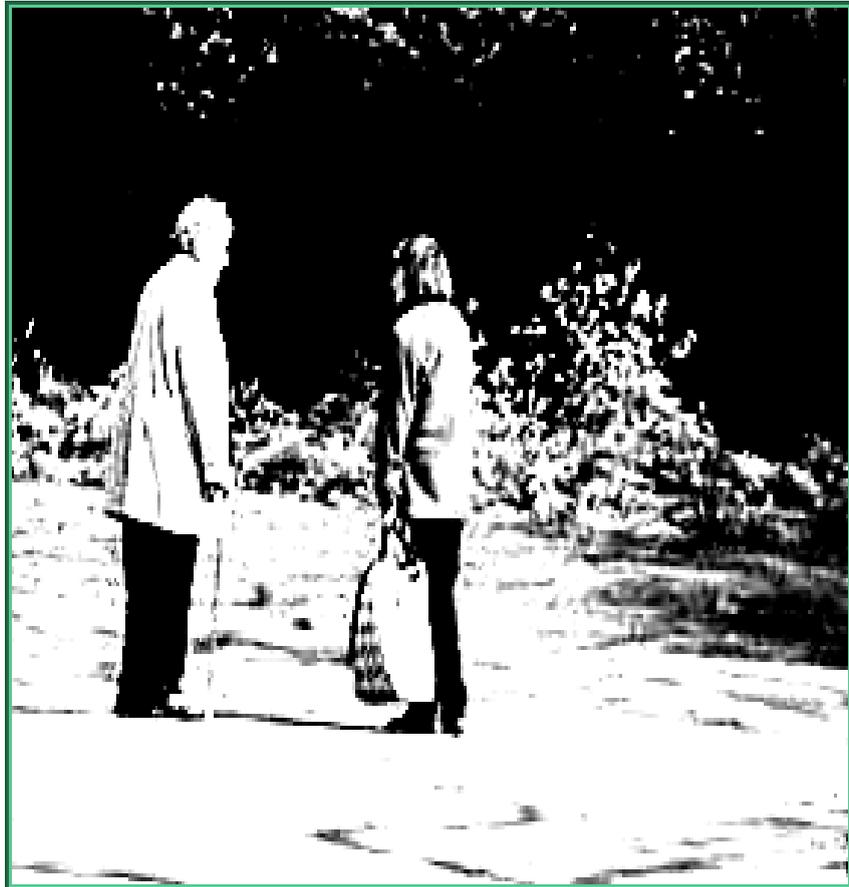


# **Looking out for each other:**

## **the Manchester neighbourliness review**



**Kevin Harris, Toby Gale  
Community Development Foundation  
July 2004**

This review was established by Manchester Local Strategic Partnership in 2004 to:

“develop understanding about neighbourliness in Manchester with a view to developing policies and services that will build and promote neighbourliness and social capital in the city.”

It assesses neighbourliness in a contemporary urban context based on research carried out in three areas of the city. The research comprised interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire survey, and was preceded by a background paper (Harris, 2004) setting out a framework for examining neighbourliness. A separate report was provided to the LSP in summer 2004.



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# 1 Introduction

Relations between neighbours can be seen as an immediate reflection of broader civil relations, offering an insight into what we might regard as the “health” of a society. Notions like respect, tolerance, consideration, and so on, while they may be hard to subject to scientific scrutiny, are popularly used to reflect people’s feelings about living alongside one another. Where levels of tolerance are low, where people behave in inconsiderate ways and show little respect for one another, a dangerous ecological imbalance can develop. Elijah Anderson has illustrated poignantly the difference between a civil neighbourhood, where a small departure from accepted norms can be questioned and negotiated, with the latent violence in areas where both legal and civil codes have been weakened and the code of the street predominates.<sup>1</sup> The entire civil renewal agenda is about avoiding such a destructive polarisation of lifestyles. Understanding neighbourliness is a key component of that agenda.

As our background paper<sup>2</sup> illustrates, neighbourliness is complex, both in terms of definition, and in terms of explaining it. Our concern in this review has been to explore what people in certain parts of Manchester think about their relations with their neighbours; and to reflect on the practical implications of what we hear, from a community development perspective.

We can think about neighbourhood relations on a spectrum covering the most antisocial behaviour at one extreme, through a passively negative style (no acknowledgment), a passively positive style (non-committal greeting), a level of contact that may border on intrusiveness and noisiness, to the most friendly and engaging at the other extreme. Two observations are pertinent at this point. First, the character of neighbourhood relations can have a profound and often under-appreciated effect on people’s quality of life and their mental health. Secondly, it’s reasonable to assume that general levels of neighbourliness could be influenced, at least indirectly, by policy measures. That assumption is what underlies the present review.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Harris, (2004).

There is a danger that the concepts we are discussing can be perceived as a mixture of moral proscription and Motherhood and Apple Pie – “do as you’re told and live happily ever after.” In this respect, “Acceptable Behaviour” programmes,<sup>3</sup> for example, are something of a marketing challenge. Similarly, the term “neighbourliness” has a positive connotation which is not always helpful because, as our research confirms, many people do not find overt neighbourly behaviour either laudable or desirable.

These conceptual difficulties have to be accommodated. From a policy point of view across a city, region or nation, the issue seems to be about the constant recycling, redefinition and re-interpretation of norms of acceptable behaviour; and the social frameworks within which these can be influenced by citizens. An issue like this is politically and ideologically loaded, but that does not mean we should be afraid to make assertions based on explicit values. This report takes some exploratory research into neighbourliness in three localities in Manchester as the basis for some reflections for policy-makers to consider.

The remainder of this introduction is intended to clear some of the ground by offering brief comments on social change (*ie* why we can’t expect communities to remain as they may have been in the past); on social class, which we were particularly asked to consider; and on social capital, seen as part of the contemporary policy context.

## **Social change**

In the background paper we noted how increased transport and mobility options appear to have played an important part in reducing the overall significance of neighbourhood ties, not least because of the ways in which they have given rise to dispersed employment, and hence have undermined the ways in which workplace ties and neighbourhood ties get re-enforced. In a city such as Manchester, characterised by traditional working class communities that have been in transition for some time, it is important to appreciate the impact of social changes on neighbourhood relations. We can note a range of lifestyle changes in the UK through the 1950s-1970s, such as:

- decreased size of families

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/asbos9.htm>

- more women in paid employment
- the decline of the dominant employer
- more working class young people leaving home of their own accord
- television providing a reason for not going out
- the car privatising the experience of going out, helping to turn streets from community spaces into thoroughfares.<sup>4</sup>

All these factors, however slight their impact on some individuals, are bound to influence neighbourhood relations generally, and that influence is of course still working through. If we add to this list certain other trends, such as the increase in single-parent households, and an increase in households that depend on two earners,<sup>5</sup> allowing less time to be spent around the home, we can appreciate how formerly cohesive neighbourhoods may have begun to fragment. Neighbour relationships are likely to be less predictable, less likely to be re-enforced elsewhere, and more often will occur at the individual's discretion. What difference does it make? It was put to us that in Manchester there is an issue about antisocial behaviour in working class neighbourhoods arising "on the back of dysfunctional structures." We have therefore begun to think about this question from that perspective.

## **Social class**

Here we are concerned with the general perception that working class communities in the past, through norms and familiarity at local level, in the workplace and at school, would have exerted a degree of control over deviant behaviour that is more rare nowadays. Whether or not perceptions of the coherence of such communities are misleading, the key point is that social change has eroded the basis for many relations that formerly would have been routine, overlapping, and re-enforced in day-to-day life. We have suggested above some general reasons why that might be the case.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Roberts (2001), chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Jarvis *et al*, (2001), chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> It may be valid to note here Wittel's claim that there is a shift from 'regimes of sociality in closed social systems' towards sociality in open social systems. (Wittel, 2001, p64) If we regard traditional working class neighbourhoods as relatively closed social systems, the direction that Wittel and others such as Wellman (2001) point to, of network sociality or networked individualism, may be part of the story of their decline.

More specifically, looking at the inter-relation of class formation and social capital (as reflected in membership of civic organisations) since the 1970s, Li and his colleagues conclude that:

"Working class men were historically able to sustain their own kinds of social capital through distinct forms of sociability and civic engagement (especially through trade unions, working men's clubs, etc). Social trends over the past thirty years have radically weakened these forms of engagement, and have led to the hegemony of forms of social involvement that have traditionally been associated with the middle class."<sup>7</sup>

Their research serves to clarify certain identified class differences in friendship and sociability. In particular, the extent to which working class sociability tends to be based on ties to people *who know one another* (network density); rather than the more segmented form of middle class networks (network extensity and diversity) where an individual's social contacts are less likely to know one another. These differences are presented as two forms of social capital that have been in "historical contest." In this way, the perceived decline in social capital recorded in the USA by Robert Putnam is seen as being linked to the decline of the working class.

To the extent that social class is associated with levels of deprivation, it is interesting to note here the findings reported from the *General Household Survey 2000* concerning trust and neighbourliness:

"People in the most deprived wards were considerably less likely to be trusting of their neighbours than those in the least deprived wards (40% trusted most or many of their neighbours compared to 73%). They were also less likely to feel that neighbours looked out for each other or to have done or received a favour from a neighbour. However, people in the most deprived wards were more likely to speak to their neighbours daily (33% compared with 19% in the least deprived wards)."<sup>8</sup>

This is a partial analysis but it helps us to see neighbourliness in working class areas as being exceptionally fluid. The turmoil of economic restructuring, higher levels of mobility, changing consumer cultures, new technologies for remote communication and so on, all challenge the tradition of dense overlapping networks.

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<sup>7</sup> Li *et al* (2003), para 7.5

<sup>8</sup> Coulthard *et al*, (2002), p31.

## Social capital

The popularisation of the notion of social capital, through the publication of Putnam's *Bowling alone*,<sup>9</sup> has led to a strong association of the concept with that author, with rather less attention paid to earlier or divergent opinions. The notion of social capital is very much contested: Fine, for example, argues that the term is so "definitionally elusive" and laden with variables that "it ought to collapse under the weight of its own inconsistencies."<sup>10</sup> In this review we have chosen to use the term sparingly, but there are a few key points to be set out here.

First, it is enormously valuable to have a shorthand term under which this debate is stimulated. But there is nothing new in the idea that a person's social networks constitute a resource for potential action and change, contributing to their health and sense of wellbeing, which otherwise they might not have. There is nothing new either in the suggestion that behaviour towards others can be motivated by a blurred combination of altruism and potential reciprocity; or that much social change (for good or ill) depends upon a level of trust between actors. If we understand social capital as being a resource lodged in individuals' social networks, it's clear that for many people it is closely related to, and reflects, neighbourhood relations. It is instructive to consider the way in which the term "social capital" has become the subject of intense academic debate while a term like "community spirit" seems to be considered too vague to merit much attention.

Secondly, there is a tension between the tendency to assert a neutral understanding of the concept, and attempts to relate it to economic capital and the politics of power. Social capital is generally discussed as if it were a force for good in society and effort should be put into its systematic generation. But it can be argued that social capital is neither good nor bad, it simply *is*. For example, strong social capital at community level can be used to mobilise racist opinions and to exclude others, as was demonstrated in a Channel 4 television programme about a local campaign to resist the development of a centre for asylum seekers.<sup>11</sup> In this instance there is a temptation to

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<sup>9</sup> Putnam (2000).

<sup>10</sup> Fine (2002).

<sup>11</sup> See "Keep them out", Neighbourhoods weblog, May 2004, [http://neighbourhoods.typepad.com/neighbourhoods/2004/05/keep\\_them\\_out.html](http://neighbourhoods.typepad.com/neighbourhoods/2004/05/keep_them_out.html)

refer tritely to “antisocial capital.” But if social capital is apolitical, we can see the potential usefulness of the term, and we can observe that confusing it with its effects can be misleading.

At the same time, there is a sense in which use of the umbrella term “social capital” risks depoliticising debate about social relations with regard to class and power. Thus for example James DeFilippis raises an important point about social inclusion in neighbourhoods by pointing out that our expectations may be too high when it comes to the power of bridging ties at local level. In this view, a focus on stimulating weak ties in low-income areas will be inadequate without recognition of the ways in which valued social ties can be and are protected. Influential informal networks may seem open but of course are subject to all sorts of hidden criteria of membership, to do with class and power. For DeFilippis, social capital, to have any value as a term, has to be “premised on the ability of certain people to realize it at the expense of others.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, it behaves or is used like economic capital.

