Understanding and engaging deprived communities

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Online Report 07/04

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the help and support provided by the four On Track project co-ordinators and their teams.

Thanks also to all the participants, adults, children and professionals for their time and the insights that they contributed.

The work would not have been possible without them.

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Executive summary

This research was funded by the Home Office as a small complementary study to the National Evaluation of On Track. On Track is a pilot project for the comprehensive provision of early and multiple interventions for children and families in areas of high deprivation and crime. Twenty-four pilot projects in England and Wales are delivering services with the aim of reducing the risks of children becoming involved in antisocial and criminal behaviour.

- This study was designed to enhance understanding of deprived, high crime communities by exploring perceptions of the local area of different groups living and working in the community: children, parents, residents, local politicians and leaders, professionals and service providers. Four of the 24 On Track areas were selected as case study examples of a range of urban and rural contexts.

- Feedback from adults and children shows that the localities selected for On Track are not single homogenous units. They house a number of sub-communities within them, based on factors such as geography, income, gender and ethnicity.

- Each of the four areas was perceived by participants to have a bad reputation. This was exacerbated by the local media but sometimes reinforced by professional networks.

- Residents and children were generally positive about their areas but, from around the age of eight, children were critical of their environment. The single most important improvement demanded in all locations was the clean up of the local area. Also of importance to children were more places to play and the desire that these places should be safe.

- The detailed layout of the housing had a significant impact on how people felt about their area and how they used it, whether it felt safe or whether it created "hot-spots" for crime. Schools, shops and community provision were all important for providing settings for community interaction.

- Young children and adults saw teenagers as the source of many of the problems of nuisance and anti-social behaviour. "Teenagers" was often used as a generic term to include those who were both younger and older. There was a consistent desire to see more things for these young people to do.

- Complaints about antisocial behaviour and crime featured strongly. There was a demand for more visible policing. People want things to be better and they want their children to have the best chances possible.

- Two of the areas had considerable population movement and a lack of stability, which made the provision of services and the interaction of neighbours particularly difficult. Residents wanted easily accessible, neutral meeting places and opportunities for self-empowerment through better access to advice and, where relevant, English language skills.

- People are more likely to participate in their local community when they sense that they are being listened to and things are improving.

1. Introduction

Under the Crime Reduction Programme, the Home Office has funded 24 areas across England and Wales to develop locally based early intervention programmes. These aim to provide multiple services and interventions targeted at children most at risk of becoming future offenders. The areas were drawn from each of the Government Regions and all display high levels of deprivation and high levels of crime. The University of Sheffield was commissioned to undertake a national evaluation of the whole programme and has worked with four Local Evaluation Teams and a programme wide Evaluation and Support Team (Home Office, 2002).

Complementary to this evaluation, a separate piece of research was commissioned by the Home Office to further understanding of the communities in which On Track was taking place, by examining four of the areas in more detail, using qualitative techniques. The research objectives itemised in the proposal were to:

- describe political and professional perceptions of the On Track area, its strengths and its challenges;
- describe residents' perceptions of the On Track area – community leaders, parents and children;
- describe children's perceptions of locality and community, and the distinctness of an On Track identity;
- describe children's perceptions of risk in their neighbourhood, the extent to which this changes with age, and how it varies by factors such as gender and ethnicity;
- describe external perceptions and media images of the On Track area; and
- compare the perceptions of different groups, and explore the implications of differences for the On Track programme.

A qualitative case study approach based on four On Track areas uses differing perspectives of adults and children living in the areas, together with the views of professionals, to develop understanding of these particular communities and to identify common themes which could be relevant to all 24 On Track areas. The work will lead to greater understanding of the contexts within which On Track is operating. The findings on "community" and the implications for community participation will also be explored and the varying perceptions of risk identified, with their implications for programme development.

There are six further chapters to the report:

2 Literature review
3 Research methodology
4 The On Track neighbourhoods
5 Communities within community
6 Crime, deprivation and community
7 Findings

Chapter 2 examines the literature on notions of community, both as a spatial entity and a social concept, particularly as applied to deprived areas. It also reviews the literature on communities and crime.

Chapter 3 sets out the research methodology, taking into account the literature on work with children. It includes reflections on the methodology and considers the particular issues arising from the highly constrained timetable for the work.

Chapter 4 considers the selection of these four neighbourhoods in terms of their external reputation and formal definition. It reviews their physical infrastructure seen as a base for providing opportunities for social interaction.

Chapter 5 explores the perceptions of children and the different communities found within the neighbourhoods. Issues of neighbourliness and collective action are also explored.

Chapter 6 focuses on crime and safety issues, the impact on children and the way in which they influence perceptions of risk.

Chapter 7 sets out the changes residents wish to see in their areas. The implications of the findings for the On Track programme and for community involvement are also explored.

2. Literature review

The concept (community) 'has been interpreted loosely, with a result that the term has a high level of use, but a low level of meaning' (Walmsley, 2000: p5).

Overview

There is a considerable literature on community from a range of academic disciplines - sociology, geography, town planning, criminology, political science and others. This indicates that "perception of community" needs to be broken down into a number of different themes, bearing in mind also that some writers see community as an outdated concept, as modern western society increasingly emphasises individual freedom and private, rather than public, worlds. Most writers, however, conclude that neighbourhood matters, and matters most to those with least resources. Spatial concentration of poor people is an important aspect of social exclusion.

Communities tend to be analysed from either a primarily spatial/physical or a primarily social/political context, the emphasis on place and space or on social relations varying according to the discipline of the writer. Whatever the starting point, it is clear that communities can exist without being in the same place (communities of interest) and equally that a single "place" housing a single "community" is probably quite rare. Much of the current interest in community is political, again from both spatial and social perspectives. There is an increased emphasis on area-based initiatives, of which On Track is one example, and there is a growing emphasis on community as a base for increasing democratic involvement.

Engagement of the community has been seen as a key to the sustainability of the work of On Track. However, Government policy on "community engagement" has been described as a dual discourse, in that there appears to be confusion as to whether this is a matter of involving participants on an individual basis or a matter of involving the community as a collective that takes ownership of the programme. This is true for all such community-based programmes. On Track areas are likely to have different starting points in terms of community engagement, different issues in terms of engaging individuals and different views on the role of community development within an On Track programme.

There are links with the concept of social capital - the idea that participation in social networks creates a form of social capital, which ultimately can be harnessed for the good of the community. There is debate over the nature of social capital in deprived areas, whether the lower levels of trust (engendered, typically, by deprivation, along with divorce and unemployment) reduce participation in social networks or whether there are strong social networks but that they are necessarily preoccupied with survival and coping. Close communities are not necessarily desirable. They can also be closed communities, seeking to exclude, and there may be cohesion around norms and values which others would deem antisocial.

