People keep talking about 'neighbourliness'. Why is it suddenly being talked about in regeneration policy, and what's the practical relevance to neighbourhood management?

Kevin Harris

I suspect there are two main reasons. The first has to do with government looking increasingly at behaviour and ways to influence it. Secondly, there's a widespread perception that there is some kind of crisis of disrespect, incivility and anti-social behaviour. Whether or not there is a crisis, there's a profound connection between these behaviours and the function of the neighbourhood as an arena for social interaction. I don't think we can be certain that neighbourliness has diminished, because we don't measure it. But it's what you would expect and what many people believe. We are more mobile than ever, most of us spend less time in our neighbourhoods, and we are more likely to invest in personal social networks than locally defined communities. Much of the time, the people who are left in the 'residual' neighbourhood are older people and young people, each bewildered by or disinterested in the other. Those connections that continue to be maintained between neighbours tend to be more individualised than in the past, rather than families or groups having densely overlapping ties.

Neighbourliness usually comprises helpfulness, friendliness and respect for privacy. If you're not living in poverty or experiencing some other forms of exclusion, it's likely that you don't particularly *need* helpful people around you; you get your friends through communities of interest; and you can buy and defend your privacy in various ways (which is how a lot of people use their cars, for instance). To an extent, neighbourliness then begins to become discretionary. Lots of questions arise. For example, where neighbouring is not practised, what have we lost? And does it not remain important for those left behind?

I can think of various reasons why neighbourliness is of practical significance in neighbourhood management. It helps to establish a sense of safety and security. It offers the basis for reciprocal exchanges of instrumental aid, support, and information, thereby giving services a necessary context in which residents have a degree of interdependency, and reaching the parts that services often cannot reach.

Neighbouring helps to establish and confirm norms of acceptable behaviour: negotiating those norms with the people with whom you share space is more realistic than getting them by decree from authorities. Furthermore, a basic level of connection between neighbours provides a

basis for community action: residents can more readily mobilise for their own defence and development. There's also evidence to suggest that where people feel more confidence in their local agencies – especially the visible things like beat-policing, street cleaning, and repairs – they are more likely to act in a neighbourly way with more people, and to intervene and act in the interests of their neighbourhood.

Kevin Harris, <u>Local Level</u>, March 2007