Thirdly, Putnam’s emphasis on the role of formal voluntary associations in the society-wide manifestation of social capital may be problematic. In the UK context at least, voluntary organisations exhibit certain key differences from community organisations; and the effect of any one of them can be at once both divisive and cohesive. It’s obvious that membership and participation in local community organisations can both result from and can stimulate neighbourly behaviour; but we should note that levels of neighbourliness can be exhibited independently of such organisations. In particular, a model of social capital that overlooks informal interactions in public and semi-public contexts – typified by parents at the school gates, dog walkers in the park, and the grunt of recognition as neighbours pass one another outside the local corner shop – is, at best, partial.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the social capital literature suggests a need to revisit what we mean by civil and civic. It is reasonable to expect that everyday behaviour between citizens on the streets of our neighbourhoods should be civil and that the neighbourhood is therefore a civil place. That civil behaviour has somehow become detached from *the civic* – the representation or institutionalisation of common values – in the modern consciousness, is perhaps the

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<sup>12</sup> DeFilippis (2001).

fundamental issue we are trying to address here. In this respect we suggest placing the current review within the progressive context of civil renewal in the UK, rather than within the overall debate about social capital.

## **2. Methodology**

**2.1** For this review we have drawn on the following:

- Literature on neighbourhoods and neighbourliness, reviewed in a background paper distributed March 2004
- Comments and discussion in two focus groups (young people and older people), Manchester, 25 February 2004
- Field notes from visit to Northmoor, 1-2 March 2004
- Comments and discussion in a Community Pride seminar, Manchester, 17 March 2004
- Semi-structured interviews with a total of 34 residents, some in groups, from which we have prepared four case studies. Most of the interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants. The participants were recruited through local agencies and by engaging with people in local venues such as an ICT training centre, a hairdresser's salon, and at a residents' meeting.
- A questionnaire survey to residents in Northmoor, Openshaw, and Whalley Range. Some 2,600 questionnaires were distributed house-to-house in agreed areas, with the help of local community agencies. The questionnaire is at Appendix C.

### **2.2 Survey**

A total of 360 responses to the survey were analysed, a response rate of 14%. For reasons of cost, it was not possible to distinguish responses by area, and therefore all analysis refers to the three surveyed areas collectively. Where appropriate and to aid interpretation, categories within questions were collapsed. Bivariate relationship tests were used to compare differences between sub-groups. As the analysis was based on survey results, the variables studied were almost exclusively categorical, and the Pearson Chi-square test was used where possible. Statistical significance was measured at the  $p < .05$  level and (with one exception which is explained) results are only reported where relationships were found to be statistically significant.

### 2.3 Index of Neighbourliness

Using questions 1 to 9 from the household survey, a neighbourliness index score was calculated for each respondent based upon the following points system.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Points</b>
1	Disagree / Strongly Disagree	3
3 / 6	Agree / Strongly Agree	3
9	Agree / Strongly Agree	2
2 / 4 / 5 / 7 / 8	Agree / Strongly Agree	1

Any respondent could therefore score a neighbourliness index value of between 0 and 16. Respondents were subsequently grouped into five categories:

No neighbourliness index;	score 0
Negligible neighbourliness index;	score 1 – 4
Low neighbourliness index;	score 5 – 8
Moderate neighbourliness index;	score 9 – 12
High neighbourliness index;	score 13 - 16

The number of respondents within each of these groups was, from no score to high, 37, 82, 93, 83 and 65.

### **3. Main components of neighbourliness**

**3.1** Our review reveals three commonly identified aspects of neighbourliness:

- awareness of the situation of other residents
- respect for their privacy, and
- readiness to take action if help is needed.

These components often appear to be in tension, and this would suggest that neighbourliness requires a sensitive appreciation of the balance. People perceive neighbourly behaviour to have minimal and maximum levels.

Problems were described where it was perceived to be either inadequate or intrusive.

“Good neighbours keep an eye out for each other, but keep themselves to themselves.”

“Being there if you’re needed, without being intrusive.”

“They have their private life and you have your private life, but they know and you know that they’d be there for you...”

“Knowing where to draw the line – being helpful but not nosey.”

Various negative aspects of “over-neighbouring” were pointed out. The young people noted that “neighbours can grass you up.” Several participants made reference to the potential for intrusiveness and people being nosey - “People should mind their own business” - but there were no specific instances reported from current experience. Some of the older people in their focus group felt it was good to have nosey neighbours.

In our survey we asked people whether they like to keep themselves to themselves in their neighbourhood.

Approximately 41% of respondents agreed with the statement, although a further 26% neither agreed nor disagreed.

When tested by the various socio-economic questions, only three were found to exhibit significant variation across sub-groups. With respect to the age of respondent (excluding the 0-19 group which included only nine

respondents), the most likely group to agree were the 20-24 year olds (67%), while the next group, 25-44, were the least likely to agree (35%). Beyond the age of 45 there was considerable consistency with around 45% agreeing they liked to keep themselves to themselves.

Respondents' tenure was also statistically significant. Fifty four per cent of social renters agreed with the statement, compared with only 30% of those who had a mortgage on their property. By employment status, the percentage who agreed varied from 61% and 54% of sick/disabled and unemployed respondents respectively, to 11% of self employed and 22% of students.

A common theme in the interviews and focus groups was "Being considerate, for example, asking if it's OK to play music." Notions like "good manners," "consideration," and "politeness" suggested broad recognition of a civil basis for neighbourhood relationships, as here in our interview notes:

For instance forewarning each other before holding a party. This consideration then makes any inconvenience caused much less of a problem. Unlike friends, neighbours "are not people that you choose." The interviewee doesn't have a lot in common with his immediate neighbours. A good relationship between neighbours, he says, is about being friendly and acknowledging each other. Becoming neighbourly is a long process, and usually there is nothing in particular hurrying it along.

As might be expected, length of residence is a significant factor in neighbourhood relations. In our survey, 46% of respondents had lived in their neighbourhood for more than 10 years. Altogether, almost 60% had lived in their neighbourhood for over five years. (The 2002-2003 Manchester Citizens Panel survey showed the following results for the relevant wards, for six years of residence or more: Bradford 87%, Longsight 84%, Whalley Range 80%. These high figures are likely to reflect a level of commitment to the neighbourhood implied in panel participation).

Length of residence showed significant differences on the index of neighbourliness. The percent of each sub-group categorised within either the moderate or high index bands varied from 31% for those living in the area for less than two years, to 62% for those who had been in the neighbourhood for between five and 10 years. Beyond 10

years, the index drops off, with 42% in the moderate or high index groups. In the *General Household Survey 2000*, Coulthard and her colleagues report that "... the positive correlation between length of residence and high levels of neighbourliness remained after all other factors were taken into account."<sup>13</sup>

Tenure and length of residence were highly correlated in the survey. Around 73% of those who owned their property outright had lived in the neighbourhood for more than 10 years, compared with 28% of those with a mortgage.

There was also a high degree of correlation between the respondents' occupation and length of residence; 73% of individuals within the Technical / Semi / Routine manual sub-group had lived in their neighbourhood for more than 10 years, whereas 26% of Modern / Traditional professional and 42% of Managers had done so.

Various specific instances of neighbourly behaviour were cited by the participants, such as sharing information, taking action and so on. Some of these are discussed in section 9 below on "Exchanging favours."

While our review helps to clarify a general understanding of neighbourliness as combining reticence, awareness, and willingness to help, that in turn implies that you have to know or surmise something about your neighbour in the first place. This will usually require a certain length of residence, and perhaps day-to-day presence, on both parts. And while we might expect to find anywhere a handful of residents who are proficient at "being neighbourly," it requires a particular ecological balance if it is to characterise a whole population. To appreciate why that is so, it helps to consider the "neutral" or "default" approach to neighbouring.

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<sup>13</sup> Coulthard *et al* (2002), p30.

### **3.2 The neutral style of neighbouring**

In our survey we asked if people would like to see more neighbourliness in their community. It was clear that neighbourliness was not universally perceived as a good: 13% of respondents did not want to see more, and this level is not affected by length of residence.

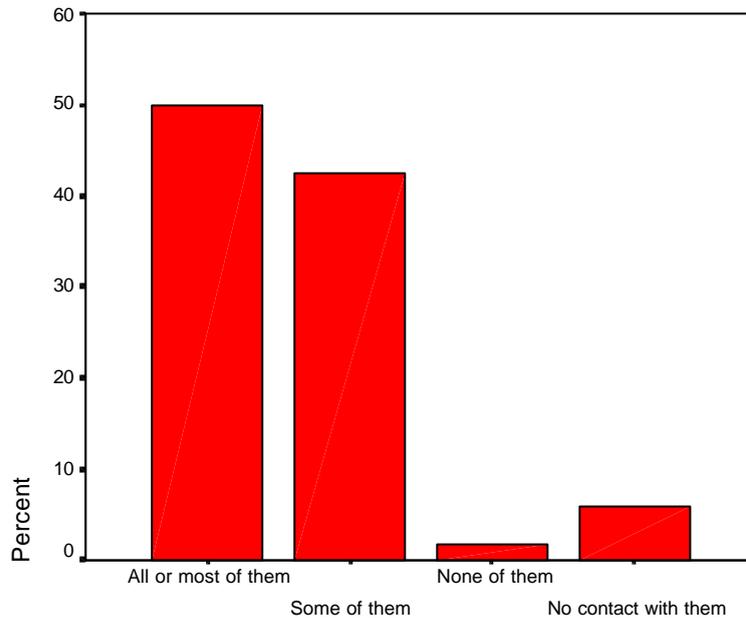
Several participants very clearly saw local relations in terms of “just rubbing along with your neighbours, not causing problems.” We were told that it’s about “the trouble you avoid by having good relations.” Another put it like this:

“The important thing about being a neighbour is not about doing the good things – it’s about not doing the bad things. What matters is that people don’t behave badly – avoiding burglary, fighting in the street, and nuisance behaviour, or dumping rubbish or litter. So long as these things aren’t happening nobody should be under pressure to interact or be ‘neighbourly’ – it’s fair enough for people to keep themselves to themselves. I’m not interested in some Enid Blyton fairy village. Good relations with your neighbours are important but people have other friends and they have their own lives.”

Older people in a focus group made the point that “you may not have much in common, but it’s in your interests to get on with your neighbours.” And another interviewee commented: “Basically, getting on with your neighbours, it just stops other situations spiralling out of control.”

One man we spoke to in a pub said that he’d had his house broken into three times in the past seven months; and that day he’d had the tyres slashed on his car. We were surprised at how dispassionately he viewed these experiences, apparently not motivated to take any particular action and expressing no negative feelings about the neighbourhood. When we asked him about this he said simply, “I keep myself to myself.”

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who get on with their neighbours**



Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they got on with their neighbours. As figure 1 illustrates, the overwhelming majority suggested that they did; with half the sample specifying that they got on with all or most of their neighbours, and another 43% suggesting they got on with some of them.

When tested against the socio-economic variables a number of interesting, if unsurprising, differences emerged. By tenure, those who own their property outright were more likely than other groups to say they get on with all or most of their neighbours (65%) while only 43% of social renters and 35% of the other group (this consisted of private renters, shared ownership and rent free) fell into this category. This other group was also the most likely not to have any contact with neighbours.

Respondents whose current or last job was either Technical, Semi or Routine Manual were above average in terms of getting on with all or most of their neighbours (56%), while Managers and Modern/Traditional professionals were the least likely (45%).

How long the respondent had lived in the neighbourhood also affected how many of their neighbours they got on with. Less than a third of recent arrivals (less than two years) in the neighbourhood got on with all or most, whereas over 50% of longer term residents (over two years) were categorised within this subgroup.

Ethnicity was also a significant factor, with Asian/Asian British the group most likely to get on with all or most of their neighbours (56%); while respondents describing themselves as Mixed Race/Black or Other were less likely to get on with so many of their neighbours (47%). More disconcerting however, is the divergence in the percentage of each ethnic group who claimed not to have *any* contact with neighbours. For Asian/Asian British the figure was 2%, for white 4.5%, and for Mixed Race/Black or Other it was 13%.

It may be that some people see any investment of time in neighbourhood relations as predominantly an insurance against difficulties. This serves to re-affirm the point that neighbourliness can be seen as much in terms of self-interest as altruism. It also raises an issue about the point at which people decline to get involved because of fear, of reprisals or other perceived threats. If you live in a neighbourhood where houses are routinely burgled and cars are damaged, it would not be entirely surprising to find a disinclination to engage with others in the street.

**Table 1: Percent of respondents who thought it mattered if people got on**

Variable / Sub-group	%
Ethnicity	
White	87.8
Mixed / Black / Other	81.8
Asian / Asian British	73.5
Occupation	
Modern / Traditional professions	92.6
Clerical /intermediate	86.4
Managers	86.1
Technical/Semi/Routine Manual	78.8

Respondents were also asked to indicate if they thought it *mattered* if people got on in the neighbourhood and the vast majority, 85%, thought that it did. This compares with the 92% of respondents who said that they get on with some, most, or all of their neighbours. The only differences between groups were found in relation to occupation and ethnicity, and these are reported in table 1. This shows that Asian/Asian British people, who are most likely to say that they get on with their neighbours, are the least likely to say that it matters.