Because On Track was set up as a crime reduction programme, the links between community, crime and fear of crime also need to be explored. Deprivation is a known risk factor, for a range of problems. It is linked with the concept of disorganised communities, which may relate to physical disorganisation (graffiti, empty houses etc.) and/or social disorganisation (fights, vandalism and crime). There is likely to be a stigma attached to living in the area. However, the community may well offer protection to children. This may be reflected in adults who take an interest in their progress and in opportunities for children to get involved in a range of activities that helps build self-esteem.

Deprived neighbourhoods

Estate regeneration/housing research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation explored eight disadvantaged neighbourhoods (none of which was within an On Track local authority area), to gain a greater understanding of what works in regeneration (Forrest and Kearns, 1999). These neighbourhoods are similar to those in the On Track programme in being externally labelled as deprived. The researchers focused on a number of interrelated components, which are also integrated into this research:

- The social glue – are these cohesive or disorganised communities?

- The civic infrastructure – what are the formal organisations and networks?
- The physical infrastructure – what are the characteristics of the housing, the amenities and the focal points?
- The external links – to what extent is the neighbourhood socially and spatially isolated?
- The attitudes and expectations of residents – what are their views, taking into account age, gender and ethnicity?

This research emphasises the importance of neighbourhood. As the authors point out *"It certainly matters to those with the resources to choose where to live in the city"*. Their views correspond to those of Massey (1994) in seeing the particularity of linkage between an area and the "outside" as a key part of the definition of place. Local environments are not sealed but linked to wider networks and there is concern that deprived neighbourhoods lack these links. This may make communities more defensive and preoccupied with short-term coping and survival strategies. Self-help and mutual aid may be prominent features of such neighbourhoods but this may reinforce the social exclusion. For those with least resources and particularly for children and the elderly, neighbourhood conditions are likely to have the greatest effects.

A key finding was the consistency over responses on what makes a good neighbourhood. Good neighbourhoods have good neighbours. It is about people rather than place. Residents may condemn the unattractive physical environment but it is less important. However, access to jobs, good transport and basic amenities are considered vital.

Community and place

The links between community and place form the background to the current focus on area based initiatives. The Government sees its national strategy for neighbourhood renewal as being crucial in securing cohesion, with the Social Exclusion Unit emphasising the importance of the community itself in turning the neighbourhood around. However, there is a difficulty in selecting the appropriate geographical scale. Meegan and Mitchell's review of the history of area-based policies (2001) discusses the different definitions of neighbourhood and community and the problem that the size of areas chosen for service delivery tend to be much greater than the neighbourhoods within which people engage in informal interaction.

This issue is typically described as place-space tension (see for example, Raco and Flint's 2001 summary of the literature). Place is the geographical location, while space (in this context) is the unit of state organisation for the delivery of services. This is particularly relevant to On Track – does the area chosen for the delivery of the programme have any resonance with the local population? And does this matter? The work of Raco and Flint emphasises the importance of historically grounded local circumstances in and through which places and communities are formed. There may or may not be a congruence of spaces of governance with structures of feeling and, further, the proliferation of such initiatives can create confusion and duplication (DETR, 2000).

One examination of Labour's area-based policies has been carried out in relation to Health Action Zones (Powell and Moon, 2001). The philosophy is that only through community commitment and real involvement can initiatives and policies become self-sustaining over the long-term. Communities are to be engaged by involving the public in planning services, and empowering service users and patients to take responsibility for their own health and health care. Strategies are based at individual and community level, in the belief that strong social networks benefit health.

Empowerment is also a key concept but there can be conflict over who is to be empowered and how they are to be empowered. Community development has long been part of the Left's rhetoric, while on the other hand the Conservatives sought to empower individual consumers through, for example, citizen charters, satisfaction surveys and citizens' juries. One can contrast empowering communities (as collective citizens using political mechanisms) with empowering individual citizens (as consumers using quasi-market mechanisms) but as the authors point out *"New Labour appears not to recognise its dual discourse"* (Powell and Moon, 2001: p47).

The relationship between community and place is also relevant at the micro-level. "New urbanism" is a movement in planning designed to enhance localism in urban life. It puts the emphasis on the "place-based" community and on designs which facilitate personal contact. For example, Talen (2000) has attempted to measure those aspects of public space within residential neighbourhoods which, in principle, provide opportunity for contact, proximity to others and appropriate space to interact. Given

a particular physical framework, one can expect the social environment to facilitate (or constrain) access to public space. The final component is the actual event of social interaction.

Communities within community

Etzioni's (1995) plea for the restoration of civic virtues sees communities as social webs of people who know one another as persons and have a moral voice. The communitarian agenda assumes shared moral norms and a single public interest, which is shared by the community at large. Bauman (2000) sees the community of the communitarian dream as focused on a notion of sameness. Strangers are a threat; difference is potentially criminal. His hope is that communities can be woven together through sharing and mutual care with the rights of individuals and the rights of communities balanced. His book *Community* has the subtitle "seeking safety in an insecure world", reminding us of the significance of community in the context of a crime reduction programme.

As Paddison's review (2001) of the different meanings of community points out, the very term community assumes a degree of internal coherence which is rarely the case, and is in all likelihood unattainable. Communities contain within them competing demands and the potential for conflict as well as harmony.

Massey (1994) points out that even apparently homogeneous communities have internal structures, quoting a woman's sense of place in a mining village as compared with a man's. The two groups experience the place quite differently. She is one of a number of current writers concerned about the potential divisiveness of communities, the danger in emphasising area boundaries and encouraging a defensive reactionary view of place and thus community.

Given the focus of On Track on 4-12 year olds, it is essential to consider the particular perspectives of children. Within the new social studies of childhood (James et al, 1998), children are viewed as actors in their own right and not simply as potential adults. The way in which children use and interpret space is an important element of this work. For example, Matthews et al (2000) considered the importance of the "street" in the lives of a group of white working class young people between nine and 16. Girls as well as boys enjoyed "hanging out", although there was a difference in that girls were more likely to be chatting with friends and boys were more likely to use the "street" as a venue for informal sports. These spaces offered security to the group and freedom from adult conventions. Other work under the Economic and Social Research Council programme: *Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st century* (ESRC, 2000a) suggests than girls may be more restricted than boys and that the restrictions are strongest for older Asian girls.

