# REPORT

# Imagining Benwell Workshop & Exhibition

**Community Development in Benwell & the West End of Newcastle:
From the National Community Development Project to 'Our Place' & Beyond**

## Thursday 21 January, 2016

## Discovery Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne

Compiled by Andrea Armstrong, Sarah Banks and Patrick Harman

# Introduction

The *Imagining Benwell* workshop in Newcastle was attended by 52 people from academic, policy and practice backgrounds. The workshop was organised by *Imagine North East.*

*Imagine North East* is part of a larger national research project: *Imagine – connecting communities through research. Imagine* is a five-year programme of research involving a wide range of universities and community organisations. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under the Connected Communities programme. The aim is to look at the ways people engage with their communities and with wider society through taking an active role in civic life. *Imagine* started in January 2013. There are four work packages, each with a different focus: social, historical, cultural and democratic. *Imagine North East* is part of the historical work package; which covers Tyneside and Coventry. *Imagine North East* involves 12 community-based partner organisations in Benwell and North Shields. It was a two-year project, running from January 2014 to December 2015.

The starting point for the *Imagine North East* research was the National Community Development Project (CDP), Britain's response to the American 'War on Poverty'. The CDP was an experimental, anti-poverty initiative of the 1970s, funded by the Home Office and located in 12 areas. The local teams were tasked with researching the causes of poverty in their areas and working with local residents to bring about change. Benwell and North Tyneside CDPs produced many detailed and critical reports, which located the causes of local social and economic problems in the decline of traditional industries along the Tyne, failures of government policy and international pressure to cut public spending. While starting with the past, *Imagine North East* has looked at the process of change in the past 40 years and the issues facing communities today in a climate of economic austerity and welfare cuts. In this workshop the focus was on Benwell. Researchers from Durham University and eight community organisations from Benwell undertook a programme of research and related activities. As part of the research, over 40 interviews were conducted with a range of people (former and current residents, community activists/workers, politicians/policymakers and others) seeking their views on the CDP, community participation and changes in Benwell. Data on regeneration and community engagement programmes following the CDP were also collected, along with information from the census showing social, economic and demographic change between 1971 and 2011. A range of projects was undertaken by the community-based partner organisations, ranging from 'Hopes and Fears' (a film made by young people about living in Benwell) to 'Never Felt So Good' (a series of colourful pictures of significant local features made in felt).

The aim of the workshop was to re-examine the achievements and challenges of the Benwell Community Development Project (CDP) of the 1970s, and consider the legacies and lessons for community development and engagement today.

**Information about Imagine North East:**  www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/imagine/

**Information about the national imagine project**: www.imaginecommunity.org.uk/

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# Workshop Programme

**11.00  Welcome, Introduction to *Imagine North East,*** Sarah Banks, Durham University

**11.10  The National CDP and Benwell CDP**
***Benwell CDP as part of the National CDP***, Sarah Banks
***Perspectives from former Benwell CDP workers on aspects of the work***:
- Setting up Benwell CDP & the research and analysis, Ian Harford, former Director
- Significant campaigns, Gary Craig, former Assistant Director (Action Team)
- The role of the law project, David Gray, former solicitor with law project

**11.40  Post-CDP**
- ***How the CDP imagined the future?***, Judith Green, former CDP researcher
- ***Overview of subsequent regeneration programmes in Benwell and the West End of Newcastle***, including visions of community and place, Fred Robinson, Durham University
- ***Benwell then and now***, comparing census data 1971 and 2011, Alan Townsend, Durham University
- ***Legacies and lessons of Benwell CDP***, from the research interviews, Andrea Armstrong and Sarah Banks, Durham University

**12.10  Questions and discussion**

**12.25  Introduction to the Imagining Benwell exhibition,** Michael McHugh, Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums with Michael Young and Ian Farrier, West Newcastle Picture History Collection

**12.30  Exhibition viewing and lunch**

**13.15  Perspectives on community engagement and development past, present and future**

- ***Overview of findings from research interviews*** with residents, community workers and policymakers, Andrea Armstrong, Durham University.
- ***Showing of film extracts*** based on the work of some of the *Imagine* community partner organisations, including Hopes & Fears, Patchwork Youth Project.
- ***Critical perspectives from local community organisations,*** key issues for present & future in Benwell & the West End: Christine Irklis, Riverside Community Health Project; Shamshad Iqbal, Angelou Centre; Ruth Taylor, Pendower Good Neighbour Project & Andrew White, SkillsBridge on the potential of the *Our Place* initiative.

**13.45  Roundtable discussions**, choice of one group**:**
1. ***Communities in control?***
2. ***Forty years of urban policy***
3. ***The role of research in community development***

**14.45  Tea and Plenary**
***Brief feedback*** from roundtables
***Community development in austerity Britain, looking back, looking forward,***
Mae Shaw, Edinburgh University.

**15.30  Close**

**Summary of presentations and discussions**

**Morning programme**

### Welcome, Introduction to *Imagine North East*

Sarah Banks (Coordinator of *Imagine North East*) opened the workshop with an introduction to the *Imagine North East* research project. Sarah explained that in Benwell and North Shields researchers from Durham University and 12 community organisations have undertaken a programme of research and related activities. The aim was to examine the history of community development and regeneration in each area, the extent to which local people were involved in decision-making, the different visions of residents, community workers, policy-makers and politicians and consider the lessons for how local communities can engage in imagining and creating better futures for their areas. Approaches included interviews, documentary sources, census data, and eight projects with community organisations (shown in the table below). The diverse parts were knitted together through group meetings, exhibitions, workshops and national conferences.

| Type of Project | Project Title | Lead Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| *Felting art project* | Benwell in Felt | St. James Centre for Heritage and Culture |
| *Events for older people* | Growing old in West Newcastle | Search |
| *Developing new ways to reach communities* | Remembering Benwell | West Newcastle Picture History Collection |
| *Film-making project with young people* | Hopes and fears | Patchwork Project |
| *Intergenerational history project* | Time traveller | Pendower Good Neighbour Project |
| *Creating a mobile interactive toy* | Playing with change and ideas | Riverside Community Health Project |
| *Creating a film of the historic graveyard* | Filming change | St. James Heritage and Environment Group |
| *Creating a website* | West End stories | Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums |

*Imagine North East* has explored a number of research questions, of which the following were focus of the workshop:

1. What did the CDPs do and what can we learn from them?
2. What happened post-CDP, especially regeneration initiatives, and how were local communities involved?

3. What was Benwell like in 1970s; and what is it like now, physically, economically and socially?
4. What are the perspectives of different individuals and groups on Benwell in the past, present and future, and on the role of community development and regeneration?
5. What are the overall messages that we can draw from the *Imagine* project on the themes of:
    o new approaches to community development in times of austerity
    o the role of research in local neighbourhoods?

## The National CDP and Benwell CDP

### Benwell CDP as part of the National CDP

Sarah Banks explained the background to the national CDP, set up in 1969 by the Home Office as an anti-poverty programme, inspired by the USA's 'War on Poverty'. There were 12 CDP areas in the UK, including Benwell and North Tyneside in the North East. Each had an action team (managed through the local authority) and a research team (managed through a University). They were planned to last for five years, coming on stream gradually during the early 1970s. The Home Office assumption was that problems of poverty could be tackled by improving self-help and better coordination of local services. Fairly quickly, however, the CDP teams began to produce a more radical, structural analysis of the causes of poverty and to support campaigns and protests by local residents linked to pressing issues of housing, employment, welfare rights and industrial decline. The CDPs were controversial at the time, and have remained influential in the community development field.

Benwell CDP was in operation from 1972 until 1978, based in former shop premises at 85/7 Adelaide Terrace. The original area covered by the CDP was to the north, West Road; to the south, the River Tyne; to the east, Fairholm Road, Northbourne Street and Noble Street; and to the west Condercum Road, Atkinson Road and South Benwell Road. However, in practice the team worked across the West End. Benwell CDP comprised an action team employed by the City Council (including a professional lawyer independently managed by a local management committee) and a research team initially linked with Newcastle University, but later transferred to Durham University. According to Kraushaar (1982), Benwell was one of five 'radical' CDPs, which strongly challenged the Home Office's social pathology assumptions in local and inter-project reports. Benwell CDP was prolific in producing reports, including eight local Final CDP Reports and involvement in many national inter-project reports.

### Perspectives from former Benwell CDP workers on aspects of the work

*Setting up Benwell CDP and the significance of the research and analysis*: Ian Harford (former Director of Benwell CDP) outlined how Benwell CDP was set up and why Benwell was chosen as the CDP area. The *main challenges* of the work were: a) determining the main work areas to focus on; b) involving local residents and groups in projects and campaigns; c) providing good information as well as legal and other services; d) liaising with local authority officers, staff and councillors; e) creating a teamwork approach through information exchange and f) maintaining the support of CDP funders and sponsors in the Home Office and local authority. The *major achievements* were: a) ensuring effective integration of action and research by both having similar or complimentary objectives; b) supporting local residents and groups for the CDP work; c) establishing (with others) the Intelligence and Information Unit in London for coordination of research work; d) establishing good working relations with other CDPs (Benwell had close links with 5 other CDPs in particular and 'these 6 projects and their work were the driving force in creating CDP momentum'; e) being willing to experiment – with projects, publicity, reports, newsheets,

videos, surveys; and f) publishing a series of 8 final reports which were widely read and generated an income of over £15,000.

*Significant campaigns*: Gary Craig (formerly Assistant Director of Benwell CDP Action Team) explained that the early Benwell CDP campaigns were very much focused on housing issues as residents brought these concerns to the advice centre. The nature of the work was shaped by the type of housing. For example, in certain areas it was clear that most of the housing was beyond restoration. As such, campaigns with local residents and tenants focussed on making the move to new housing tolerable and helping tenants organise their demands about being able to return to the area when it was redeveloped. The CDP also worked with residents to provide input to plans for the new housing.

In other areas, housing was in a poor state but was considered capable of being modernised. The CDP organised local groups to press for the most effective forms of modernisation available within the time frame. In one particular area, for example, the housing issues were about quick and comprehensive modernisation with decent bathrooms and toilets, general maintenance of the housing fabric and building a community. However, this was made difficult as the area was a popular site for student rented accommodation and the landlords were accused, often in a very racist way, of 'bringing the area down'. The CDP had to help develop an understanding that it was the failure of the University student housing provision that was leading to pressure on the housing.

Later campaigns were more industrially-based, with several major multinational companies such as Vickers and Ever Ready planning to make thousands of redundancies, claiming that their factories were unprofitable. The CDP undertook research for trades unions, demonstrating that these companies were deliberately disinvesting in their Newcastle enterprises and shifting investment overseas to low wage areas.

About 70% of CDP workers' time was spent on neighbourhood work despite the claims by some community workers that the CDP regarded neighbourhood work as useless. The distinctive feature of the work was that it was informed by a wider structural analysis of why processes apparent in these neighbourhoods were happening (for example, disinvestment by housing owners or by multinational companies). Thus, the CDP was able to challenge the view that poor neighbourhoods were poor because of the irresponsible behaviour of local residents. Residents were in fact the victims of increasingly globalised phenomena.

*The role of Benwell Community Law Project*: David Gray (former lawyer with the Benwell Community Law Project) explained that the law project was essentially a part of CDP team, with the objective of using the law to address the issues that the CDP and the local community were identifying. It was felt that legal independence was important. Therefore the law project had a separate Management Committee. The Law Project worked on a number of issues, including: a) housing (e.g. rejecting demolition, compensation and rehousing, landlord issues and housing conditions such as dampness); b) employment (e.g., trade union recognition, strike rights, wages, redundancy and minimum wage; welfare rights, including entitlement and take up campaigns for various benefits and tribunal work; c) other issues, including children's rights and school issues, travellers' rights, immigration (deportation and settlement) and challenging national and local state actions such as Judicial Review and Habeas Corpus. David considered the legacy of Benwell Community Law Project to be Newcastle Council's continuing support of the legal work by funding the Newcastle Law Centre covering the whole of the City, as well as their support of Welfare Rights Officers through the city, which has recently been affected by budget cuts. He concluded by saying there had been 'little impact on structural issues'.

**Post-CDP**

***How the CDP imagined the future?*** Judith Green (former Benwell CDP researcher still currently working in Benwell) discussed how the Benwell] CDP imagined the future. Referring to some of the Benwell CDP Final Reports, which show in detail how the project analysed the current situation and imagined the future, Judith focused on key areas of Benwell CDP's work, emphasising the importance of locating these in their specific historical context. Taking the *Imagine* research question 'What kind of future can we imagine for communities in Benwell?' she described 'what they imagined would happen' and 'what they didn't imagine would happen' in these work areas:

In the final report, *Permanent unemployment,* Benwell CDP 'imagined' a future comprising:

- Persistent high unemployment locally as a result of the combination of factory closures and cutbacks mainly resulting from the fact that companies were increasingly multinational (in fact the CDP team was tracking the process of 'globalisation', which was not widely understood at that time).
- Together with the impact of 'new technology' – they were seeing the early stages of the introduction of computer-based manufacturing processes.
- Linked to this there was a growing problem of low pay as local people were pushed into relatively low paid service sector jobs in contrast to the previous skilled and semi-skilled factory jobs.

However, this imagined 'permanent unemployment' was a warning rather than a definite prediction.

*Campaign to save Vickers Scotswood works:* Benwell CDP also 'imagined' a future where these trends could be offset by actions at a national and a local level:

- For example, the project worked closely with the Vickers workforce which was involved in the movement for "socially useful production" (i.e. using existing skills and equipment etc to produce goods that were actually needed in contrast to armaments);
- Contributing to the national debate about the extension of ownership and control of British industry.

They did NOT 'imagine' the speed and thoroughness of the deindustrialisation of this area and region, or that this would come to be seen as acceptable. Nor did they 'imagine' the appearance of a government that would see unemployment as a reasonable price to pay for limiting inflation.

*Women's clothing work:* Benwell CDP looked at the employment situation of women locally – especially in the clothing industry, where low pay and part-time and casual working were prevalent and the principles of equal pay and removing sex discrimination at work had only recently been enshrined in legislation. They 'imagined' this could change, e.g. through action in the workplace and wider campaigning, which the project supported. What they did NOT 'imagine', of course, was that the conditions that characterised much of women's work – part-time, insecure and casual employment – would spread much more widely across the economy in future under the guise of a flexible labour market.

*Housing*: Benwell CDP argued strongly for the need to build and maintain good quality council housing and make it available for people generally, not ghettoised as housing for the poor and slum dwellers. The project worked closely with tenants who were fighting for modernisation of their homes when needed, an effective repairs system and community facilities such as play areas and community centres. This was how they all imagined their future. What they did NOT imagine was that council housing would almost completely stop being something to be proud of – to become something to be dismantled wholesale and

blamed for many of the ills of the inner cities, from the riots to poor educational outcomes. Nor did they imagine the growth once more of private landlordism – not all bad, but generally bringing with it a crop of problems.

Judith concluded with the message of 'carrying on imagining', highlighting the strong, vibrant and diverse community and voluntary sector in Benwell. As well as residents' associations and other volunteer-run groups, the area also has a number of staffed but community-based voluntary organisations which have been built 'bottom-up' by local people in response to local needs. Judith gave two examples, Riverside Community Health Project and Search, adding that there are many more examples in the area. She said, 'these are excellent examples of the ways in which the imagination and creativity of local people have made a significant impact on the quality of life and helped to mitigate the many problems the community has experienced'.

Benwell CDP was committed to the welfare state, but believed that it could be improved and supported greater user and community involvement in planning and delivery of services. The project also argued for a greater role for local government. They never imagined that the welfare state could be systematically dismantled nor could they imagine the extent of centralisation of power or the scale of the attacks on council funding.

Judith ended by saying that history shows us that the Benwell community is very good at 'imagining' better futures'. But we have also to keep asking why so often they cannot have what they ask for.

*Overview of subsequent regeneration initiatives in Benwell and the West End of Newcastle*: Fred Robinson (Durham University) referred participants to the Benwell and West End of Newcastle urban policy timeline in the *Imagining Benwell* booklet, which shows a succession of policies and programmes aimed at tackling the area's economic and social problems over the past 40 years, see www.imaginenortheast.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FINAL-PDF-Version-132099_Benwell-Booklet.pdf

The sheer number of initiatives had previously led Fred to describe the West End of Newcastle as a 'policy laboratory'— most things have been tried, with varying degrees of success. He provided an overview of the key initiatives, which included: Inner City Partnerships, the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities, Going for Growth and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders.

*Benwell then and now: comparing census data from 1971 and 2011*: Alan Townsend (Durham University) compared the original Benwell CDP area census statistics for 1971 and 2011 to demonstrate how much the area has changed.

| Benwell CDP area census statistics, 1971 and 2011 | 1971 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|
| Population | 13,070 | 6, 320 |
| Born outside the UK (%) | 2.2 | 34.9 |
| Employment (economically active) (% of working age) | 47.4 | 59.9 |
| Employed in manufacturing (%) | 35.2 | 6.3 |
| Unemployment (% of economically active) | 11.3 | 21.6 |
| Access to a car, households (%) | 18.0 | 28.9 |
| Dwellings with hot water, inside WC and bath (%) | 42.9 | No data |
| Social rented housing, including from Council (%) | 21.3 | 53.9 |
| Privately owned housing (%) | 14.4 | 14.1 |
| Private rented housing (%) | 64.3 | 29.0 |

Key findings include:

- the population halving over the past 40 years, largely as a result of de-industrialisation, the demolition of old housing, and the shift to smaller households;
- the dramatic shift in housing tenure, from nearly two-thirds being privately rented to more than half the stock being social housing, with the majority rented from the Council;
- an increase in the proportion of people who are economically active, not least because of rising female participation in the labour market;
- the unemployment rate doubling;
- the area's continuing low incomes as indicated by low car ownership, with less than a third having access to a car;
- the large increase in diversity, with just over a third of residents being born outside of the UK in 2011.

***Legacies of Benwell CDP***: Andrea Armstrong (Durham University) summarised what Benwell CDP left behind after it ended (the legacies). These were identified through examination of documents and interviews. Andrea discussed each briefly:

*Documentary legacies*: many of the interviewees with community work backgrounds said the CDP reports were the most significant legacy. Some said they had read them at the time, others reported that they had been used as teaching materials in, for example, social work, youth work or community development courses.

*Organisational legacies*: Benwell CDP, in contrast to North Tyneside CDP (and many other CDPs) left tangible legacies in the form of organisations that continued after it ended. To achieve this, Benwell CDP approached the local authority with a proposal to continue the Information and Opinion Centre (which became known as the West End Resource Centre) and Benwell Community Law Project. A third organisation, Search, also continued after the CDP ended. Search is a community-based, voluntary organisation for older people in West Newcastle located on Adelaide Terrace. It was set up in the mid-1970s as a joint initiative between Benwell CDP and a group of local pensioners and still exists today. Another organisation – the Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU) – was a joint initiative between Benwell and North Tyneside CDP. TUSIU came about from discussions to improve trade union education on Tyneside because most trade unions at a local level lacked the resources to do it themselves.

*Networking and knowledge exchange legacies*: Networks and personal connections were important during the time of CDP, but we have also identified how informal networks of people continued once the CDP ended – and many of these inter-connections continue today. Some workers stayed in the area whereas others moved to other parts of the country but they used the skills and expertise developed during their time with the CDP, e.g. the use of evidence and community mobilisation. Some became academics and the production of 'radical' analyses continued into the 1980s.

## Questions and discussion

These presentations were followed by questions and discussion. Points made included:

- The difficulties in evidencing the impact of regeneration and community development through comparing changing social and economic indicators over time in an area. People may move out of the area after having been supported and influenced by educational and skills programmes.
- How choices and decisions are made on which areas will receive funding from regeneration initiatives and the role of the power-holders in such decisions.
- What does 'class', a strong feature in CDP analysis, mean in the present day?

- Considerations of statistical interpretations, such as the importance of situating place in the political economy of the city as a whole; considering a low number of unmarried people to be an indicator of students; and the inadequacy of using car ownership as an indicator of income.

## Exhibition viewing

Michael McHugh (Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums) introduced the *Imagining Benwell* Exhibition in the museum's Hub Space. The exhibition included a cabinet display of photographs, paintings, objects and documents depicting imaginings of Benwell over time. Some of these items have been in the museum collection for years, but this is the first time they have been displayed. There was also a film compilation of extracts of films made by *Imagine NE* partner organisations. Participants were invited to look at the exhibition over lunch, where Ian Farrier and Michael Young from the West Newcastle Picture History Collection were available to talk about the exhibits and answer questions.

# Afternoon Programme

## Current perspectives on community development and engagement

Andrea Armstrong (Durham University) gave an overview of *Imagine North East* research findings from residents, community workers and policy makers entitled '*Community development and engagement in austerity'*. Interviews revealed that the closure of Newcastle City Council's Community Development Unit found that:

Despite the closure of the Unit, current local authority workers said that they have ensured that the principles and values of community development have survived by ensuring co-workers understood them. The connections and relationships which took time to build between the local authority community development workers and local communities has been broken but workers foresee that in years to come they will have to re-connect.

There has been a shift away from working 'with and for' communities on their own agendas towards working for the local authority and local councillors. Local authority workers engage and consult communities but do not develop them anymore. For example, local authorities are setting statistical targets to evaluate services and only engaging the public in 'collecting local narratives' about services (e.g., public satisfaction/dissatisfaction about street lighting).

The loss of community development in the local authority has meant the voluntary sector has taken on some of the work they did. Benwell has a relatively large community sector compared to some areas and they continue community development but in a challenging environment due to spending cuts.

## Film extract of 'Hopes and Fears'

A short film extract (prepared by Vincent Chu, Durham University) was shown from 'Hopes and Fears' – a film made for *Imagine North East* by young people involved in the Patchwork Youth project in Benwell. The film illustrated young peoples' individual hopes and fears for the future.  Many of the young people's hopes were to have a 'good' job, be a good parent, and to have a car. Their fears included not having a stable job, relapsing into substance abuse, and lacking money.

## Critical perspectives from local community organisations

***Riverside Community Health Project***:  Christine Irklis provided an overview of Riverside, which is celebrating its 35 year anniversary. The organisation uses a community development approach to health and is operating three major programmes: 1) an early year's project that includes Sure Start and a play group for children from two years old that encourages migrants to participate; 2) a volunteer project which focuses on training; 3) a community cohesion project, which is about bringing different communities together; and 4) a migrant project providing support on issues such as housing, schools, benefits, registering with GPs, dentists etc. Key issues in the area include: a) residents asking for basics like money and food due to welfare cuts and the 'bedroom tax'. Staff direct people to the food bank, which is the largest in the UK (5,700 people used the foodbank last year); b) a lack of social housing; c) absent landlords; d) fuel poverty and e) the environment (e.g. litter and rubbish in the back lanes) and the blame culture.

***Angelou Centre:*** Shamshad Iqbal explained that the Angelou Centre is a black women's education project located in the West End of Newcastle. Shamshad discussed how she came to live in Benwell (moving from Leeds), her experiences during the 1970s and how she became involved in the community and with the Angelou Centre. She explained that the main issues for the Angelou Centre, which focuses on BME women, are training (e.g., information technology and languages) and domestic violence.

***'Our Place' partnership***: Andrew White (SkillsBridge) and Ruth Taylor (Pendower Good Neighbour Project) spoke about 'Our Place', a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded initiative that involves a package of support to help neighbourhoods develop detailed plans for their local area. The aim is to enable local people to have a say in the services they want to see delivered in their community. The Benwell and Scotswood 'Our Place' operational plan has two themes: 1) *Stabilising Families* - focusing on what can be done to support families in crisis, living in poverty, with poor health, out of work, in debt, often facing multiple challenges with chaotic lives and 2) *Moving Forward* - following on and looking at opportunities for training, work or self-employment. For participating organisations, the benefits included knowledge and intelligence sharing and learning from each other (e.g. sharing expertise in applying for large funding applications). Despite a lack of further support from DCLG in engaging with commissioners, the Partnership members have continued to meet and are working towards joint funding applications to take forward their plans for the area.

## Roundtable discussions

*1. Communities in Control?* (facilitated by Andrea Armstrong)

The brief for this roundtable was: *According to the latest policies of the Department of Communities and Local Government, central government wants communities to be 'in control'. Examples of this in practice include neighbourhood planning, transferring 'assets' (such as community buildings) from local authorities to community organisations, the 'community right to challenge' and play a role in shaping, redesigning or running services.*

1) *What are your experiences of this?*
2) *Is this what communities want?*
3) *How do you see this working in practice?*
4) *If you had the ear of government (the Prime Minister or Department of Communities and Local Government) what would your message be about Benwell, the West End and neighbourhoods like them?*

Participants provided a number of examples (e.g. leisure centres in Newcastle, a community trust in Jesmond, a library in Haydon Bridge, Hexham community cinema and Hexham River Hydro) and discussed their experiences. A number of issues and challenges were raised about how these examples worked in practice. For example, community ownership of an Adventure Playground in Sheffield brought tensions with the local authority and the group had to learn how to work with local government. Newcastle City Council retained control of two leisure centres and the others were taken over by a company. However, there was a community campaign to take over Elswick swimming pool, which has been mothballed and there was a feeling that assets are being stripped out. There have been struggles with the Fenham Community Pool. One challenge when transferring community assets is staff conditions and wages (e.g., it was reported that staff are on minimum wage). Hexham River Hydro, a community-led energy project that won a competition was unable to raise money beyond feasibility studies. There were also a range of challenges, including:  social (conflict with other river users); technical (Environment Agency requirements); and economic (change in 'Feed in Tariff' meant future maintenance and repair would be difficult). These meant that the project was shelved after investing three years of time and effort.  The change in 'Feed in Tariff' also meant that another local project, Sherburn Road Estate community energy in Durham city, would be unsustainable.

There was also discussion about a number of other challenges and concerns in relation to communities being in control. These included what happens in communities and neighbourhoods that do not have the necessary infrastructure, resources, and/or organisations (e.g. residents/tenants associations); the role of philanthropy and venture capitalists; a need to further develop a modern way of expressing democracy and community issues, tapping into social media and politics; becoming aware of any attempts to challenge the state, and not regarding the local authority as a single entity.

***2. Forty years of urban policy – what can we learn?*** (facilitated by Fred Robinson and Patrick Harman).

The brief for this roundtable was: *In 2005, Fred Robinson wrote an article 'Regenerating the West End of Newcastle: what went wrong?'*

1) *Looking back over 40 years of regeneration and community development in the West End of Newcastle and nationally, including your own experiences, what went right?*
2) *What can we learn from this?*
3) *If you had the ear of government (the Prime Minister or Department of Communities and Local Government) what would your message be about Benwell, the West End and neighbourhoods like them?*

Funding was discussed first and in particular that 'there is never enough funding'. It was agreed that there has been a significant shift at national government level towards the self-generation of income. Looking back at decades of urban policy reveals that policies reflect the aspirations of the government at the time. For example, when the Home Office was in control of urban policy it was about 'how to control problems' e.g. CND, riots. The post-1970s period was about 'how do you manage decline?' and presently, a neoliberal government creates inequality and competition. If we ask: 'did it work? did it cure poverty?', the answer is 'of course it didn't, we didn't expect it to'. However, if you focus on the 'small things' and the detail, it has made a real difference. The narrative for Newcastle's 'Going for Growth' was 'we've spent all this money and it hasn't worked', but there are projects and people in the West End that can demonstrate what has worked. It is important to focus on the details, not just the big picture.

It was suggested that Newcastle suffers from its ambition to be a regional capital, whereas Gateshead is completely different and 'is a local authority in every sense of the word'. Gateshead Council focuses on service delivery rather than the grand schemes. There were

suggestions that collaboration across city departments made a bigger impact on community development efforts. For example, community workers in Gateshead collaborated with many departments to facilitate neighbourhood improvements that occurred to a greater extent than in other nearby cities.

***3. The role of research in promoting and supporting community development in urban neighbourhoods*** (facilitated by Sarah Banks and Kate Pahl).

The brief for this roundtable was: *The CDPs included a significant element of research. The Connected Communities programme, of which the Imagine project is a part, is promoting 'co-produced' research by universities and communities in partnership.*

1) *What can we learn from the CDP approach to research?*
2) *How can communities and universities work together, using an action research model to work for better communities today?*
3) *If you had the ear of government (the Prime Minister or Department of Communities and Local Government) what would your message be about Benwell, the West End and neighbourhoods like them?*

Key points made in the discussion in this workshop include:

- The research linked with the CDPs was critical, looking back to see why things were the way they were - telling the story of why Benwell was starved of money, for example. Historical research painted a different picture from the public image.
- The growing interest of community organisations and museums in working in partnership with universities on research was noted.
- There is increasing demand from universities, whose academic staff now have to show that their research is making a social and economic impact, particularly in the context of the Research Excellence Framework (a periodic assessment of the quality of university research).
- However, it is important that there is a balance of knowledge. It should not be assumed that universities have the knowledge – often people in communities themselves are experts on key issues. Universities may have research skills. We need to think how we can change universities so communities can set the agenda.
- Students might become involved in community-based research.
- It is important to find the right people in universities, and also to recognise that research cannot in itself solve what are structural problems of poverty, unemployment etc.
- However we do need a counter-narrative to the 'blame the victim' story.
- The situation may be different in Scotland, where there is more of a feeling of hope and engagement with community organisations.

## Feedback from roundtables

In the final plenary session, each group presented highlights of their discussions, including their key message for central government:

1. ***Communities in Control****:*

   'We want real control and real accountability from the local authority and business, with resources based in the community so we can decide what to do with them'.

2. *Forty years of urban policy – what can we learn?:*

'Don't create more divisions' by supporting policies that increase inequality, hamstringing local government with budget cuts, privatising and/or cutting public services, and ignoring the voices of the poor.'

3. *The role of research in promoting and supporting community development in urban neighbourhoods*:

'If we are thinking about improving places, we need to ask why they are as they are. We need to divest ourselves of the idea that people have made them as they are. Citizens have a right to get knowledge back. The role of social sciences is to say how things can change. People know their areas best.'

## Closing Plenary

Mae Shaw (Edinburgh University), speaking about *Community development in austerity Britain, looking back, looking forward*, shared five things about community development which have stood the test of time. The first is that community development is *historically situated*. The 'community solution' has been a response to social problems and crises of various kinds since the twentieth century. The second is that it is *always contextual and contingent* upon prevailing conditions, particularly the nature of the state. Over time, community development has fulfilled different functions for the state as it has gradually shifted its orientation from a social democratic model of public welfare to a neoliberal model of private welfare. Performance and management systems have increased pressure on community development practitioners and communities to identify with neoliberal ways of thinking, talking and being. At the same time, there is an increasing trend towards differentiation and deregulation of community development within and between different contexts: away from a professionally validated occupation, for example, to a renewed emphasis on standardized approaches which can be used by anyone in any setting.

Community development is *intrinsically ambivalent*. It can be as much about control as about empowerment, depending on the terms in which it is deployed and enacted. It is difficult to pin down the institutional geography of power and decision making processes that shape political outcomes. On one hand, power has become increasingly centralized upwards, while at the same time, there has been a downwards retreat to competitive privatism and self-help which holds communities responsible and which may disempower them from making claims on the state for democratically accountable public services.

Fourth, *community is always framed in particular ways*. The CDP projects highlighted the way in which community was always framed through a deficit model – with communities regarded (explicitly or implicitly) as obstacles to progress for one reason or another: deviant or deprived. Community has now become shorthand for the problematic poor.

Finally, there is a tension *between community development as policy* (reflecting the imperatives and interests of government) and *community development as politics* (reflecting the concerns and interests of diverse community groups). There is a widening gap between the position community development occupies within the wider politics of contemporary state power and the democratic disposition it espouses. The readiness, or disposition, to think and act democratically could be decisive in supporting communities to challenge the state to live up to its democratic potential rather than simply supporting them in absorbing the devastating and disproportionate effects of a crisis they had no part in creating.

# List of attendees

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Armstrong | Andrea | Durham University |
| Araa | Isma | The Angelou Centre |
| Banks | Sarah | Durham University |
| Bun | Ku Hok | Hong Kong Polytechnic University |
| Craig | Gary | Durham University |
| Crane | Maggy | |
| Crow | Graham | Edinburgh University |
| Dale | Wendy | The Search Project |
| Davis | Bob | |
| Devaraj | Uma | The Angelou Centre |
| Devlin | Pat | |
| Dominelli | Lena | Durham University |
| Farrier | Ian | West Newcastle Picture History Collection |
| Gollan | Martin | Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service |
| Gray | David | |
| Gray | Moira | |
| Green | Judith | St James' Centre for Heritage & Culture |
| Haggie | Emma | Durham University |
| Harford | Ian | IH Consulting |
| Harman | Patrick | The Hayden-Harman Foundation, USA |
| Hollely | Sarah | Sheffield University |
| Iqbal | Faleet | The Angelou Centre |
| Iqbal | Shamshad | The Angelou Centre |
| Irklis | Christine | Riverside Community Health Project |
| Ito | Fumihito | Nihon Fukushi University, Japan |
| Javeria | Jalam | The Angelou Centre |
| Jeffs | Tony | Durham University |
| Kane | Joyce | |
| Laidlaw | Maggie | Edinburgh University |
| Levi | Clare | The Search Project |
| Matthies | Alia-Leena | University of Jyvaskyla, Finland |
| McHugh | Michael | Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums |
| Morrow | Hannah | Reviving the Heart of the West End |
| Motrani | Isma | The Angelou Centre |
| Mujib | Hira | The Angelou Centre |
| Obisesan | Kemi | The Angelou Centre |
| Pahl | Kate | Sheffield University |
| Pool | Steve | Artist |
| Rawcliffe | Sue | University of Strathclyde |
| Robertson | Jim | |
| Robinson | Fred | Durham University |
| Salamon | Esther | |
| Shaw | Mae | Edinburgh University |

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|---|---|---|
| Swindell | Fiona | |
| Taylor | Ruth | Pendower Good Neighbour Project |
| Townsend | Alan | Durham University |
| Ward | Paul | Huddersfield University |
| White | Andrew | SkillsBridge |
| Winlow | Cass | Newcastle City Council |
| Young | Michael | West Newcastle Picture History Collection |
| Zaki | Azza | The Angelou Centre |