### **3.3 Intrinsic value of neighbouring, to the individual**

Participants recognised a range of personal benefits from their activities as neighbours, such as the sense of security, a sense of belonging, and feeling informed about what is going on.

One interviewee told us that having good relationships with neighbours -

“...makes your patch bigger. Rather than your home being just your four walls, your patch is somehow extended. It makes a bigger area around your home part of your ‘safety zone. You’re more likely to feel loose ownership so you respect it, you keep it tidy. If there’s litter around you pick it up... There’s a lot of give and take. When people know each other they’re more likely to treat one another with consideration.”

Another participant echoed this, picking up the theme of security:

“...some sense of being part of something larger, through which you also have a sense of protection.”

The same participant spoke about a sense of belonging, defined as “being part of where you are.” Another interviewee implied that *not being judged* is an important part of belonging. And another explained the notion of “belonging” in terms of being “known” locally – recognition by others is fundamental to a positive sense of association with the area.

One interviewee who had experienced a range of neighbourhood problems in the past, said that what neighbourliness meant for her was:

“A quiet life... peaceful, not in conflict. Not being woken up at two o’clock in the morning with people having their heads kicked in.”

Within the survey, just sixty one per cent of respondents felt like they “belonged” in the neighbourhood. Table 2 reports the percentage of each category in various socio-demographic variables where significant differences were found.

This shows that the sense of belonging increases with age, and up to a point with length of residence. It also shows a

significant difference between women and men. (Few other gender differences emerged in our research. More men [30%], than women [21%], appear to feel that their neighbours look out for each other, but the data here are not quite statistically significant. Again, our data suggest, but not robustly, that women are more likely [22%] to trust their neighbours, than men are [14%]. See also our findings on the sense of safety in section 15 below. We note that Coulthard and her colleagues, in their review of the social capital module of the General Household Survey, found “no major difference between levels of neighbourliness among men and women.”<sup>14</sup>)

**Table 2: Percent of respondents who say they belonged**

Variable / Sub-group	%
Sex	
Male	51.1
Female	67.3
Length of Residency	
Less than 2 years	45.2
3 – 5 years	64.8
5 – 10 years	70.0
Over 10 years	65.2
Age of respondent	
0 – 19	100.0
20 - 24	30.0
25 – 44	57.8
45 – 64	59.2
65 – 74	73.3
75+	78.9

Early in the research we became aware of the extent to which some people are dependent on their neighbours for basic human contact. There are two distinct aspects to this which can be described briefly here. The first concerns the clear sense for some people that civil contact with one’s neighbours can be essential for mental health - “You’ve got to speak to somebody or you’d go doolally.” Various participants spoke of how contact with neighbours helps them “feel relaxed,” “comfortable, at ease, satisfied... gives you confidence...” One remarked that “you’d be living on your nerves if it was all argument,” which raises the question, are some people living on their nerves because of poor neighbour relations, and is this hugely detrimental to their mental health?

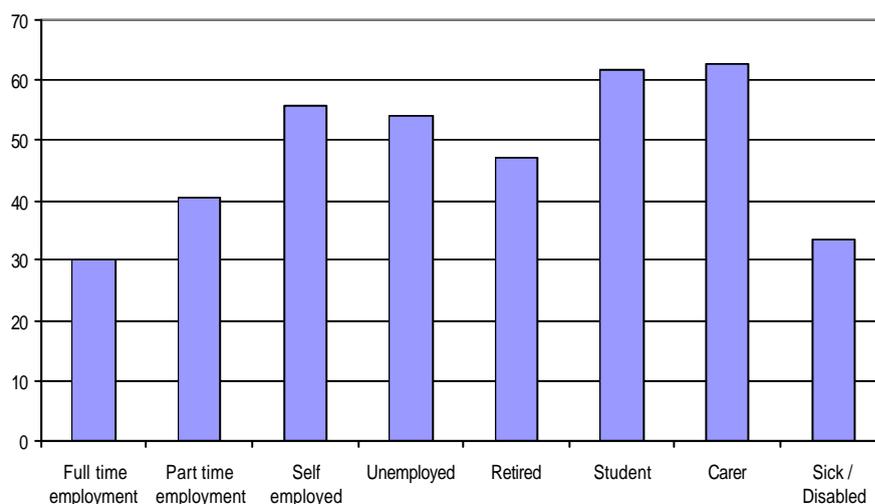
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<sup>14</sup> Coulthard *et al* (2002), p28.

The second aspect of the expressed need for contact among neighbours has to do with the amount of time people spend in their neighbourhood. Perceptions of neighbouring are inevitably different for people who are at home most of the time, perhaps disabled or with childcare commitments, and rarely going outside the neighbourhood; as opposed to professional people who may be more likely to get stimulation and social contact from their work, and wider interests and friendship networks. We can relate this to findings from research carried out by Atkinson and Kintrea, who looked at the activities of home owners and renters in three Scottish estates with mixed tenure. They found striking differences between the social worlds inhabited by the two groups: “the estate rather than the world beyond is a much more important realm for renters than owners, and vice versa.... Renters generally have a vigorous pattern of social and family activities within their estates, whereas the majority of social and family activities for owners takes place elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup>

Figure 2 highlights the percentage of respondents within each employment status category that scored within the moderate or high bands of our index of neighbourliness. The results would appear to confirm opinions that those whose employment status indicates that they may spend a greater proportion of their time in the neighbourhood, score higher on the index.

**Figure 2: Employment status and high score on Index of neighbourliness**



<sup>15</sup> Atkinson and Kintrea (2000), p98.

Social renters score the lowest in our index of neighbourliness. Only 32% were classified as either moderate or high, compared with 49% of outright owners and 46% of those with a mortgage. This finding echoes the research of Groves and his colleagues in Bournville, who found that:

“those neighbourhoods in which neighbours interact most are not those with the highest levels of social renting.”<sup>16</sup>

Coulthard *et al*, however, in their analysis from the General Household Survey found that social renters and owner occupiers were more likely to be classified as neighbourly than people who lived in privately rented accommodation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Groves *et al* (2003), p16.

<sup>17</sup> Coulthard *et al* (2002), p29.

## 4. Informal acknowledgement

“In Anglo-American society there exists a kind of ‘nod line’ that can be drawn at a particular point through a rank order of communities according to size. Any community below the line, and hence below a certain size, will subject its adults, whether acquainted or not, to mutual greetings; any community above the line will free all pairs of unacquainted persons from this obligation... In the case of communities that fall above the nod line, even persons who cognitively recognize each other to be neighbors, and know that this state of mutual information exists, may sometimes be careful to refrain from engaging each other...”<sup>18</sup>

Informal recognition of other residents, casual greetings, and non-committal encounters in neutral places, are part of the shifting material that helps to build meaningful connections between people. These seemingly trivial behaviours accumulate over time to form the basis of trusting relationships which can be drawn on in time of need. They serve to establish and re-enforce norms, and help people to identify and deal with threats. The relationships can accumulate to provide a communication network which people are likely to deem reliable where important information is concerned.

An ICM survey for Lloyds TSB carried out in May 2004 found that 16% of British people only ever see their neighbours in passing, and 4% admitted that they didn't know their neighbours at all.<sup>19</sup> Findings from the 2001 General Household Survey provide some detail on neighbourhood interaction, by age group: frequency of speaking to neighbours increases with age. For example, just 69% in the 16-29 year age group spoke to neighbours more than once a week. For those aged 70 and over, the figure is 88%.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Goffman (1963), p132-133.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyds TSB (2004).

<sup>20</sup> *Indicators of neighbourliness: by age, 2000-01: Social Trends 33*, General Household Survey, Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/>.

One participant in our research spoke of how “relationships grow from just nodding to people in the street,” and another stressed the importance of stopping and chatting in the shops or in the street. Several participants said they spoke to their neighbours every day, but there are a couple of other aspects of informal acknowledgement that are pertinent here.

To begin with, some residents do not communicate very often with their neighbours, indeed one said: “I try to avoid people.” A man who had lived for 15 years in a semi-detached house in a relatively affluent area told us that he had only spoken once to his next-door neighbour, and that was on the day he moved in. He put this down in part to the layout of the long front garden, with cars parked at the top near the house. (We discuss gardens in relation to interaction, in section 14 below).

It’s also the case that people’s choice of transport can influence neighbourly contact profoundly. One of the older people in the focus group said they never see their neighbours, “they just use taxis.” We interviewed two housemates, one who drives to work by car and one who goes by bike. They showed clear awareness of the difference in their experience of the neighbourhood, the cyclist being “on the streets,” seeing and greeting people almost everyday.

Very few interviewees distinguished between greeting residents who are known and those who are just recognised. Older people in the focus group discussed neighbourliness in terms of talking with those you don’t know. It was pointed out that dog walkers and those with young children get to know their neighbours. This tends to begin with being “on nodding terms” with those encountered occasionally. It could be argued that in an increasingly privatised context, where the phenomenon of “fear of strangers” can readily paralyse social interaction, informal acknowledgement of familiar but “unknown” neighbours is an important indicator of the health of a community.

In this respect the perspectives of incomers are of particular interest. One refugee told us that she knows no-one personally, and that she and her neighbours do not ask each other for help. She felt the important components of being neighbourly were “greeting each other, communicating, being willing to start a conversation.” As a Muslim woman she feels that she is not accepted by the white population in the

neighbourhood. They don't communicate and "some don't even bother to smile." By contrast, an interviewee from Northmoor explained that she got talking to people on the bus or in Kwiksave: "because I have a child they start talking to me."

The refugees and asylum seekers were perplexed by what they see as low levels of interaction and mutual support, and a lack of interest in other human beings. They are puzzled by the fact that people here don't seem to want contact. One said he would have thought that people would be interested in people from a different culture, but they're not. "People here care less for each other."

There is thus a final dimension to informal acknowledgement, which has to do with the fact that even a basic level of casual recognition may not be sufficient to cultivate a sense of hospitality, welcome and belonging. As one of the refugees told us:

"I have a lot of people I say 'hello' to, but I feel a stranger."

Questions 10, 11 and 12 of the survey required individuals to indicate when they were out and about in their neighbourhood, how likely they were to:

- see someone they knew very well;
- see someone they did not know as well, but recognised and greeted;
- see someone they recognised but did not acknowledge.

Over half of the respondents said they either very often or quite often saw someone they knew very well, and 57% said they greeted people they did not know so well but recognised. There was a high degree of correlation between these two questions, with approximately two thirds of respondents providing the same response to each question. Therefore those who saw people they knew well, also tended to greet those they only recognised. About one third of respondents claimed they did not acknowledge someone they recognised, and there was little divergence between subdivisions for this particular question.

Table 3 shows the significant differences between sub-groups in their response to these questions. In relation to seeing someone they knew well, a number of variations emerged, some of which would be expected, for example length of residence. More surprising is the difference between those who owned their property outright and

those who had a mortgage or other form of tenure. The number of respondents who were carers was very low but this table suggests that they may be particularly well-connected in their neighbourhoods.

**Table 3: Percent of respondents who very often or quite often ...**

Variable / Sub-group	<b>Saw someone they knew well</b>	<b>Greeted someone they did not know as well</b>	<b>Recognised someone they did not greet</b>
<b>Tenure</b>			
Social Renting	58.9	54.7	
Own outright	61.2	67.1	
Other	45.5	44.4	
Own with a mortgage	40.8	58.3	
<b>Length of Residence</b>			
Less than 2 years	20.5	36.4	
3 – 5 years	43.6	64.8	
5 – 10 years	62.0	64.0	
Over 10 years	68.8	64.2	
<b>Employment Status</b>			
Full time employment	37.6		28.8
Part time employment	48.6		18.9
Self employed	44.4		47.1
Unemployed	57.7		46.2
Retired	67.9		28.2
Student	57.7		38.5
Carer	87.5		75.0
Sick / Disabled	54.5		45.5
<b>Occupation</b>			
Modern / Traditional professions	37.9		
Clerical /intermediate	55.6		
Managers	30.6		
Technical/Semi/Routine	68.5		
Manual			

## 5. Informal social control

Informal recognition of others can be seen as one of the bases of informal social control. Two aspects emerged strongly in our research: the importance of having “eyes on the street,” and the phenomenon of “neighbour clout.”