There is also an important environmental psychology literature on children and space, reviewed by Spencer and Woolley (2000). It considers what it is that places offer the child, as they experience a series of behaviour settings. Favourite places may relate to social contact, particularly where adolescents are enabled to "hangout" but, equally, places may be valued because they enable one to be away from other people. It seems that gaining control over space is important in contributing to self-identity and this may indicate that frequent relocation may impact on a child's well being. It may also be limited by the tendency of some parents to severely restrict their children's wanderings, with boys usually being given greater freedom to explore. Anxieties about traffic and an awareness of potential danger spots for street crime are part of the child's understanding of the city. Children are also keenly aware of the lack of care for place and people which is revealed in dirt, litter and graffiti (Woolley et al, 1999a). They have strong views on the possibilities for improving cities and public spaces but do not expect anyone to listen (Woolley et al, 1999b).

Support to young people in the form of caring adults in the community is considered an important factor increasing resiliency, with the assertion that supportive relationships foster resiliency. This is based on the finding that most survivors of childhood adversity identify at least one caring adult from their past (Wolkow and Ferguson, 2001), though it has to be borne in mind that there may not be accurate recall and that people reinterpret events in the light of their present circumstances. It is also difficult to interpret exactly what are the essential behaviours and underlying processes associated with supportive interactions between children and non-parental adults. In spite of the problems, they consider social support to be the protective factor most amenable to intervention.

Overall one must be wary of romanticising notions of "community", for example, associating it with a stable past or with a rosy view of village life. Even as far as rural life is concerned, current research would deny this view (Mullins et al, 2001). Although rural areas do not experience the crime levels of

the towns and cities, they experienced a sharper rise in crime than elsewhere in the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s. Crime and anti-social behaviour has therefore become more prominent in the rural agenda (Aust and Simmons, 2002).

Some writers see "community" as a concept of the past, now outdated. Webber (1963) observed that individuals had their greatest involvement with like-minded individuals, their sense of community arising from shared interests and values, rather than with those among whom they lived. He expected this trend, which was being observed among middle and upper class American society, to come to characterise society as a whole. However, Walmsley (2000) has criticised this idea, as it seems that in many places communities are still based on propinquity. He notes that where urban redevelopment has destroyed links to local communities there have been problems. He also looks forward and reviews the potential impact of cyber communities. His conclusion is cautious, suggesting that cyber-communities may produce less significant changes to contemporary social life than is sometimes suggested. Indeed, place and the distinctions between different places may become even more significant.

Social capital in Britain

The social capital literature (see Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 1995; and, for the UK, Hall, 1999) focuses on face-to-face relations of relative equality and sees these social networks, and the mutual trust and capacity for collective action which they are seen to engender, as the basis for enhanced democracy, the prevention of crime and higher rates of economic growth. The conventional definition has been based on membership of voluntary associations, involving face-to-face interaction and some degree of common endeavour. Hall finds that, in the UK, contrary to the American experience, overall levels of association membership were at least as high in 1990 as they were in 1959, even when controlling for higher levels of education. There appears to be a strong life-cycle effect, with people's civic involvement peaking in their 40's and 50's but no clear indication that the post war British generations are becoming less involved. Hall suggests three reasons why the British case may be different – the reforms of the educational system between the 1950s and 1990s, dramatic changes in the British class structure and a government policy, that has actively supported the voluntary sector.

He also pinpoints a decline in the trust which people express in others. This seems to have occurred among all groups between 1959 and 1990 and to have reached especially low levels among the young. Lower levels of trust are also associated with divorce, movement to a larger city or unemployment. The two groups increasingly left out of society are the working class and the young, and Hall is particularly concerned about the working class. Movement to another locality (increased by economic restructuring) erodes social capital and reduces levels of social trust. Decline in trade union membership and workingmen's clubs is another trend, which is limiting the association life of the working class. The forms of civic engagement available to the least privileged appear to be more fragile. Nevertheless, as the Rowntree study found (Forrest and Kearns, 1999), residents are not in the main passive or dependent, in spite of the levels of disadvantage. Although some people are fully occupied in getting by under circumstances of extreme hardship, many residents are engaged in a variety of activities.

Perhaps relevant to our deprived areas is Goldthorpe's work (1987) on the different organisational affiliations of the middle and working class. Social clubs and trade unions dominate the affiliations of the working class. While the middle classes join a variety of associations at frequent intervals, those in the working class join fewer associations but stay in them for long periods of time. Patterns of informal sociability of the working class are more likely than those of the middle class to revolve around close contacts with kin and with a small set of friends all of whom are relatively closely connected with each other. Procter's research (1990) in a working class area in Coventry identifies a high level of communal sociability but it is probably significant that his survey covered a stable community, where people lived amongst those they had played with as children, gone to school with and worked with.

Lowndes (2000) has criticised Hall for the limited analysis his article makes of gender dynamics. Although similar proportions of men and women are involved in voluntary work, men tend to be involved in sports and recreation while women tend to be involved in health, education and social services. Men were more likely to occupy committee posts while women dominate in befriending and visiting activities. Women also spend much more time on informal sociability – visiting friends. She suggests that men and women may be involved in different gender-specific "circuits" of social capital which may "capitalise" political engagement in different ways. Hall used measurements that

considered pub attendance but neglected the social networks around childcare. These – the school run, childcare swaps, baby-sitting – are characterised by mutuality and reciprocity and clearly fit the definition of social capital forming activities. Such activities seem to be omitted because the traditional activities of women are conceived as outside the world of citizenship – as part of the private sphere rather than part of the public sphere. The effective co-ordination of home, work and family life frequently relies on supportive local networks. Lowndes also cites the body of literature showing how women have been politicised through engagement in community activity – housing, health, child-care, crime prevention and neighbourhood regeneration. The causal links in the virtuous circle of social capital are illustrated as women move from self-help to campaigning to political activity.

Recent work is exploring more fully the concept of social capital as it impacts on children. In the USA, a study of Chicago neighbourhoods has examined the relationships between the generations, the level of reciprocated exchange (of advice, material goods and information about child rearing) and the level of informal social control and mutual support of children (Sampson et al, 1999). It highlighted the importance of stable neighbourhoods and showed that the expectation for the informal control of children was considerably lower in areas of disadvantage.

Morrow's work in the UK takes a child-centred approach, both from the theoretical (1999) and empirical (2001) perspective. For children, personal networks are the critical element of social capital as they are generally excluded from civic participation. Choice and freedom are constrained by everyday contexts which will vary from school/institution, family and peer group; a range of community, environmental and socio-economic factors are all likely to play some part. Her empirical work was with 12-15 year olds and their experience of neighbourhood. They were reflective and resourceful commentators on their environments but had no formal channels through which they could communicate their views. Social capital was useful in exploring social processes and practices around young people's experiences of their environment but she found conceptual, methodological and theoretical limitations.

