out of an overall Kent population of 1.6 million. Kent, as a large county, contains at any one time about 700-750 caravans (KCC 2006:11).

One of the project's aims was to bring agencies together to learn lessons about neighbourhood relations in areas with housed residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin and the relevance of current resident involvement and community development practice to such settings. This is particularly valuable because Newtown represents an exception to the national picture of high rates of failure in housing Travellers as identified by Kendall (1997).

Monitoring resident take up by ethnicity, including Gypsy/Traveller origin, and other social characteristics is key to ensuring that

equitable, quality neighbourhood delivery gets off the ground. It is also vital if national funders are to allocate resources for areas with Gypsy/Traveller populations to be targeted at building cohesion and integration. However, one of the issues central to the project has been the complex ways in which people of Gypsy/Traveller origin live in relation to their Gypsy/Traveller identity. This has emerged through on-the-ground discussions and through attempting to build up an accurate picture of the local Gypsy/Traveller origin population. It has been difficult to find reliable statistics regarding the number of families who are of Traveller origin in the area. This is due to a number of factors:

- There is likely to be under-reporting because various Traveller identities are often not included in ethnicity options in tickbox-based monitoring. At a national level, apart from in education, there is currently a lack of formal monitoring of Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity and there is currently no Gypsy/Traveller category within the ethnicity details contained on the neighbourhood statistics website.²³ Locally, we found that some agencies do not have a Gypsy or Traveller ethnic monitoring capacity.²⁴
- Even when categories exist, however, declaration can be an issue. There is likely to be under-reporting of Gypsy or Traveller identity due to the stigma associated with the identity.²⁵
- In the agency audit, some agencies reported that people of Gypsy/Traveller origin do not seek to access services because "Travellers

²³ See CRE Common Ground chapter 7 for more on the monitoring issue, and the undercounting of housed Travellers. For the exception, the education sector, see www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/datacollections/

²⁴ Of the local agencies formally interviewed, 50% did not monitor in this way. During the project agencies commonly reported that members of this group are unlikely to declare themselves. Many agency staff reported that they informally 'knew' some of their beneficiaries to be of Gypsy/Traveller origin, even though these clients were not formally recorded as such.

²⁵ See *Gypsies and Travellers: A Strategy for the CRE 2004-2007*, which identifies that housed Travellers often conceal their Traveller identities because of vulnerability. However, the report contextualised this in terms of detachment from extended families, which is less the case in Newtown where there are several Traveller households and more the case with single households housed on estates. Nonetheless, interviews with Traveller origin residents indicate a number of them are, at least in some circumstances, 'passing' as non-Traveller or actively deny that they are Travellers when talking to other residents.

sort out their own troubles". This may be the case or it may be a perception.

- From the agency audit, it appears that Travellers' nomadic histories and connections out of the area (e.g. close links with Traveller sites in Bromley, Orpington and elsewhere) mean such families' patterns of service use do not coincide with local authority borders.

This lack of hard data on the local Gypsy/Traveller origin population presented challenges for the project and has relevance to future work with housed Gypsy/Roma and Traveller people. It made it difficult to set targets for including people of Gypsy/Traveller origin in survey and interview work and to gather ethnicity data from survey work. Because of the factors noted above, it is likely that some people may not have declared themselves as being of Gypsy/Traveller origin during project survey, workshop and meeting work.

An audit of West Kent's census data found fewer people of declared Gypsy/Traveller origin than the housing officer had been told were living in the area.

From this, we conclude that there is an urgent need to develop more robust, standardised ways of recording ethnicity.²⁶ These need to be imaginative and locally relevant. National standard categories may not work well when individuals' relationships to Gypsy/Traveller identities are so complex. However, categories need to be nationally comparable, so it must be recognised that the blunt instrument of a generic 'Gypsy/Traveller' category may need to be used, perhaps alongside more finely-tuned, locally defined categories. Locally, we found using the category "of Gypsy/Traveller

origin" more effective in eliciting declaration than a generic "Gypsy/Traveller" category.

Alongside this, there need to be imaginative and locally meaningful strategies for encouraging declaration. This will only work if agencies are not seen to be stigmatising Gypsy/Traveller clients.

Promising practices:

Monitoring service take-up in order to develop services that take into account those of Gypsy/Traveller origin will need a range of monitoring activity and adaptations such as:

- Building trust on the ground.
- Staff awareness raising and training on the relevance and subtleties of service monitoring and development.
- Finding ways to ensure that verbal declarations to housing staff find their way into formal monitoring information so that it can inform service developments.
- Giving consideration to locally informed and tailored monitoring categories.
- Using imaginative, verbally-based monitoring methods.
- Piloting sensitive ways of actively encouraging declaration.

In the housing sector, the following practices could be adopted:

- Having positive images and references to Gypsy/Traveller residents at housing offices in order to encourage declaration.
- Adopting a respectful, open and accepting attitude that will encourage declaration.
- Ensuring that the *Current housing situation* section of housing register application forms includes caravans in order to open up discussions that could result in declaration.
- Giving sensitive explanations of why ethnicity is monitored to encourage declaration.

²⁶ See Crawley 2003 and Warrington and Peck 2005 for similar recommendations.

Reaching and monitoring residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin in the project

It is worth describing the process the NNP used to reach residents of Gypsy/Traveller origins in Phase 1 of the project, as this illustrates the challenges in this area.²⁷

Because of the reasons discussed above, the project knew it was unlikely that people would declare their Gypsy/Traveller origins via street survey. Residents working on the project were identifying that residents who were 'known' locally to be of Gypsy/Traveller origin were not stating this when completing the ethnicity section of the survey in public. The project therefore encouraged residents involved in the research to use local contacts to ask those of Gypsy/Traveller origin to complete surveys with resident researchers in their homes. The project encouraged residents to take part by stressing that we sincerely wanted the views of those of Gypsy/Traveller origin to be included in neighbourhood findings and any neighbourhood improvement plans that resulted.

Given that the process of surveying revealed the likely tendency for those of Gypsy/Traveller origin not to declare their origins in public, we do not know how many of the other declared/undeclared survey ethnicity categories include (or hide!) those of Gypsy/Traveller origin. This makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about whether those of white English/Irish etc origins and those of Gypsy/Traveller origins are saying anything distinct or similar about their neighbourhood. Such comparative analysis has thus been avoided. This situation also makes it difficult to discretely analyse white English responses with accuracy. Where

useful, frequency of responses of those of declared Gypsy/Traveller origins were compared with frequencies across the whole respondent group (i.e. everyone that answered a survey question).

As stated, to gain adequate declaration from those of Gypsy/Traveller origins it was necessary to locate some respondents via resident networks and to ask them to complete the survey at home. This meant a number of respondents of Gypsy/Traveller origin were 'networked to' residents involved in the project. This may impact on the representative nature of the views expressed and any suggestions arising from findings would therefore need further 'testing out'.

3.2 Agency practice with housed residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin

Key findings:

People of Gypsy/Travellers origin are often housed in areas already experiencing a lack of resources, which has the potential to exacerbate community cohesion issues. Newly-housed Travellers face particular issues for community development work.

For national bodies:

Adequately fund housing and community development providers to develop strategies for including Gypsy/Traveller populations in neighbourhoods, based on principles of common ground and visible fairness set out in section 2.

Explore the possibility of supporting the piloting of neighbourhood-based mentoring networks in neighbourhoods where there are groups that may require support in sustaining tenancies.

²⁷ A full description of the survey process is included in the Methodology Section of this report (page 18). For an academic discussion of these issues in relation to survey work with Roma in Eastern and Central Europe, see Ahmed et al (2007)

Welcome packs for newly-housed residents that do not rely on the written word (e.g. are DVD-based) and specifically respond to the needs of Gypsy/Traveller residents moving from sites should be piloted in estates to which residents are moved. These will also be useful for other groups with verbally-based culture and/or restricted written communication skills.

Fund training on specific Gypsy/Traveller-origin residents' housing issues, ideally delivered by experienced housing practitioners alongside residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin. This may again lead the way for similar material helpful to other groups.

For agencies:

Integrate work with residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin in neighbourhood work, involving residents in developing strategies that include them.

Develop locally-meaningful strategies for countering stigmatisation and involve local residents, including those from stigmatised populations and those from majority populations.

The issue of people of Gypsy/Traveller origin living in housing is relatively under-researched. Newtown is unusual in having a high number of such residents, but far from unique. Our findings on this topic are, therefore, of relevance in a number of locations.²⁸

Agency practice and stigmatisation

The project has brought agencies together to

discuss, debate, share information, share practice and plan joint delivery about people of Gypsy/Traveller origin in the location. This is a new approach for agencies that generally deal with individual clients, or in some cases families. Work with individuals and families has not so far been linked to neighbourhood approaches and such a linking would continue to facilitate the type of sharing of learning and joined up work the project has begun. It is also a way of avoiding Gypsy/Traveller origin populations being stigmatised by having their needs separated from those of the general population.

When placed in social housing, stigmatised populations such as Gypsy/Traveller families or dispersed asylum seekers are often - almost by definition - housed in estates where there is already concentrated multiple 'deprivation'. Here the lack of resources that is the norm in such areas can create conditions for intense prejudice.²⁹ This can feed into the challenges for cohesion already identified in this report. For example, there may be myths about who gets access to allocations.³⁰

Such experiences of prejudice can in turn lead to members of those stigmatised populations who are able to hide their identities in public 'passing'. At the level of service provision and the monitoring of take-up, this phenomenon of passing can lead to the under-declaration discussed above, but it can also have more profound psychological impacts for the people living in this way.³¹

There is an urgent need for agencies to

²⁸ See Greenfields 2006, Greenfields and Home 2006, Home and Greenfields 2006 and Lovatt 2006 for work that does address this issue.

²⁹ Dench, Gavron and Young 2006, Hudson, Phillips, Ray and Barnes 2007, Markova and Black 2007

³⁰ See Our Shared Future p.122-3

³¹ Ronald Lee has written of "'incognito Gypsies', Roma who have adapted enough to pass as gaje, but are in danger of losing their identity." (Weyrauch and Bell 2001: 59). See also Gobbo 2004 and Oakley 1997. There is an extensive literature on 'passing in' in Jewish cultural studies (e.g. Boyarin and Boyarin 1997), in the critical sociology of working class life (e.g. Skeggs 1997). See Jacobson 1998 for a discussion cutting across these groups.

develop strategies to counter the negative cohesion impacts of stigmatisation, given that this report has already argued that celebratory and issue-based projects might reinforce a lack of cohesion. However, we suggest that ideas for such initiatives should come from local people if they are to be meaningful in the neighbourhoods affected by these issues. Housing providers and community development anchor organisations in such neighbourhoods might, for instance, consider developing resident task groups made up of people of Gypsy/Traveller origin to look at ways forward locally.

The project agency interviews revealed that the extent to which staff are offered training in Gypsy/Traveller culture and practice varies greatly, and that opportunities for discussing issues relating to practice with, and for, Gypsy/Traveller origin populations are few. Where training does occur it tends to focus on understanding the Gypsy/Traveller traditional culture. For example, West Kent provides Gypsy/Traveller awareness training for its entire staff, resident representatives and board members, but staff report that although they find those elements of training in Gypsy/Traveller traditions and etiquette particularly useful, there is a relative lack of practice-based and housing-specific content available. Training provided by Gypsy/Traveller residents and housing professionals with experience of working with Gypsy/Traveller people might offer a better mix. The introduction of local and national networking, discussion and debate on work with housed Gypsy/Travellers in the context of neighbourhoods might also be beneficial.

Engaging residents of Gypsy/Traveller origin

The project's agency audit and research with residents found that recently-housed Gypsy/Traveller origin residents are less likely to get involved in neighbourhood improvement activity than longer established residents.

Promising practices

Involving these residents requires imaginative approaches. These might include:

- Personal visits.
- Taking time to talk on streets.
- Going to (and leaving fliers at) the places where recently housed residents go, such as churches.
- Working closely with housing officers who are able to identify recently housed residents.
- Contact through already involved Gypsy/Traveller origin residents.

There are two final important points arising from this. First, some of the lessons here will apply for other groups that tend to favour verbal networks as a way of sharing and gaining information - as is the case in many working class cultures. The lessons are also relevant for other recently-housed populations, such as new migrants. Secondly, and crucially, if such strategies are to be deployed, then there needs to be resourcing available nationally.

Issues for housing providers

The project also had some findings specific to housing. For example, the semi-structured interviews showed that some Gypsy/Traveller people who had recently moved into housing from sites reported that they would welcome support and information on issues related to

setting up home such as signing on and electricity. Similarly, the interviews recorded that cultural expectations affected how newly-housed residents from sites deal with issues such as antisocial behaviour, which the interviewees suggested was something dealt with internally on sites in their experience.

Promising practices:

With new tenants:

- Ethnicity should be sensitively monitored and declaration enthusiastically encouraged at this stage.
- Sensitive explanations of why ethnicity is monitored may encourage declaration.
- Be aware of, and able to identify, potential literacy and numeracy problems; imaginative ways of giving tenants information, such as on DVD, would be beneficial.
- Have a section on nomination and other housing forms that asks: "If not the tenant, who completed this form?" This could help identify literacy problems.
- Complete the initial benefit application at sign up.
- Orally run through tenancy agreements and termination procedures and check understanding before handing over keys.
- Ensure that staff are aware of potentially differing lifestyles and what these might mean in terms of honouring the tenancy agreement:
 - Support may be required with bills, benefits and accessing a range of financial and support services.
 - Consider animal and livestock policies (including issues around breeding animals), hard standing requirements (more than one vehicle), and outbuildings as these may be issues requiring special discussion.
 - Consider providing clearly-outlined

payment contracts.

- The need to notify the association if going away for a period of time may require a special mention.
- Introductory tenancies and regular home visits will allow both parties to explore and review the success of settling into the home and neighbourhood
- Welcome packs might facilitate this process.

Sustaining tenancies:

- Use face-to-face contact rather than in writing. If written correspondence is necessary, hand deliver it to the tenant in person.
- Develop strong delivery relationships with relevant support agencies and staff such as Traveller support projects, CAB, neighbourhood workers and schools so that referrals are done in person rather than relying on the prospective tenant to make contact themselves.
- Links with the education authority may be valuable. The Education Achievement Service and the local primary school were in this instance organisations held in high regard by local people of Gypsy/Traveller origin. Research elsewhere suggests this is often the case with Traveller Education Services.
- Consider establishing Gypsy/Traveller peer mentoring in neighbourhoods for those who are unfamiliar with a location or have just moved in from site. Be aware that inter and intra family relationships may sometimes affect who a Gypsy/Traveller resident is prepared to be mentored by.
- Ensure that tenant representatives in neighbourhoods with housed Gypsy/Traveller populations are aware of Gypsy/Traveller needs and are public advocates for the group.
- Be aware that those of Gypsy/Traveller origin

may be less likely to report on issues of antisocial behaviour and harassment, often being used to 'sorting' such issues themselves.

Published materials:

- Those of Gypsy/Traveller origins should be recognised in standard association documentation e.g.: diversity statement, antisocial behaviour policies, service standards, tenants' handbook etc.
- Encourage positive news stories and use of images that positively portray, and/or mean something to, Gypsy/Traveller residents. This should be done in a manner that encourages neighbourhood cohesion and takes account of local interrelations between Gypsy/Traveller and other groups of residents (see section 2).
- Take account of the fact that paper-based resident information is not the most effective way of reaching those of Gypsy/Traveller origin. Verbal interaction is likely to work better.

4. Participation and participative action research

Key finding:

The project built on innovative methods of action research to develop a powerful, effective model we have called *Neighbourhood Know How*. This provides a framework for neighbourhood engagement and improvement. It integrates participative research, community development and strategic neighbourhood improvement. Integrating participatory research with adults and participatory research with young people worked well in breaking down inter-generational barriers and supporting the civic development of young people.

Recommendations:

For action research projects in neighbourhoods:

Innovative methods, such as visual methods, are well suited to neighbourhood work with adults and young people of diverse working class origins.

Research can be a valuable engagement tool because it involves meeting people 'on their own terms' and on their home territory.

Involving residents as researchers is useful to engagement and cohesion. In deciding upon research samples based on local demographic information, residents are encouraged 'as researchers' to make reasoned decisions about who to reach in the neighbourhood, in what proportion and how.

Sustaining resident engagement requires swift and transparent translation of research findings into action. This requires genuine commitment to the neighbourhood from key partners.

Getting research translated into action is easier if the research team works closely with the agency or agencies ultimately responsible for taking action. This provides continuity and sustainability after the research period has ended so that residents experience a seamless transition between the action research process and neighbourhood improvement.

Participative and inclusive working is helped by documents that try to reflect action agreed by agencies rather than simply telling people what to do.

Producing a *researched neighbourhood*

findings document that emphasises common neighbourhood concerns is a fair and systematic way of bringing residents and agencies together to work on building a shared, neighbourhood future. This can be used as a script for neighbourhood action.

We believe that the *Neighbourhood Know How* model, as used by the NNP, is an exemplary model of participatory action research as a tool for facilitating resident-agency dialogue to deliver neighbourhood improvements identified through action research in areas where people are identified as traditionally difficult to engage (including those of Gypsy/Traveller origins).

The following section discusses in detail the methodology of the NNP. It sets out the steps involved in a participatory approach to research and community development and the challenges along the way. It describes the development of the Neighbourhood Know How model, which is an action research and community development model offering specific benefits for RSLs working at a neighbourhood level, especially those acting as community anchors. The NNP was funded by the Housing Corporation as part of its Innovation and Good Practice programme, and the innovative nature of the project - issues of process and methodology - is in some ways as important as our specific findings around cohesion and agency practice. We have therefore devoted considerable space to it.

Discussions with agencies in the period leading up to this project revealed a feeling that it would not be possible to engage local people. The neighbourhood work that has taken place in Hopefields offers a model of how to reach a range of local people who are

generally considered 'hard to reach'. This includes local working class residents who live alongside those of Traveller origins. The fact that the area was considered 'hard to reach' meant a particular approach had to be taken. The next section (4.1) describes how we came to use this approach before moving on to describe the five elements of this approach: A community development ethos, harnessing residents' own knowledge of their area, using engaging methods, a commitment to effecting real change and developing partnerships with agencies to do so.

4.1 The development of our action research model

The *Neighbourhood Know How* model builds on previous work that Real Strategies and CUCR have done in South London and Kent, both separately and together. In particular, it draws on the *Learning to be Local* model developed by Real Strategies with the involvement of CUCR researchers and in partnership with housing organisations. The *Learning to be Local* model was, for example, used in Stone in North West Kent, working with local residents and Kent Police on community safety concerns.

A key element of the *Learning to be Local* model, incorporated into the NNP, was a two-stage approach, starting with a *Finding Out* phase to gain a picture of the locality, often using 'on the street' and community project/school-based participative research work using imaginative techniques (e.g. visual research/arts events training local people and agency staff as researchers), alongside an agency audit to understand agency needs. The research process is used as an engagement tool to establish a local community group that will take ownership of the project. The lessons

that emerge are then shared with agencies in the action phase, a process of service and neighbourhood improvement bringing together individual agencies and local people. Agencies and residents jointly agree an action plan for forward improvement strategy. After the project, this local action plan is implemented and regularly monitored and reviewed, steered by the agency/resident partnership.

In parallel with Real Strategies' *Learning to be Local* model, CUCR was involved in the development of *Local Knowledge for Local Solutions*. This was a partnership between CUCR and two community-based organisations in Deptford/New Cross, Magpie Resource Library and Gap Research. The partnership was commissioned by the Southwark Alliance (the London Borough of Southwark's Local Strategic Partnership) to develop a toolkit for neighbourhood research, including both traditional and participatory research methods, to be used to train local residents as researchers in three Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) priority areas.³² The research was intended both to develop the peer researchers as community champions and to use local intelligence to identify priorities and solutions for the areas that could be built into the way the NRF was spent in the borough. As with the current project, Southwark Alliance's premise was that local people often know best about the issues that affect them and are likely to be able to reach sections of the community that consultants or professional researchers might not be able to reach.³³

Subsequently, CUCR used Real Strategies' *Learning to be Local* model in the *Hyde Sport Inquiry*. This was an action research project

commissioned by Hyde Charitable Trust on two South London estates owned by Hyde Housing to identify the issues and solutions around leisure activities for young residents. Summer photography workshops were held with young people to get their perspectives, using various mapping-based and visual participatory methodologies, along with focus groups with parents. At the same time the research team undertook an audit of local agencies. At a photographic exhibition the young people's findings and wish lists were formally presented to other local stakeholders, and out of this a shared action plan for the neighbourhood was agreed and a group of residents and agencies was formed to deliver the action plan.

There is one crucial difference between the Hyde Sport Inquiry and the work in Stone on the one hand and the Southwark project and NNP on the other. The former projects were very focused on particular issues - community safety in Stone, 'things to do' for the Sport Inquiry - whereas the latter projects' focus has been less predetermined and more informed by *neighbourhood* concerns. In Newtown, the focus was on 'neighbourliness' and improving the neighbourhood, a huge topic that involves issues like housing, community safety, opportunities for young people and so on. When the focus is wider and completely agency and resident informed, the *Learning to be Local* model cannot be delivered in such a compact way as it was in Stone; it requires a longer term, intensive intervention. This has advantages, however; the earlier projects missed out some issues due to limitations of time and were not always completely successful in terms of agency buy-in. In Newtown these aspects were strengthened.

³² Many of the methodologies had been developed or adapted by the NX Project, an action research project in New Cross led by Magpie in partnership with Gap and CUCR. Many of the methodologies had been developed or adapted by the NX Project, an action research project in New Cross led by Magpie in partnership with Gap and CUCR.

³³ See <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/research/res20.php> for details of the project and Gidley (2004) for discussion of the issues raised by the project.

Furthermore, the ethnic make-up of the area is unusual, sensitive and presents specific challenges. Due to these factors, too, the NNP was conducted over a longer period of time. Over time we saw a specific focus emerge through investigating local concerns; the issue of the area's negative reputation and a desire on the part of local people of all generations to retell the story of Newtown in a more positive light, focussing on the area's rich history and positive aspects. In this sense, local people were re-narrating the story of the area and highlighting narratives of working class lives. With this in mind the later phases did not follow the earlier *Learning to be Local* model of neighbourhood planning but rather developed a *Neighbourhood Know How* model that created a space for the exploration and retelling of community narratives as a way to increase social cohesion and recover local class identities. Crucially, this model also delivers specific neighbourhood improvements, too, such as reducing the amount of litter on the streets, improving policing and providing space for the development of young people's creative capacities. Indeed, these are some of the measures of the success of the project generated by local participants. These improvements to the area and improvements to community cohesion and neighbourhood relations are to some extent interdependent within the *Neighbourhood Know How* model.

4.2 'Neighbourhood Know How' as a model of engagement, research and development

The *Neighbourhood Know How* model has five key elements, which we set out here.

A community development ethos

The key ingredients for this neighbourhood's success in engaging residents considered by

some agencies to be 'hard to reach' stem from its community development ethos, rather than from either an academic or consultancy approach. The NNP has painstakingly built up trust among residents and between residents and the research team by working in a low-key, 'user-friendly' manner. In this process the research team has repeatedly demonstrated that the project values residents' own experiences. As described earlier, the team spent time walking the streets, visiting people in their homes, attending existing groups, engaging in honest and friendly discussions about neighbourhood concerns, taking care to talk in the terms that people understand and responding to their concerns in a timely fashion. This also involved the development of an 'ethnographic' sensibility; a commitment on the part of the research team to being there, to participating while observing.

As discussed, the project has also worked carefully in addressing issues of diversity and equality in a sensitive local context where minority communities are not recent immigrants and often not visibly from minority communities. Examples of this approach include discussing people's 'backgrounds' with them in an open and engaging way and carefully exploring vernacular 'name calling' in order to understand local meanings of terms.

At the same time, the project has consistently placed residents' own perspectives at the centre of its work. In identifying the issues that face the estate, it is residents' own concerns that inform us. This has equally been the case when residents have expressed 'politically incorrect' views. For example, if residents have used derogatory language about Travellers or about new non-white residents, this has not been 'corrected' or condemned as white racism. Instead it has been taken seriously, drawn out and worked through. If perceptions

of unfair treatment or of being under attack from certain members of the community are simply denied, then resentments and hostility will continue.³⁴

Promising practices:

Linking neighbourhood research and practice in with Gypsy/Traveller populations requires particular efforts in terms of gaining access and trust. Essential practices here include:

- 'Snowballing' via local contacts and trusted agency staff.
- Working through organisations that are known to be seen in a favourable light (e.g. the primary school in this instance, Traveller Education Services in many areas).
- Being prepared to conduct research in local people's homes.
- Taking the extra time necessary to reach people.

Here, the development of genuine local knowledge in Phase 1 was particularly important. This included learning about local landmarks and local informal networks (e.g. extended families on estates) and local informal sites of community activity. This was developed out of the ethnographic sensibility/community development ethos already stressed.

Harnessing residents' own knowledge of the area

The *Neighbourhood Know How* model uses peer research as a strategy for engaging and developing residents. In peer research, people are trained to research other people like themselves - for example, training residents to research other residents, or training teenagers to research other teenagers. The research methods used can vary enormously; street or door-to-door surveys using questionnaires designed by participants can often be used, but

more qualitative methods can also be employed. In peer research, the emphasis can be on the process - the empowerment or community cohesion built during the project - rather than on the outcomes of the research. As well as the findings of the project, outcomes will include outcomes for the peer researchers such as increased skill or confidence levels and perhaps employment.

As described in the methodology section above, the NNP has trained residents, including adults and young people, as researchers, involving them in the research design and in reaching out to other residents. This has been motivated by a number of considerations. First, we believe that local people often know best about local problems and are uniquely placed to do the research that identifies the key local issues and solutions. Second, in a location like Hopefields, where there are issues of trust and suspicion, local researchers are likely to get better responses from their peers than outside consultants. These two factors meant that extra research data was gained by working alongside local people, for example around Traveller identities and Traveller and non-Traveller perceptions of Travellers. Third, and crucially, the research process itself was envisaged as a form of community development or civic activity, building up confidence, cohesion and trust amongst residents - as we will explore further later in this section.

During the project, we have seen a number of illustrations of the way peer research can contribute to community cohesion. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the way the issue of multiculturalism and diversity was raised through research methods training. In comparing the local demographic profile with details of who had been reached so far by the project, the resident peer research group

³⁴ Hewitt 1997, 2005)

spontaneously identified a number of under-represented sections of the community to be targeted by the research; men, the oldest residents, Travellers and non-white residents. In this way a multicultural approach emerged organically, owned by the group, instead of being imposed from above, as is so often the case in communities. Had we locally identified the neighbourhood project as being 'about' particular social group/s (e.g. young men, Gypsy/Travellers) then the researchers feel that at this stage local people would have reacted to this and any existing social divisions would have been strengthened. Doing a participative neighbourhood research project that aims to find out what different sections of the community want, and involving residents in deciding who should be approached and how, assisted in involving some younger and adult residents in thinking about the views of groups they might not usually mix with.³⁵

Involving young people as peer researchers had particular advantages in the project. It can give young people a sense, not just of their own worth (as with the *Once Upon a Newtown* project) but also as members of a community (as with the young people involved in the resident research group), thus contributing to their development as active citizens. Linking young people's own concerns with adults' concerns about young people can also contribute to community cohesion.

Engaging methods

Action research and peer research, as well as participatory forms of development, have innovated a whole range of methods that can be used to engage residents, beyond the more familiar survey or interview methods. Various

forms of mapping can allow participants to map the issues they face in their neighbourhood. Such methods have also been used in projects that have no 'action' outcomes.

Participatory methods have been built into the NNP. In particular, when working with young people in the *Finding Out* phase of the research, the research team used a variety of techniques involving mapping and photography. These included visual methods, such as the use of disposable cameras, mapping exercises and drawing/painting sessions.³⁶ The team used these methods for a number of reasons and in a number of ways:

- To draw residents, especially young residents, into the project, as well as to establish goodwill with organisations and parents.
- To make the experience more participatory and engaging for those involved.
- To get a vivid representation of residents' own sense of the space of their area - to walk the territory through new eyes.
- To give something back in terms of arts skills, life skills and visual mementos of the project.
- To create visual material to be used in other workshops with adults to show and elicit information.

A commitment to concrete change

The project is committed to bringing about concrete positive changes for the neighbourhood. This promise has been central to getting residents on board. The *Neighbourhood Know How* model is an action research approach. In action research, practical outcomes are valued equally with (or more than) the knowledge outcomes - the findings or academic learning. For example, action research

³⁵ However, it should be noted that although reaching certain groups was agreed, the process did not necessarily change individual prejudices; that is clearly a longer term issue, which will hopefully continue to be addressed through the story-telling work, and beyond.

³⁶ Many of these methods were first developed as part of the Centre for Urban and Community Research's *Finding the Way Home* project (see Back 2005, Back and Keith 1999, Back, Keith and Cohen 1999a, 1999b, Keith 2005, Rätzl 2008) and subsequently developed as part of other CUCR projects, such as the Hyde Sport Inquiry.

projects might seek knowledge about an area or a service in order to change the area or service. Action research in this sense can use a variety of methods and need not directly involve residents or service users.³⁷

The NNP has, from the start, had strong action outcomes built in, such as informing policy around housed Travellers locally and nationally, making Hopefields a better place to live and building neighbourliness locally. These sorts of action outcomes can sometimes be difficult to balance with more purely academic outcomes, as we will explore further below.

Partnership with agencies to deliver change

One of the key features of the *Neighbourhood Know How* model is the way in which it brings together residents' priorities and agency practice. Central to the success of the project, as we have already seen, was that by working with agencies the project could bring about 'quick wins' that could be seen as the start of a real, tangible improvement in the area. The alley days were a good example of this; they took an issue that had emerged during the research phase that both residents and agencies were concerned about. The project encouraged dialogue between residents and agencies as to what the problems were, who was responsible and what the barriers to change were. This created opportunities for both residents and agencies to 'learn' more about the neighbourhood together, see that their priorities were aligned and understand the social, economic and political factors associated with its improvement. So, for example, pathway and verge maintenance contracts were 'demand-response' led, i.e. the alleyway's graffiti, litter and fly tipping would remain unless residents took ownership and reported problems.

Residents would report things if they knew how, if they knew who was responsible and if they knew what they could expect to happen. Residents wanted to see that agencies 'cared' enough to respond and agencies wanted to see that residents 'cared' enough to report.

Promising practices:

Some of the factors that enabled a positive relationship with the agencies that could make a difference were:

- The project delivery team acting in an extremely professional way with providers to understand both mainstream agency culture and resident culture and find a way to bridge the two. The project delivery team worked within, and reported to, existing partnership forums to facilitate agency involvement and engagement and promote research findings and inclusion in action planning.
- Seeking to develop, in partnership, achievable, realistic and researched neighbourhood improvements that aligned both agencies' resources and residents' priorities.
- Finding ways that agencies could get a sense of ownership over the project - for instance developing reporting mechanisms that respected agency priorities and existing structures.
- Showing agencies how they could benefit from involvement in the project, rather than simply asking them to do things for the residents.
- Using pilot activities to understand agency processes, such as with the alley days.
- It is possible that the fact that a housing provider was leading the project - working in its role as a community anchor - was a source of reassurance for agency partners.

Working with agencies in this way does, however, present some challenges that are

³⁷ Reason and Bradbury 2001

specific to the Newtown context and others which are more general to the *Neighbourhood Know How* model.

One of the crucial factors in the project's success was that priorities and necessary actions identified by local people were seen to be acted upon speedily in order to recognise the general view of residents involved in the project that "we know what is needed, now let's just get on with it". However, one of the features of statutory agencies is that they typically work to timescales oriented to funding cycles and organisational strategies. It is often the case that, for agencies, residents' wishes or priorities have to be considered alongside a range of other priorities and objectives. One of the challenges of the project has been sustaining local agency involvement. Clearly this approach often requires agencies to commit to neighbourhood work. The commitment of the organisation at a managerial and strategic level as well as workers 'on the ground' is often necessary. Effective and sustainable change at the level of agency strategies can be a lengthy process. Thus, while doing work too slowly runs the risk of losing residents, neighbourhood work done too quickly risks losing the commitment of agencies.

Sustainability

As discussed, one of the key aspects of Phase 2 has been the importance of communication, publicity and public relations. One of the positive outcomes of the project has been the shift in agencies' discourses about the area. Crucially the work of residents and the delivery team has emphasised the positive aspects of Newtown; this has meant that it has become harder for agencies to be negative about working in the area, a tendency that has in the past perpetuated the negative reputation that

Newtown has suffered in the national and local press.

Clearly, in order to sustain the project's momentum and build on successes it is necessary to retain residents' enthusiasm and energy, address the priorities for neighbourhood improvement that they have identified and ensure that agency practice is tuned to neighbourhood working. West Kent's new Neighbourhood Co-ordinator will have a crucial role in bringing agencies together at the local level. In addition, the delivery team is giving a *Sharing Neighbourhood Practice* workshop on "How to reach local people", aimed at all the agencies that have worked with the project. Groups will share learning and, crucially, identify what resources are collectively available to work together on the issues. The aspiration is that this will leave in place some sort of structure for dealing with the area's issues beyond the life of the project.

Neighbourhood Project

Sharing Neighbourhood Practice 1

HOW TO REACH LOCAL PEOPLE
MONDAY 31ST MARCH 2008, 12.30-3.00

SESSION OUTLINE

- Introduction
- What you have tried & why
- Sit with policy context
- Reach, engage... terms & meaning
- Case studies - engagement & Participation in partnership
- What we do well and need to develop together

The Neighbourhood Project has been going for a year and a half. During the course of the project we have learnt a lot about reaching different types of local people (young, old, those of Gypsy/Traveller origins, white English etc). At the December partner agency meeting several of you expressed interest in exploring how to reach local people and involve them in enquiries, projects and services.

"Regular, informal on the ground contact limited by a few flights is better than putting thousands of leaflets through doors."

The session will therefore use partner experience to look at:

- Policy and practice trends (relevant to you)
- Ways of reaching and involving local people
- Managing diversity, encouraging cohesion
- Measuring success
- Developing ways of doing this together in future

West Kent Extra, West Kent Housing & Real Strategies Ltd
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Appendix 1: The agency interviews and meetings

Organisations interviewed and/or met with, including those on project groups:

- Newtown Gypsy and Traveller project
- Newtown Surgery
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Connexions
- Local councillors
- Jobcentre Plus
- Evangelist Church
- 8-12s Club
- Kent County Council (KCC) youth club *the Junction*
- KCC Adult Education Service
- KCC Community Warden Service
- KCC Children, Families and Education Directorate
- KCC Ethnic Minority Achievement Service
- KCC Warden Service
- Mediation Service
- Mind (held at Youth and Community Centre)
- Neighbourhood Watch Scheme staff
- Sevenoaks District Council (Community)
- Sevenoaks District Council (Housing)
- KCC Social Services - family centre
- Newtown People First Partnership
- Hopefields Primary School
- Newtown Technology Centre
- Newtown Volunteer Bureau
- Town Library
- West Kent Police
- West Kent and West Kent Extra staff

Appendix 2: The project partnership and advisory group

Advisory Group membership

- Professor Marj Mayo, Goldsmiths College, expert on community development and participatory action research
- Dr Kalwant Bhopal, Southampton University, expert on Travellers
- Geraldine Blake, Links UK, Community development and action research expert
- Trevor Diesch, Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Department for Communities and Local Government
- Dr Roger Hewitt, Goldsmiths, research on white backlash and multiculturalism, including in outer SE London
- Heather Juman, Housing Corporation
- Dr Jo Richardson, Centre for Comparative Housing Research, De Montfort University, Leicester (JRF project: Contentious spaces: the Gypsy/Traveller site issue)
- Alexis Wright, Commission for Racial Equality (Guildford office: Southeast region)

Project management group membership

West Kent Housing/West Kent Extra

- Eamonn Dillon, Managing Director, West Kent Extra
- Linda Hogan, Resident Involvement Manager, West Kent Extra
- Vicky Murphy, Neighbourhood Housing Officer, Hopefields Estate, West Kent Housing
- Sasha Harrison, Head of Housing and Communities (now left West Kent)
- Genette Allen, Head of Housing, West Kent Housing

Real Strategies Ltd

- Sue Lelliott and Debbie Humphry, Real Strategies

CUCR

- Alison Rooke and Ben Gidley, CUCR (Goldsmiths)

Residents

- Lesley White (Phase 1-2) and Ann Watkins (Phase 1), Tenant reps and residents

Other agencies

- Liz Davies, Newtown Town Council
- Sally Ratchford, Regeneration and Youth Manager, Sevenoaks District Council
- Chief Inspector Gill Ellis and Sergeant Nick Plaice, Kent Constabulary

Real Strategies research team

- Sue Lelliott
- Debbie Humphry
- Ros Young
- Imogen Slater

Wider partnership

Newtown Town Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Kent County Council Adult Education Service, Kent County Council Youth Service, the Newtown 8-12s Project and West Kent Police were actively involved in the project group and/or project delivery.

Appendix 3: Demographic profile

Demographic data from www.neighbourhood.gov.uk gathered in the 2001 Census³⁸ shows that Hopefields Ward has a recorded population of 4535 (Cherry Tree Ward: 6287). Hopefields Estate contains 35 streets. More than 60% (680 properties) are owned and managed by West Kent. The remaining properties are either privately owned or owned by the local authority or other housing associations.

Age

Hopefields and the adjacent Cherry Tree Ward have younger populations than Sevenoaks District, Kent and the region as a whole. The median age of the population in Sevenoaks is 41 whilst that in Hopefields is 36. Hopefields and Cherry Tree generally have higher numbers of under-15s, with Hopefields having 24% of the population aged 15 and under and Cherry Tree having 21% (compared with 19% for the South East and 20% for Kent and Sevenoaks). There are less people aged 85-plus in Hopefields than in Cherry Tree, Sevenoaks and Kent.

Education and Training

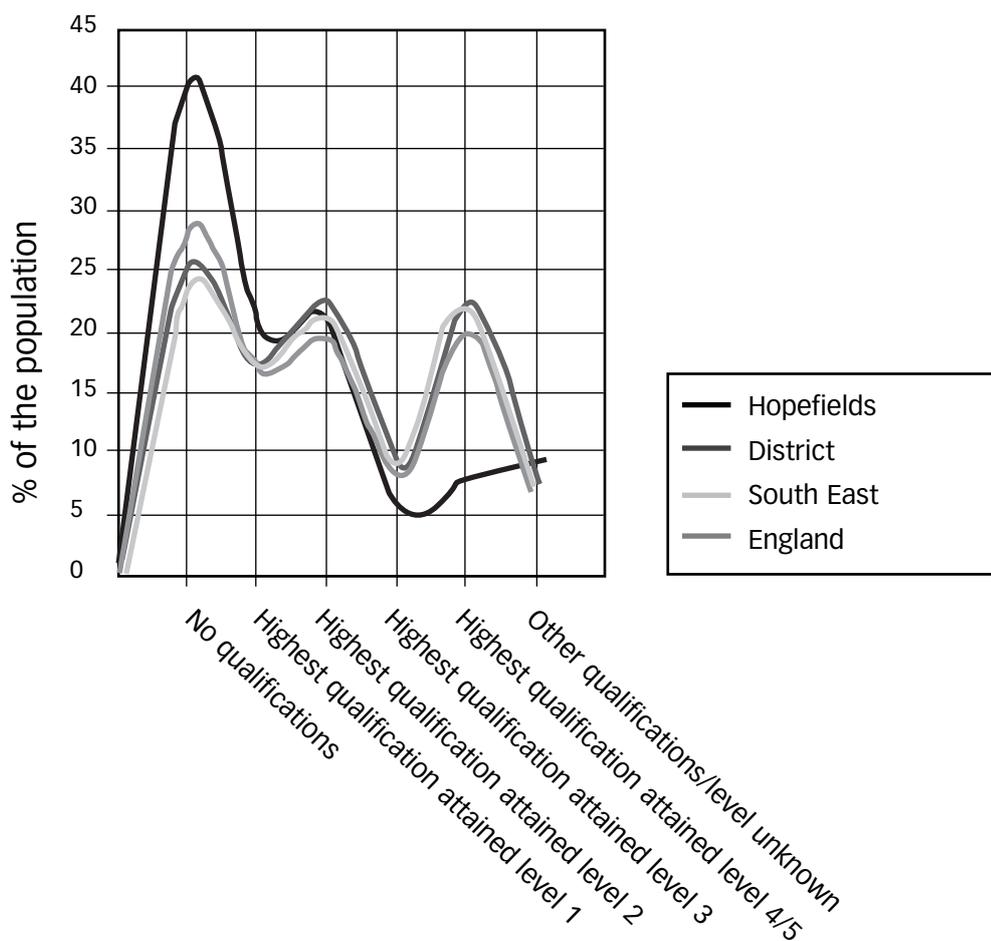
There are much larger numbers of unqualified people in Hopefields than in Kent, the district and in Cherry Tree. For example, 41% of those in Hopefields Ward and 37% of those in Cherry Tree have no qualifications; this compares with 23% in the south east, 28% in Kent and 24% in Sevenoaks. When focusing in on the 'Super Output Area' (SOA - the smallest area in the Census data) at the heart of our research area, the number of people unqualified is

extremely high; 55% unqualified as compared to 29% in a comparator Cherry Tree SOA.³⁹ As for those with qualifications in the selected Hopefields SOA, there are 21% with level 1 and 4% with level 4/5 qualifications as compared to 18% having level 1 and 11.30% having level 4/5 in the Cherry Tree comparator SOA.

³⁸ All statistics are taken from the neighbourhood statistics website Accessed March 2008. It should be noted that at the time of writing these statistics are 7 years old.

³⁹ We omit the reference number of this SOA in order to respect the residents of these areas.

Qualifications of People aged 16-74 in Hopefields compared with Regional and National Levels



Health

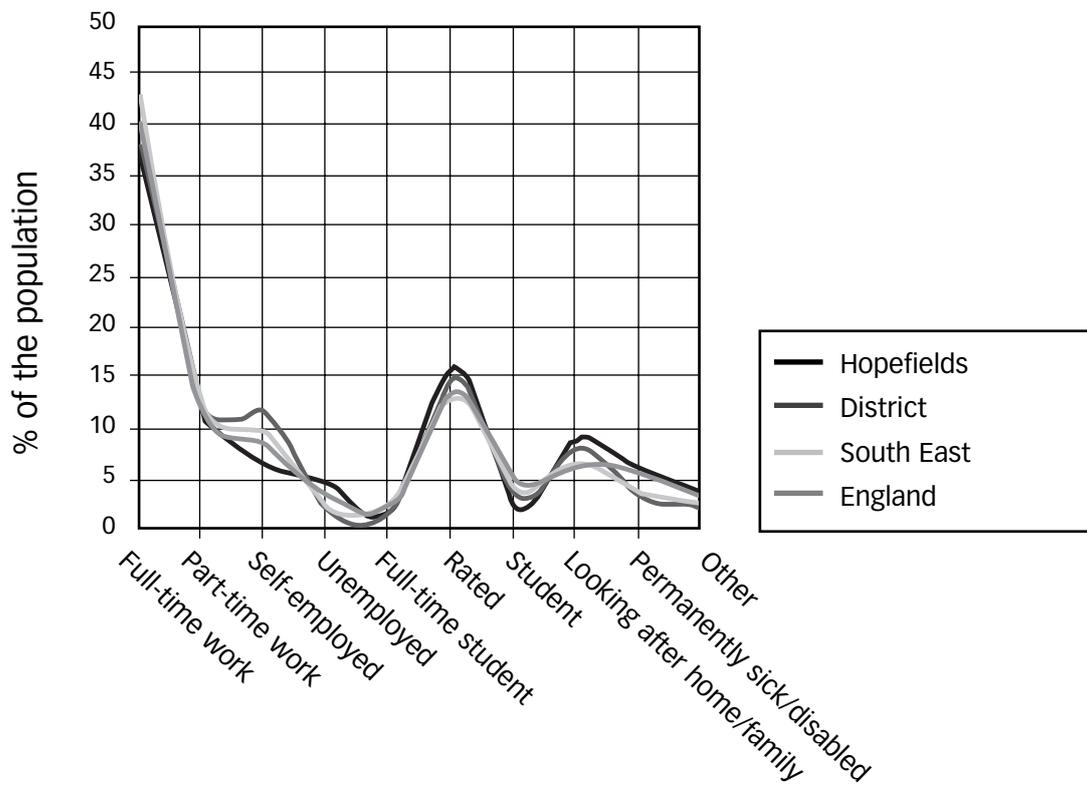
There are higher numbers of people reporting limiting long-term illness and poor health in Hopefields Ward, where 18% report long-term illness as compared to 14% in Sevenoaks. Nine per cent report health not being good as compared to 6.5% in Sevenoaks. Of those reporting that they provide unpaid care, far greater numbers provide 20 to 50-plus hours per week (37% in Hopefields and 22% in Sevenoaks).

Car ownership, poverty and employment status

Forty per cent of households in the selected Hopefields SOA are reported as having no car or van. This compares with 25% in Hopefields

Ward, 27% in Cherry Tree Ward and 14% in Sevenoaks. Of the 16 to 74 population, those in part-time work in the selected Hopefields SOA is slightly lower (10.4%) than the Hopefields Ward average (12%, which is similar to the Kent average). In the selected Cherry Tree SOA this figure is much higher (15%). Of the 16 to 74 population, the number of those in full-time work is lower than the Sevenoaks and Kent average in both Hopefields Ward and the SOA (Kent 40%, Hopefields Ward 38% and SOA 35%). Of the 16 to 74 population, those actively looking for work but unemployed are recorded as 7.6% in the selected Hopefields SOA as compared with 4.5% in the Ward and 2.8% in the county. In Cherry Tree Ward the percentage of those looking for work is the same as for the county.

Level of Economic Activity in Hopefields compared with Regional and National Levels



There are slightly more retired people in Hopefields Ward as compared with the county but there are far less in the selected SOA area.

When those in work, students and the retired are taken into account, 39% of the population aged 16 to 74 in Hopefields Ward are not working for one reason or another. Cherry Tree has 33%. The selected Hopefields SOA has 45% not working.

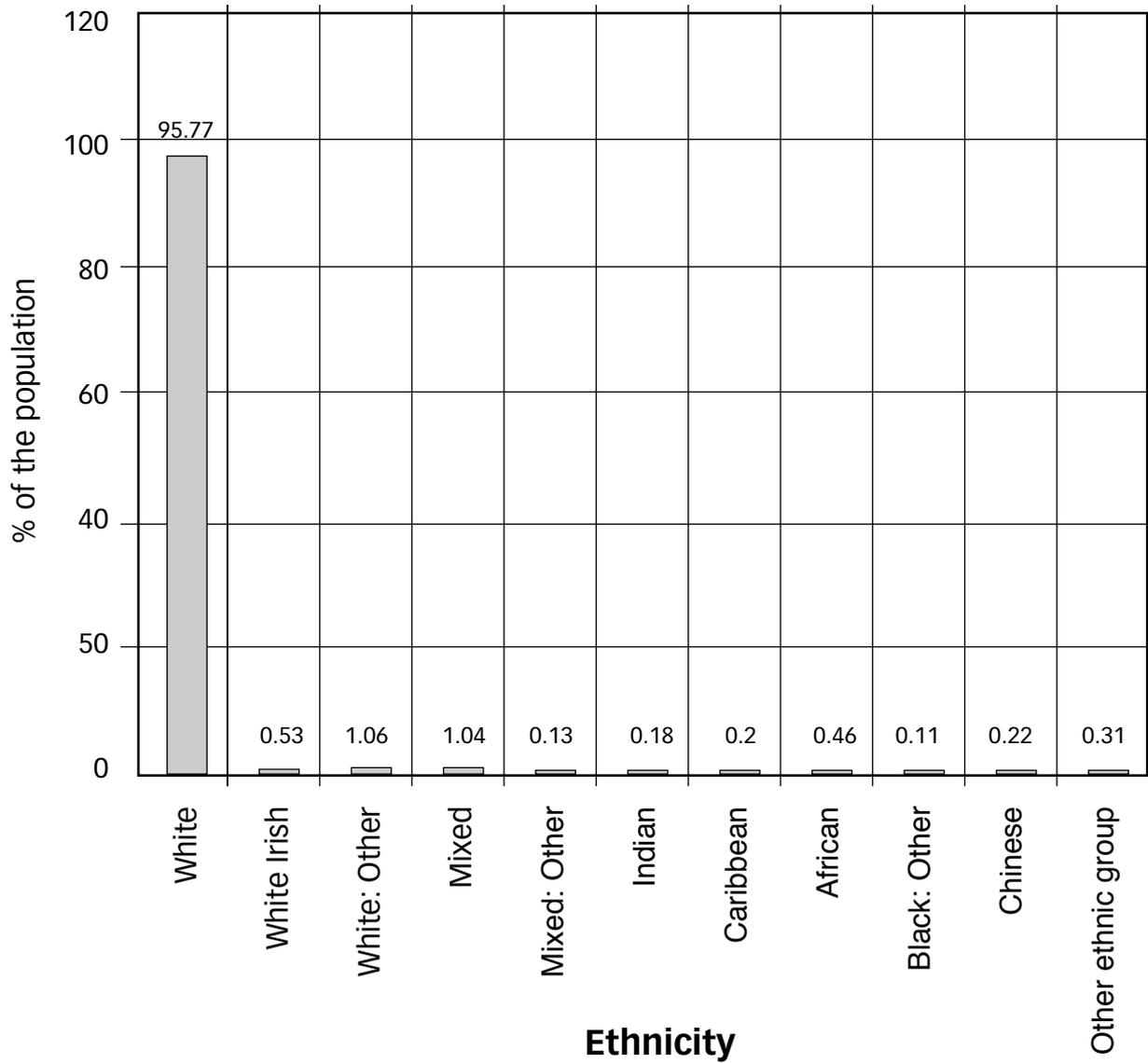
The Citizen's Advice Bureau Community Profile and Advice Needs Analysis (2006) demonstrate that the three Newtown wards provide the highest number of debt, employment and benefits enquiries in Sevenoaks.

Ethnicity

Kent has significantly more white British people than in the population as a whole, but Newtown stands out even within Kent: Newtown is one of the whitest places in England. Hopefields Ward (and Cherry Tree) is recorded as having a slightly higher white British population than Sevenoaks and Kent (Sevenoaks and Kent 94% and Hopefields and Cherry Tree nearer 96%).

Hopefields is recorded as having slightly less White Irish and White other residents than Kent and the District.

Population of Hopefield, Newtown, by Ethnicity



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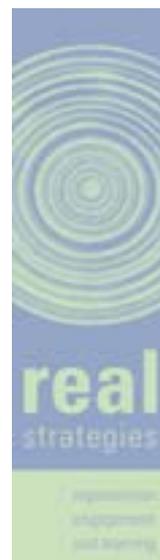
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