One participant in Whalley Range reflected on the lack of observation of their street:

“With the problems at the corner of the road – drug-dealing, prostitution – we ... identified the problem of us not being very present on that side of the houses. We’re all in the back garden and this street just belongs to anybody who’s out there, which is a lot of people who are up to no good. It would be nice ... just to be around to make it more our space again.”

Partly this is about the design of the houses, but elsewhere it is more about reclaiming the streets from cars, as a social and community space. In Northmoor we were told that:

“the home zone has had an impact because it has tempted people out of their houses. Now you get kids playing in the street or people standing outside their front doors. These extra eyes keep the vultures away. And menacing-looking gangs of teenagers don’t hang around so much.”

The presence of “eyes on the street” is a crucial part of the ecology of neighbourhood, and was very much apparent in Northmoor and Openshaw. Of course, the design of the housing and the nature of the weather both make a difference to the use of the semi-private space around the home. And there is a connection between informal mutual supervision and socialising. As Richard Hoggart put it:

“Home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living room on to the street, and when you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening you become part of the life of the neighbourhood.”<sup>21</sup>

Openshaw residents added colour to this:

“All the mothers used to sit on the doorstep and

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<sup>21</sup> Hoggart (1957), p58.

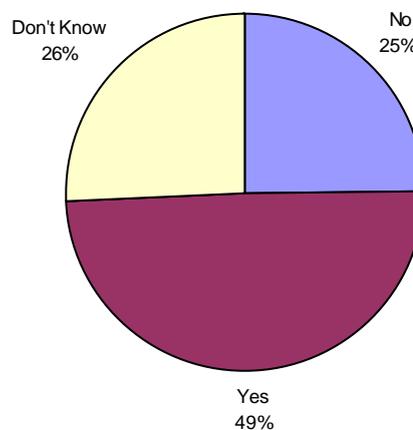
they'd take it in turns to brew up and give the kids orange juice and turn the skipping rope."

And in Northmoor a neighbourhood warden offered a more up-to-date comment:

"In summer people like to sit out in the street. They have a few drinks and if they have too much there are disagreements. But yes it's a lot more sociable than sitting in."

Figure 3 below illustrates that just under half of the survey sample thought their neighbourhood was a place where neighbours look out for each other. The remaining respondents were fairly equally split between the 'don't know' and 'no' categories. Women (53%) were significantly more likely than men (43%) to agree with the statement. Thirty per cent of men and 21% of women said that they disagreed with it.

**Figure 3: In your neighbourhood do neighbours look out for each other?**



These results are in contrast to the findings reported in the Home Office citizenship survey for 2001, in which some 84% of respondents felt that their neighbourhood is "a place where neighbours look out for each other."<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to relate this to the British Crime Survey figures for "community spirit": respondents were asked if

<sup>22</sup> Attwood *et al* (2003), p 58. The survey covered England and Wales: 43% said 'yes definitely' and 41% said 'yes to some extent.'

their neighbourhood was one “in which people do things together and try and help each other or one in which people mostly go their own way?” According to *Social trends*, “Since 1996 the proportion of neighbourhoods where people are perceived to ‘help each other’ has risen slowly to 36 per cent by 2000.”<sup>23</sup> These figures neatly illustrate the subtleties of neighbouring: “looking out for each other” is to be distinguished from “doing things together and helping each other out.”

In our survey, splitting the sample by length of residence indicated that up to a certain point, the proportion of respondents who thought neighbours looked out for each other increased as residency in the area increased. For those who had lived in the neighbourhood for less than 2 years, 39% answered ‘yes’ compared with 61% of those who had been in the area for between 5 and 10 years. For those resident longer than 10 years, the percentage dropped to just over half. (In the citizenship survey, 36% of those who had lived there for less than a year said that they thought people “definitely” looked out for each other in their neighbourhoods).<sup>24</sup>

The only other socio-demographic variable to show variation across its categories was tenure: 35% and 47% of those in the ‘other’ and ‘social renting’ groups believed neighbours looked out for each other, compared with 54% and 58% of respondents who had a mortgage or owned their property outright.

The second feature of informal social control in neighbouring that was emphasised to us has to do with the degree of *influence* that residents have over others’ behaviour. This goes to the heart of the civil renewal agenda, because the dissolution of that influence can leave a vacuum filled quickly by antisocial forces. The sharp polarisation of “decent” and “street” codes of behaviour is powerfully illustrated by Elijah Anderson in his account of “the moral life” of inner city Philadelphia. Gang warfare, a drug economy, intimidation and violence easily fill the vacuum of a disowned neighbourhood. Anderson notes that:

“Neighbors are encouraged to choose between an abstract code of justice that is disparaged by the

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<sup>23</sup> *Community spirit in neighbourhoods, 1984-2000: Social Trends* 33, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/>. Groves *et al* in their (2003) Bournville study report a very similar figure: “35% of respondents felt it was an area in which people help each other and 23% where people ‘go their own way’.” (p17)

<sup>24</sup> Attwood *et al* (2003), p65.

most dangerous people on the streets and a practical code that is geared toward survival in the public spaces of their community.”<sup>25</sup>

It is therefore not fanciful to relate the issue to Manchester’s campaign against gang-related gun crime. Levels of mutual respect and influence at the most local level are the basis for social control. (This is not meant to imply either that there are not negative aspects to social control, such as suppressing legitimate grievances; or that people do not see a role for formal mechanisms of control such as police and other authorities. We also explored people’s attitudes towards disputes and how they negotiated issues with their neighbours: this is reported in section 6 below).

One participant presented the issue of informal social control in this way:

“What counts is who they will listen to. Different people in the neighbourhood have different degrees of neighbour clout.”

Other residents gave us an example:

“[He] knows he can come to my house and say, ...I’ve had a problem with [your daughter] ... and will you sort it out, and [he] knows that I will. But many people will not accept any complaint about their children and will simply challenge you to phone the police or the council.”

“Neighbour clout” is one resident’s way of describing the kind of respect that he feels is appropriate for dealing with challenging behaviour. It does not just apply to relations with children and young people. It reflects a perception of status among other residents, and how they’re viewed by others for different reasons. It hints at roles formerly (and formally) fulfilled by recognised figures such as priests, policemen, and teachers. A neighbour with clout can get people to do things and to listen to what they say, and it will affect what they do. Thus another resident with these attributes said:

“The good thing about knowing people is that you know how far you can go when you go out with your elbows sharpened, without causing a falling out. I’m continually going out shouting at the kids...”

Another who had helped people in the street with domestic violence problems remarked: “They trust me

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<sup>25</sup> Anderson (2000), p134.

and know me.”

Research by Atkinson and Flint in adjacent affluent and deprived neighbourhoods in Edinburgh and Glasgow sheds light on this issue. The researchers report an example of how in an affluent area, resources can be mobilised quickly and effectively to deal with a perceived threat. In deprived areas, responses to threats were more often directed personally where individuals felt confident enough to do so, or not at all:

“...threats were dealt with by those who had been long-term residents, were older or had local social networks which might act as a defensive resource in the case of reprisals.”<sup>26</sup>

In some ways, neighbour clout may seem similar to the notion of “community leadership” but we suggest that it should be distinguished. Having clout may be a form of power, but it is non-competitive. From the way it was presented to us, and discussed with a small group in Openshaw, it appears to be based on being known and on a level of respect that has been reaffirmed over a period of time, with different generations. Wielding clout will not necessarily be convivial:

“You know what irritates certain people. I know what irritates the girl next door, so I won’t sort of do it. You know how far to go with people without upsetting them.”

“When I go out with me elbows sharpened because I can see something happening in the garden I know exactly how far I can go and what I can say to different people ... because [I’ve] got to know them over the years.”

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<sup>26</sup> Atkinson and Flint (2003), p22.

## 6. Disputes and negotiations

Maintaining harmonious relations with neighbours is not necessarily straightforward, and we wouldn't expect to find many people with what has been identified in the preceding section as "neighbour clout." In our research we sought to gain insights into the kinds of issue that people had to resolve in the course of local life, and the kinds of negotiations they had to go through.

The classic problems emerged: noise, rubbish, and the behaviour of children.<sup>27</sup> And perhaps a more modern issue to go with them: in Northmoor it was observed "they do all go on about where they park their cars."

Some sense of the scope of issues can be gleaned from the following examples raised in interviews: loud music, smelly compost bins, the appearance of houses and gardens, the burning of noxious rubbish, the use of communal gardens by children, verbal abuse, boys kicking footballs against windows. One example we were given is interesting because it stresses collective action by a number of neighbours:

"There was a very violent fight, a drunken fight outside the other night. My immediate neighbour went out and stopped it. Recently a man dragged his girlfriend from the next street to beat her up, lots of us went out there and we got it stopped."

One interviewee had a dispute with neighbours about the communal garden, the main issue being whether children should be playing there. Two households in particular don't want to allow any children to use the garden, even though it was intended to be for everybody. This disagreement has got to the point where they're not speaking. "I don't even look at them." There was an argument before Christmas "over nothing ... [which] blew

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<sup>27</sup> Writing about working class neighbourhoods historically, McKibbin notes that "In both traditional and new communities there were certain recurrent points of conflict: gossip, noise, and the behaviour of children especially." McKibbin (1998), p199.

up out of proportion.” (This illustrates how community projects can sometimes drive people apart as much as bring them together, and in this instance having a shared interest in a facility has created a rift between neighbours who have known each other for more than 17 years.)

Our seminar group talked about the possibility that people were holding back from challenging behaviour of which they did not approve. They may anticipate that they would end up modifying their own behaviour if “acceptable behaviour” loses ground. Atkinson and Flint, in their research in Edinburgh and Glasgow, noted that “fear of reprisals [was] a key driver of not getting involved in interventions.”<sup>28</sup> In a telephone interview one resident told us:

“...people are afraid, it's people that are not, if you like, calibre people... There've been some shootings, people don't like to socialise together. When there've been shootings, the area goes quiet, you think heyup, what's going down? You can feel the intensity.”

We turn lastly to the question of formal intervention in disputes, by the police or other authorities – as Atkinson and Flint put it, “an official presence that was not directly linked to the local community.”<sup>29</sup> In general, neither violence nor the role of the police or neighbourhood wardens came across as salient issues in our research. But neighbourhood wardens in Northmoor suggested that their visibility and open style is welcomed, and that they have no difficulty in assuming a clear third party role. Thus, for example, one of them told us about a resident who plays his drums loudly. “It's antisocial and it's a problem. But the neighbour's friends have been antisocial by pushing him around and threatening him in the street.”

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<sup>28</sup> Atkinson and Flint (2003), p16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

## 7. Kin, friends and neighbours

“*Knowing*” means you know them in more practical ways, not as friends. They’re neighbours not friends. There is a difference isn’t there?

Mapping people’s social networks within and beyond their neighbourhood was beyond the scope of this research, but we were interested in understanding how similarities and differences between kinship, friendship and neighbourliness are perceived.

In one of the standard texts on neighbouring, Philip Abrams notes that in studies of working class areas the term “friend” is not often used.<sup>30</sup> Confusions arise most probably for two reasons. First, some commentators have come unstuck through the semantic confusion of friendliness with friendship. Friendliness is of course a characteristic of neighbourliness but, as Abrams puts it, “it is precisely the guarded quality so characteristic of neighbouring that is absent from friendship.” Secondly, it’s apparent that neighbours often become friends, usually over a period of neighbouring built around “an enrichment of reciprocity.”<sup>31</sup> (Also, we encountered examples of people who were friends before they became neighbours). And the confusion is compounded, as Abrams points out, by the fact that people often claim members of their family among their “best friends.” This seems to apply especially to women in close-knit communities.

In the limited exploration of our interviews we found a considerable mixture. One respondent, for example, mixes with a large extended family nearby and the rest of the time tries to keep herself to herself. Similarly, another also has most of her family close by and only interacts with two of her neighbours.

The tension between family loyalties and neighbourhood

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<sup>30</sup> Bulmer (1986 ), p96.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p97.

relations emerged in one case. The interviewee's son caused a problem with a neighbour, and as she felt that she had to side with her son she didn't speak to the neighbour for a year. Eventually one day as she was going out she struck up conversation with the neighbour, and after that they did "mend fences."

In Northmoor, one interviewee claimed that most of her neighbours are also friends. We found evidence of well-developed friendships among neighbours in Openshaw. In one street it was claimed "there are bonds between many of the people [here]." One of the respondent's neighbours was already a friend when she moved onto the close, so she was able to get to know other neighbours through her friend - "they get talking, so then you get joined in, don't you? That's how you get to know them."

One of the refugees told a similar story from a neighbourhood inhabited previously, a predominantly white estate in Eccles. She happened to become friendly with one of her neighbours, who had a family spanning three or four generations living in the area. These links meant that she was accepted by the wider community. "If one person knows you well, everyone accepts you." She also suggested that the problem is that families are usually dispersed, so there is very little basis for this sort of communal response or acceptance. Perhaps also, people feel less secure in the area and less responsible for welcoming newcomers.

Given other options, particularly mobility, the principle of homophily ("birds of a feather") tends to draw people to others like them beyond the neighbourhood.<sup>32</sup> Thus one interviewee says he gets on fine with his neighbours, and will talk to them, but doesn't see them as part of his social circle. They don't have a lot in common socially and they wouldn't really socialise.

Although our research has not thrown up any particular examples to illustrate the question, it's obvious that the impact of school catchment areas merits close attention. The young people in our focus group pointed out that their mates at school are not necessarily neighbours.

Finally, we are reminded again by the group of refugees and asylum seekers, that a tradition of neighbourhood relations in which privacy and reticence dominate, can seem profoundly inhospitable:

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<sup>32</sup> McPherson *et al* (2001).

“What matters is if somebody has the interest to befriend somebody.”

## 8. Visiting

US literature tends to emphasise visiting in one another's houses as an indicator of positive neighbouring. For the most part, our research confirmed the extent to which this is frowned upon in England.

“If I go out of the house and I see them I'll chat with them. But we don't go in each other's houses. I think that's where friction starts.”

“You don't live in each other's pockets.”

“You don't live in one another's houses. You don't knock on doors and say ‘Well, I'm coming in for a cup of coffee.’ If they invite you in, very well. But they look out for you...”

“We don't neighbour in each others' houses.”

In the focus group with older people, it was suggested that being invited in was a measure of neighbourliness, but not all agreed.

The respect for the privacy of people's homes is widespread but not universal. It was clear for instance in another interview we carried out elsewhere, with a particularly neighbourly resident:

When asked if sometimes she *doesn't* meet anyone she knows, she says “it never happens. I always meet somebody, sometimes for half an hour or so I'll be talking to them.” She passes the houses of several neighbours she knows, and often stops for a chat – “Outside. I wouldn't go in.”<sup>33</sup>

Some residents had no difficulty with the notion of visiting (“You just turn up. If they're too busy you come away again”) – but some had had negative experiences of “over-neighbouring.”

The reason she doesn't “go neighbouring in other people's houses” is due to a bad experience of excessive neighbourliness where she lived before.

“My house became the local drop-in. It got too much. All day there was four or five people in the house - I couldn't get my housework done and there was no privacy. I was trying to bring up two

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<sup>33</sup> A conversation with Alice, the Neighbourhoods weblog, November 2003.

[http://neighbourhoods.typepad.com/neighbourhoods/conversation\\_with\\_alice\\_nov\\_03.pdf](http://neighbourhoods.typepad.com/neighbourhoods/conversation_with_alice_nov_03.pdf)

sons at the time. They'd come in mine and drink all me tea, sugar and coffee, it went on all day, sometimes they were there until late at night. I don't think a lot of the neighbours round here do that kind of thing. I think it's a different kind of community, [it's] not nose-y. I wouldn't say they were less friendly. They're just not as overpowering. I think basically they stick to either family or very, very close friends down here. They don't make a point of over-neighbouring."

Another said "sometimes when they knock on the door I feel like I wish they'd leave me alone, but not on a day-to-day basis." Another told us that they find unplanned visits difficult to accept. Conversely, one of the asylum seekers had invited people from his college to come to his house, and was puzzled because they never took up the offer.

## **9. Exchanging favours: lending and borrowing, looking out for each other**

The amount of mutual support and exchange of favours that takes place will be an indicator of neighbourhood viability. To put it another way, policy makers might have cause for serious concern if they found neighbourhoods with very low levels of reciprocal behaviour. Where neighbourliness is evident we would expect to find people sharing materials such as tools, helping one another occasionally with simple tasks, and in the course of various interactions, passing information and providing a supportive context for sharing experience.

In our survey, almost exactly the same proportion of people (40%) say that they “borrow things and exchange favours” with their neighbours, as those who say that they don’t. Men (45%) are slightly more likely than women (38%) to do so. Similarly, 37% of men told us they don’t exchange favours, and 44% of women.

We were offered many examples of practical neighbourly behaviour, such as:

fixing fuses, changing a light bulb, taking in a parcel, tapping on the door to check that someone is OK if they haven’t been seen for a while; babysitting, feeding cats, lending or borrowing tea bags, milk, lawn mower and van; and sharing the shower or fridge when a neighbour’s was broken.

One interviewee has helped neighbours who are not English speakers with official and other admin tasks – filling in forms, making phone calls, going to court with them.

Another said that one neighbour in particular is very supportive. When her garden fence was kicked in by some schoolchildren they helped her to get it repaired and take up the matter with the local school. When they saw three men climbing over the fence into her back garden they came and told her, and went outside with her to find out what was going on. She used her neighbour’s phone when hers wasn’t working.

Members of the older people's focus group spoke about the practice of collecting money when someone has died; and the under-appreciated point that some people need a neighbour there in order to feel safe when agencies, services or tradespeople call.

We were offered an extreme example of "looking out for someone's home":

"When I got my refusal [of refugee status] I just left the house. I left the door [open] for four hours. When I came back my neighbours were watching the door to make sure that no-one went in."

In their focus group the older people suggested that *offering* to help, and *being prepared to ask* for help, were both key aspects of neighbourliness. This suggests that exchanging favours can be both a reflection of, and the basis for, civil relations.

## 10. Reciprocity and trust

As an extension of the evidence about reciprocity, we asked people whether they held keys for any of their neighbours' homes, and whether their neighbours held theirs. Unsurprisingly, the majority did not, but some people held several and often this was reciprocated.

There is a strong relationship between the levels of trust in one's neighbourhood and the likelihood that a neighbour holds a key. Table 4 shows levels of trust among those who have keys held by neighbours.

**Table 4: Levels of trust in neighbourhood indicated by those who have keys held by neighbours**

Would you say that you trust ...	
Most of the people in your neighbourhood	47.0%
Many of the people in your neighbourhood	33.0%
A few of the people in your neighbourhood	15.6%
Or that you do not trust people in your neighbourhood	8.6%

As table 5 below shows, the proportion both holding keys and having keys held increases with age, up to the oldest age group. Key holding is more prominent among owner-occupiers than renters. This is reflected in our results on the extent to which residents trust most or many people in their neighbourhood, in table 6 below. The propensity for holding a neighbour's key also seems to increase with length of residence. Almost one third of respondents who had lived in their home for ten years or more held a neighbour's key. We should note that the questionnaire did not distinguish kin from neighbours, and for some people, as one interviewee told us, "holding spare keys is kept in family circles."

Asking a neighbour to hold your key is not just a matter of self-interest for the forgetful. It is a significant indication of trust. Most strikingly, one of the refugees said that they "would love to" hold a neighbour's key, but have no opportunity to do anything like this.



**Table 5: Respondents holding keys or for whom keys are held, by sub-group**

Variable / Sub-group	% who do hold key for neighbour	% whose neighbours hold their key
Age of respondent		
0 – 19	0.0	9.1
20 – 24	9.5	0.0
25 – 44	20.6	22.6
45 – 64	22.7	23.7
65 – 74	42.9	49.0
75+	10.0	25.0
Tenure		
Social Renting	17.1	17.9
Own outright	31.4	32.6
Other	12.5	14.5
Own with a mortgage	24.3	31.4
Length of Residency		
Up to 2 years		16.1
3 – 5 years		18.2
5 – 10 years		26.5
Over 10 years		32.3
Ethnicity		
White		28.4
Mixed / Black / Other		25.0
Asian / Asian British		10.0
Employment Status		
Full time employment		21.8
Part time employment		16.7
Self employed		33.3
Unemployed		23.1
Retired		39.2
Student		19.2
Carer		50.0
Sick / Disabled		12.1

**Table 6: Respondents who trust most or many people in their neighbourhood**

Variable / Sub-group	% who trust most or many of people in neighbourhood
Age of respondent	
0 – 19	45.5
20 – 24	40.0
25 – 44	44.4
45 – 64	43.2
65 – 74	43.8
75+	50.0
Tenure	
Social Renting	35.8
Own outright	43.0
Other	35.8
Own with a mortgage	58.0
Length of Residency	
Up to 2 years	39.3
3 – 5 years	46.3
5 – 10 years	55.1
Over 10 years	43.1
Ethnicity	
White	48.8
Mixed / Black / Other	32.1
Asian / Asian British	36.7

## 11. Difference and commonality

“Nobody's more posh than anybodyelse.”

In this section we record some of the aspects of difference that affect neighbourliness. The tension between homogeneity or cohesion on the one hand, and diversity or heterogeneity on the other, is characteristic of many neighbourhoods. Without some readily-discovered commonality, connections between neighbours may not be strong enough to cope with any significant change or threat. On the other hand, without sufficient variety, people may find that they are too insulated from the outside world and are therefore also vulnerable as a community. And as one interviewee put it, a cohesive neighbourhood can be seen by those outside the circle as “cliquey.”

The dominant sense that we got from our research was that people are nervous about the diversity they find around them. This was most apparent in Northmoor where we witnessed several clear instances of “passive” racism –

“There’s no point us going in the park because it doesn’t belong to us anymore... the Asian community appear to have taken it over.”

This was offered alongside a sense of relief that in some cases people from different backgrounds do get on well together: *[from our interview notes]*

At one end of their street people from different backgrounds get on very well – Asian, Chinese, and West Indians will offer her help and ask if she needs running anywhere.

One woman told us that the attitude of people in the neighbourhood makes her feel that she does not belong – specifically the attitude of the white population. She feels there is “something lacking, there is no communication.” She thinks that the onus is on the people who are here already to come forward and make the first approach to newcomers. “They should come forward to me... If I start something they might mind it.” She feels that because of cultural differences, if she does something she might get it

wrong.

Similarly, the group of refugees and asylum seekers told us that most of the younger English seem to have no time for them. “For us as foreigners it is hard to introduce ourselves.” A neighbourhood warden in Northmoor suggested that perceptions are gradually changing:

“... there are more non-whites than whites. There are differences in cultures, the perception of neighbourliness. The integration, you see it with the young people who’ve gone to school together, they have a common culture.”

In our seminar with residents from across the city, we touched on housing allocation as a factor that contributes to the sense of difference. This issue and the complex issue of tenure mix is beyond the scope of this report, but a useful summary can be found in Groves *et al* (2003).

Positive attitudes towards diversity were reflected in a number of ways. A resident in Whalley Range argued that “it doesn’t matter that you’re different, it matters that you find the commonality” – which raises the fundamental policy question, “what sort of conditions serve to stimulate the discovery of commonality?”

Two interviewees tried to pin down the problem of how difference constitutes a barrier to, rather than an opportunity for, neighbourliness. One argued that it is education and social class that determine the sense of joint purpose which characterises neighbourliness.

Another said:

“The limit comes from education... It doesn’t matter what car one might have, or what haircut. It does make a difference if you can have a conversation.”

## **12. Parents, children and young people**

In this section we bring together a number of points about children, young people and parenting that emerged in the research.

Fear is a key aspect of poor neighbourly relations and this is often directed at young people, especially when they congregate in groups on the street. They may do so for various reasons - from a need to stake their territorial claim, to the simple fact that they're not welcome anywhere else or cannot afford to get to, or spend time in, the available leisure attractions.

Young people don't necessarily want to be hanging out on the street and they may not want to be at home, or may not be wanted there. The need for activities and places for kids to go is a familiar theme and has to be repeated here, along with an emphasis on the need to involve them in the design of spaces.<sup>34</sup> There is also a case to be made for an extended school agenda to give kids somewhere to go in the evening.

Another issue that arose in relation to young people's use of space concerns the need for changes to pub culture. Some places could remain adult spaces, but the problem is their predominance. The fact that many young people seldom have access to spaces with inexpensive food and drink, where they can socialise with friends, and not feel the need to react to being constantly judged by adults, is problematic.

Participants in the seminar felt that inadequate parenting causes problems. One interviewee stressed the extent to which norms of parental behaviour have a major impact on neighbourliness. She felt that many parents are not as committed to the role as they used to be, either because they are busy working or because of social problems such as drugs. Therefore, she said, they push their children out into the neighbourhood where they bother other people, or else perhaps buy them a games console to keep them quiet. Either way, looking after children ceases to become a point of positive social contact for the adults. Instead,

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<sup>34</sup> See *What would you do with this space? Involving young people in the design and care of urban spaces*. London: CBE Space, 2004.

children behave anti-socially which then leads to rancour between parents if there is no background of co-operation or mutual responsibility for each other's kids.

One interviewee illustrated the dual sense of parental responsibility for the child's behaviour and collective neighbourly responsibility for children:

“My daughter's known in all the shops and people know us in the streets. I don't mind her going out. If she does anything stupid someone will tell me... She's well socialised with adults, always has been.”

Another interviewee made the point that when parents get on well it encourages their children to get on – the implication being that the reverse also applies.

We should also note that negotiation skills in most families are almost certainly far higher than in the past. It's reasonable to suggest that the most 'successful' families are those where negotiation happens.

As a footnote to this section, we note a point made by seminar participants about increasing numbers of single-parent families and single person households. These are of course distinct issues. The proportion of single person households in the UK increased from 26.3% in 1991 to 30% in 2001 and that trend is expected to continue. For many of these people, sociability may be a problem but the need for neighbourliness is unlikely to diminish.

Meanwhile, Census 2001 showed that 23% of children are living in lone parent families, compared with 18 per cent in 1991. This too has implications, and perhaps constitutes another challenge, for the promotion of neighbourhood relations. In research on parents and children, Mary Larner found high turnover and smaller social networks for single-parents.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Larner (1990), p192-193.

### **13. Community organisations and projects**

In this section we consider the connection between community organisations and neighbourhood relations. We also report some comments about community regeneration projects. The significance of the connection is neatly illustrated by Edward Platt in his book *Leadville*, in which he describes the effects of threats of demolition and relocation on the inhabitants of parts of the A40 road in west London. As a journalist, Platt spoke to a number of occupants of the houses and then attended a tenants meeting:

“During the last two weeks, I have visited most of the condemned houses around Gipsy Corner, but I have met very few of these people... Yet as I look round the room, I realise that I recognise more people here than anyone else does. Most of them have never met each other; why should they have? ... It is strange to think that I already know more people in the condemned houses than the people who have invested years of their lives here.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to stimulating connections between residents, community organisations can provide an interface with authorities and a semi-formal context for neighbourhood relations, which in turn can make it much less problematic for local people to mobilise in the event of a threat or opportunity. Several respondents had clear views on their value:

“They get people out from behind their own front doors and they get people talking and they get people knowing each other – without taking it too far, without invading too much of your own private space.”

Community organisations help because they mean that “people are meeting people... Instead of coming home and shutting the door and watching television all night.”

“They make a difference by communicating knowledge about the area.”

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<sup>36</sup> Platt (2000), p30.

“...part of the job of the community association, to keep people coming out, and if they’re not coming out, to keep information coming in to them.”

“They help people to mix.”

“If they are active they bring people together and bridge communication gaps.”

One respondent said she did not think community organisations make a difference, but then went on to concede that the youth club does a lot to bring people together.

It is worth noting that a number of interviewees who demonstrated an interest in neighbourhood relations showed little interest or involvement in community organisations. One said that “neighbourliness is just about your immediate neighbours. Community is a ‘different kettle of fish’.” Another had no involvement at all in community organisations, although she does routinely meet local contacts at the hairdressers. We did not have the time or space to pursue this in the survey, but suggest that future research might examine the relation between a high neighbourliness index score and low levels of community involvement.

A Northmoor resident told us that the reason he wants to stay in the area is because he has formed relationships with neighbours, and this has largely been through community activities.

The role that community organisations can play in promoting diversity and cross-cultural understanding was picked up by several interviewees. In this respect, one said that activities are needed “that involve everyone in the community.” Taken literally (although the remark was not intended in this way), this raises an important point. At the community level, it’s practically impossible to have events that involve everyone, partly for logistical reasons but mainly because some people will self-exclude and they have every right to do so. So the key is to promote a *range* of activities for the broadest range of legitimate interests; and to encourage *overlap* between the groups and networks that form. The point is that community development is not served by grand but impractical rhetoric about involving everyone, but more by looking for realistic ways of promoting civil interaction at local level, and correspondence between groups is a key aspect of that.

Finally, a number of comments were made about community projects and regeneration programmes. These relate to neighbourliness to the extent that they often have a significant impact on people's sense of belonging and on what is perceived as "community spirit." How residents feel about regeneration initiatives in their area often reflects their sense of empowerment or disempowerment, and can be a factor in enlarging or exaggerating divisions.

- One interviewee said: "Too many roles and activities now require training or a paid worker, making it less easy for local people to get involved on an informal, voluntary basis. People don't relate to strangers coming in to do the work."
- Participants in the seminar noted how regeneration can be destabilising, and that they felt a sense of powerlessness.
- One resident in Whalley Range felt that "quicker responsiveness would make people more inclined to be active."
- A Northmoor resident argued that the construction of the home zone there had caused disruption which made people more stressed and less neighbourly.

## 14. Place and space in the neighbourhood

The relation of people to the physical spaces they inhabit and occupy has a profound effect on social relations. As Hugh Barton and his colleagues have noted,

“good urban design – in other words, responsiveness to the existing context, compatible mix of uses, appropriate buildings to accommodate activities at the right rent, appropriate location and levels of accessibility, all brought together in a place which is attractive and feels safe – can create conditions where a sense of neighbourliness and belonging is more likely to develop.”<sup>37</sup>

We were interested to hear about the extent to which the areas around people’s homes constituted an arena for informal interaction. One interviewee developed the theme:

“You really find that houses work. People living on their own in flats are less likely to be neighbourly and mix with their group of neighbours, they also seem not to use the amenity space around the property, because no individual feels like they have ownership. They pay for the maintenance to be done, the gardeners come and do it. One person might go into that garden, but when that person’s in it everybody else thinks ‘well, they’re in [the garden], I’m not going in it.’”

In Openshaw one resident told us that during the summer they sit outside her friends’ house “and [C] brews up and we all sit there.” It’s a handy spot for everyone to keep an eye on the children who are playing out at the front or on the square at the top of the road.

Another drew attention to the importance of the layout of the houses, and especially the positioning of front doors and gardens – whether it allows neighbours to lean over the door or fence, or out of the window, and talk to each other. This makes a difference to whether or not one is “open to contact” with people.

In the home zone in Northmoor, we were able to observe

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<sup>37</sup> Barton *et al* (2003), p184.

children playing in the streets, which seem to have fulfilled the design intention of stimulating greater pedestrian activity and interaction.

Our seminar participants dwelt on the importance of having central places in the area (with shops and other amenities), arguing for easy access to help people to get there.

One of the striking things about our interviews is the fact that relatively little mention was made of the usual elements of disorder – litter, graffiti, vandalism and so on.

However, the significance of gardens – both communal and private – came through as one of the strongest themes in the research. For instance, we learned about the effect of a communal garden:

“Most of the neighbours from the 18 houses do use the garden. It has made a contribution to neighbourliness – 20 houses down where they haven’t got anything like this garden it’s very different. The neighbours sit out and enjoy it, and have a drink together and chat. They put paddling pools out for the young children. They have also had birthday parties, and organised a celebration for the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. But most of them don’t want to do any work, even though they’ve got a shed full of tools.”

“We’ve got benches out there, and I begged two little benches for the kids to sit on. It’s used a lot... In the warm weather the kids come out with the paddling pools during the day, and when they’ve gone off to bed the bedroom windows come open, and you can hear if the children cry; and everyone sits there having a cool drink and it’s very nice.”

We have seen that some Whalley Range residents felt they did not spend sufficient time at the front of their houses to assert a sense of ownership over their streetspace. But we found that several of them were well-aware of the advantages their gardens offered. In three successive interviews, residents told us that most social contact is in the back gardens because of the adjoining gardens with low walls and hedges:

“The layout of the gardens makes a difference, and whether the walls or hedges are low enough for people to see each other and chat. A lot of it is to do with working in the back gardens.”

Again, several participants mentioned that people sometimes stop and have a chat about plants or flowers as they are walking past front gardens – or even just noticing pots placed outside the front door. This stimulant to social interaction is very familiar in Amsterdam, where there is a related tradition of sitting out on chairs or benches.



Older people in the focus group mentioned that drinking coffee and chatting takes place out back in the communal gardens, not in the back yard. Again, “borrowing activity,” we were told, takes place in the communal gardens and expressly not in the (private) back yard. A related point was made by members of the Northmoor Social Club. They noted that their back gardens or yards are divided by quite high walls, which means they do not have much contact on that side of the houses.

## 15. Safety

Several interviewees mentioned feeling safe as one of the benefits of good neighbourhood relations. A number of people were clearly affected by the lack of both safety and neighbourliness.

One woman said she doesn't feel safe "because of the gangs of lads that hang around. Not all of them live on the estate but they're all well-known."

A man from the same neighbourhood said he did feel safe, but

"You do get a few ... who don't live round here and they're the ones you've got to keep your eye open for."

The perception of a threat to safety from "outsiders" to an estate or neighbourhood is a common one, and was very much apparent in Openshaw. For one woman we spoke to, it seemed not to be an issue:

"I know the people, I'm safe with the people. I don't feel intimidated by the area or the people in it and I don't see why I should. I walk this estate at all times of the night and day and it doesn't bother me one little bit. But there again, I talk to the kids, I say 'hiya lads... what you doing stood out in the freezing cold...'"

One interviewee, when asked what she felt the benefits of neighbourliness to be, said "It makes the place feel safe." Then later she gave us an insight into what safety and security might mean in her terms [*from interview notes*]-

She used to feel safe but not anymore. Her house was burgled three times. A neighbour saw the burglar, and her family knows who was responsible - it is someone from this neighbourhood. They have reported this to the police. After these burglaries her family were very frightened and afraid to walk about at night. They have now moved to another area.

In a telephone interview a correspondent expressed her concerns:

“I had a bad experience, I had neighbour disputes...  
I got assaulted in my own home, my neighbours  
were harassing me...”

Whatever the cause, the sense of anxiety and isolation this woman felt was acute, and the neighbourhood context she was inhabiting was not helping to heal her wounds. The two most likely effects of such situations are that the individual will leave the neighbourhood – possibly continuing or fuelling a semi-nomadic and unsettled life-history; or they retreat indoors. As it happens, we know that this individual had a carer, and her narrative raises a question about the need for an understanding of neighbourhood relations to feature strongly in support programmes for carers.

Within the survey almost half of respondents indicated that they felt safe in their neighbourhood while 30% did not (the remaining 21% neither agreed nor disagreed). Table 7 reports the percentage of each category in various socio-demographic variables where significant differences were found. The table shows that social renters tend to feel less safe than owners, and Asian / Asian British respondents feel significantly more safe than whites.

**Table 7: Percent of respondents who felt safe**

Variable / Sub-group	%
Sex	
Male	42.4
Female	54.0
Tenure	
Social Renting	37.4
Own outright	46.4
Other	46.4
Own with a mortgage	65.3
Length of Residency	
Less than 2 years	47.1
3 – 5 years	63.0
5 – 10 years	63.3
Over 10 years	41.8
Ethnicity	
White	43.1
Mixed / Black / Other	58.2
Asian / Asian British	70.6

## 16. Decline and regeneration

In this section we summarise people's perceptions of decline or improvement in their neighbourhoods; and their suggestions for improvements.

We were surprised at how few negative remarks there were. In an impromptu encounter in the street in Northmoor, we heard fundamentally racist objections to the home zone initiative; and as mentioned there was some concern in Openshaw over the penetration of the neighbourhood by gangs of young people from outside. In one interview the lack of parental control was identified as a cause of decline:

“They let the kids trash the garden, and this is the beginning of the rot setting into a neighbourhood. People start to go in and close their doors.”

By contrast, a couple of parks employees told us:

“It's definitely improved on Northmoor, it's a large park and it's busy and there's no trouble.”

Similarly, a neighbourhood warden said:

“There's enough of a feeling here that the area is going in the right direction. Things have definitely improved over the last few years. People who don't see that are basically deluding themselves. There's a basic human sense that if somewhere looks better, it is better. If you're having major anti-social behaviour it makes a difference if someone does something about it. There are some people who are quite happy to live in an area of hopelessness, that suits them, they think they can do what the hell they like.”

One interviewee accredited recent improvements in his area to two changes: first, the fact that some less considerate neighbours have moved away; and secondly, there had been significant improvements to the local park.

As might be expected, there was a mixture of practical and more fundamental cultural suggestions. They covered broadly three groups: services, community activities, and education. Thus improved services for children and young people were called for, and several people mentioned the need to “cut down on crime,” and for more visible policing.

Someone asked for “more places, more facilities” and another said that neighbourliness could be improved if

there were more places where people could socialise and meet each other. Community events “which bring people together” were suggested – “and social activities where people meet and mix.” One of the group of refugees and asylum seekers said:

“Groups and activities are needed that help people to become more open and accepting, and that encourage people to have more interest in finding out about other cultures.”

This view is related to the feeling expressed by several participants that “it’s education,” and seminar participants stressed the importance of education and communication skills for social interaction. “Educating parents” was suggested by one interviewee and in the seminar.

In our survey we asked if people would like to see more neighbourliness in their community. Those who said yes, were asked to suggest how. Table 8 below lists the kinds of responses, in order of popularity. The most common suggestion was for more community events (15%) with some 5% suggesting that more community centres or places are needed.

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**Table 8: Suggestions to help increase neighbourliness**

More community events organised  
More community centres etc.  
Work as a team to look after one another  
New tenants not same - older tenants left  
Most have lived here from the beginning  
We need to organise events to get to know neighbours  
Fill the empty houses  
Not everyone wants to be friendly  
Move out trouble makers  
People move on  
Good manners  
Have only english speakers + No BME groups  
To recognise differences and diversity  
Help each other  
Encourage young to speak to elderly  
Affordable housing  
Enhance public areas  
Deter crime  
More inclusive approach to residents' associations  
A wine and tapas bar!  
Ownership of housing  
More parental control of kids



## **17. Concluding remarks**

Much of the literature on neighbourhoods and social capital focuses on neighbourhood satisfaction and whether people say that they trust their neighbours. In this review we have sought to avoid a conflation of neighbourliness with neighbourhood satisfaction, and we have tried to see trust as just one component among a number. This approach may help to explain why certain factors that might usually be considered significant when examining neighbourhood - such as crime, disorder, housing allocation policy and transience - did not feature strongly in our findings. It doesn't mean that such factors aren't significant in people's lives; but they may not be a particularly strong feature of the ways in which people think about neighbourliness.

We are also keen to place this discussion within the context of civil renewal. This report is intended to contribute to the debate on the extent to which it is legitimate and possible for neighbourly behaviour to be promoted and stimulated through policy, and if so, how; and in what ways such an approach might contribute to other policy concerns such as antisocial behaviour and social inclusion. To that end, this review needs to be related to other work on neighbourhoods and social relations. We suggest the following key issues for further consideration:

- Social class and neighbourliness: by developing the index of neighbourliness and linking it to an index of social class we would be clearer about the distinct characteristics of working class sociability, which is perceived to be in decline. If the strengths of working class social relations are under threat, perhaps because social networks are being stretched and not re-enforced, what are the implications?
- Housing choice: neighbourliness is related to issues of population stability and transience, which in turn are closely related to housing options. A key factor here is the need to provide

pathways of housing choice that allow residents the chance to adjust their housing as their needs change, without necessarily having to leave the neighbourhood.<sup>38</sup>

- Community development: the policy approach to promoting connections between neighbours, between specific social groups, and between neighbourhoods should include community development techniques. Community development can serve to bring people together and provide them with the context and purpose for raising issues collectively, and developing individual and collective skills.
- Semi-public and semi-private space: the spaces around people's homes can have a significant impact on sociability, and some aspects of the design of those spaces are within the reach of policy, as home zones illustrate clearly. Planners and policy makers might help to stimulate neighbourliness by taking account of the extent to which people use private and communal gardens (front and back) as semi-private space from which they can allow a degree of engagement with others (familiar or stranger) on their own terms. Addressing the issue of high walls behind the houses in Northmoor might be one aspect of this. Similarly, initiatives that discourage excessive car use (especially with regard to the school run and shopping) also merit attention.
- Definability of neighbourhoods: what more can be done by planners, including transport planners, to contribute to the sense of defined neighbourhood that promotes association and belonging? This issue is pertinent because it relates to current government thinking about neighbourhood governance, which implies that at some point it will be necessary to be able to say "this is Neighbourhood A, not Neighbourhood B" and perhaps also to say to which neighbourhood people belong. An element of this theme that has to be taken into consideration is the fashion for gated communities – clear physical manifestations of neighbourhood which seek to control interactions with outsiders.

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<sup>38</sup> Groves *et al* (2003), p50.

- Defensiveness, reticence and hospitality: it is reasonable to suppose that there is a connection between the emphasis placed on reticence and privacy in neighbouring, and the sense expressed by refugees of a lack of hospitality. Are there ways in which more open attitudes towards incomers can be promoted as a key component of neighbourliness?
- Regeneration and governance: we have alluded to a range of long-term social trends, but there are also more immediate forces that, in one interviewee's words, "disturb community." These include regeneration initiatives and housing allocations, and they raise familiar issues of governance and the feeling of disempowerment which can have an impact on neighbourhood relations.

Finally, emerging from discussions and observations during the research process, we suggest here a number of potential practical initiatives for consideration:

- Communal garden design: although there have been problems, it seems that communal gardens can be successful if properly designed and managed with a range of residents (especially a cross-section by age); and some neighbourhoods may well be appropriate for such an initiative. This might be stimulated by some arranged group visits to successful examples.
- A small grants scheme for neighbourhood events: there may be a case for increasing the funds available for small local events, such as parties, that demonstrably bring diverse local people together in a semi-formal context.
- 'Plan your own neighbourhood': the process of designing and using games can be a very powerful community development technique, particularly because it can be inter-generational. One positive step would be to develop a game on "designing your own neighbourhood," exploring issues of why some things can't be done and why some may have more impact than expected. A model of this type of initiative, on planning your own park, can be found at <http://www.gothamgazette.com/parksgame/>.

- Supporting carers: there may be a case for promoting a systematic understanding of neighbourliness in support programmes provided to carers.
- Further research: we would like to see our exploratory research developed, particularly with regard to exploring working class sociability, possibly using social network analysis. A larger survey should include educational attainment, involvement in community organisations, presence of kin locally, and use of community places. It would also be valuable to gain clearer insight into neighbourliness among specific groups, particularly women, carers, disabled people, and single-parent households. Further qualitative research could also explore the use of 'third places,' and the relationship between levels of neighbourhood interaction and involvement in community organisations.

## **Appendix A. Case studies**

1. Whalley Range
2. Northmoor Social Club
3. Refugees and asylum seekers
4. Openshaw

These are written-up examples from interviews conducted during our research.

### **Case study 1: Whalley Range**

Steve and Elaine are owner occupiers living in Whalley Range. For them, neighbourliness means showing consideration for each other. It is also about looking out for each other, and each other's property – for instance not ignoring your neighbour's alarm if it goes off.

When new people have moved in nearby, they've gone round to introduce themselves. Being owner-occupiers in old houses which need a lot of work gives people something in common, and they often ask each other to recommend tradespeople. But the biggest factor promoting neighbourliness is that their back gardens back onto each other with low dividing walls, so when people are in their gardens they see each other and chat. They don't drop round to their neighbours on the spur of the moment; but the gardens allow informal, unplanned contact without having to step onto one another's space. "You can pop round and see somebody in the garden much easier than you can pop round for a coffee, 'cause you can see whether you're going to be intruding or not." They believe it's vital to keep the space at the back of the houses as amenity space where people are likely to socialise. Turning the houses into flats and putting car parks round the back kills social interaction and neighbourliness.

They have also met people through their involvement in the residents association and "Friends of Alexandra Park." Community organisations are important "as a catalyst for getting things going." They provide a "common goal or reason to get people together." People see each other at meetings and then will recognise and talk to each other after that.

They feel that an important consequence of contact with their neighbours is that it “makes your patch bigger. Rather than your home being just your four walls, your patch is somehow extended.” It makes a bigger area around your home part of your “safety zone.” You’re more likely to feel “loose ownership so you respect it, you keep it tidy. If there’s litter around you pick it up... There’s a lot of give and take.” When people know each other they’re more likely to treat their neighbours with consideration.

Steve and Elaine have asked neighbours to move things which have been inconveniencing them, such as a smelly compost bin. They have also asked landlords of neighbouring private rented properties to attend to the external appearance of the houses and gardens. They have fitted a gate in the garden wall so that they can go to and from their neighbour’s house through the back gardens. They and their neighbours hold keys for each other’s houses.

They feel that they belong in the neighbourhood, but Steve says: “I suppose the attachment’s to the house more than anything. If we had to get rid of this house we wouldn’t strongly want to live in this neighbourhood. I like the architecture and the houses and the type of neighbourhood it is.” Their sense of a neighbourly community is limited to a cluster of houses around them and a few people who they know through the residents association. In this small corner of Whalley Range a number of people share an interest in preserving the character of the neighbourhood - helping to keep track of developers’ plans so the old houses are not ‘over-developed,’ and springing to the defence of the area’s mature, distinctive trees if the sound of a chainsaw is ever heard. They describe this as a sense of “stewardship.”

Sharing these sorts of values or attitudes is part of their connection or understanding with their neighbours. But the neighbourhood as a whole is very mixed socio-economically, ethnically, and in terms of age. They believe that diversity is one of the area’s good qualities. A drawback, however, is that “there’s no decent shops. We shop on the way to and from work... There are no cafes or bars or anything.”

## Case study 2. Northmoor Social Club

The Social Club is an informal drop-in which meets once a week at the community centre. It does not have a programme but is a place where people can come and have a cup of tea and a chat. It is open to anybody but most of the regulars are older people. All those present were white, though there are people from ethnic minorities who sometimes attend.

Most of those who go to the club have lived in the area for 20, 30 or 40 years; if not all their lives. They have known, or known of, each other for a long time – sometimes just as ‘nodding acquaintances’ - and the club has helped bring them closer together and develop friendships. As well as socialising they also look out for each other. If they don’t see someone for a while they’ll check to make sure they are alright. They think it’s very important to have people close by who they can rely on. The older generation will help each other, for instance with shopping, getting the pension; though there are less of them around now and they are further apart from each other. Most have got at least one or two neighbours on their street that they could ask for help.

For this group, it’s generally understood that being good neighbours means respecting one another’s privacy.

- “You don’t live in each other’s pockets.”
- “You don’t live in one another’s houses. You don’t knock on doors and say ‘Well, I’m coming in for a cup of coffee.’ If they invite you in, very well ...”
- Your neighbours “have their private life and you have your private life; but they know, and you know, that they’d be there for you ... and you’d be there for them if they needed help.”

The area now has a large Asian community, and some of the older white people at the social club have mixed feelings about the changes this has brought. They have good relations with individual neighbours of different ethnicity. One woman says that her neighbours of Asian, Chinese, and West Indian origin are “great,” will offer to help, and ask her if she needs “running” anywhere. “They all get on great together.” But “over the last 18 months three or four of the houses at the bottom of the avenue have been taken over by Asians that do not speak English, do not understand the culture, do not know that they’ve

got to put the dustbins out. They put all their rubbish out in their front gardens. And it's upsetting all the avenue, even the [more longstanding Asian neighbours]." They also complain that some of the Asian households throw waste food out into the back alleys which attracts rats. They've tried to explain this but they can't get the message across.

They find relations easier with second or third generation members of minority ethnic communities. "The first generation Asians are very hard to get on with, a lot of them don't even speak English. But the second generation are better ... I think the language problem is one of the biggest problems." "Sometimes you find their attitude is 'we live like this,' and they will implant their way of life on us, and that is not right. If I went to Spain or ... Africa I'd have to fall in with how they live. That's how you've got to do it."

"I think a lot of the Asians... they actually want to keep themselves to themselves ... they don't want to mix." One woman says that she would not feel welcome "with a white face" going to some of the activities at the community centre. "When they have their sewing class it's their sewing class, and when they have their keep fit it's their keep fit ... and you're not invited."

Nothing has undermined their sense of belonging on the streets they live on, but they sometimes feel less comfortable in the wider neighbourhood. "There's no point us going in the park because it doesn't belong to us anymore ... the Asian community appear to have taken it over." She feels that it is mainly Asian people using the park now, and that they don't "mix;" therefore she feels uncomfortable or excluded.

Their back gardens or yards are divided by quite high walls, which means that they do not have much contact on that side of the houses. Since the Home Zone, many of the houses have small patches of garden at the front. One of the respondents has arranged with his neighbours to look after their garden, since they do not want to do it.

### **Case study 3. Refugees and asylum-seekers**

We attended a weekly drop-in for refugees and asylum-seekers in one of the neighbourhoods, and discussed neighbourliness with three refugees and asylum-seekers in the twenties to forties age bracket, and the group's support worker.

The group thinks that neighbourliness is especially important in their situation. "People need each other," especially people "like us – single mums on our own." They need help and protection in case something happens. Neighbourliness is about someone helping you to solve a problem, especially when you are vulnerable.

Experience of their neighbours is mixed. With some neighbours the door just goes "open, close; open, close. None of them says hello." With others they will say "hi" to each other if they meet on the doorstep and spend five minutes chatting; "but everyone is busy."

However, Sarah says that her neighbours do offer help, particularly the older ones. They have offered to take her shopping and look after her baby, and they'll give her directions if she needs to go somewhere. "When I got my refusal [of refugee status] I just left the house. I left the door [open] for four hours. When I came back my neighbours were watching the door to make sure that no one went in." Also, when she is out and about she finds that older people take an interest: "They are very helpful, they ask me where I live, they hold my baby." Her friend Theresa agrees that having a baby makes a difference: "because I have a child they start talking to me."

But Sarah doesn't feel comfortable accepting interest and assistance from her neighbours, partly because they are much older than she is. She feels that she doesn't "have much to share, to exchange" with them and so is reluctant to visit them in their homes. Theresa wonders if this will make these people less likely to offer friendship in the future. "They've tried to befriend you, if it's not taken up [they may be] less likely to do it again."

Although they have had good experiences with older people, their strongest desire is for relations with people of their own age. The problem is that most of the younger English have no time for them or, worse, harass them. "It's hard to be friendly with the ones who are our own age." It seems indifference is their worst enemy. They seem genuinely perplexed by what they see as low levels of

interaction and mutual support among English people, and a lack of interest in other human beings. Frank is baffled by the fact that apart from the older ones, people here don't seem to want contact. He would have thought they would be interested in those from a different culture, but they're not. He has invited people from his college to come to his house, but they never do – he wonders if they are suspicious of his motives. He thinks that “people here care less for each other,” and they seem depressed. People seem to be more interested in interacting with technology than directly with other human beings - “people have every relationship with technology, with their computer; but they don't know their neighbour.”

Despite this negative impression he wonders if he just doesn't understand English culture – “maybe they are OK, [even if] I'm thinking they are not OK.” The problem as he sees it is that people from different cultures are not interested in understanding each other and are therefore ignorant of each other. This leads to distrust, hostility and even fear, which can cause serious problems. The group think that what is needed more than anything else is education. Groups and activities are needed which help people to become more open and accepting, and which encourage people to take more interest in other cultures.

They have all experienced verbal abuse from people in the neighbourhood. Frank was castigated by someone living in the same block for “getting money from the Home Office.” They have had boys kicking footballs against their windows and abusing them - “they know who they're doing it to.” One person was told “go back to your country, or we'll burn your house.” This happened when she and her husband were about to go away so her neighbour offered to keep an eye out for her house.

In this part of East Manchester they think a lot of white people are racist. They have found life easier in more diverse areas such as Cheetham Hill, where people are “used to other colours.” However, Jennifer related a positive experience of living on a very white estate in Eccles. She happened to become friendly with one of her neighbours, who had a family spanning three or four generations living in the area. These links meant that she was accepted by the wider community. “If one person knows you well, everyone accepts you.” She thinks that the problem is that families are usually dispersed, so there is very little basis for this sort of communal response or acceptance. Perhaps also people feel less secure in the area and less responsible for welcoming newcomers.

The fact that children often move away when they grow up weakens social ties in the neighbourhood, and the group think this also partly explains the difference between young and old. Older people have “lost” their families and feel lonely, and are therefore more neighbourly because they need to somehow replace that social contact and fulfillment. “The older people have a culture like African culture. They greet you in the morning, they’re comfortable.”

This group feels that “for us foreigners it is hard to introduce ourselves.” It seems they are wary of the reaction that they might get if they take the initiative and cross the cultural boundary. They would like to take part in community activities but do not know how to get involved. They get leaflets through their doors but they don’t know where and when activities are taking place - “we have not been given the chance. We don’t know who is presenting the activities.” The drop-in is good but it doesn’t help them to build relations with the host community. They need some input and information from English people if they are to understand the culture and how to live here.

None of the group feels that they belong in the neighbourhood. Belonging means “you have friends, you are free to express yourself, other people feel the way that you do. It’s not that way here. We’ve got [our own] history and background.” They mainly associate with other asylum-seekers - “we are open with each other.” The feeling of being such outsiders, of not being part of the world they are living in, is very difficult to handle. Frank says: “I am unhappy. I feel very alone. I have a lot of people I say hello to ... but I feel a stranger.” He had to leave his wife and son behind in his home country and now he feels like ‘a nobody.’ He used to be active and sporty, but not anymore. “I feel like an outcast. I’m not encouraged to do anything. I am the wrong man in the wrong place.”

#### **Case study 4. Openshaw**

Eric has lived in Openshaw Village for a long time and has been involved in a wide range of community activities over the years. He’s involved in the local residents

organisation; and he helps at the football club, and at the community centre. He knows a lot of people locally. He's more than happy to help his neighbours if he can: for example, he got in touch with the council for an elderly neighbour to sort out some dangerous wiring in his house.

He talks about the skills and qualities that help to maintain good neighbourhood relations, including an ability to mediate when there is a dispute. People are likely to approach him or other members of the residents association to try to resolve things. He has had some training in mediation skills, but what also matters is the level of authority or "neighbour clout" a person has within the community; especially when responding to anti-social behaviour such as kids throwing stones at windows. "It's got to come from higher up. For instance they will listen to people like Tommy 'cos he's a bit like higher up than I am; whereas they won't take no notice of me. They know I haven't got his neighbour clout."

Eric says that in his neighbourhood if people see anyone "messaging about" they tell each other. "We look after each other. To me neighbourliness is looking out for each other. If an alarm starts to ring you find out why it's ringing."

Social contact is much more limited now than when he was growing up, but sometimes it's still in evidence. "When I go to pick the kids up at the school that sort of thing's still there, but as soon as they leave the school yard it seems to disappear." It's the same in the street. "You used to play in the street but now the people just come in, shut the door, then you don't see anyone and the streets are empty." Whereas when he and his friends were children "there was always something to do in the street."

He believes that community activities help promote good neighbourhood relations because they mean "people are meeting people... instead of coming home and shutting the door and watching television all night." If there are things going on people will talk to each other to find out what's happening, and sharing information is an important part of neighbourliness.

But he is concerned that community activity is under threat because of the way that funding is channelled in line with the priorities and pet projects of funders and agencies, rather than necessarily supporting what the community itself wants. "There's money in certain places and no money in other places." Bigger projects attract the funding, while local clubs and groups are losing out and therefore having to close down. This threatens the viability of the centres where they hold their activities.

He and his friends in the residents organisation believe that local people need to feel more in control if things are to get better. The estate has always been very territorial, and “community spirit has got to be done on the estate, in [this] neighbourhood.” Currently people have to fit in with agencies’ ways of working just in order to do something positive in their own community. Too much rests in the hands of outside professionals, and too many roles and activities now require training or a paid worker, making it less easy for local people to get involved on an informal, voluntary basis. And if people are discouraged from getting involved, then “the people who run [things] won’t bother. When there’s a voice in the area telling them ‘you’re not going to do that,’ then it’s a big difference and that’s what we need. We’ve lost the voice.”

What makes him feel that he belongs in the neighbourhood is knowing people. Even so, “If I had the money I’d get out.” He feels there is too much transience on the estate. This dates from when much of the older housing was knocked down and people were rehoused on new estates. “They broke the communities up originally... It took years and years to get it to a good position, and it seems to have slowly gone down and died again.” But despite the changes, people still identify with each other in this part of Manchester. Eric says: “we’re all basically the same, nobody’s more posh than anybody else.”

Eric and his friends think the way that people take responsibility for children has major implications for neighbourhood relations. Liz says:

“I don’t think parents are as committed to their children as they used to be... Whether it’s because they work or because they’ve got social problems or whatever. We’ve noticed across this estate, [for] a lot of people it’s a case of ‘get out there, and don’t bother me. As long as you’re not bothering me I don’t care what you’re doing out there.’”

This means that looking after children ceases to become a point of positive social contact for the adult community. And if there is a problem involving somebody’s child it leads to rancour between parents because there is no background of co-operation or mutual responsibility for each other’s children. Liz again:

“If Eric had to tell our Rebecca off, she’d probably turn round and ...give him cheek back. But Eric would say: ‘that’s enough, I’m going to see your Mum and Dad.’ And Eric knows that he can come

to my house and say, 'Liz, I've had a problem with Rebecca ... and will you sort it out,' and Eric knows that I will. But many people will not accept any complaint about their children and simply challenge you to phone the police or the council."

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Appendix C: Questionnaire

## Manchester Neighbourhoods Review 2004

You are keen to hear your views about life in this neighbourhood. Please take the time to answer the questions on this form. The questionnaire has been prepared on behalf of the Community Engagement Strategy Working Group for Manchester. Please return the form in the Freepost envelope provided – no stamp needed – just pop it in the post box. There is a contact number at the end of the form, in case you have any questions.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with these statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<b>In my neighbourhood I like to keep myself to myself.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I feel safe in this neighbourhood.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I borrow things and exchange favours with my neighbours.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I like neighbours to visit me in my home.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I feel like I belong in this neighbourhood.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If I have a crisis I could go to someone in my neighbourhood for help.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I think of myself as similar to other people in this neighbourhood.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>There is a strong sense of community in this area.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I like to socialise with the people in my street.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>When you're out in the neighbourhood, are you likely to see someone who you know very well?</b>		Very likely <input type="checkbox"/>	Quite likely <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Seldom <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>And are you likely to see someone who you don't know so well, but who you recognise and greet?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>And are you likely to see someone who you recognise but don't acknowledge?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Would you say that you get on with your neighbours?</b>		All or most of them <input type="checkbox"/>	Some of them <input type="checkbox"/>	None of them <input type="checkbox"/>	No contact with them <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Do you hold a spare key for any of your neighbours' homes?</b>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> →	How many of your neighbours? <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>And do any of your neighbours hold your key?</b>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> →	How many? <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Would you say that you trust...</b>	Most of the people in your neighbourhood? <input type="checkbox"/>	Many of the people in your neighbourhood? <input type="checkbox"/>	A few of the people in your neighbourhood? <input type="checkbox"/>	Or that you do not trust people in your neighbourhood? <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Does it matter if people get on in the neighbourhood?</b>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> →	Can you say why? <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Would you say this neighbourhood is a place where neighbours look out for each other?</b>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Would you like to see more neighbourliness in this community?</b>		No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> →	Can you suggest how? <input type="checkbox"/>	

Now, please give us some basic information about yourself. This will help us analyse responses by different groups of people.

1. **Your age group**

<input type="checkbox"/>					
<b>0-19</b>	<b>20-24</b>	<b>25-44</b>	<b>45-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>	<b>75+</b>

2. **Sex**

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. <b>Size of household (the number of people usually living there)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4. **In which of these ways do you occupy this accommodation?**

Own it outright	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buying it with the help of a mortgage or loan	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Pay part rent and part mortgage (shared ownership)
- Rent it -
- Local Authority/ Housing Association/ Registered Social Landlord
- Privately
- Live here rent-free (including rent-free in relative's/friend's property; excluding squatting)
- Squatting

**4. How many years have you lived in this neighbourhood (not necessarily this accommodation)?**

- Less than 1
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

**5. To which of these groups do you consider you belong?**

- White
- Mixed race
- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British
- Chinese
- None of these

**6. Are you employed?**

- |               |                          |                            |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| In employment |                          | Registered unemployed      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Full time     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Retired                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Part time     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Student                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Self employed |                          | Carer                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Full time     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Permanently sick/disabled  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Part time     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Temporarily sick / injured | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**7. Your occupation**

Please tick one box to show which **best** describes the sort of work you do.  
(If you are not working now, please tick a box to show what you did in your last job).

*Pease tick one box only*

*Modern professional occupations*

Such as: teacher - nurse - physiotherapist - social worker – welfare officer – artist - musician -  
police officer (sergeant or above) – software designer

*clerical and intermediate occupations*

*Examples:* secretary - personal assistant - clerical worker - office clerk –  
call centre agent - nursing auxiliary - nursery nurse

*Senior managers or administrators*

(usually responsible for planning, organising and co-ordinating work, and for finance)  
*Examples:* finance manager - chief executive

*Technical and craft occupations*

*Examples:* motor mechanic - fitter - inspector - plumber - printer - tool maker - electrician -  
barber - train driver

*Semi-routine manual and service occupations*

*Examples:* postal worker - machine operative - security guard - caretaker - farm worker - catering  
assistant - receptionist - sales assistant

*Routine manual and service occupations*

*Examples:* HGV driver - van driver - cleaner - porter - packer – sewing machinist - messenger - labourer -  
waiter / waitress - bar staff

*Middle or junior managers*

*Examples:* office manager - retail manager - bank manager – restaurant manager - warehouse manager –  
publican

*Traditional professional occupations*

*Examples:* accountant - solicitor - medical practitioner - scientist - civil / mechanical engineer

**Thank you for your time and effort in completing this questionnaire.**

**If you have any queries or comments, please contact:**

**Kevin Harris, Community Development Foundation**

020 7226 5375