Community development

Thomas (1991), formerly the Chief Executive of the Community Development Foundation, stresses the central role of social resources and processes in the production of "viable" or "coping communities". Such communities will be designed in a way that brings residents together, have facilities that promote social contact, have daily routines that promote interaction, have "live" social and recreational networks, have a variety of organisations and allow residents to take on public roles. He sets out "A ladder of community interaction" which distinguishes between routine, taken for granted aspects of daily life and more formal elements of community organisation.

11	Owning and managing local facilities
10	Working with policy makers
9	Co-operation with other community groups
8	Joining community groups
7	Participating in community activities
6	Informal mutual aid
5	Involvement in informal networks
4	Social contacts; such as at the pub, church or community centre
3	Routine contacts; such as picking the children up from school every day
2	Casual contacts; for example whilst shopping or waiting for a bus
1	Mutual recognition

He points out that the privileged have a range of choices about where they obtain support, such as family, wider networks or in the commercial sector. The underprivileged have to face difficulties with little access to solutions to problems outside their neighbourhood or through commercial services. This is described fully in Meegan and Mitchell (2001) as background to their discussion of the Pathways Objective One programme in Merseyside which aimed to hand back control of money which was for the deprived communities to the communities themselves. They conclude that the operational definition of policy areas should be part of an evolutionary process of community engagement. This is in clear contrast to the approach with On Track.

Participation is influenced by political culture and local political institutions. Docherty et al (2001) found that the two most deprived areas among the four Scottish locations they studied had a sense of community and belonging, with strong ties to family and friends in the area, but had less trust of

politicians or of local community groups. The level of trust depended on the institutions and on past attempts to gain participation. Community-based housing associations are generally regarded as successful – typically covering 200-500 housing units rather than the scale of city council housing offices (around 3000 units). Differences in civic culture between neighbourhoods are not fully explained by the nature of the population, educational levels etc. Efforts to create opportunity structures to encourage participation are helpful. A key factor was whether people felt things were getting better. Broadly, people then feel that it is worth participating because it appears to be having an effect.

The Government wants to create more participative mechanisms of community consultation and involvement, so that citizens have a more active role in local politics. Lowndes et al (1998) show that local agencies increasingly select a range of different participation methods to meet different objectives, reach different citizen groups and address different issues. Deliberative approaches (citizens' juries, "visioning" exercises and focus groups) are operated alongside traditional public meetings and the consumerist techniques that gained ground in the early 1990s such as satisfaction surveys and complaints procedures. The latter probably contribute little to social capital, as people participate as interested private consumers, rather than with any sense of public interest. Participation is not the same as social capital and is not necessarily associated with widespread norms of trust and with a community capacity for co-operation. It may indeed be divisive.

Government has a role in community development because they shape the conditions in which voluntary associations and social networks more generally thrive. As well as influencing the creation of social capital, they affect the extent to which it is mobilised. Opportunities depend on "*constitutional and legal frameworks, the structures and conventions of government and the traditions and conventions of political life*" (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001). However, there could be a reaction to lack of opportunities, with a mobilisation of excluded groups. Normally however, the relevant factors are relationships with the voluntary sector, opportunities for public participation, the responsiveness of decision making and arrangements for democratic leadership and social inclusion. Contractual and formal partnership relations with voluntary bodies can undermine the capacity of voluntary bodies to generate and mobilise social capital, as they are obliged to become bigger and more bureaucratic.

Purdue (2001) has expanded the role of community leaders in neighbourhood renewal partnerships in nine case studies. Community leaders tend to be identified by their leadership position or by their reputation and may operate as social entrepreneurs, combining entrepreneurial skills with a vision for the neighbourhood. Ethnic community leaders were more comfortable with the term, as they saw themselves in a political role, confronting racial exclusion. White women stressed their confidence in the face of authority. The fragmentation of community networks and a low level of trust in government initiatives made it hard to gain the trust of a wide range of residents. However, if there is trust between the community and its leaders, these leaders can contribute to the effectiveness of neighbourhood regeneration projects.

Community, risk and crime

One of the factors assumed in the setting up of the On Track programme is the link between deprived communities and crime and there is a considerable criminological literature exploring the link between particular environments and high levels of crime (Bottoms and Wiles, 1997). The fact that the concept of community safety appears to have been used successfully to promote On Track certainly suggests that crime is a key issue for the selected communities. Sherman (1993) presents a useful framework for classifying community risk factors covering community composition, social structure, oppositional culture, criminogenic commodities, and social and physical disorder and provides a detailed review of mainly American literature on the different elements of this framework. Each of these apparent risk factors has at different times become the focus of comprehensive community crime prevention programmes. UK work is incorporated into the following elaboration of the framework.

In terms of *community composition*, unmarried or divorced adult males, teenage males, non-working adults, poor people, persons with criminal histories and single parents have all been identified in the literature as groups whose presence is associated with higher rates of violent crime. Carmichael and Ward (2001) have recently confirmed the link between male unemployment and crime in England and Wales. Community composition is accentuated by both public housing policy and the operation of private housing markets as they serve to concentrate these groups (Bottoms et al, 1992). What is unclear in the literature is whether having more such people simply produces a higher total of individual level risk factors, or whether there is a "tipping" effect associated with the concentrations of

these groups (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1993), which causes the behaviour of entire communities to change (Kanter, 1977).

Social structure refers to the way in which people in the community interact. It has been a fruitful line of criminological inquiry since the original work of Shaw and McKay (1942, revised 1969) which argued that low socio-economic status, ethnic heterogeneity and residential mobility led to disruption of community social organisation, which in turn accounted for variations in crime and delinquency.

Sampson and Groves' (1989) analysis of the 1982 British Crime Survey data explored these ideas in the UK context. They developed and tested the theory that the intervening constructs were sparse local friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups and low organisational participation. The factors producing the greatest explanation of different crime levels were residential instability, low socio-economic status and high levels of family disruption. The greater difficulty of single parent families in supervising young males is multiplied by the association of young males with other unsupervised young males, since delinquency is well-known to be a group phenomenon (Reiss, 1988). The empirical evidence for this risk factor is particularly strong, with violent victimisation rates up to three times higher among neighbourhoods of high family disruption compared with low levels, regardless of other characteristics such as poverty (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1993).

Observers of high crime neighbourhoods have long identified the pattern of *oppositional culture* arising from a lack of participation in mainstream economic and social life: bad becomes good and good becomes bad. Given the apparent rejection of community members by the larger society, the community members reject the values and aspirations of that society by developing an "oppositional identity" (Massey and Denton, 1993). This is especially notable in terms of values that oppose the protective factors of marriage and family, education, work and obedience to the law. Foster and Hope (1993) referred to the "subterranean culture" which developed on one of the estates studied in their review of the Priority Estates project. While the project had real potential for reducing crime, on the estate in Hull, parallel processes occurred more or less independently, that widened and deepened this culture. In particular, public housing policy, in allocating a substantial number of young people to the tower blocks on the estate, created a "demographic/lifestyle" bridge between local adolescent gangs and the networks of older criminals. As the authors point out, a cohesive network of offending, once established, can persist for many years. However, the use of such terms as "oppositional" and "subterranean" begs the question of who defines the cultural norms.

Communities with very high rates of youth violence are places in which there are high concentrations of *criminogenic commodities* i.e. ready availability of alcohol, drugs and weapons. While Roncek and Maier (1991) were able to show a link between the number of liquor establishments and the level of crime in neighbourhood blocks, they were cautious over interpreting the effects as due to alcohol. It was more productively viewed in the context of the routine activities of individuals and associated "hot spots". Under age smoking and drinking, together with substance abuse have been highlighted as risk factors by Loeber and Farrington (1998) in their study of violent youths.

The impact of *social and physical disorder* and the relationship between the two has been described as the "broken windows" hypothesis (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). More recent work suggests some support for the theory (Skogan, 1990; Kelling and Coles, 1996.) The theory claims that in communities where both people and buildings appear disorderly, the visual message that the community is out of control may attract more serious crime. Signs of disorder, such as broken windows, housing abandonment, litter and graffiti, undermine social control, as residents shrink back into their own dwellings and take less interest in the public space. Dilapidation in turn encourages vandalism and acts as an unintended invitation to those engaged in drugs and prostitution to trade in the area. Subsequent writers, as summarised by Bottoms and Wiles (1997), emphasise the role of those macro-level forces which impact on housing markets as an element in changing the character and crime potential of different areas. However, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) cast doubt on the direct link between social and physical disorder and crime, although they acknowledge an indirect link, such that eradicating disorder may reduce crime by stabilising the neighbourhood. They identify "collective efficacy" as the underlying factor, defining this with reference to cohesion among residents, combined with shared expectation for the social control of public space. This emphasises the social capital findings outlined earlier.

There is a substantial literature on fear of crime and the potential for "designing out" crime. Koskela and Pain (2000) have pointed out the fallacy of attempting to design out fear by altering the built environment. Reactions to the threat of crime in particular environments depend on social and political relations which structure both the physical spaces and the daily lives of the individuals. They consider the social causes of fear to be more important than the built environment. Women questioned in both

Helsinki and Edinburgh highlighted both quiet areas and noisy areas as problematic, mentioned poor lighting in some cases and bright lighting in others, and were concerned about lack of surveillance in affluent suburbs versus narrow alleys in the city. Few types of built environment were not mentioned by at least some women and the authors conclude that gendered power relations are the key to women's fear.

Skogan (1986) suggests that fear of crime may cause individuals to withdraw physically and psychologically from community life. This weakens the informal processes of social control that inhibit crime and disorder and produces a decline in the organisational life and the mobilisation capacity of a neighbourhood. Borooah and Carcach (1997) have examined the links between crime and fear in Queensland, Australia. Unfavourable perceptions about one's area of residence – whether relating to incivility, cohesion or (relative) crime levels – did serve to increase fear of personal crime. However, fear of housing crime reflected a more accurate assessment of the incidence of crime. They also found that lack of neighbourhood cohesion, neighbourhood incivility and perception of relatively high neighbourhood crime levels contributed significantly to the probability of being afraid of crime and to the risk of victimisation. This led the authors to favour community action both as a way of combating crime and as a way of countering fear of crime.

3. Research methodology

Selection of the research locations

Four On Track areas were chosen, varying according to their heterogeneity and residential mobility as these have been identified in the literature as key community level risk factors. Evidence of existing community capacity was the third variable used, as this is a potential protective factor. It was also thought desirable to consider a range of geographies – rural and metropolitan, north and south, very deprived and less deprived. Existing data collected for the National Evaluation of On Track enabled appropriate candidates to be selected:

- the 1991 Census, backed up by the responses to the On Track school surveys[1] on the main language spoken at home
- the school survey data on numbers of primary aged children who had attended three or more schools[2]
- the community profiling data on the number of locally based community groups operating in each On Track area
- Delivery Plan evidence on community involvement and early knowledge acquired informally by the National Evaluation Team (NET) of interventions geared at community development.

Funding constraints required that the project be completed within a very short time-scale of three months and the willingness and ability of projects to participate within the period allocated was inevitably a key determining factor. The areas selected were:

- *Parkland:* an edge of town estate developed in the 1970s, with an ethnic minority population of approximately 10 percent. The area displays considerable transience, with 24 percent of pupils in the primary school survey saying they had changed schools three or more times, markedly higher than in any other area.
- *Hightown:* a small town in a rural setting, subject to rapid expansion during and after the 1960s. The On Track area also includes three rural parishes. Community development was a key part of the Project Delivery Plan. Ethnically, the area is almost wholly white.
- *Redstone:* a diverse and very deprived area near to recent race riots, with a high proportion of residents of south Asian, mainly Pakistani, descent. A language other than English was the most usual language spoken at home for 46 percent of the pupils in the primary survey and 77percent in the secondary survey.
- *Meredith:* an inner London Borough, also very diverse but with a different ethnic mix to Redstone and known to have operated a universal intervention for children around the theme of "Building a Safer Community".

This has provided us with two distinct types of areas - two areas whose current condition is strongly influenced by the planned growth of recent decades and two older metropolitan areas which are very deprived and very diverse.

The research questions

The literature review suggested a range of ways in which the On Track "communities" can be explored in this project. They are grouped here into five main topic areas, indicating the specific questions to be addressed in the fieldwork:

The On Track area as a geographical neighbourhood

What does the area offer in terms of public space and public amenities, focal points, opportunities for contact, shops etc? Opportunities for play, leisure? Is it well maintained / cared for? Are there signs of disorganisation (empty houses, graffiti, and litter)? Is it physically isolated? Is it changing? Is the area stigmatised? What do outsiders think of it? When did it last hit the headlines?

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[1] Armstrong, et al (Forthcoming)
[2] Ibid.

The On Track area from the policy perspective

Is the area clearly defined and understood in the same way by everyone? Is it normally treated as a distinctive area for policy purposes? Do the schools serve this area and this area alone? Conversely do many children go out of the area for secondary education? What are the job opportunities? The public transport situation? What do people know about On Track? What other initiatives are people aware of?

Social relations

Beyond the On Track area
To what extent do people's communities of interest lie outside the On Track area? Where do people work? Shop? Go for leisure? Go for treats for the children?

Within the On Track area
Is this one community or many? Are certain groups excluded? Is it stable or do people move? Who are the newcomers? Do people know each other? Help each other out?

The On Track area and the potential for community engagement

Do people work together over particular issues? What are the formal organisations and voluntary associations? Are there community leaders? Are there informal networks to control children? To organise childcare? Who gets things done? Can residents do anything about their area? What would they like to change? Are things getting better or getting worse?

The On Track community and crime

What is bad about the area? Fights, conflicts, crime, policing, and fear of crime? Are some forms of crime acceptable? Is it safe for children? Can the kids play out? Is it safe to go out at night? What is the overall social structure and culture? Is there easy access to drugs, alcohol and weapons? Are there signs of physical disorder?

In presenting the results, topics 1, 2 and 3a are covered in Chapter 4, topics 3b and 4 form Chapter 5 and topic 5 is reported in Chapter 6.

The research participants

The essence of this research is the exploration of a range of perceptions. Project co-ordinators were approached for their advice on key professionals and on appropriate local settings where focus groups and individual interviews with children and adults could take place.

Overall it proved possible to gather a wide range of views in each locality:

- In Parkland:
    - three County Council professionals (also members of the On Track Steering Group), a police inspector, a local councillor who lives in the On Track area, a head teacher, the project co-ordinator
    - a mother who lived in the On Track area until recently and two mothers participating in On Track and the children of one of them
    - fourteen children individually, age six to nine and two children of one of the mothers, a small activity group of four five-year olds and four focus groups of boys and girls separately aged 8/9 and 11/12, 24 children in all. Except for two of the five-year olds all those interviewed were white.

- In Hightown:
    - a member of the Steering Group, employed by the district council, a learning support assistant, two head teachers, a local councillor who had lived in the area many years, the project co-ordinator, a beat constable

- three focus groups of mothers participating in On Track, 15 in all, and two couples living in the On Track area, including one of the villages
- a focus group of six six-year olds, four groups of 9/11 year olds, 16 in all, and four groups of 10/12 year olds, twelve in all.

- In Redstone:
  - two workers from the On Track office, two non-teaching classroom assistants, the project co-ordinator, a youth and community centre manager, an educational psychologist and a councillor (from a different ward), a mixture of Asian and white participants
  - three parents participating in the On Track programme, one with mixed race children, one traveller and one Pakistani
  - seven 6/7 year olds in three groups, a focus group of seven nine year olds and one of nine 14 year olds, a mixture of Asian and white participants.

- In Meredith:
  - an On Track worker, a local councillor living in the area, the project co-ordinator, a head teacher, a primary care manager, also on the On Track Steering Committee, and a local church representative, including a mixture of ethnicities
  - six parents whose children were attending an On Track holiday play scheme (seen as a group of three and three individually), five of whom were African Caribbean and one white
  - a group of 9/10 year olds, a group of 8/9 year olds and a group of 11/12 year olds, some 50 children in all, mainly African Caribbean.

Overall, the work took place in the following settings, requiring an adaptable approach as the techniques were adjusted to the circumstances (see also the section below on qualitative techniques):

- at council meeting rooms, professional's own offices, On Track offices
- in people's homes (for people already known to the researcher or to the On Track team)
- at On Track interventions e.g. parent's groups, children's groups, breakfast clubs
- in schools, using individual interviews, focus groups and Circle Time[3]
- at youth clubs and at a holiday play scheme.

The amount of fieldwork carried out was limited by both the number of days available for research in each area and the narrow time scale within which the work had to be concentrated. A gradual accumulation of evidence using the "snowball method" was not possible (see, for example, Hancock, 2000.) The planning time available was also a constraint. It was important to be sensitive about putting too much pressure on busy On Track offices at times when other issues around evaluation and year end deadlines, intervention planning and staff changes needed their full attention. They equally had to be sensitive about putting pressure on intervention providers. (One key head teacher in the heart of an On Track area was not included for interview because of the pressure she was under.) The views will not necessarily be representative of the full range of views in the locality. However, every attempt has been made to ensure that particular local issues were addressed.

The qualitative techniques

This project employed both individual and group techniques. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the basis for individual interviewing. This enables a consistent range of items to be addressed (across areas and across individuals) but gives scope for the respondent to expand on their own particular focus and ensures that items which are of particular importance to them are given the weight they deserve. While this ensures that a wide variety of issues is explored, some issues attracted much more comment in some areas in others, depending on the people interviewed as well as on the locality. Focus groups were seen as an excellent way of extending the number of opinions collected in the limited time available. Appropriate trigger topics were selected to guide the discussions. For this approach it is particularly important that the researchers gain the rapport of the group and that people feel that their opinions will be valued. All respondents agreed to their interviews being taped and, where possible, the tapes were transcribed for analysis. Otherwise, the researchers involved identified the key issues after listening and re-listening to the tapes.

Similar approaches, both individual and group interviews were used with children. In these situations, researchers need to be aware of the perceived power of adults and the presumptions that may be

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[3] A whole class discussion where children learn to listen, put forward their views in turn and respect others' views, often covering sensitive issues.

made about the answers which "should" be given. This may be particularly significant when the research takes place in school. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest that disparities in power are the biggest ethical challenge for researchers working with children. As Christensen and James (2000:p7) point out *"Children are not adults. Researchers need, therefore, not to adopt different methods per se, but to adopt practices which resonate with children's own concerns and routines."*

The semi-structured interviews and the focus groups sought to address the research questions in a positive way, with participants encouraged to discuss the strengths as well as the problems of their area. The approach was to use open questions to initiate topics, for example:

- What do you see as the main strengths of the area?
- What do you think are the main difficulties for people living here?

After the open questions, the researchers probed further about other aspects of community, crime and stigma if they did not emerge naturally.

For children, the language was simpler. It was expected[4] that the youngest children would tend to have a focus around home and school and other key points like their grandparent's house or a park; they would be unlikely to have the experience to formulate a wider view of community. This overall mental map would develop at around eight to nine. The exploration was therefore more general:

- What's it like round here?
- What's the best thing about your area?
- What's the worst thing about your area?

There is considerable literature on the comparative value of individual interviews or focus groups with young children (Mauthner, 1997; Scott, 2000). It is suggested that around age six to seven, both techniques are feasible. Between five and six, children tend to find individual interviews awkward. In small focus groups, participants can interact with each other to produce valuable discussions. Hill et al (1996) suggests that a group of five to six children is the best number and that the age range should be kept small. A study of children's experiences of British town and city centres carried out by Woolley et al (1999a, 1999b) focused on ten to twelve year olds. They found that the most relaxed groups had only four participants and that they worked better where they were friendship groups. There is debate in the literature as to whether single sex groupings are likely to be more productive. Mauthner (1997) found single sex groups to be more productive and our work confirmed this. In one youth club, the organisers split the groups this way and, in another, the natural friendship groups who volunteered for interview were, in fact, single sex groups. The 14 year olds were seen as a single mixed group but the researcher reflected afterwards that this had been a mistake as two boys were very dominant and openly making trouble such as giving answers that would provoke laughter from the others and flirting openly with a couple of the girls.

Visual techniques and activity-based sessions were also used for the work with children. Drawings, for example of the journey to school, have been used to initiate discussions and to explore understandings of neighbourhood among children as young as three by Spencer and Darvizeh (1983). Their work involved nursery schools in Iran and Britain and the children already knew the researcher well. Without time to establish a similar relationship, it was possible to get a group of five-year olds (in a school setting) to draw their journey to school and talk freely about what they had chosen to portray. It seemed clear that the drawing helped them to relax (see also Gross and Hayne, 1998). At a youth club, two ten-year-old girls enjoyed creating a picture around the suggested theme of "my community". It is important to allow sufficient time for these activities; at least 30 minutes seemed to be needed for the children to explore the coloured pencils on offer, to make their choices and perfect the drawing to their satisfaction, often with border, title and dedication. The appendix shows examples of the very different journeys to school drawn in Parkland and Redstone.

It had been hoped to use disposable cameras to encourage older children to set their own agenda, picking out the things which were important to them but there were a number of issues which could not be resolved, not least that of personal safety. Young and Barrett (2001) describe issues of personal safety around their distribution of disposable cameras in Kampala. In a context where mobile phones are the trigger for muggings, disposable cameras might similarly attract unwanted attention.

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[4] From discussions with Helen Woolley and Chris Spencer at the University of Sheffield, January 2002.

Photographs to trigger discussion (see Scott, 2000 for further discussion of the technique) were therefore taken by a researcher, a former town planner, based on a very brief visit to the area. They focused on key landmarks and play areas and were taken to elucidate views on the potential for play and to assess the extent to which the children were familiar with buildings beyond the On Track area. A conscious decision was taken to avoid selecting "bad" views such as burnt out cars, litter and graffiti, as it was thought more important to see if comments on such things arose without prompting, as indeed they did. An apparently attractive lakeside view in Parkland was almost universally condemned by the children because of the rubbish commonly found in the lake. Fortuitously almost all the photographs were taken in bad weather and there were few people in the views. This enabled a creative discussion to elucidate who might have been in the area, had the weather been better, and enabled the children to explain why they liked some places and not others.

Settings and samples

Contact with parents and children was based on On Track interventions. In Hightown, most of the residents' views were gathered in focus groups i.e. from mothers already involved in local networks. This is very different from Parkland and Redstone where the mothers seen were from targeted On Track families and this may have affected the tone of the comments. Gender balance would have been unrealistic, using On Track interventions as the mode of access in areas with high proportions of single parents. Two couples were seen (in Hightown) but otherwise those selected were all female. While there were hopes of accessing one initiative involving fathers, the timing of the fieldwork did not, in the end, enable these interviews to take place.

With children, the use of On Track interventions meant working in a variety of settings and adapting the techniques accordingly. Stakeholders (intervention leaders) inevitably impacted on the methodology. At one school, the On Track worker particularly wanted the five six-year olds to discuss the issues, without being distracted by drawing, because the timetable slot was specifically for the development of social skills. The teacher and an assistant remained with the group, who did indeed manage to talk about issues around their journey to school and where they played and shopped for the full half hour (using the photographs), but it was stilted rather than spontaneous. At another school, a learning mentor led a Circle Time session, with the researchers taking notes. This experience showed the value of the rapport which the learning mentor already had with the group and the advantage of Circle Time "rules" whereby the children (aged nine to ten years) knew that their contributions would be respected and that no-one would be interrupted. She managed the discussion around some key questions which the researchers had provided, enabling a number of very interesting topics to emerge, which the class were keen to return to on another occasion.

In one primary school a series of individual interviews was undertaken, aided by the excellent conditions in the school – a spare classroom, giving a quiet space for the two researchers to work, and the ability to withdraw children at times convenient to the researchers. Children are usually very willing to talk to strangers in a secure environment such as school and hardly any, including six-year-olds, were overawed by the occasion. They seemed to value the opportunity to be heard.

At a holiday play-scheme with children around eight to nine years, drawing was used in part to create an enjoyable "out of school" activity. After a whole-group discussion of their area, each child drew the best thing and worst thing in the area and explained their selection to the researchers who moved informally through the group. The appendix provides some examples. Both here and at one of the Youth Clubs, the discussions were programmed sessions. At another Youth Club, however, it was clear that it would be very difficult to take the young people away from their activities for a focus group. As soon as they signed in, they moved to the snooker table, the football pitch or to a room for dancing. It did, however, prove possible to encourage them to write on separate bits of paper "The best thing about my area" and "The worst thing about my area". The contributions were put on the wall (see appendix) and a few children consented to brief interviews to expand on the points they and others had made. The observer felt that the children took the activity seriously, enjoying reading other people's contributions and reflecting on what they would like to add to the display.

Overall there was a good balance of boys and girls. The only exception was in the individual primary school interviews where there was a tendency for girls to volunteer and for the teachers to select girls from among the volunteers.

4. The On Track neighbourhoods

The areas selected for On Track have been externally, and professionally, defined as deprived high crime areas. In general, the professionals interviewed were much more negative about the areas than the residents. They were acutely aware of problems related to their own profession, for example, the behaviour difficulties in schools and the difficulties of attracting teachers, the high rates of illness and premature death and the families where children were taken into care and where the situation was being repeated in the next generation. They tend to emphasise their particular professional focus and to be wary of drawing conclusions beyond their own sphere but this professional focus seems to colour their whole response to the area. It is fair to say that in some cases there was also real understanding of the experience of residents; the accounts given of the area were not simply "distant" perspectives. However, it has to be recognised that the negative view of the areas which pervades, while often the responsibility of the media, is frequently reinforced by professional networks and continuous analysis of the problems. As one said, *"there'd be some professionals that it would be hard to find, for them to find strengths"* and certainly they were likely to mention the physical environment or the schools as the strengths of the area rather than to make reference to the people in the community.

Interestingly, the councillors seen tended to be upbeat. (They have been categorised as professionals in the report to avoid identification, but in three areas, they were long-standing residents as well and also had a resident's perspective.) Maybe because they were used to interviews and used to putting across a positive approach, they did indeed emphasise the positive, talking particularly about current investment programmes. They did not mention crime in the areas until late on in the interview and usually after a specific question on the subject.

The reputation of the areas

Hightown and Parkland were both involved in planned expansion schemes and are defined locally by their role in housing an influx of Londoners. It is this history which colours their reputation even though the main population movement occurred in the 1960's and 1970's respectively.

A young professional based 20 miles away reacted to one researcher's impending visit to Hightown with *"there's nothing good about Hightown is there?"*, acknowledging that he had never been there and that this comment was based on professional networking. A professional working in the area had, before her arrival, been given the strong impression by colleagues that Hightown was *"not a terribly desirable place to live or to visit"* but she set this in the context of the area which has many pretty villages and small towns, with Hightown not having as much scenic or historic character as many of the other settlements. Within the town (all of which is included in On Track), one estate has the worst reputation - *"you don't normally say you live on the ****"* [resident]. People were very aware of living on the *"worst reputationed estate"* and usually mentioned this early on in the interview.

> *"I was really worried because of everything I'd heard about *** and then I moved here. I've never met such nice people, nice neighbours"* [resident]

Residents seemed to rely on the local newspaper, which they felt reported things fairly. They felt that the reputation was based on some 20 years ago when things were worse in the town.

For Parkland, parents and children thought that there was some stigma attached to living in the area. This seemed to work at a micro-level within the area as well; certain addresses were more acceptable than others. The press is seen as reinforcing its poor reputation by consistent reporting of bad news. *"If they are going to report something in the area they will report something that has gone wrong …burglaries, vandalism, attacks on people, crime in general"* [professional]. The "leafy suburbs" have space allocated in the paper for their local correspondent to put forward the pleasant items such as jumble sales, outings and concerts. A professional pointed out that there is no such input for the On Track area. However, it is not clear whether the facility has not been offered or not taken up. The professional networks sustained the reputation. *"At conferences, people give a deep sigh and say it's such a difficult area"* [professional].

In Meredith, residents thought that the outsider view was *"that people are being burgled all the time. People are being mugged, and unless you live here you really haven't got a clue."* A professional

explained that the whole eastern part of the Borough did not have a good press. It is *"always good for a scary story; stories about* (it) *will be stories about crime"*. It was very difficult to get the press to take any interest in "good news" stories. However, other parts of the Borough had worse reputations.

Redstone's local authority area had a negative image based on recent race riots but one professional felt that this had put the spotlight mainly on the area of rioting and that their part of town was being ignored by the press for the moment. There was, however, a strong feeling amongst most professionals interviewed that the media often contributed to a general level of discontent in the area:

> *Because of what's been going on in *** as a whole and the coverage in the media... It depends who you speak to, they will all have a lot of concerns.*

The 14-year-olds felt that the media was unfair to them:

> *They paint a negative image, it's not like that.*

> *They say that all "Pakis" are the same. If there is a fight on the street they call it racist even if it is not.*

> *There is a stigma associated with the area. It has a bad reputation.*

The On Track areas

No one interviewed had been involved in the early stages of defining the On Track areas and it seems that the precise area selected for On Track reflects the Home Office criteria for the On Track programme rather than being an area which is readily "understood" locally. In one case, three rural parishes were added to the urban area. This makes the programme area *"a little bit unusual because agencies either sort of cover the town itself or cover a much larger rural area"* [professional] and one official suspected that the parishes had been included because *"the funding regime wanted some rural input"'* [professional]. Most services are delivered over a wider area, including a larger rural element and so from the professional perspective this was a small area. To the urban residents, it seemed strange as the town was quite distinct and *"large enough already".* This reflects Meegan and Mitchell's reflection (2001) on the differences in scale between areas chosen for service delivery and areas within which people interact. In an other area only two of the three wards normally considered as a "district" were included in the On Track area, as the child population would otherwise have been greater than suggested for On Track. Professionals felt that this was reasonable, as the remaining part of the area had already benefited from a crime reduction programme. Residents, in any case, associated themselves with smaller estates within the total area, again supporting Meegan and Mitchell's work. The other two On Track areas were based on electoral wards, apparently in the belief that this was a requirement. As commented by one professional, *"Wherever you put Ward boundaries they will be to some extent arbitrary. People don't organise their lives according to what ward they're in but to what is convenient to themselves as they go about their lives"* and another said that everyone had their own idea where a particular area started and finished. The areas chosen do not seem to reflect meaningful areas for local people.

Spatial isolation

One potential characteristic of deprived communities highlighted by Forrest and Kearns (1999) and Massey (1994) is physical isolation. This can be a matter of geography and/or public transport. This was a matter of greatest concern in Parkland. Residents found the public transport to be expensive and inconvenient. They said that it was *"impossible to get in and out of town at night"* and also mentioned the fact that taxis would not come onto the estate at night. It is regrettable that not all the professionals interviewed appreciated the difficulties, which this created for families, severely underestimating the problems and cost of taking a family on the bus and failing to recognise that the scale and lay-out of the district meant that facilities in one part of the area were not readily available for people living on another estate. Physical isolation can lead to social isolation, particularly where the cost of public transport is an element in the equation. The former Parkland resident explains:

> *I mean it does look lovely but you really … to live there and cope you really need a car … it was impossible to get anywhere …* (the) *church* (had) *a trip once every summer, we went on that.*

And later:

> Some have moved off because of problems with other families … and they feel it is better, there is not the bitching and the back-biting and the stirring going on because I suppose being on the edge of town, set out that far, there can be nothing better to do with time.

The potential for social isolation is compounded by the fact the *"other people will avoid it"*, and the professional commenting also discussed issues within the community itself: *"Some of the children have never been to the town centre. Some of it might be the parent's ability to step out of the area, feeling confident or feeling like there's something for them to even do outside the area."*

At the local level, Hightown was well placed. At least from the established housing estates, people could make their way to the small town centre, on foot or by bus, and, although the shopping provision there was not vast, it did at least provide a focus of social life which all residents could share. The difficulties arose when people needed access to higher level services, such as hospital appointments. These required a bus ride to towns some 18 miles away. For those with a car, this was not a problem but a professional pointed out that the fares would be several pounds for one person and if children were in tow as well, cost would be a major issue. Although the ten to twelve year olds were being critical or sarcastic in saying that the best thing about Hightown was the fact that you could get out and get to the nearest large town, this does indicate that, for many, the links with other towns were part of their life. Probably the majority of people were not limited to their own locality for their shopping and entertainment and were able to travel for training and for work.

Perhaps not surprisingly, isolation was less of an issue in the metropolitan areas. Residents in Redstone seemed to shop in town regularly and, in Meredith, public transport was considered one of the area's main strengths. