Low-income neighbourhoods in Britain

The gap between policy ideas and residents' realities

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This report examines some of the principles and assumptions behind policies concerned with place, poverty and welfare introduced by the Coalition Government, and considers how they connect with the perceptions of residents.

The report is based on the findings of a three-year research project, *Living through Change in Challenging Neighbourhoods*, which was carried out in six low-income neighbourhoods across Britain. The report uncovers how some of the assumptions implicit in the Government's policies are at odds with the attitudes and experiences of residents. It then considers the implications of the research for current and future policies towards work, welfare and place.

The report concentrates on four key themes in policy reform and neighbourhood change:

- community cohesion and division and the Big Society;

- 'making work pay' and reducing dependency by improving opportunities to enter the labour market;

- encouraging localism and developing neighbourhood planning; and

- achieving community regeneration through economic growth.

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Executive summary

This report is based on the findings of the research project *Living through Change in Challenging Neighbourhoods*, a three-year research programme examining the dynamics of neighbourhood change, the strength of local attachment in different communities, and how households living on low incomes get by when faced with continued financial hardship. The research is based on detailed qualitative research with participants in six low-income neighbourhoods across Britain.

The report examines some of the principles and assumptions behind policies concerned with place, poverty and welfare introduced by the Coalition Government and considers how they connect with the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the research respondents. We concentrate on four key themes in policy reform and neighbourhood change: community cohesion and division and the Big Society; 'making work pay' and reducing dependency by improving opportunities to enter the labour market; encouraging localism and developing neighbourhood planning; and achieving community regeneration through economic growth.

The six case study areas were Amlwch (Anglesey, Wales), West Kensington (inner West London), Oxgangs (a suburb of Edinburgh, Scotland), West Marsh (Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire), Wensley Fold (Blackburn, Lancashire) and Hillside (North Huyton, Knowsley).

The research explored the implications of households' experiences and perceptions and raised a number of key findings. We observed that despite references in policy debate to 'broken' communities or enclaves of dependency, there was no evidence of distinct places of difference, dislocated from the world of 'hard-working families' and replete with broken families, poor parenting, lawlessness and hopelessness.

The six areas had, to differing degrees, problems with antisocial behaviour, gangs and incivilities, as well as social divisions. But this was not seen as an endemic and all-consuming syndrome in the neighbourhoods; that is, as 'inherent in place'. Indeed, there was a strong affiliation to the virtues of hard work, self-reliance, responsibility and independence.

The need to provide for one's family and to make a contribution to society were prominent in many accounts people gave of meeting the challenges they faced. There was no evidence of an entirely different hierarchy of values and morality informing their experiences and perceptions.

Many participants were juggling daily between state, informal and family-based systems to generate often intricate webs of care and support that would perish if some strands were peremptorily torn away.

Many households, especially those with children or vulnerable family members, are time-poor as well as income-poor, so that any exhortations to spend more time in order to stimulate the Big Society are likely to fall on deaf ears. There was a strong attachment to the locality in four of the six areas and recognition of the value of place-based resources in helping people to get by. Many responses demonstrated how participants' sense of self was rooted in place, giving many of them a basis for some security in a context of growing economic uncertainty. Most respondents therefore viewed their future as staying in their neighbourhood, even if they were dissatisfied with certain aspects of living there.

Long-term deprivation did not necessarily prompt a desire to leave. For many participants, any benefits of moving for work would be outweighed by the costs: a severing of social networks; a lost sense of belonging; an undermining of feelings of safety and security derived from living in familiar places; and loss of informal assistance that allows people to cope and can actually serve to render work a viable proposition.

Some workless individuals engaged in unpaid activities that delivered benefits such as a sense of purpose, social contact and a feeling of 'making a difference' to the wider community. The benefits associated with particular forms of activity, especially volunteering, sometimes seemed to equal or outweigh those delivered by paid work. There was not a straightforward distinction between the positive impact of paid work on well-being and the negative effects of worklessness.

Reflecting on these findings, we moved on to consider the implications of the research for current and future policies towards work, welfare and place.

The Coalition Government's approach to regeneration emphasises connecting disadvantaged neighbourhoods to growth and opportunity nearby or, on a wider geographical scale, attracting employers and

investors, not least through favourable fiscal incentives. It is not clear from our research how this particular balancing act, between 'nudging' growth in certain directions and at the same promoting local autonomy and community self-help, can be achieved in practice.

The different economic legacies of the areas have left marks that may require different policy responses. If the Government's macro-economic strategy works, the country may witness a more geographically balanced profile of economic growth, at comparatively little cost to the Exchequer. If the strategy does not work, what will be left in these neighbourhoods – as the employed and employable move out, or are forced out, to seek work elsewhere – is a demographically, economically and socially vulnerable and 'residualised' shell of the communities that once existed.

'Neighbourhood' often mattered most to people where both the economic legacy of and future prospects for their community were least favourable. As a result, the various policy instruments designed to stimulate greater household mobility into more buoyant labour markets (such as social housing reforms, relaxing planning controls in areas of growth, Housing Benefit reform) are actually likely to find least traction in those places where 'localism' means most.

Initiatives such as neighbourhood planning may offer an appropriate way forward so that future measures can be fashioned to the specific processes of change the area has undergone (and, especially, the impact of population change due to processes of in- and out-migration over time). But it seems that most of the additional resources for these areas are going to be locally generated. Without some supplementary support from non-local sources and some form of territorial redistribution, the pay-off here for communities with slack housing and labour markets will be very limited. Developers and investors will have few inducements to enter more economically vulnerable markets.

The fate of 'second order' and relatively isolated places that have suffered from long-term economic decline – such as older textile, mining or seaside towns – requires a specific and determined policy response. Any 'trickle down' benefits from future growth elsewhere will have to trickle a very long way indeed to make a difference. The various 'carrots' of deregulation designed to stimulate growth are unlikely to suffice to turn round such tenacious trends of economic decline. Is it morally justifiable and politically feasible to write off the economic future of such places? If not, can it be assumed that, eventually, the market will provide, or does government still have a role as 'saviour of last resort'?

Introduction

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

The creation of the Coalition Government following the May 2010 general election prompted a spate of new proposals, reviews and legislative measures, introduced at an often bewildering speed. The Government's emergency budget of July 2010 was followed by the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, consolidated by the budget of March 2011. The difference between firm policy commitments and more speculative intentions in this agenda was sometimes blurred, and certain policy areas have recently witnessed a pause for review. However, few would deny that the Coalition's social and economic measures have constituted a radical and far-reaching programme. This report is primarily concerned with assessing an array of policies broadly concerned with place, poverty and social welfare. It explores the potential impact of these initiatives at the local level, in areas that have experienced varying degrees of social and economic deprivation, but which can all be broadly categorised by statistical measures as relatively deprived.

How do the ideas behind the Coalition Government's programme connect with the realities of community life in such areas? Do the principles that lie behind welfare and housing reform or economic and neighbourhood renewal, for example, resonate with the priorities and aspirations of households in lower-income areas? Or is there a mismatch between what is assumed about such communities through policy and how residents in these areas live their lives on a daily basis?

Rather than attempt an encyclopaedic review of measures introduced in the Government's first year in office, the report concentrates on four themes that have often recurred in discussion about policy reform and neighbourhood change:

- community – promoting the Big Society as a means of restoring community self-help and replacing state support with informal and voluntary support;

- work and opportunity – 'making work pay' and reducing dependency by improving opportunities to enter the labour market and discouraging long-term reliance on state benefits for the economically active;

- localism – decentralising government functions wherever possible and stimulating locally run services and neighbourhood planning;

- regeneration – improving opportunities for households living in more deprived areas through developing local self-help and stimulating entrepreneurship and private sector economic activity to ensure that new jobs are created across the country, and not just in more economically buoyant areas.

These four themes are set against the main findings emerging from the research programme in chapters 2 to 5 of this report. The intention is to examine some of the common drivers behind different policies and assess their potential impact on residents living in relatively low-income neighbourhoods, and to explore how far some of the underlying assumptions in the new policy agenda can be aligned with the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of respondents in six localities across Britain. These perspectives were shared in the course of an intensive longitudinal research programme undertaken over a three-year period. (For a comprehensive account of the research, see CRESR Research Team, 2011.)

The research project sought to understand how the experiences of households living in low-income neighbourhoods in Britain varied according to time and space, and to assess the influence of place in their perceptions, actions and decisions. It was able to compare and contrast the experiences of households in low-income areas that had divergent geographical, social and economic characteristics. What factors help to explain different levels of neighbourhood attachment and the propensity of individuals to stay put or want to move on in such areas? The research evidence was largely qualitative and drawn from in-depth interviews with a sample of residents, residents' diaries and focus groups, and was supported by an audio-visual record of their responses to social, economic and demographic change. The six case study areas, described more fully in the Appendix, were:

- Amlwch – a small town on the northern tip of Anglesey, Wales, which has suffered rapid economic decline in recent years;

- West Kensington – an ethnically diverse area comprising two social housing estates in inner West London;

- Oxgangs – a social housing estate located next to one of the most affluent suburbs of Edinburgh, Scotland;

- West Marsh – an area of predominantly private housing located close to the centre of Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire;

- Wensley Fold – an ethnically diverse mixed-tenure area near to the town centre of Blackburn, Lancashire; and

- Hillside – a predominantly social housing estate undergoing major transformation in Knowsley, Merseyside.

The main basis for the discussion of research findings in this report is the three waves of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of residents. The first wave involved 30 interviews in each of the six case study neighbourhoods, undertaken between November 2007 and April 2008. The second wave of interviews was undertaken between March and July 2009 with a sub-sample of 92 respondents across the six areas. The third wave in spring 2010 involved a more in-depth follow-up with 42 individuals, which provided a different grain of information more directly concerned with the biographies of the respondents and accounts of their everyday experiences of living in the case study area. This gave a more comprehensive, detailed and in-depth account of how change had been experienced, not just within the three-year period of the research, but reaching back to childhood memories and looking ahead to the future. In all, this amounted to more than 300 in-depth interviews during the course of the research.

The research material was never intended to provide a running commentary on the impact of the policies of the Coalition Government; indeed, the vast majority of interviews were undertaken before the 2010 election was held. What we have sought to do is to provide some insights about life in these areas from the comments and experiences of the research participants, and then set these alongside implicit and explicit assumptions about low-income neighbourhoods contained in government policies.

The focus throughout is on the neighbourhood level. From its very first statement, the 'Coalition Agreement', the Government has espoused a policy of localism:

> The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.
>
> (HM Government, 2010, ch. 4)

We therefore concentrate on the locality rather than individual level in the report.

The four policy themes we have selected – community, work and mobility, localism, and regeneration

– are assessed against research evidence common to the neighbourhoods, and then in terms of any specific local differences that emerged. The report then considers the extent of synergy and dissonance between the policy proposals and the experiences of residents revealed by the research, and reflects on the potential impact in these neighbourhoods as these policies are implemented. It thereby attempts to shed some light on the 'shadows' that may fall between the ideas informing policy and the lived realities of those who participated in our research. First, the aims and scope and findings of the research programme will be briefly outlined.

1 The research approach

The research project on which this report is based, *Living through Change in Challenging Neighbourhoods*, examined the changing circumstances and experiences of households living in six low-income neighbourhoods across Britain. As discussed in the introduction, one of the project's objectives was to explore the implications of households' experiences and perceptions, as captured in the research, and to set these alongside the assumptions behind policies designed to tackle deprivation at both the household and neighbourhood level. This report is based on a distillation of some of the primary messages emerging from the research. For more detailed analysis of the empirical findings from the research, a full list of research papers is given at the end of this report (see References). These papers are available, along with audio-visual material produced by the research team, at http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/index.html.

The project sought to explore the interaction between poverty and place by focusing on how living in a low-income area was experienced, and what prompted subsequent action and behaviour, in different geographical settings and over a specific period of time. The research team attempted to explore the ongoing interactions between household and area-based deprivation by looking at how the experience of living in particular kinds of towns and neighbourhoods acts to shape, reinforce or counter the daily challenges that confront people living on relatively low incomes (CRESR Research Team, 2009). At an analytical level, the project reflected the growing interest in mapping the qualitative experiences of local 'geographies of poverty' (Milbourne, 2010), to complement the more statistically-based measures of local deprivation that are regularly produced. At a policy level, the project was concerned with the development of more nuanced place-based interventions for deprived neighbourhoods, how these needed to be aligned with economic and social policy interventions at the macro level, and how local informal social networks, relationships and forms of support might be sustained, nurtured or fractured by the implementation of different policy options.

The research findings therefore provided, among other things, an opportunity to reflect on the salience of the emerging poverty, social policy and urban governance agendas of the Coalition Government, and its commitment to the Big Society, 'opportunity', 'localism', and 'regeneration though growth' (see Conservative Party, 2010; Cameron, 2010; Communities and Local Government, 2011b).

This research approach was prompted by a series of underlying questions. How can we account for how place might impact on the experiences of households living on low incomes? What characteristics of place might emerge as important here? How do processes of neighbourhood attachment (whether strong or mild) manifest themselves in terms of people's intentions and actions over residential mobility? And what might this say in terms of the rather contradictory policy messages regularly directed to those living in relatively deprived areas: to stay put and (re)build community and cohesion, or to move out and shake off the detrimental shackles of place on economic ambition and opportunity (CRESR Research Team, 2011)?

Our research approach followed in the path of other work (Allen, 2005; Robertson, *et al*., 2008; Watt, 2006) based on the residents' accounts, which sought to develop explanations of local neighbourhood variations, emphasising the distinctive socio-cultural and historical features of the communities in question. This approach involves the interweaving of individual biography and local history by examining patterns of change and the impact of any major periods of disruption, discontinuity or transformation in the locality. It can then consider the way the physical aspects of place embody individual and collective histories. All this can give a different reading on what matters to residents, what is seen as valuable about their area and what needs to be preserved or changed.

In assessing our research evidence on neighbourhood differences, what seemed to count was the pattern of residential settlement over time and the degree of turbulence or stability created as a result, the proportion of younger people in areas where the public realm was eroding, and the extent to which the wider neighbourhood was a self-contained or a more 'porous' geographical entity for those who lived there. The historical narrative of the area, and the collective experiences that narrative comprises, acted as a key signifier of current social and community dynamics (Bashir and Flint, 2010; Batty, *et al*., 2011). Economic heritage was important to this shared cultural story, and the (not unrelated) pattern and progress of in-migration to the

neighbourhoods was critical. A sustained period of in-migration from a distinctive national or cultural group may lead to the ancillary revitalisation of communal space, increased primary school rolls, and so on. Whether this was subsequently perceived as shared or segregated space by the existing and the new communities was crucial, and the evidence pointed to different outcomes across the six neighbourhoods (Cole and Green, 2010).

The research programme therefore provided an opportunity to step back from categorisations and characterisations of 'poor' people and 'poor' places from without, and to describe instead the (often conflicting) values, priorities and lifestyles of households living in these neighbourhoods, primarily on the basis of their own accounts. The emphasis on the historical pattern of neighbourhood change emerged strongly from the interviews. When participants were asked to make comparative judgements about how they, or their neighbourhood, were doing, for example, they reflected on previous points in their own lives, or on how the neighbourhood had changed over time. As a rule, they did not rate their own area, or their own personal circumstances, against other places or people. Many participants described their neighbourhood as 'ordinary', effectively bypassing the need to measure their own circumstances against some kind of yardstick. Time rather than space was the more common medium for comparison (Flint and Casey, 2008; Batty and Flint, 2010). This outlook also became important in framing any decision on whether to stay in the neighbourhood or to seek to improve opportunities by moving elsewhere (Hickman 2010b).

Family history was a more potent reference point for participants to reflect on their circumstances than the influence or adoption of the values of other groups in society. There was reference to learning from direct experience rather than from the example set by external role models. Views about values or priorities, or about the attributes of other social or ethnic groups in the neighbourhood, were often not the product of self-conscious deliberation or the adoption of an explicit moral paradigm. They were often, more prosaically, about what seemed the 'right thing to do' in certain situations, about 'what mattered' or what was 'normal' or 'natural' and was therefore beyond debate or dispute (Flint, 2010). In order to convey how these predispositions and perspectives sit with some of the assumptions that underlie current government policies on welfare reform, social housing or regeneration, we have therefore illustrated more general points from the research with specific quotations from the participants and extracts from more detailed biographical accounts (Green and Hickman, 2011; CRESR Research Team, 2011). Further information about the contrasting characteristics of the six places selected for the research study is given in the Appendix (and for further details, see Batty, *et al.*, 2011).

2 From 'Broken Communities' to a 'Big Society'?

The incidence of 'brokenness'

The diagnosis by the Conservative Party of the causes of area deprivation preceding the 2010 general election formed part of a set of assumptions often grouped under the generic label of 'broken Britain' (Centre for Social Justice, 2007; Cameron, 2010). This approach suggested that particular neighbourhoods and localities facing hardship were distinct from mainstream values, were uniquely dysfunctional, and should accept responsibility for their problems. As with other policy themes considered in this report, the thread of analysis about community dysfunction was not drastically different from many of the recurrent ideas in the New Labour pantheon. Amin (2005), for example, identified a similar strain in the thinking of the previous Government, in an approach he described as placing communities 'on trial'. Just as families on welfare were deemed to need a 'hand up, not a hand out' to be roused from their torpor, so communities marked by 'brokenness' needed a jolt so that families would take direct responsibility for public incivilities and neglect and not wait for the state to sort these issues out for them.

This diagnosis in framing welfare policy does not accord with some of the main findings of our research in the six case study neighbourhoods. The local economy (and how this, in turn, was influenced by national and international economic processes and policy) remained the most important factor determining the trajectory of neighbourhoods and outcomes for their residents (Bashir and Flint, 2010; Batty, *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the abstraction of 'the neighbourhood' as a kind of self-contained object of policy that could somehow be prodded into action, did not accord with the way people in these areas were leading their lives. Many of the activities of our research participants took them outside the area.

The 'broken Britain' idea implied that residentially segregated and economically deprived communities were by definition socially isolated; these places were therefore problematised for nurturing cultures and associated behaviours at odds with the dominant moral order. Yet the research revealed that the action spaces of people in deprived neighbourhoods frequently extended beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood (Robinson, 2010). Rather than leading segregated or isolated lives, participants were often mixing and engaging with people from other places. The spatial horizons of participants varied for a variety of reasons, but an analysis confined to identifying problems and seeking solutions at the local scale alone would be too restricted.

Furthermore, there was no evidence from the research of distinct places of difference, dislocated from the world of 'hard-working families' and replete with broken families, poor parenting, lawlessness and dependency. The areas had, to differing degrees, problems with antisocial behaviour, gangs and incivilities, and there were social divisions in these areas. But this was not seen as an endemic and all-consuming syndrome in the neighbourhoods; that is, as inherent in place. Indeed, there was a strong affiliation to the virtues of hard work, self-reliance, responsibility and independence. The need to provide for the family and to make a contribution to society were prominent in many accounts people gave of meeting the challenges they faced. There was no evidence of an entirely different hierarchy of values and morality informing their experiences and perceptions (Batty and Flint, 2010; Crisp, 2010).

In the 'broken Britain' narrative, the family was often identified as a prime example of what had been fractured as a result of a blend of cultural and social factors. The dysfunctional family was presented as the prime culprit behind poor socialisation, antisocial behaviour and low achievement. This depiction of family life in more deprived neighbourhoods in Britain was emphatically not supported by this research (CRESR Research Team, 2011). Strong and often reciprocal relationships with other family members emerged as a universal feature across all six neighbourhoods, whether they were geographically dispersed or more concentrated in the neighbourhood (Crisp and Robinson, 2010).

The centrality of the family was evident, often as a fluid (and hence flexible) amalgam of relationships. In cases where immediate families had split up through separation or divorce, extended families fulfilled a kind of

substitute role (often including some members of a former partner's extended family). There were many examples of grandparents undertaking important duties – a role that has been increasingly recognised and celebrated by policy-makers – but also aunts, nieces, brothers, cousins and step-sisters. The diversity and inventiveness of systems of family support was evident in many accounts given by the participants (CRESR Research Team, 2009; Crisp and Robinson, 2010).

Family members were often involved in the provision of services that people would otherwise have to pay for or do without. Many older participants, for example, mentioned help around the house, or with gardening or transport (such as a lift to the shops). In some cases this supplemented formal care; in others it substituted for it.

Among younger participants, particularly women, regular and intermittent help with childcare was an important form of support provided by family members, and in some cases, it was part of a complex tapestry of childcare that participants put together in order to be able to work. Some participants said they preferred informal childcare because of concerns about formal provision (child-minder or nursery), including safety, suitability and cost. Informal childcare provided by relatives was also seen as a more flexible option that people could rely on at short notice, and that would be available when formal provision was closed. In one such example, a mother put her daughter in nursery while she was working during the week, but relied on her family or her daughter's father for childcare when she worked on Saturdays.

Participants who were grandparents frequently reported spending much of their free time looking after grandchildren. One respondent, for example, reported often looking after her five grandchildren in the evening when her son was out at work, while their other grandmother looked after them during the day when their mother was out at work. Another talked about how important it was to her to live close to her sister because they were mutually reliant on each other's help to get by on a day-to-day basis. This included looking after each other's children so they could do various chores or go out. An important benefit of the informal childcare provided by family members was that it occasionally allowed parents the space to enjoy some time together (Crisp and Robinson, 2010).

One should certainly not presume from this that family harmony always prevailed, that the networks of support in these localities were smoothly self-sustaining, that the nominally closest relatives were automatically the most supportive, or that some people in each of the neighbourhoods did not feel isolated and alone. Many respondents spoke to us in some detail about strains in their relationships, about difficulties in getting other members to 'do their bit' or about challenges in bringing up their children. But the overall sense was that there was a lack of conditionality attached to emergency requests for help from family members, and the sense of mutual obligation that often emerged as crises ebbed and flowed was a priceless asset for many people trying to make ends meet (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). The essence of family support was its flexibility for people trying to negotiate often complex financial and social challenges. Forms of support could be ongoing or episodic, given or taken (or both), economic, social or practical. If family members did not live nearby, this limited the regularity with which services could be provided and the breadth of what was on offer, but family networks were crucial for the vast majority of the participants.

Olive's story (see Box 1) illustrates the experience of many respondents in the six areas, in which different forms of support are needed when faced with unexpected financial and emotional circumstances.

Box 1: Olive – adapting to changing circumstances

Olive is in her early 40s, and when we first spoke to her in 2008, she lived in Oxgangs with her husband and their three young children. Her husband was employed full-time, and she had given up work to care for her three children. Olive did return to work part-time after the birth of her youngest son but she found it too difficult to balance work and childcare. Also, with tax credits they were around £30 better off if she did not work. Money was tight, but a maturing endowment meant they could purchase a car, which Olive described as 'a luxury'. The family also relied on Olive's parents (who lived close by) for loans, which they would otherwise have sought from a loan shark.

By 2009, and wave two of our research, Olive's husband had left her suddenly and she found herself managing the children and the home alone. The trauma had a severe financial and emotional impact. She was claiming benefits, struggling to manage and finding it difficult to deny the children their usual lifestyle. She found it very hard to come to terms with the change in direction:

I never ever thought I would be a single mother with three kids.

Family and friends provided a source of support and Olive depended on and enjoyed infrequent social outings with her friends. However, she only socialised when her budget allowed. With less income, unplanned expenditure (such as an invitation to a children's party) had a more detrimental impact on making ends meet:

Yeah or someone's birthday or they're invited to a party or something like that, just a few things like that, 20 quid or something, 20 quid's a lot of money if you're not [pause] it is a lot of money.

She did accept some financial support from her parents, but was reluctant to rely too heavily upon them:

If I need to I would borrow off [them] but I don't like to, I tend to think I've got to manage on my own steam. She would give me it, but at the same time I need to learn to manage.

In 2010, when we spoke to Olive for a third time, she had come to terms with her changed circumstances:

All the things that I thought I could never have done … I'm probably stronger now than I was.

She had taken on sole responsibility for the mortgage, mainly to ensure that her children had a secure and stable home. She has aspirations to work, and had been looking for work but could not find a position that fitted with her family responsibilities. She was also mindful of the guaranteed income from benefits and was reluctant to rush into employment and disrupt her benefit claim. She was attending an IT training class, and was looking to pursue a social care course at a local FE college.

Several participants had returned to their home area because they missed their extended family, and the support it provided. One respondent, for example, felt that with this support he would be better placed to find work, having failed to do so when he moved to another part of the country. He said he wanted to come back home, 'sort his life out' and start working (Hickman, 2010b).

Others felt that family responsibilities (from caring for sick parents to looking after younger siblings) were such that their desire to move out would just have to wait. This was often expressed in very pragmatic terms, as something you 'just have to do', rather than as a source of intense frustration. One respondent put this in a rather more ambivalent way: 'Sometimes I feel like I want to just escape, get out of the house and just go. But when you've got responsibilities you can't just up and go.'

Dependency and division

An adjunct of the 'broken community' is the 'dependency culture' it is held to foster. Here we found a significant gap between what people did, in their daily routines, and what they said, in their views about others (CRESR Research Team, 2011). The values of autonomy, duty, independence and self-sufficiency were widely held by research participants. Thus, within what David Cameron (2010) described as 'the daily decisions of millions of people', there was little evidence of a 'sapping of responsibility'. Our research participants were not, nor did they desire to be, 'passive recipients of state help', and actually often believed that 'they could shape

the world around them' (Cameron, 2010). In many accounts, people spoke about wanting to contribute to society in some way, and about their aversion to becoming dependent. What some of these individuals lacked were the material resources, at personal and community levels, to meet the aspirations that they held for themselves and their families; but these aspirations about 'getting on' were not somehow qualitatively different from the majority of individuals in our society.

However, one social division was raised by participants in each locality and finds resonance in recent policy pronouncements from the Government: that between those seen to be 'working hard' and those 'on benefits' (Batty and Flint, 2010; Crisp, 2010). The fecklessness of particular local families who were thought to be 'working the system' was a familiar refrain among respondents, especially as it stood in contrast to their own valiant efforts to make ends meet on stretched budgets. There was evidence of resentment of others based on their assumed avoidance of employment or manipulation of the benefits system. Many of the central assumptions in the Government's programme of welfare reform – about making work pay, making benefits more conditional and time limited, subjecting claimants to tests of various kinds – resonated with the perspectives of many of the people we talked to. Whether it will continue to do so, as the impact of these policy reforms becomes more evident, remains to be seen.

Moving from benefits to work could increase spending power, ease debts and enhance the well-being of individuals and other household members. Given that the type of work secured rarely paid high wages, this indicates that even comparatively low-paid work could still provide financial gains over and above the income secured from out-of-work benefits. One element of working and earning a living that was valued was the sense of financial independence it provided, and this was often expressed in terms of avoiding dependence on welfare (Crisp, *et al*., 2009).

Many of the interviews revealed an underlying tension between long-standing residents and incomers, and in some cases (notably in Amlwch), discourses around worklessness mapped onto long-standing distinctions between insiders and outsiders. As one relative newcomer to Amlwch put it: 'I don't want to be claiming benefits, I don't want people to label me as one of those "from Manchester" again, coming here scrounging'.

The notion of 'fairness' has received considerable attention recently, not least as a criterion for judging policy impacts (O'Brien, 2011). Competing versions of fairness in the policy domain include a *behavioural* discourse, associated with the Coalition Government, that focuses on the unfairness of taxing hard-working people to give financial support to those who are not prepared to work; and a *material* discourse, which is about the unfair discrepancies in income, wealth and life chances between the rich and poor (Dorling, 2011). The former version was much more prevalent in accounts from the research participants; even those respondents who were themselves on benefits were keen to disassociate themselves (for various reasons) from the generic picture they painted of the lifestyles of others who were not in work. In contrast, respondents rarely made reference to inequalities between rich and poor, even in the two areas (Oxgangs and West Kensington) where residents were living in close proximity to relatively wealthy neighbourhoods. There was a tendency towards normalisation, through which residents living in different neighbourhoods were regarded as essentially being the same, despite their different financial and housing circumstances (Flint and Casey, 2008).

As an adjunct to this, the research participants rarely identified their neighbourhood as affecting their self-esteem, either positively or negatively. When asked what they were proud about in their lives and how they felt about their own position, respondents compared their current circumstances with other times in their lives, or with other family members, rather than where they lived, which was regularly described as 'just ordinary' (Batty and Flint, 2010). The idea of a gap between 'broken' and (presumably) 'cohesive' communities that has underpinned some policy rhetoric in recent years found little echo in the accounts given by respondents in our research.

Evidence of the Big Society?

It has become something of a cliché to ask what the Big Society really means, but the general idea behind it seems fairly straightforward. The logic is that by encouraging people to be more active in their community – through voluntary effort, taking on responsibility for running some services, and 'cutting themselves free' as

employees of the state to derive more autonomous, locally responsive agencies such as mutual organisations – the process of decline in 'community' can be remedied and local people can come together to solve problems in their area. Shortly after the election, the Cabinet Office published a short document, *Building the Big Society*, which described its mission as follows:

> *We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all.*
>
> <div align="right">Cabinet Office, 2010</div>

The document then suggested five components of the Big Society: giving communities more powers; encouraging people to take an active role in their communities; transferring power from central to local government; supporting co-ops, mutual, charitable and social enterprises; and publishing government data more widely. The question that remains is whether the promotion of such activity can help substitute for any shortfalls or gaps in provision formerly provided by the public sector in this period of severe expenditure restraint.

The research evidence from the three most deprived (statistically) of the six areas – Amlwch, Hillside and West Marsh – make it difficult to see how residents might work together to turn round their fortunes. They each had entrenched trajectories of decline associated with long-term economic restructuring and physical disconnection from areas benefitting from sustained economic growth elsewhere in Britain during the 1990s and early 2000s (Batty and Cole, 2010). Without addressing the case for new economic development, any attempt to rebuild apparently fractured communities through voluntary effort, cultural change and physical renewal would probably be limited in its impact. Even then, there is a problem with the implicit assumption in the Big Society notion that, given more opportunity to pull together, residents can arrive at a common understanding about local problems, needs and solutions, agree on a shared vision for the future of the neighbourhood, and work together towards this goal.

Evidence from these six neighbourhoods suggests that it is difficult to establish 'a community view' on problems in the neighbourhood and how they might be resolved (Bashir and Flint, 2010). There are often competing interests and priorities, reflecting the complexity of perceptions of neighbourhood change, between neighbourhoods, between residents, and indeed within individual accounts; residents often identified both positive and negative aspects of neighbourhood change at the same time. The research showed that in some neighbourhoods there were very different and distinct notions about problems and challenges among residents of the same community; that in neighbourhoods characterised by social and cultural difference a shared vision will be difficult to reach; and that in ostensibly more atomised communities it will be difficult to create any shared perspective at all (Bashir and Flint, 2010; Cole and Green, 2010). Enacting the Big Society locally is therefore likely to be particularly fraught in areas that have experienced recent population change and where social and cultural differences between residents might hinder co-operation and serve to exclude some groups.

The individualistic paradigms of poverty that dominate contemporary policy discourses also run counter to the promotion of community and civic action. If individuals subject themselves and others to personal critiques, this mediates against a propensity to engage in collective endeavour and generates divisions and distinctions within neighbourhoods (Flint, 2010). It is not surprising that the individualisation of poverty in policy and other powerful discourses sits uneasily with the promotion of social solidarity at the neighbourhood level. Conversely, the extent to which individuals viewed their personal and neighbourhood circumstances as 'ordinary' and 'normal' poses challenges to policies designed to promote community activism. The impulse for such activity is often generated, at least initially, by a sense that local communities are experiencing particular or unusual problems (CRESR Research Team, 2011).

There was plenty of evidence in the research to show how people in the six areas were already leading crowded lives, with little space to devote to civic duties of various kinds. Some were in paid work; others were

taking on responsibilities and carrying out roles and functions important to their family, friends and the wider community/society. In many cases, a complex web of formal and informal support was making it possible for people to combine formal work with 'responsible' parenting, supplementing formal care with informal support of a more flexible (and less costly) kind, being active in the community and being involved in groups and activities of various kinds (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). The time devoted to some tasks (finding and changing jobs, having to rely on cheaper informal systems of care, and so on) is also likely to increase if levels of unemployment rise in these areas in the near future. Many of the problems facing households in our case studies were rooted in the consequences of economic restructuring rather than some form of cultural malaise, and the challenges of getting by on a daily basis were often quite a sufficient test of their resourcefulness (Crisp, 2010).

This is not to suggest that these six neighbourhoods were somehow oases of virtue, and indeed residents described their own actions as 'something you have to do' rather than anything more noble or overtly altruistic, but the assumption that there is a considerable latent commitment to 'help out' just waiting to be ignited would seem to be wide of the mark. The ambitions of the Big Society will also need to be set against the reality that the significance of the neighbourhood as a site for informal interaction and support of any kind will vary. In Wensley Fold and Oxgangs, for example, neighbourhood attachment was strong, whereas for many in West Kensington the neighbourhood was a base, and a toehold in a very tight housing market, while most of their work and leisure activities took place elsewhere (Robinson, 2010).

A further challenge to the relationship between the Big Society and 'the state' is the implicit belief in the 'zero sum' nature of support and provision: that the role of the shrinking state can be compensated for by the growth of the informal and voluntary sector. However, these sources of support were seen as complementary by our research participants. When looking ahead to possible future cuts in public expenditure, several respondents said that if one plank of support was removed, it was likely that the entire edifice of support would be endangered (Batty and Cole, 2010). This was particularly the case for those who felt strongly that reliance on the support of others (outside the family) should be reciprocated and that accruing 'debts' of this kind was problematic.

Many non-material factors helped to generate self-esteem among participants in the six neighbourhoods, including volunteering, parenting and caring, and these have significant positive outcomes for families and local communities (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). There is a need to reflect on whether the predominance given to paid employment in welfare programmes is too inflexible to promote other forms of citizenship and civic action. It is also the case that volunteering, parenting and similar activities do require some material basis, and changes to basic sources of income such as Housing Benefit will impact on this. Likewise, routes to enhanced well-being and self-esteem through training or education require the necessary infrastructure and provision to be in place.

Many of the biographical accounts and observations made in the course of the research, therefore, suggested that it is inappropriate to counterpoise voluntary effort and community resourcefulness, on the one hand, against local public sector services and state welfare support, on the other. Both were seen as necessary by our respondents to sustain families, and the reduction or withdrawal of neighbourhood facilities was likely to hit the most vulnerable the hardest (Hickman, 2010a; Green and Hickman, 2011).

Time was clearly a barrier that limited some from community engagement in the way foreseen by the aims of the Big Society, but we also found examples of what we term 'ambivalent neighbouring' (Crisp and Robinson, 2010), where people limited the scope of interactions with their neighbours and preferred to 'keep themselves to themselves'. Continuous sociability was not a widespread preference. In other cases, where there were fears about crime and antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood, 'defensive' forms of neighbouring emerged, with a marked reluctance to get involved or even undertake mundane tasks outside the home at particular times of day. This was especially prominent among respondents in the West Marsh case study (Hickman, 2010a). It is difficult to partake in the Big Society if one rarely ventures outside one's own home.

3 Moving to opportunity? Neighbourhood attachment, work and mobility

To stay or to go?

The Government's commitment to localism is concerned with reinvigorating a sense of community, getting people involved in the immediate issues they face and, in some cases, encouraging them to take over the running of local services or amenities themselves. However, this invitation to commit oneself more fully to one's locality would appear to be rather selectively applied. The promotion of the virtues of place sits uneasily alongside other policies that are intended to promote mobility, especially for those out of or on the margins of the labour market, so that they can break free from their existing community links and seek employment elsewhere, where the job prospects may be better.

It has been suggested that other policies – notably the proposals to reform the Housing Benefit system in the private rented sector and the reforms to social housing – may induce mobility for different reasons. Taken together, the caps on Local Housing Allowances (LHAs), the recalculation of LHA rates, the reduction in non-dependent allowances and the extension of the single room rate will make it very difficult for households on stretched budgets, in receipt of Housing Benefit and with few additional resources, to continue to stay in high-cost housing areas, such as inner London. The pressures are likely to cause them to migrate to slacker housing markets where it is likely that the demand for labour will also be lower, thereby making it more difficult to gain access to jobs. The scale of the impact of the policy remains in the realm of speculation and there is relatively little firm research generally on the spatial consequences of Housing Benefit (although see Hamnett, 2009).

A simulation model by Fenton (2011) on the impact of the proposed reforms (which have been modified a little since the study) suggested that between 136,000 and 269,000 households would find their rent payments unmanageable. Fenton projects that around half of these households will be unable to sustain their tenancy and so will be evicted or move involuntarily. This group, he calculates, could include up to 21,000 elderly households and 72,000 families with children. The Government's hope, however, is that the caps will exert downward pressure on rent levels in the sector, mitigating affordability problems as well as reducing the overall Housing Benefit bill.

The Government's plan to reform the social housing sector (Communities and Local Government, 2010) contain two proposals that may increase mobility: the introduction of fixed term tenancies of a minimum of two years at a landlord's discretion, and the introduction of a new national 'home swap' scheme for council and housing association tenants. In its response to the proposals, the Chartered Institute of Housing broadly supported the idea of flexible-length tenancies, but argued that two years was too short a minimum period (suggesting five instead), and claimed that the measure would 'run counter to wider government aims to reinvigorate local communities and civic activism through the Big Society, by creating transient and insecure communities' (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2011). In terms of the home swap proposal, evidence on similar national schemes to encourage exchanges among social housing tenants across the country has shown that the impact has been relatively limited.

Many residents we spoke to said they did not want to move. Even when they were aware of problems in their neighbourhoods, they felt that these problems were an 'everyday' feature of life and that their area was 'no worse than anywhere else'. Partly this was influenced by a concern that they would be 'exposed' if they moved to another place. As one respondent put it: 'People know each other. Whereas, if I'm somewhere else I feel more at risk because I don't know the people.'

There were clear tenure differences, and many households in social housing who had secured a tenancy, often after a long wait, were not minded to join another queue for something elsewhere. The shortage of local social housing was also a potential source of social division, and perceived injustices in access to social housing often echoed the critiques of the lifestyles of households seen as gaining advantage through being dependent on benefits (Cole and Green, 2010).

The difficulty of securing high-quality affordable housing in each case study area was also recognised by those respondents who were happy with where they lived and described themselves as being 'lucky' to have secured their property. The value of continuity here was expressed in terms of the virtues of patience, of queuing for a home (Hickman, 2010a). Some participants – notably social housing tenants – said they had not wanted to move to their current property and had only done so because they felt that they had no choice. However, a small number of residents who had originally not wanted to move to their neighbourhood said that they had now 'come to terms' with the move (CRESR Research Team, 2011).

The implicit premise for the reforms to social housing is that the offer of a permanent tenancy can act as an anchor for the household, limiting their propensity to move on in search of jobs (Centre for Social Justice, 2008). However, this remains more of an assumption than an empirically demonstrable outcome. The suggestion that social housing has an independent effect on participation in the labour market was not, for example, substantiated by qualitative research undertaken for the Department for Work and Pensions in 2008, which concluded:

> *Being a social tenant was not recognised as presenting any unique or particular barriers to work ... Significant work incentives were associated with being a social tenant. In particular, respondents referred to sub-market rents, the sympathetic and flexible attitude of social landlords and the stability provided by security of tenure ... levels of worklessness are high within the social rented sector, not because tenants do not recognise or realise these incentives, but because they do not overcome the breadth and depth of concerns that social tenants have about the financial viability and risks associated with entering low-paid and often insecure work.*
>
> Fletcher, *et al*., 2008

Neighbourhood attachment

The research interviews revealed a strong, though geographically variable, attachment to the locality in the responses of residents. There was widespread acknowledgement of the value of place-based resources, including those provided by friends, family and neighbours, in helping people to get by. Many responses demonstrated how participants' sense of self was rooted in place, giving many of them a basis for some security in an uncertain and perilous world. Given this strong attachment to place, most of them viewed their future as being in their current neighbourhood, even if they were dissatisfied with certain aspects of living there.

This degree of local attachment was especially true of places such as Amlwch and Hillside, where longer-standing residents were immersed in networks of family and friends that had developed across the generations (Cole and Green, 2010). These respondents often had a very strong emotional and social attachment to their existing neighbourhood, with memories, family and friendship networks, services and the benefits of familiarity and ontological security all located within it. For these reasons, these people often viewed their futures (and those of their children) playing out in these same neighbourhoods, even if there might be better economic prospects elsewhere. As one young man put it:

> *I wouldn't move out; this is where my roots are. Everything that's ever happened to me was around Blackburn or my area. To lose that would be like losing a part of me. And sometimes it's too much to lose, all the memories and the happiness that lies here. I wouldn't want to lose all that.*

Long-term place deprivation – which was a factor in all neighbourhoods, but especially notable in Amlwch, Hillside and West Marsh – did not necessarily prompt a desire to leave (Hickman, 2010b). The findings have implications about how far the development of stronger social networks can revitalise disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Many participants were involved in quite intensive networks of support so a (residential) move to another area in pursuit of a job or to undertake training could involve crucial sacrifices of other kinds (such as caring for sick relatives who were unwilling or financially unable to access formal systems of care). Any benefits of moving for work would, for many people, be outweighed by the costs of such a move: a severing of social networks; a lost sense of belonging; an undermining of feelings of safety and security derived from living within the familiar; and loss of informal assistance that allows people to cope and can actually serve to render work a viable proposition (Crisp, *et al*., 2009; Crisp, 2010).

The experiences of Mel (see Box 2) and Cordell (see Box 3 in this chapter) illustrate the diverse connections between our research participants and their neighbourhood, forged from experiences over time rather than any utilitarian judgements about relative economic positioning.

Box 2: Mel – life in West Marsh

Mel is in her early 20s and has lived in Grimsby all her life. In 2008, she had recently left her family home to live with her partner and young daughter in a private rented property close by. Having responsibilities for childcare, running the home and managing the household budget was challenging and she frequently made sacrifices to ensure her daughter was well cared for.

Mel grew up in West Marsh, and knows a significant number of her neighbours. When we initially spoke with her, she felt safe living there, but acknowledged that there was a degree of antisocial behaviour:

> I know most people on the West Marsh and I know the good 'uns and I know the bad 'uns and obviously I know them all.

However, when Mel was burgled in 2009, her attitude changed dramatically. She felt less safe, was much less likely to go out at night and told us that 'there is a lot of crime'. Mel's family situation had also changed. She and her partner had separated after having their second child. Mel had custody of the children, and received financial and practical support from their father, who visited them regularly. She had also moved to a different street in West Marsh, for reasons of affordability and because of her fear of crime:

> It's so much better, the area's so much quieter with it being a little off street, there started to be a lot of trouble round Corner Street, we had a drug dealer living down the street and their windows was put in every night cos they weren't getting what they wanted and trouble, fighting and all sorts.

The move worked out very well for her:

> Me life's better here because I feel safer leaving the kids to go in the garden to play when I'm just pottering about in the house … where in the old one I wouldn't. I'd be happy for her [daughter] to play up and down the street with her friends when she got a bit older. I wouldn't before.

Mel, therefore, clearly differentiated between different streets within the neighbourhood:

> … with this being a little street it's loads better, I feel safer in me own home … I don't feel I have to have the door locked … before I had a Yale lock where every time my door shut it was shut and me back door was permanently locked and I wouldn't leave me kitchen windows open while I was in the front room and stuff like that.

> … living down there [previous accommodation] you think all areas are the same and you look at them but all of Grimsby isn't the same and I've realised that moving 'ere, you don't have your gangs that you get and the noise and racing down the street …

In 2010 Mel's life was more settled, and she voiced an aspiration to buy the property and, crucially, stay in West Marsh:

> … if the opportunity ever come up to buy this I'd go for it, there's a lot I'd do, it would take time but I'd certainly stay.

Box 3: Cordell's story – life in West Kensington

Cordell is in her early 30s, has two young children and has recently separated from her long-term partner. She is a long-term resident of West Kensington, and rents her flat from the local authority. She works part-time in a local school. She described herself as 'black British'. This section looks at one particular facet of her story: her experience of life in West Kensington. (For a fuller account of Cordell's story, see Green and Hickman, 2011.)

Although she had some concerns about the quality of life in West Kensington, Cordell reported that she liked living in the area. She said that she liked living in London and would not live outside the city. She also liked living in West London, which she felt offered a much better residential and cultural environment for her and her children than the only other place where she had lived, South London. She did not like South London because she felt that it was 'rough' and, unlike West London, which she described as being multi-cultural, it was mono-cultural; she did not want her children to go to schools '*where all [the] other kids are black*'.

Cordell also noted that the neighbourhood's social problems, such as anti-social behaviour and drug dealing, were not unique to it and could be found in all parts of London. Therefore, there was no point in moving from the estate as an attempt to insulate herself from social problems that were prevalent elsewhere:

> *It's a nice area West Kensington, Fulham, Gibbs Green. It's just a problem with teenagers everywhere. Wherever you go in London now there is drugs, I think. Everywhere you go it's a place which is quieter than the other one but this problem you can find them everywhere in London.*

To some extent, Cordell's apparent satisfaction with West Kensington as a place to live might be more about her reluctance to move to places with which she was unfamiliar, and less about her satisfaction with the neighbourhood *per se*; she talked on a number of occasions about the importance of 'knowing' people and being 'known'.

Cordell highlighted a number of positive attributes about life in West Kensington. For example, on a number of occasions she noted that it had a strong and close-knit community. She noted that '*there's a lot of community*' in the area and (inextricably linked to this) that she was fortunate to have excellent neighbours. For Cordell, 'community' appeared to equate to her immediate neighbours and there was little sense that she saw it as encompassing all the residents of the West Kensington estate.

Her neighbours were, however, often very supportive:

> *My next door neighbours, they're brilliant. [I] wouldn't change them for the world … there's a few neighbours down there that we get along good with and we've known for many years. Something happens they all come rushing to see what's going on and see if you're all right … I'd stay round here, to be honest with you, cos if there's any trouble or anything like that or you're in need of anything, all you have to do is knock on the door and ask one of the neighbours. Or something like that. The ones that we talk to and keep in touch with, yeah.*

She felt that the '*rapport*' that she had with her neighbours only existed because she had lived in West Kensington for a long period of time:

> *Yes, I don't think you'd get it anywhere else unless you lived somewhere for a certain amount of years. You wouldn't have that rapport. That's what I believe.*

Cordell noted that living in an area with close community ties could be both a '*good and bad thing*'. A recurring theme to emerge from all three of her interviews was that she did not like the fact that (in her eyes) everyone appeared to '*know her business*'. Her and her partner's strategy for dealing with this perceived intrusion was to '*keep ourselves to ourselves*'. This was clearly evident when she talked about her shopping trips to the main shopping area in West Kensington, North End Road, and her desire to remain anonymous:

> *I hate North End Road … I try to avoid it because North End Road's a place where you see everybody you know. And that's where you've got your Sainsbury's, your Iceland, [where I] do my shopping.*

> *Sometimes [knowing lots of people] … it can be a bad thing … I mean sometimes I dread going down North End Road market as people will come up to me and want to start talking … but when I'm busy, that's the last thing I want to do … They're what I call acquaintances. They're not friends but acquaintances. They're a nice lot but sometimes they do my head in … I've got a really busy life.*

On a number of occasions Cordell noted how West Kensington had deteriorated as a place to live and how, as a result, its reputation had declined. Although she spoke very highly of the area's New Deal for Communities programme, she felt that it had not been able to reverse the (downward) trajectory of the neighbourhood.

Furthermore, while she noted that the New Deal for Communities had developed the infrastructure of West Kensington, there was still a dearth of facilities, activities and amenities for young people living on the estate. She felt that this was the reason why so many of them congregated in public spaces on the estate:

> *More things [are needed] for young kids. When I was growing up just across there – they've knocked it down, though – there was a youth club … just over there opposite the surgery, we used to go there. There used to be so many different things for kids. But now the reason why kids congregate now is because there's nothing for them now. There's no youth clubs. No youth centres. So parents don't really want their kids and ten of their friends in their house. So they go somewhere else and this is where they go. They go from house to house and end up on the street just chilling with their friends.*

The preference of many participants to live near to friends and family was not necessarily inimical to finding work. There was evidence that the support of family and friends gave workless residents the confidence and practical assistance – whether in the form of childcare support, somewhere affordable to live, or a lift home from work – that they needed to find (and hold down) employment (Crisp, *et al*., 2009; Hickman, 2010b).

There were also questions about the type of work people would be moving to. Many participants already had long experience of relatively lowly paid and insecure work, and did not expect opportunities elsewhere to offer qualitatively different prospects. The findings from these six areas therefore suggest that attempts to promote labour-market-driven mobility among workless and low-paid residents living in deprived neighbourhoods are likely to be unsuccessful (see also Fletcher, *et al*., 2008, p. 55). Greater residential mobility may not be positive or desirable for those who are the target of these policies. Many workless residents in the six neighbourhoods felt they were only able to 'get by' in often very difficult and challenging circumstances because their neighbourhood provided them with a vital resource which would be very difficult to replace: the support of their friends and family (Batty and Cole, 2010).

The acquisition of social housing was certainly viewed by participants, especially in the higher value, tighter housing markets (West Kensington and, to a lesser extent, Oxgangs), as a priceless asset, and to that extent it reinforced the desire for many to stay put. However, it was one factor among many; only in rare cases

did it appear to act as an inhibitor on mobility out of the area in order to improve access to economic opportunities elsewhere.

The model of economic rationality that often underpins debates about differential access to labour market opportunities at regional and sub-regional levels simply did not connect with the immediate pressures on systems of support, care and mutual exchange present in some of the neighbourhoods (Hickman, 2010b). In terms of mobility, as we have already seen, the influence of family relationships of various kinds was pervasive, and a crucial ingredient in many people's decisions about where to move from and to.

The paradox of neighbourhood change is this: the level of attachment and tenacity of social networks, and evidence of informal reciprocity favoured by the Big Society agenda, were generally more prominent in those case study areas suffering from sustained economic decline that also had a higher proportion of social housing. This applies to Hillside, for example, but not to West Marsh, which has a much larger private rented sector (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). This is partly because the extent of migration has been less here than elsewhere, so longer-standing linkages have developed as a result. The perceived social and personal costs of moving elsewhere are thus likely to be higher. Yet these areas would be precisely those most affected by plans to enhance labour market and housing mobility.

Following the jobs?

The strength of this emotional commitment, and the psychological and practical benefits deriving from connections to the neighbourhood, tend to undermine 'rational actor' models of enhanced economic position based upon increasing residential and labour market flexibility. This is an important corrective to some of the assumptions in policy about how far residential mobility (as a mechanism for linking populations to economic growth and realigning housing demand) can be stimulated through specific measures and sanctions, such as the Housing Benefit reforms.

The research findings also highlighted the need for studies of poverty or disadvantaged neighbourhoods to consider the full spectrum of activities constituting work, including but beyond that of paid employment. They showed how work could have a negative impact upon financial and emotional well-being through combinations of low pay, long and unsocial hours and job insecurity (Crisp, *et al*., 2009). Such employment could also generate stress and tensions for the individuals directly concerned and for other household members. Whilst these findings corroborate many of the negative portrayals of low-skilled low-paid work in other studies, it was also the case that these forms of employment could bring a number of valued benefits. These include financial independence, social contact, a sense of purpose, a feeling of 'making a difference' and social status. This suggests that individuals can invest meaning and significance in employment, in spite of otherwise onerous terms and conditions (Crisp, 2010).

One participant from Hillside, for example, had experienced a significant pay cut when made redundant from a full-time cleaning job that included generous overtime. She had since only managed to find part-time cleaning work with another company and these hours had been further reduced because of the recession. Her husband had also been made redundant recently following several years in skilled manual work and they consequently found it difficult to manage financially. Nevertheless, despite the low wages and insecurity associated with her present job, she spoke positively about how much she enjoyed the social contact that work brought.

While several accounts corroborated the negative portrayals of work in previous academic research (Charlesworth, 2000; Smith, 2005), others showed clearly how it could also be considered to confer valued benefits. Although some respondents experienced financial gains in moving into work or, in a minority of cases, good incomes, benefits were identified in largely non-financial terms. Our findings suggest that labels such as 'poor work' (McDowell, 2003), 'donkey work' (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998) or 'junk jobs' (Lash, 1994) fail to capture some of the value attached to work at the lower end of the labour market. Whilst it is certainly the case that such forms of employment can involve low pay, long or unsocial hours and pervasive insecurity, it is also evident that these jobs can still generate esteem and provide the basis on which dignified working identities can be constructed (Crisp, 2010).

The experiences recounted in our research therefore echo other findings about the capacity of low-paid work to deliver value (Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010; Ray, *et al.*, 2010). At times, this takes on a gendered dimension, with women placing importance on the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities beyond domestic identities, which are sometimes experienced as restrictive, unfulfilling and monotonous. In case study neighbourhoods that had lost an economic base involving a skilled male workforce, however, it was this loss that dominated their place-based narrative (Crisp, 2010).

Some workless individuals clearly felt the weight of moral judgement on their status, while other residents engaged in unpaid activities outside the labour market appeared to have constructed identities that, at least from their perspective, conferred legitimacy and respect. These activities also delivered a number of benefits, including a sense of purpose, social contact and a feeling of 'making a difference' to the wider community or society as a whole. Moreover, the benefits associated with particular forms of activity, especially volunteering, sometimes seemed to equal or even outweigh those delivered by paid work (Crisp, 2010). This challenges the viability of a straightforward distinction between the positive impact of paid work on well-being and the negative effects of worklessness. At the same time, it highlights the need to study a broad range of activities in understanding work and its relationship to poverty and place-based disadvantage. Debates about the economic link between worklessness, paid work and poverty could perhaps benefit from a concurrent focus on the potential for other forms of unpaid activity to alleviate some of the social consequences of poverty.

This evidence suggests that there could be value in ensuring that individuals have the maximum opportunity to engage in unpaid activities in the absence of employment, given the benefits it delivers. The Government has outlined a commitment to 'foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action' (Cameron, 2010). The question remains, however, whether that commitment includes a willingness to countenance the idea of unpaid activity as a legitimate alternative to work.

The Coalition Government had expressed some interest in the notion of a Community Allowance put forward by a group of organisations known collectively as the Create Consortium. The Community Allowance would be paid on top of benefits to enable workless individuals to undertake community work in their local area. Whilst it is ultimately envisaged as a way of improving confidence and employability – as a route back into employment rather than a genuine alternative to paid work – this approach could offer a way of supporting individuals to perform vital work in their communities. Clearly, this kind of proposal raises other issues, such as the potential impact on existing activity, such as volunteering, if paid alternatives become available. Nonetheless, it does at least open up an important debate on how workless individuals in disadvantaged areas might be encouraged to engage in socially valuable activity that deliver benefits both to themselves and to others living in the locality.

Our research suggests that experiences of work and the relationship between work, place and identity are therefore complex and nuanced. No single narrative can capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives of work, especially when unpaid work is also taken into account. Whilst work undoubtedly continues to matter for residents in low-income neighbourhoods, it matters in different ways according to a range of variables, including age, gender and employment status.

It is also important to highlight that the ways in which work is sought and secured, and the processes by which employment status or orientations to work provide the basis for esteem or identity, often require active management by those affected (CRESR Research Team, 2011). Economic change and the restructuring of employment opportunity are not simply processes which determine the outcomes for individuals living in the areas affected. They are, rather, the context in which individuals seek, negotiate and manage the economic opportunities or constraints they face. The extent to which they will continue to be able to do this may be constrained, however, if the rate of worklessness is stable or increases in the months and years ahead. Some of the case study areas have never fully recovered from the shocks of past recessions. A return to a period marked by austerity and economic decline in the near future may test to the limit the ability of even very active individuals who are trying to navigate turbulent and fragile labour markets (Batty and Cole, 2010).

The persistence required to gain a foothold in the labour market and to remain in work, even in more economically advantageous periods, is exemplified by Kyle's experiences living in Hillside (see Box 4 in this chapter).

Box 4: Kyle – a fragmented working life

Kyle is 23 and has lived with his parents on the Hillside Estate in Knowsley all of his life. One interesting aspect of his life was his employment history, which included a variety of different jobs and training programmes. This short story highlights Kyle's employment history and his attitudes to work.

Kyle left school when he was 15 with four GCSEs. From there, he enrolled on an NVQ training course at St Helen's College to become a chef. This was a common pathway among his peers and friends on Hillside, and he travelled by bus to college with people from his school, some of whom were also taking catering courses. For Kyle, going to college to study catering was '*something to do*' after leaving school, rather than a carefully planned career path. Part of his motivation was that his close friends were also doing so, and that he was able to claim Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Although this was a relatively small amount of money (around £20 per week) it was more disposable income than he had had at school, and he regarded it as his 'earned' income, rather than pocket money from his parents. It was also an incentive to turn up at college, as poor attendance could jeopardise payments. As he was living at home and not expected to contribute to the household budget, the allowance was used mainly for social activities. These included buying cans of beer at the supermarket to drink at night, and buying fast food.

Kyle successfully completed his NVQ, but never sought a job in the catering industry:

> *I done me training at college, so I was there for like a two-year course. I spent like a year and a half but I didn't like carry on to be a chef afterwards like because I got a bit bored with it. I thought I'd try and do warehouse work and stuff like that, and got me CSCS Card and I'm just getting trained up basically. I'm not really time served, basically a fella's given me a start and he's training me up and he's going to like learn me the machines and stuff like that you see.*

Kyle, therefore, did not use his catering training, instead opting for other manual work, and doing some further training along the way. This included warehousing, labouring, factory work, refuse collecting and recycling centre jobs. The training that Kyle mentioned above did not lead to a permanent job, which he found disappointing and made him reluctant to do on-the-job training in the future. Working was a source of pride for Kyle. Many of his friends were not working, and while he was very loyal to them, he distinguished himself from them by working. He also believed that it made him '*better off*' than many other people.

His work came through employment agencies, which Kyle thought had been beneficial in getting work, but it was never permanent. The longest job had been six months. Kyle, at the age of 23, had '*lost count*' of the number of different jobs he had done. He also felt that it was impossible to get manual work in the area without doing so through an employment agency. When asked about doing so many different jobs, Kyle said:

> *Yeah, not because I've been sacked. Because they was agencies and you never know from one day to the next whether you're in or not … the longest job I've had is probably six months … Yeah cos of the agencies. The company's never hiring, it's always the agency that's hiring for 'em.*

Kyle told us that he was paid at the minimum wage for most of these jobs. But he became used to having this income, and during periods when he was out of work and claiming Income Support, the drop in income had a significant impact. It meant that he did not contribute to the household income, as he did when he was working, and it meant he could no longer afford to purchase video games and DVDs or go out to pubs and clubs.

In 2010, Kyle was out of work and finding it harder than ever to find a job:

I don't know, people say 'there's jobs out there but they just don't look'. But they haven't got a clue what they're talking about because I'm in the Job Centre every day and when I'm not I'm on the internet and passing me CV out and it's just agency work and no-one's taking on. There might be jobs out there for people who are qualified to do certain things but when it comes to little things like labouring, it's a lot harder for them.

The worst thing about it is you start getting used to [not having a job]. Yeah you just get depressed.

Kyle was still signed up with several employment agencies, but felt there were lots more unskilled people doing that, and less work coming through. He was determined to find another job and actively looked each day. '*Yeah well*,' he said, '*I've got nothing else to do cos I'm just sitting there bored*'. He was pessimistic about finding a job, and very negative about the support he had received:

I'm not [confident about finding a job], I'm just hoping for the best, I really could do with a job badly. The Job Centre don't do a thing for you, they're crap. They'll stop your money for any reason but they won't go out their way to help you look for a job. They just want to stick you on some course, like 13 weeks where you get an extra £15 a week for it, learning how to do CVs and applications even though I've got certificates saying I've done that before, I have to do it again. Think, all the time I'm wasting in there I could be out looking for a job. So they're actually setting you back a bit but they don't seem to take it that way.

Kyle had actually refused to go on some of these courses that the Job Centre offered him, preferring instead to sign off:

I don't bother [with the courses]. They say if you don't go they'll stop your money but I just sign off. I'd rather go without no money than go on them … cos the time I'm wasting there I could be out looking for a job. I'm more than happy to stay at me ma's. I don't need that money, the only reason I get it is to give it to me ma to help her out, but she's not bothered so I just sign off at any time. I know it sounds horrible but they don't do much to help you and don't give you much really.

In addition to his paid working history, Kyle also took a great deal of pride from the voluntary work he did for a youth club several evenings a week. This involved helping to supervise sessions. It had given him an interest in seeking paid work as a youth worker in the future, but he felt that his existing school qualifications held him back, and there was no chance of improving them:

I'd love to get into youth work but I know I've got GCSEs but with jobs like that you need like maths, science and English grade A–C and mine aren't that good. I've got a couple of Bs but mine are B, C and D.

Interviewer: *Could you ever see yourself going back to try and get those?*

Not in this lifetime. I think volunteering's the way to go, maybe you can get a job out of it.

4 The limits of localism?

We have noted that the Coalition Government has signed up to the principle of localism, though it is less clear how this will affect the overall central–local balance in the future allocation of public spending. The reorganisation of local government finance in 2011/12 may provide major opportunities to reshape the profile of revenue and capital funding at the local level. Notwithstanding the current economic context, the Government has made it clear that it wishes to maintain as far as possible high levels of capital investment in infrastructure at the national scale to secure future economic growth (HM Treasury/BIS, 2010). On the basis of our research, there is a similar case, from a social as much as an economic rationale, for also sustaining capital investment in neighbourhood infrastructure. This might be a way of ensuring that these neighbourhoods are not 'hollowed out' further in advance of the economic upturn that the Government expects to follow over the next two or three years. The Government is also concerned to ensure that alternative sources of funding for many neighbourhood services and functions are provided by the voluntary and private sectors, but this is unlikely to happen on any large scale for core infrastructure, where any positive return on investment is only likely to be in the longer term.

In all of the six communities covered in the research, the continued provision of key facilities and amenities ('third places') was seen by residents as crucially important (Hickman, 2010a). It was evident that these localities were considered to need a certain level of infrastructure to function. In addition to performing a practical function as a medium for social interaction, third places also appeared to have a symbolic role within the case study areas – they were seen by residents as a marker of the health and vibrancy of their neighbourhoods. Their removal was perceived as being a very tangible indicator and symbol of decline, especially in terms of shop closures. This was particularly the case in three areas: West Marsh, Amlwch and Hillside. In Hillside especially, there was a lack of key infrastructure, including basic services such as post offices and pharmacies. There was also a lack of shops selling affordable essential goods in Hillside, West Marsh and Amlwch, coupled with poor public transport connections to other centres.

Third places were seen as important and valued spaces for social interaction, helping some people to 'get by'. For many residents, third places fulfilled an important social function that enhanced the quality of their lives and provided vital services. This was especially true of childcare amenities and local convenience stores, which many less mobile residents rely on for their day-to-day necessities. Third places also provided affordable leisure opportunities, and a reason to get out of the house.

The physical transformation of neighbourhoods was welcomed by residents. Poorly maintained public spaces, littering and vandalism were seen as important symbols of neighbourhood decline, and addressing these problems could have a significant impact on neighbourhood satisfaction, often for relatively modest capital outlays. The research findings also indicate the potential for maximising the use of existing community services and facilities. Many residents believed that these facilities were not utilised fully and others indicated that when these facilities were enhanced (for example to incorporate parenting or health provision), it had a very positive impact.

The failure to address the loss of key retail provision, services and communal facilities would risk repeating the mistakes of the later-phase new towns or the peripheral estate developments of the 1960s. There has, perhaps, been insufficient attention given in policy debate to defending or securing key public amenities necessary for a neighbourhood to function (CRESR Research Team, 2011). It is also likely that, given the reliance of these neighbourhoods on public services, substantial future cuts in service provision will have a disproportionately negative impact. Within the six areas, the decimation of the public realm in West Marsh, the level of population churn in the private rented sector, and the consequent difficulty in retrieving a sense of 'shared place' in these areas through recent investment, might stand as a warning for other places struggling to retain local amenities in the face of expenditure pressures.

The closure of the post office in Hillside, for example, was a key moment in the recent history of that area. It also carried strong messages about the sequencing of neighbourhood redevelopment. In Hillside, the plan for estate transformation was initially a housing-led programme, with improvements to the public realm

following on. If that process had been reversed, it would have sent a very different message about the future of the area, both to existing residents and to private developers (Batty, *et al.*, 2011). But it would still be extremely difficult to attract commercial interest in these neighbourhoods at this early stage, or to prevent the continued closure of local shops making a loss.

In the launch of the Big Society programme in July 2010, reference was made by David Cameron to a community buyout of a local post office as an example of what could be done, and reference was also made to developing community pubs. It is very difficult to see this happening in the six neighbourhoods in our research, given the limited financial resources available to the vast majority of households, unless considerable additional support was granted.

The loss of local amenities was therefore symptomatic of a wider sense of loss, of a distinctive and relatively prosperous economic history. In the accounts of many participants, the local economy was seen as a key driver of change, and while the impact of these changes was undoubtedly felt locally, the source of these trends was regional, national and international in origin. Four of the six neighbourhoods (the exceptions being Oxgangs and West Kensington) had experienced the long-term decline of key sources of employment (Batty, *et al.*, 2011). In some cases, this was located within a longer-term historical decline in specific sectors of industry and the particular dependence of some neighbourhoods on a small number of predominant firms. In Amlwch, for example, the successive closure of local firms and the ending of construction projects had a major impact. In West Marsh, participants identified the loss of key local employers, especially in the food processing sector, whilst residents in Wensley Fold noted the decline of production work. What had been lost, according to these accounts, was the distinctiveness of the economic foundations for these neighbourhoods, as the employment opportunities that replaced them were more heterogeneous and anonymous, with reduced pay, conditions and security, in sectors such as warehousing or basic level service industry (Crisp, 2010).

While the recession had led to some job losses among respondents and other members of their household at the time of our interviews, there was widespread foreboding of worse to come (Batty and Cole, 2010). Some talked of their personal experiences in the struggle to remain in the labour market or to continue to make a living (for example, among taxi drivers who reported a marked decrease in trade). The experiences and perceptions of the respondents provided some valuable insights into the nature of labour market conditions, but in ways that also said something about the meanings invested in, or attached to, particular places. Many accounts were given of the difficulties in securing work, gaining work locally and getting anything better than short-term jobs (Crisp, 2010). As one Wensley Fold respondent put it: 'By getting rid of the factories, they've closed down our means of earning a living and putting food on the table'.

It was also evident how the negative impact of job loss could affect the well-being of other household members. Alongside these personal accounts of difficulties, perceptions of economic decline were expressed through inter-generational concern about the lack of opportunities for young people. In Amlwch especially, decreasing local employment opportunities for young people were directly linked to the wider social decline of the town.

It is important to remember in all this that the general view was that the employment situation would get considerably bleaker and that the impact of the recession on most jobs had been relatively limited (Batty and Cole, 2010). There were, however, some countervailing views. Following a discussion of factory closures in Grimsby, for example, one resident in full-time employment went on to assert that: 'There is work if you're really prepared to look for it, there is if you really want work', while another noted: 'There's work round here, it's just if you can be bothered to do it'. Explicit in these claims was a sense that work could be secured if those out of work were willing to invest the time and effort in looking for it. Such claims, though, fell short of asserting that work was readily available. Moreover, these were atypical of the majority of respondents who thought that local employment opportunities were definitely limited.

In these neighbourhoods there was a profound sense of loss attached to the perceived decline of important sources of work. Such accounts often transcended individual experiences of job loss or difficulties in finding work to convey a more generalised sense of living in an area deeply affected by economic change and decline. It is also interesting to note that these narratives of decline were often framed in terms of the loss of a few dominant local employers or industries. This suggests that neighbourhood identity was often intimately linked to the fortunes of large-scale, Fordist-style workplaces (Crisp, 2010). There was a lack of such narratives in West Kensington, which was located in a more diverse, fluid and active labour market (Batty, *et al.*, 2011).

These narratives were framed largely in terms of the loss of large-scale employers, particularly manufacturers that would have provided manual work primarily for men. There was little countervailing discussion of new employment opportunities, particularly in the service sector, in which some female participants had found employment, and which was sometimes identified as a source of self-esteem. This suggests that perceptions of areas are more intimately linked to the fortunes of key sources of male employment rather than growth sectors in which women are more likely to find work. Neighbourhood identity, it appears, is linked to gendered perceptions of long-term economic change.

Two of the measures introduced by the Coalition Government to stimulate economic activity for neighbourhoods like Hillside and West Marsh are the creation of Enterprise Zones and the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). Twenty-one Enterprise Zones are to be set up, of which the first eleven have been announced, with local enterprise partnerships submitting bids for the remaining ten areas. The RGF is a discretionary £1.4 billion fund that will operate for three years between 2011 and 2014 to stimulate enterprise by providing support for projects and programmes with significant potential for creating long-term, private-sector-led economic growth and employment. In particular, it will help those areas and communities that are currently dependent on the public-sector to make the transition to sustainable private-sector-led growth and prosperity. In total, 450 bids worth £2.8 billion were submitted for Round 1 of the RGF, for which £300 million was initially made available, although the first tranche of funding announced in April 2011 subsequently released £450 million.

Time will tell what impact these specific initiatives, alongside the Government's wider macro-economic strategy, will have in these neighbourhoods. But it is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects for areas like Hillside, Amlwch and West Marsh, which have suffered from sustained structural economic decline, and which are relatively disconnected from the most likely sources of future growth in their respective regions. These areas have never fully recovered from the shocks of previous recessions, and the sustained period of economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s tended to pass them by. In these communities, a continuation, or even intensification, of this process of economic decline in the years ahead will test the limits of residents' capacity to get by, with ongoing pressures on public services and amenities and little prospect of a revival in labour market performance. In addition, if the only realistic choice for the economically active is then to move out, that poses a series of practical financial and emotional dilemmas for them, as Chapter 3 illustrated.

It is widely accepted that any future economic recovery will be spatially uneven, with more prosperous areas and regions benefitting from the first wave. If that is the case, the only option for many in economically marginal areas, such as those in our research, will not be to invest in their locality, but to leave it. This theme is taken up in the next chapter.

5 Regeneration – or destabilisation – through growth?

The aims of the Localism Bill have been summarised by the Government as having 'the potential to effect a significant change in national life, passing power to a local level, creating space for local authorities to lead and innovate, and giving people the opportunity to take control of decisions that matter to them' (Communities and Local Government, 2011a, p. 21).

(Undefined) communities beneath the local authority level will play a greater role in determining budgets, in running public services and in getting involved in local activities. However, as noted in Chapter 2, there may be a lack of consensus on what the main problems in a neighbourhood are, and on what needs to be done to remedy them, and the legitimacy of community representatives to decide between competing claims on limited budgets may also be unclear.

Nevertheless, if one of the aims of localism is to give more appreciation to neighbourhood differences in devising policies and setting priorities for any investment, this would accord with some of the contrasts between neighbourhoods revealed in our research (Batty, *et al*., 2011). Indeed, the findings of our study reveal the limitations of both research and policy programmes premised upon the similarity or classification of 'deprived communities'. Economic development and renewal programmes, at regional, local authority and neighbourhood levels, have often been premised on a universal set of drivers of change and a common approach to solutions. What is evident is the diversity of local contexts and manifestations of change in these neighbourhoods, as well as their commonalities. In other words, the possibilities and potential for change vary considerably.

In the past, area-based programmes with a neighbourhood focus (like the New Deal for Communities programme) have tended to adopt a fairly standardised template for the arena of intervention: an area of a particular geographical scale, with a population of a certain size, and so on. Yet, reflecting on the findings from these six neighbourhoods, this assumed equivalence of the problems faced in relatively deprived areas, and the policy responses to them, is not borne out by the geographical compass of the daily lives of the residents and the problems they encounter, which vary widely. In the case of West Kensington, for example, questions of access and opportunity were essentially governed by the constraints of the housing market (Hickman, 2010b). Access to, and the cost of, housing dwarfed all other issues, and broad-based holistic programmes might have much less purchase here than in places where more complex interactions between different policy areas were manifest.

Four of the case study areas had been subject to some regeneration, of varying intensity and impact. The regeneration programme in Hillside, for example, had caused considerable community disruption and disquiet, while the more modest programme in Wensley Fold had proved largely successful in providing additional housing options for local residents as well as incomers. The sequence of investment was key in gaining, or losing, community support (CRESR Research Team, 2011). One of the clear messages from our research concerns the need to understand in greater depth the impacts on existing communities of programmes of significant neighbourhood regeneration (Cole and Green, 2010). This requires a better knowledge of the (variable) strength of community networks and a recognition that poorer quality housing or social problems constitute only part of residents' experiences of place. The impacts of the process of regeneration on residents need to be given greater weight, and far more comprehensive support needs to be provided during the process. There is a danger that a focus on the wider, longer-term beneficial outcomes of regeneration underplays the disruption caused during the process. More intractably, neighbourhood change, including change brought about by regeneration and renewal programmes, does not benefit all residents, and there needs to be a greater honesty and acceptance of this in policy-making and delivery. The contrasting experiences of those in the midst of regeneration schemes are starkly illustrated by the accounts given below by Winnie in Hillside (see Box 5 in this chapter) and Hashim Mirza in Wensley Fold (see Box 6 in this chapter).

Box 5: Winnie – the mixed impact of neighbourhood 'transformation'

Winnie is in her early 60s and has lived in the same home in Hillside all her life, which her mother and father occupied when it was first built. She subsequently took over the tenancy and purchased the house through the Right to Buy scheme. The house is now paid off. Due to the redevelopment of Hillside, Winnie's house is scheduled for demolition. Despite attempts to stay in Hillside, she has recently elected to buy a house in a neighbouring area. Winnie is married and has four children. One still resides with her and other family members live close by. She now has several grandchildren. Winnie works part-time as a cleaner, her husband is retired and her son does a range of casual part-time jobs. This extract focuses on the impact of neighbourhood change upon her housing circumstances.

Over the course of the *Living Through Change* project, Winnie and her family have witnessed a deterioration in their housing circumstances. When she married, some 40 years ago, her husband moved in with her at her parents' house where they subsequently had four children. At times, this meant the house was overcrowded. The house has three bedrooms, but as her mother's mobility deteriorated, the downstairs living room became a bedroom too. They did apply for re-housing, but the properties they were offered were (in their eyes) too far away from Hillside, and they chose to remain in the area. Winnie's mother eventually moved into a sheltered housing scheme nearby and Winnie took over the tenancy, going on to purchase the property through the Right to Buy scheme.

While their household income fell, they were still able to cover their housing costs by making economies elsewhere in their household budget. However, the regeneration process in Hillside has had a negative effect on them as home-owners. Winnie's home is in a part of the estate that has been scheduled for demolition. Her neighbours, who were renting from the local housing association, have already gone, either moving away from Hillside or moving into the newly built properties on the estate.

The uncertainty about her future housing has caused a great deal of anxiety. Winnie was first made aware that her house was part of the demolition plans in 2002, and was very upset by the notion of moving. Over the past eight years, she has been given a host of different housing options, which have never come to fruition. Initially, she was told that a 'like-for-like swap' would be possible if a council property became available elsewhere on the Hillside estate. She was offered a property that would be refurbished, but she had misgivings about the road it was located on and turned it down. She also sought advice from the New Deal for Communities' regeneration team about selling her house and moving on, but she soon realised that the proceeds from the sale would not be sufficient to buy another property on the open market. She was very reluctant to switch from being a home-owner to being a tenant again. When she had bought the house, she had done so with a view to being secure and having no housing costs in later life. More recently (2009/10), she was offered the opportunity to purchase a newly built shared-ownership property in Hillside. She declined this offer because she did not want to wait the three years (minimum) that it would take for the new-build home to become available.

Although Winnie was very reluctant to move from her home and away from Hillside, she finally decided that it was necessary to do so. The declining condition of her home, and the decanting and demolition around her, were having a detrimental effect on her quality of life:

> … after this winter I said, my fella says 'we'll have to get out', so I did start looking around then.

More recently, the council offered Winnie and several other residents in her situation a £40,000 loan to help home-owners on the estate buy elsewhere on the open market. The loan was interest-free and only repayable on the future sale of the property. This made purchasing a house on the open market a possibility, and Winnie made a successful offer on a property in a neighbouring area, and began the conveyancing process.

Being in this uncertain position for an extended period affected the way Winnie looked after her house. Since receiving notice that her house was scheduled for demolition to make way for new development, Winnie had been reluctant to invest in her property as she would have liked to. In 2007, she stated that she had put off buying anything new for the house and tackling any repairs that were needed, as she would have to move out soon, and the house would be demolished. However, as time went on and she had not moved on, she was forced to make repairs and replace white goods. When we spoke to her in 2010, she had been forced to buy some essentials for the house using small amounts of money that she had saved for moving house:

> Well like I just had to pay out, I didn't want to but, cos we're in the position that we've been like this for about five years. We know we've gotta go, I don't wanna go anywhere, I would be quite happy if they just left me alone, I don't wanna go anywhere, I wanna stay where I am. But I'm being forced out so we haven't done nothing to the house for the last few years cos we're in this position, I can't afford to keep my house up and then when I move buy things for a new house, so what few bob I've had saved up I'm hangin' onto. But we've just had to buy a cooker cos me cooker went and we've just had to have a new toilet fitted [and] me gas fire's on the blink.

Box 6: Hashim Mirza – cohesion and regeneration

Hashim Mirza is 25 years old and has lived in Wensley Fold since 2006, in a newly built three-bedroom house rented from a housing association. She describes her ethnicity as Pakistani. She is married and has three young children. Wensley Fold is an ethnically diverse mixed-tenure neighbourhood, the main ethnic groups being white and Asian. More recently, there has been a growing Eastern European community occupying the private rented sector. Hashim Mirza's street is part of a new mixed-tenure housing development in the middle of Wensley Fold that has been sympathetically integrated into the traditional grid-iron street pattern that exists.

Hashim Mirza believed that there were good relationships between her neighbours, and she had never been a victim of racism while living there. Her positive perception of Wensley Fold was tempered by the very negative experience she had before moving there:

> Yeah that's what the big difference were for me cos when I used to live in my old house they used to say racist comments and stuff and here it's totally different people. Not everybody's the same.

She had a particularly amiable relationship with her white next door neighbour, which she felt typified the street as a whole. However, she did not believe that this was the case in other parts of Wensley Fold, where there were tensions between whites and Asians. So why the difference in her part of the neighbourhood? She pointed out that her street comprised predominately new houses, and the people living in them were mostly new to the area. They therefore had a 'new resident' status in common:

> Our neighbours and that we're all friendly. I don't think many's lived in that area, cos everybody, these houses were built newly and we were all coming in at the same time and as far as I know I think everybody's quite happy with the area, they don't have a problem.

While it was clear that she perceived there to be mutual respect between neighbours, it was clear that the nature of relationships varied between people, based on ethnicity. Generally speaking, relationships with her white neighbours were polite, but not personal, whereas she had formed closer relationships with other Asian women. This was revealed when we asked her whether her neighbours were in similar financial positions:

To be honest, I haven't asked cos she's not Asian, she's white. But she's really really nice. Every morning you'll see her, we'll say hi and bye and how are you and everything but we don't go into financially or how's this and how's that but [further up the street is] an Asian, she's like single and that, she was married and that but her husband's gone and she's got a hard life, we'll talk to her and that. But we won't go into complete detail and how life is and that, I just think that's a bit rude going straight into that.

The quotation above also suggests that there were personal boundaries between neighbours that Hashim Mirza would not cross. She also reflected that her interactions with her neighbours in Wensley Fold were very different from those of her parents and the experience she had whilst living at home with them:

We don't actually really mix in the way that we, you know, when we used to live at our mum's. It's not the way it used to be then because we don't go out much now, the kids play out and we just watch them.

Hashim Mirza's relationship with her Asian neighbours was also tempered by language. Not being fluent in Punjabi often made her shy in the company of other Asian women. This was in contrast to her sister (who lives close by) who had a better grasp of Punjabi, and with whom she did most of her socialising in the neighbourhood:

I'm sort of the shy one. They talk to me, I don't know, I think I'm like hi and bye sort of thing, but when they start talking and everything, my sister, she's the chatty one, she talks about everything, what happened on that street and what happened to this person and that, and I just sit on one side and listen to it.

In terms of delivering more empowerment as part of the localism agenda, the research findings would suggest that in the six neighbourhoods participants' sense of powerlessness had very deep, long-term and non-local roots. As we have seen, residents themselves identified the centrality of the wider economy to neighbourhood change and the limited sustainability of responses to economic change. Physical renewal programmes, for example, often generated short-term construction employment but did not deliver longer-term employment opportunities. Renewal programmes aimed at fostering a social mix, such as in Hillside, did not address the employment or financial circumstances of existing residents. Many participants would also be bringing with them a personal history of receiving 'promises' about new opportunities for their neighbourhood, which were then not realised in practice.

These experiences also affected the widespread perception that neighbourhood changes had been (or would be) 'imposed' on them, whether they then benefited from them or not (Bashir and Flint, 2010). Even in those regeneration initiatives judged by residents to be successful (Oxgangs and Wensley Fold), participants were well aware of the constrained choices they had open to them (such as which block of flats to move into) and which they did not (such as access to jobs and improved financial resources). The voices of the participants in Hillside indicated the high levels of anxiety and uncertainty that can characterise these developments (Bashir and Flint, 2010; Cole and Green, 2010). One respondent, noting that the development had stopped, referred to the estate as a 'big waste ground', while another commented on the vast open spaces 'where there is nothing', affecting the morale on the estate:

so they're more or less sectioned off from the other part of the estate and it's 'you get on with it' at that end of the estate ... I think there'll be a split community to be honest, for the simple reason that they'll get in their cars, they'll drive off. They will get in their cars, get on the motorway and go. So what difference is it really making to this economy? They'll take their children to schools that's outside the area, they'll most probably work outside the area, so they'll shop where they work.

This pervading sense of powerlessness, of being unable to make changes through collective action, goes much deeper than the nature and extent of consultation exercises undertaken, or whether specific budgets are set aside for 'the community' to spend. Policies to promote empowerment need to take this into account.

In terms of major regeneration initiatives established over the past ten years, the New Deal for Communities programme has now come to an end, and the Government has terminated funding for the Housing Market Renewal programme, despite a relatively positive independent assessment of its impact so far (Audit Commission, 2011). The Government's own approach to regeneration lists a series of 'policies, rights and funds' that may be applicable to different localities, while making it clear that state programmes driven by Whitehall are seen as a thing of the past. The clear emphasis is on connecting disadvantaged neighbourhoods to growth and opportunity nearby or, on a wider geographical scale, attracting employers and investors, not least through favourable fiscal incentives. It states, 'the Government will continue to help rebalance growth across the country, but regeneration activity should be led by local communities, not by Whitehall' (Communities and Local Government, 2011b). However, it is unclear how this particular balancing act, between 'nudging' growth in certain directions on the one hand, and promoting local autonomy and community self-help on the other, will be achieved in practice.

It is possible to envisage that a carefully targeted and sustained programme of rebuilding community infrastructure might be developed. This could be coupled with RGF-style support to stimulate private sector investment in jobs, and allied to making a priority of transport investment. Such a programme could be focused on geographically disconnected 'second order' places that have often been often overlooked in previous bids for special place-based support. Among the six neighbourhoods in our research, this could cover places such as Amlwch, West Marsh and Wensley Fold: places that are geographically disconnected from major towns and cities. This could also be linked to ideas about developing a 'Decent Neighbourhood Standard' (mirroring the Decent Homes Standard introduced in 2002) to try to ensure a minimum level of accessibility to services and amenities – including schools, hospitals, retail outlets, public spaces and transport – for more deprived areas.

However, such an approach is likely to require a greater degree of interventionism (and front-loaded public subsidy) than would be palatable to the present Government. Instead, emphasis is being placed on attracting new forms of economic activity to disadvantaged areas and, presumably, upskilling the labour force through measures such as the Work Programme so that local people can take advantage of these opportunities, instead of them being taken up by new economic in-migrants. Much turns on the extent to which any perceived advantages of investing in such areas can be sufficient in the future to outweigh long-standing historical patterns of economic decline, deskilling and outward migration.

We return to this issue in the Conclusion, as the outcome of economic change on areas like the six considered in this report will be paramount. If the Government's strategy works, the country will witness a more geographically balanced profile of economic growth, at comparatively little cost to the Exchequer, than has been the case for the past 30 or 40 years during the steady decline of the country's manufacturing heartlands. If the strategy does not work, what will be left in these neighbourhoods – as the employed and employable move out, or are forced out, to seek work elsewhere – is a demographically, economically and socially vulnerable and 'residualised' shell of the communities that once existed.

6 Conclusion

This report has assessed the 'lived realities' in six neighbourhoods against some of the principles that have informed the battery of measures introduced by the Coalition Government since May 2010 in terms of four main themes: community work and mobility, localism, and regeneration. The report has attempted to describe how these themes connect with the actual experiences of residents as revealed by the research, and to speculate on the potential impact as some of these policies are implemented.

The research was focused on only six relatively deprived neighbourhoods, and so generalisations would be hazardous, but there was little evidence in the research of any fault line between 'cohesive' and 'broken' communities, of places somehow set apart from 'the rest of us'. The gradations were more finely calibrated, created by a constantly shifting balance of forces between social solidarity and social division. In places with a lower level of residential turnover, a smaller private rented sector and a mixed age profile, it was more likely that robust localised friendship and neighbour networks were present. In other communities, social life was more dispersed or atomised: a quality that could be seen as problematic (as in West Marsh) or not (West Kensington). The sources of social division could be locally specific as the insider/outsider dynamic took different forms (nationality, ethnicity, age), especially if it was manifest in contested local resources – not least, access to housing.

'Brokenness' was not therefore an appropriate label to describe the different neighbourhood experiences explored in this report. Three of the neighbourhoods (West Kensington, Oxgangs and Wensley Fold) seemed to be fairly unproblematic, according to most of the respondents we interviewed. In other places, the source of social division was partly a reaction to the perception of certain different lifestyles and partly anxiety created by a retreat from the local social realm, in which the safe and familiar was now seen as more threatening and uncertain.

Locality or opportunity?

The research evidence has underscored empirically some of the central paradoxes or tensions between the core principles of the Government's programme. The first is the emphasis on *connection to locality* as a driver of policy on the one hand, and the emphasis on *connection to economic opportunity* on the other. For most residents in our research, place mattered – 'their' place, which usually meant their immediate neighbourhood – although the extent to which it mattered varied significantly between the areas. As a rule, neighbourhood mattered most to people where both the economic legacy of and future prospects for their community were least favourable. The nature of the housing market was also important: neighbourhoods with a higher proportion of social housing often provided households with an island of stability in an ocean of turbulence (not least in the jobs market). Given this, the various policy instruments proposed or already introduced to stimulate household mobility to more buoyant labour markets (such as social housing reforms, relaxing planning controls in areas of growth, Housing Benefit reform) are actually likely to find least traction in those places where 'localism' means most. This tendency will be compounded by the Government's overall economic strategy (whatever its other merits or demerits) to shift the emphasis from public sector employment (often rooted in a specific locality) to ostensibly more geographically 'footloose' private sector jobs.

Local preference or territorial equity?

A further tension is between the Government's commitment to greater local autonomy and the imbalance in resources necessary to realise this commitment. Certainly, the different social and cultural histories of the six neighbourhoods suggest strongly that it is mistaken to devise policies from 'the centre' that assume that the experience of living in relatively deprived areas fits some notional standard template or can somehow be 'read off' from the characteristics of the residents. The research evidence therefore suggests that initiatives such as

neighbourhood planning may in theory be an appropriate way forward so that future measures can be fashioned to the specific processes of change the area has undergone (and, especially, the impact of population change due to processes of in- and out-migration over time). But many of the additional resources for these areas are themselves going to be locally generated (as reflected in measures such as the New Homes Bonus, the Community Infrastructure Levy, the relaxation of planning controls in areas of high housing demand, the possible retention of the income from the business rate and so on). The pay-off here for communities with slack housing and labour markets will be very limited, especially as developers will have few inducements to enter more economically vulnerable markets anyway.

Informal or state support?

A third tension between policy ideas and lived realities in the six neighbourhoods is the assumption that informal and state provision for hard-pressed households are somehow on opposite sides of a see-saw, so that tilting the balance away from public sector support will thereby enhance the opportunities for other forms of support, whether through third sector agencies, local social networks or the family. For many of the residents interviewed, these different sectors are intrinsically inter-related as they juggle daily between state, informal and family-based systems to generate often intricate webs for care and support that will perish if some strands are peremptorily torn away. Many such households, especially those with children or other vulnerable family members, are time-poor as well as income-poor, so that any exhortations to give more time in order to stimulate the Big Society are likely to fall on deaf ears.

Renewal through growth?

A final tension arising from the research concerns the relationship between regeneration and growth. What happens to those communities that are facing structural economic weakness but where countervailing systems of mutual support and resilience have also become attenuated over time – those at the end of the economic line – if the opportunities for growth are based elsewhere? A flight to any opportunities will empty these areas even more of the economically active, but the prospects for endogenous growth due to market processes are likely to be bleak. This is not a new problem, and the need to think radically about the fate of those areas facing long-term decline and entrenched poverty has been pressed before, but the political ramifications of either option – sustained public investment to stimulate the local economy, or an acceptance of growing residualisation and decay – are equally unpalatable at the moment, albeit for different reasons.

Initially, it appeared that place was being banished from the Government's policy lexicon, but now it appears to be creeping back into contention. At the moment, the Government's implicit approach to area-based policy seems to be directed to encouraging those nearer the 'tipping point' of prosperity, as in the recent announcement of the areas eligible for Enterprise Zone status. The fate of 'second order' and relatively isolated places – such as older textile, mining or seaside towns and villages – rarely surfaces in policy debate. Given the non-local factors governing their economic outlook, it appears that 'trickle down' will have to trickle a very long way from the areas of growth to make a difference. In 2008, the then Labour Government produced a green paper on welfare reform entitled *No One Written Off*. Is there now a need for an equivalent document called *No Place Written Off*? And what policy agenda might emerge in response to that question? In the years ahead, it could well transpire that it is in these places – in the gap between the idea of new growth and the reality of continued decline – that the darkest shadows will fall.

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Appendix

Six neighbourhoods

The case study areas selected in the research can be described as 'relatively deprived' but they did not represent the most 'extreme' forms of area deprivation, as conventionally measured. The selection was guided by three themes identified by the research team as being relevant to policy development and neighbourhood impact and change: cohesion and connectivity; population diversity; and geographical isolation and residential mobility. Hillside is a relatively deprived neighbourhood in one of the most deprived districts in England, whereas Oxgangs is adjacent to very high-status high-value neighbourhoods such as Morningside in the southern suburbs of Edinburgh. Wensley Fold is an ethnically diverse neighbourhood in a town with a large south Asian population, whereas the ethnic composition of West Marsh, and Grimsby itself, is predominantly white British. West Kensington is a London suburb with very good transport connections, while Amlwch is an isolated town some distance from the major centres of population in Wales (see CRESR Research Team, 2009, for a fuller discussion of area selection).

The research therefore provided an opportunity to explore the perspectives and actions of residents in different neighbourhood contexts, including the degree of severity of measured deprivation. Table 1 shows the positioning of the areas in their relative national indices of deprivation when the research started, and Figure 1 in this chapter shows their geographical location.

Table 1: The case study areas and their respective national Indices of Multiple Deprivation

Neighbourhood	Rank	Decile
Wensley Fold	628[a]	1
West Marsh	2,247[a]	1
Hillside	1,443[a]	1
West Kensington	4,281[a]	2
Oxgangs	1,335[b]	3
Amlwch	432[c]	3

(a) out of 32,428 LSOAs; (b) out of 6,505 data zones; (c) out of 1,896 LSOAs. Lower rank and decile implies greater deprivation
Sources: English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007; Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2009; Welsh Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2008

Looking more closely at the individual deprivation indices that comprise the indices of multiple deprivation, in terms of income, four localities (Hillside, Wensley Fold, West Marsh and West Kensington) are in the lowest decile, Oxgangs ranks in the second decile (for Scotland) and Amlwch in the third decile (for Wales). In terms of employment, Hillside and Wensley Fold stand out with the lowest rankings (first decile), followed by Oxgangs, West Marsh and Wensley Fold (second decile) and Amlwch (third decile). In terms of health, Hillside and Wensley Fold again stand out with the lowest rankings (first decile), followed by West Marsh and West Kensington (second decile), and Amlwch and Oxgangs (third decile).

There are marked differences between the areas in terms of barriers to housing and services, which is one proxy measure for accessibility. While Oxgangs, Amlwch and West Kensington are poorly ranked (first and second decile), Hillside, West Marsh and Wensley Fold are favourably ranked (in the eighth, ninth and tenth decile respectively). In terms of physical environment, Hillside stands out as the most favourable locality of the six (in the third decile), whilst all others are ranked in the first decile (excluding Oxgangs, as there is no comparable measure included in the Scottish IMD). On the crime measure, Wensley Fold and West Marsh are the least favourably ranked localities of the six (first decile), followed by Hillside and Oxgangs (second decile)

and then Amlwch and West Kensington (third decile). In terms of ethnicity, West Kensington is the most diverse, Wensley Fold has a mixed Asian/white population, and the other four are predominantly white areas. All the localities have significant proportions of people in receipt of benefits. Most notable is Hillside, where 28 per cent of working-age residents were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance in August 2009 (see Cole and Green, 2010 for a fuller discussion). We now consider each area in turn.

Figure 1: Case study locations in the UK
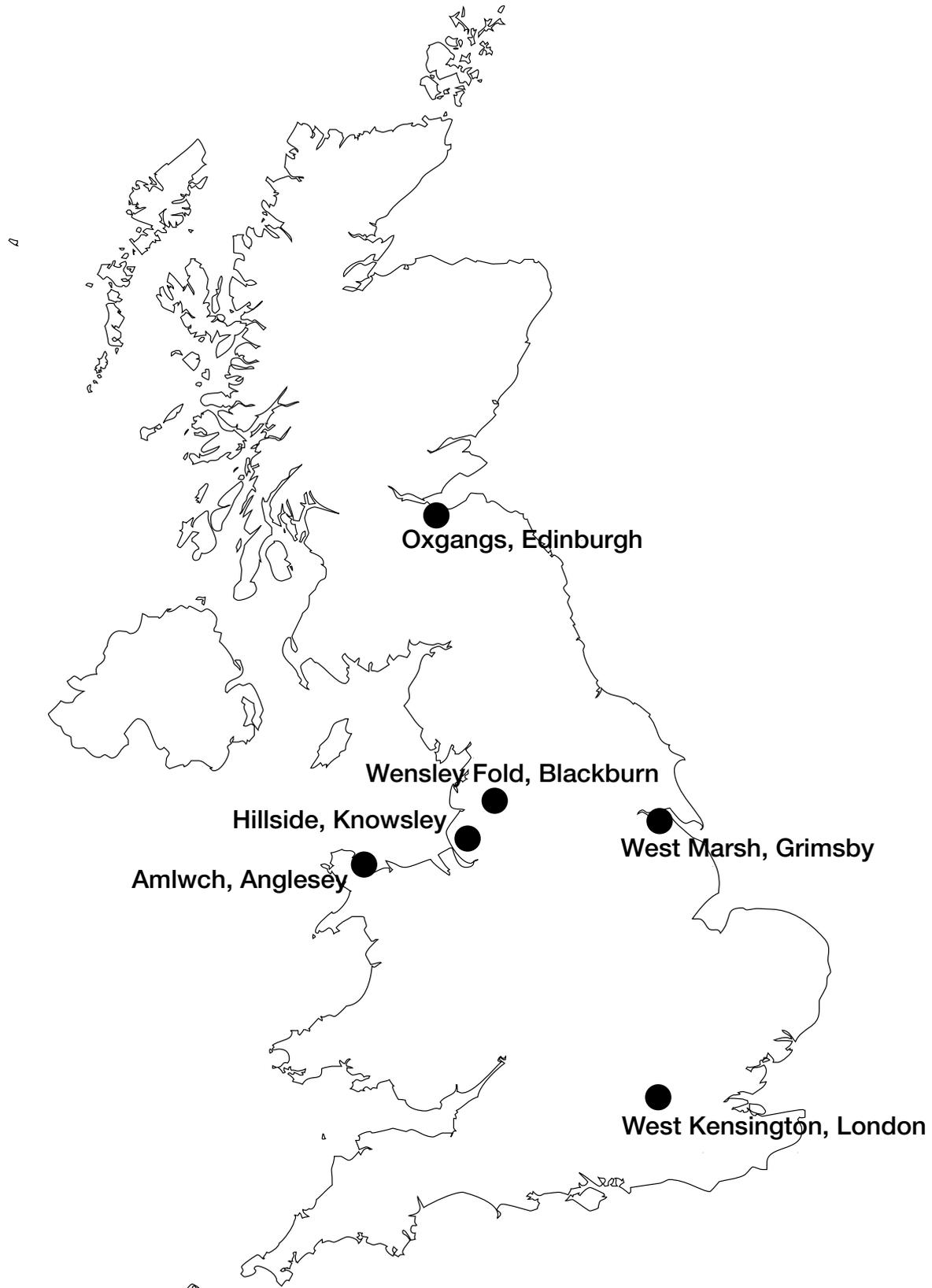
Amlwch, Anglesey

Amlwch is a small town located on the northern tip of the Isle of Anglesey. It is the fourth biggest settlement on the island and has a population of 1,400. It is relatively isolated geographically, and the nearest towns are Llangefni (13 miles away) and Holyhead (20 miles). Amlwch comprises three distinct neighbourhoods: Amlwch Port, which was once a thriving source of trade; Amlwch town itself, where most shops and services are based; and Craig-y-don, a small local authority housing estate located between Amlwch and Amlwch Port. The residential areas contain a mixture of property types, although most of the stock consists of houses of traditional construction built in the late nineteenth century and in the inter-war period of the last century.

      The two enduring elements of Amlwch's history are copper and the sea. Amlwch developed as a town in the eighteenth century with the advent of large-scale copper mining. The growth of copper mining in the nineteenth century led to the development of what had been a small harbour in Amlwch Bay into a larger port capable of accommodating ships to export the copper. Copper mining steadily declined from its zenith in the nineteenth century, though there have been recent plans to revive it as a commercial proposition. Amlwch Port was a centre of commercial fishing before the general decline of the industry from the mid 1970s. Amlwch's manufacturing industry has suffered in recent years as the advantages of its location by the sea and close to copper deposits waned. The relative inaccessibility of the town has made it difficult to attract new industry, despite the development of under-occupied industrial parks on the edge of the town. Given the fragility of the local employment base, it is not surprising that the majority of local people travel outside the town for work, especially to the Wylfa nuclear power station near Cemaes. The key to Amlwch's (and indeed Anglesey's) economic future lies in the recently approved plan to commission a new nuclear reactor plant (Wylfa B) from the partnership Horizon Nuclear Power by 2020. This should create around 3,000 jobs during the employment phase, and up to 800 permanent jobs (predominantly skilled labour), rising to 1,000 during maintenance periods. They would not be entirely new jobs, however, as it is likely that many currently working on Wylfa A will be redeployed at the new plant.

      Amlwch has tried to develop a tourist heritage interest, building on the annual Copperfest, and to open up the port to extend its function, but this has not reversed the general trend of economic decline. Overall, Amlwch is marked by long-standing problems of economic vulnerability and isolation and heavy dependence on a single industry, and has witnessed a steady exodus of young people from the town over the past 20 to 30 years. Many residents speak Welsh and it is the first language for some.

Hillside, Knowsley

The neighbourhood of Hillside in North Huyton, Knowsley, Merseyside, forms part of the collection of inter-war and post-war municipal housing estates that were developed on the edge of the Liverpool conurbation as overspill from slum clearance programmes and the expansion of the Liverpool Docks in the 1930s. It was common for several generations of the same family to have lived in Hillside since it was developed. The construction of the housing estate was concomitant with the development of engineering and manufacturing firms such as Marconi's nearby. The fortunes of Hillside declined in the economic recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, which led locally to a reduction in job opportunities and a sharp decline in the level of economic activity of its residents. Lack of investment in the estate's housing stock, and housing allocation policies that tended to lead to concentrations of households in severe need in the area, were also factors in its declining popularity. In 2001, North Huyton was designated as one of 39 New Deal for Communities areas in England. The New Deal for Communities identified the main problems in the area as:

- housing market fragility, characterised by high void levels, abandonment and low take-up of Right to Buy;

- a high number of 'blighted' properties, which fell below the Government's Decent Homes Standard;

- increasing problems associated with antisocial behaviour and crime, including vandalism and arson attacks on empty properties. Drug use and drug dealing were also thought to be more prevalent;

- poor standards of housing management and a lack of investment that prevailed before council stock was transferred to Knowsley Housing Trust in 2002;

- inadequate choice in type and tenure of housing (with a concentration of two- and three-bedroom social rented properties); and

- the increasing isolation of some communities as a result of poorly implemented traffic-calming measures.

The production of a masterplan in 2002 proposed a remodelling of the neighbourhood, extensive demolition (much of it in Hillside) and new mixed-tenure housing. While the masterplan was being prepared, demolition of properties – many of them void and declared structurally unstable – continued in various streets in the estate. While this cleared 'blighted' properties, it also reinforced the sense of physical isolation in certain areas, with many unused open spaces that had yet to be developed for any purpose. Overall, the masterplan proposed that, across the whole New Deal for Communities area, 1,200 homes should be demolished (of which 700 had already been cleared) and replaced by 1,523 new properties. Of these, 85 per cent were to be homes for private sale, 12 per cent for social renting and 3 per cent for low cost home-ownership.

During this period of flux, many households continued to move out of Hillside, but other stayed put until the option of a new property in the neighbourhood was made available to them. In some cases this took several years. The decline in community facilities, including local shops, was a marked feature of changes in the estate. During the course of the research project, the closure of the local post office was seen by residents as a particularly bitter blow. The recession and the consequent housing market downturn affected the development plan. The development of 400 new properties in the Hillside part of the estate was suspended in late 2008. It recommenced in 2010, but the delay caused considerable disquiet, both in terms of delays in rehousing and in terms of the 'hollowed-out' visual and social aspect of the neighbourhood. A number of new-build private properties were recently transferred to the social sector and low cost home-ownership units were proving to be very difficult to sell to existing members of the local community.

Oxgangs, Edinburgh

Oxgangs is a residential suburb of Edinburgh, located in the south-west of the city. The neighbourhood is served by a variety of shops, amenities and public facilities. It has two small shopping areas, a post office and a pharmacy. The local library is a popular and well-resourced community hub, and is regularly used for meetings and classes, as well as for its wide range of books and IT facilities. Oxgangs has three primary schools, as well as a nearby high school, which is reported to have a very good reputation locally and further afield. Two neighbouring primary schools situated on Oxgangs Green (Comiston and Hunters Tryst) were recently merged and renamed Pentland Primary.

Oxgangs was developed in its present form in the early 1950s to provide predominantly council housing for skilled workers in the city and to attract incomers to an economically buoyant area. It also provided housing for people displaced by redevelopment in other parts of the city. Various housing types were constructed: low-rise blocks of flats, semi-detached houses, bungalows and, most strikingly, high-rise flats. Completed in the early 1960s, Oxgangs' three high-rise blocks (Caerketton, Allermuir and Capelaw) were known locally as the 'village in the sky'. Each block consisted of 60 flats and 20 two-storey maisonettes. Although the community was flourishing, serious defects emerged fairly quickly after the development was completed. While solutions could be found for the houses and low-rise blocks, the high-rise flats suffered from inherent structural problems that could not be suitably rectified. During the 1970s and 1980s, Oxgangs remained a popular residential location and a significant proportion of council housing was bought by tenants under the Right to Buy scheme.

The biggest change to the fabric of Oxgangs was the decision to demolish the high-rise flats, which was undertaken in 2005 and 2006 to make way for redevelopment and regeneration. Where possible, tenants were housed in empty properties within Oxgangs and given a right to return to the new development. However, many tenants moved away from the area. Work began in 2006 on a new mixed-tenure scheme of low-rise flats

and houses, providing a range of dwelling types, including provision for the elderly and people with disabilities. The scheme was responsive to a local desire for low-rise housing, balanced against the practical requirement to achieve relatively high dwelling densities to meet high housing demand and make it financially viable. Phase 1 of the scheme (91 units) was completed at the end of 2007, and has accommodated former tenants of the high-rise blocks who were given the right of return and priority allocation. Phase 2 included 85 residential units, along with a community centre and some commercial units. Phase 3a began in 2010 (34 residential units) and Phase 3b will begin once further land has been acquired. In 2009/10 a major refurbishment programme of council housing in Oxgangs was undertaken, providing new kitchens and bathrooms in existing properties, as well as other improvements to fixtures and fittings.

Wensley Fold, Blackburn

Wensley Fold is a neighbourhood of Blackburn, a Lancashire town with a population of some 100,000. The neighbourhood is located immediately west of Blackburn town centre. The area has a population of approximately 3,000, occupies a hillside situation and is characterised by rows of parallel terraced houses organised in a compressed grid pattern. The area has a local shopping centre with a variety of shops, including several specialising in south Asian produce. There are also a number of major supermarkets on the edge of the area, and the town centre is within walking distance. Local community resources include a community centre that runs various training, educational and social activities, as well as places of worship and parks.

Wensley Fold has an important symbolic role in Blackburn's economic history as it was the site of the earliest powered spinning mill in the town, developed in 1778. In the 1840s, the Wensley Fold mill alone had a workforce of around 1,400. The town of Blackburn itself witnessed a six-fold increase in its population between 1821 and 1911, when it reached a peak of 133,000. There was some diversification of the town's economic base in the inter-war and post-war era, as engineering and manufacturing companies moved into sites on the outskirts of the town.

As with other textile towns in the area, Blackburn became the focus for Asian migration from the late 1960s onwards. The largest proportions of immigrants to the town in this period were rural Indian Gujarati Muslims and rural Pakistani Punjabi Muslims (Robinson, 1986), many of whom settled close to the town centre. Gujarati Hindus and Punjabi Sikh families tended to settle in the northern and eastern parts of Wensley Fold. Most of the original settlers from south Asia worked in the textile industry, although over the past 30 years the unemployment rate has been considerably higher among the Asian communities in Blackburn than for the population as whole (Beattie, 2007, p. 327). In the past ten years, the quality of social housing has improved due to an ongoing programme of refurbishment after stock transfer to Twin Valley Homes in 2001. Improvements in neighbourhoods with higher levels of private housing, like Wensley Fold, took place over a longer time frame.

Most of the initial investment in Wensley Fold was directed towards group repair programmes and improvements to the external fabric of the properties to ensure basic wind- and weather-proofing. A range of complementary initiatives was also introduced, such as a community safety programme, a home zone and additional youth provision. A masterplanning exercise carried out between 2003 and 2004 revealed a high level of local support among both the Asian and white communities for the development of larger properties with gardens nested within the neighbourhood.

The new development of larger properties using designs and materials sympathetic to the existing dwellings was subsequently supported by the Pennine Lancashire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder. The development of larger properties was seen as a particular need for the south Asian households in order to extend the range of properties on offer and to reduce overcrowding. The social composition of the first group of households proved to be more ethnically diverse than had been anticipated by local authority officers.

The renewal programme placed emphasis on retaining shop frontages and residential units above the shops in the main street, as well as investment in the local primary school, a community centre, a health centre and an all-weather pitch. Wensley Fold is now an area with lower levels of recorded crime than in the early 2000s, a private rented sector which has stabilised, and very strong demand for both the rented and open sale properties in the new development. The local primary school is also one of the most popular in the town.

West Kensington, London

The West Kensington case study area is located in West London, in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The area, comprising the West Kensington and Gibbs Green developments, is located within walking distance of Earls Court Exhibition Centre and a number of London Underground stations, including West Kensington, West Brompton and Earl's Court. The area is surrounded by several high-status neighbourhoods including Chelsea and Kensington. In some parts of the area, property prices are very high, with some selling recently for more than £1.5 million. West Kensington falls within the area covered by the North Fulham New Deal for Communities programme, which closed in March 2011.

The Gibbs Green estate, which comprises some 160 flats and maisonettes, was developed between 1957 and 1961. The scheme comprised eight blocks of dwellings between four and eight storeys high and a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom flats. The West Kensington estate was developed between October 1970 and 1974 as a mixed development of 626 dwellings comprising 160 houses, 78 maisonettes and 388 flats. There were problems with the blocks almost immediately, and a major repair and improvement programme was undertaken in November 1980. Two hundred families had then to be evacuated from the high-rise blocks during a three-year period to undertake the programme. The West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates have recently undergone refurbishment under the Decent Homes programme, involving improvements to kitchens and bathrooms and common parts.

The neighbourhood is centred on a major intersection between North End and Lillie Roads, where most of the area's numerous shops, pubs and cafes are located. The area also has a bustling and long-standing semi-permanent market, which is located on North End Road. One of the striking and enduring aspects of the West Kensington area is the diversity of the wider Hammersmith and Fulham area and the lack of an obvious focal point for the community, apart from the shops and, above all, the market.

The area has recently been the focus of a controversial plan for an ambitious redevelopment of the wider area – including the nearby Earls Court complex, owned by the developers Capital and Council (Capco) – once the 2012 Olympics has finished. The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham expressed interest in the plan, including the phased redevelopment of the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates. The local authority has undertaken some initial consultation with residents about the scheme, which could involve a new international conference centre, hotels, new transport interchanges, offices and 8,000 units of high-value private housing. The redevelopment has been promoted in furtherance of the local authority's objective of 'offering mixed and balanced communities'. This had led to a public campaign and a petition expressing concerns that households would be displaced, and anxiety about reassurances given by the council that alternative housing would be offered on a 'like-for-like' basis 'wherever possible'.

West Marsh, Grimsby

West Marsh is an area adjacent to the north-western part of the town centre of Grimsby, the largest town in North-East Lincolnshire, which has a population of around 90,000. The area is a mix of residential and small business developments, a business and retail park and considerable green space. The area is predominantly private rented and owner-occupied, and largely composed of street-fronting rendered terraced housing built to a grid pattern in the period between 1875 and 1913, with a few more recent infill developments.

The economic growth of Grimsby in the nineteenth century lay in the twin development of the fish docks and the connection to the expanding rail services. The passing of the West Marsh Act of 1856 enabled the acquisition of land for the further development of the railway system and three new fish docks between 1857 and 1878. Ancillary industrialisation followed on from the development of the docks. There was also direct access for workers in West Marsh to the port and chemical plants of Immingham. The population of Grimsby grew rapidly from 4,000 in 1841 to 35,000 by 1901, and 92,000 in the mid 1930s, and the population has stabilised since then. By the 1950s, Grimsby was the largest fishing port in the world, but trade declined sharply thereafter.

In the post-war period, the decline of the fishing, timber and coal exporting industries were only partly compensated by the development of the frozen food processing industry and ancillary engineering and

manufacturing industries. The shift from fishing to food processing altered the character of employment as well: from the distinctive occupational culture of trawlermen to the more female-dominated shift work patterns involved in the food processing sector. A new post-war industrial estate was developed adjacent to West Marsh, but all the main factories in it have now closed. The recently constructed 110-acre Europarc has witnessed a rapid turnover of occupants and is currently the site for a range of smaller businesses involved in packaging, warehousing and fabric manufacturing.

Residential development in West Marsh mainly took place between 1875 and 1913 as terraces were constructed by local builders according to basic grid patterns. There were scattered demolition and infill redevelopments in the 1960s and 1970s, but there has been no systematic investment plan to improve the poor-quality properties and reduce the proportion of vacant dwellings. It is likely to be quite some time before the Neighbourhood Investment Plans prepared for the West Marsh and West Marsh Macaulay neighbourhoods (North East Lincolnshire Council, 2007) are delivered.

There are three primary schools in the area and two secondary schools, but there is no post-16 education provision nearby. At the heart of West Marsh, bordering the River Freshney, is the Duke of York gardens, opened in 1894 and recently subject to substantial refurbishment. Other social activities are organised by the West Marsh Community Centre (set up in 1999), St Hugh's Community Centre and the Macaulay Area Action Group. A Forward West Marsh group was set up in 2007 to identify priorities from the area's share of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, and considerable resources have now been devoted to improvements to the West Marsh community centre, an annual West Marsh fun day, musical theatre classes and computer courses. Many of these activities are dependent on the energy and enthusiasm of a small group of individuals, several of whom have now returned, some 20 or 30 years later, to the West Marsh they first lived in as children and young adults.

Acknowledgements

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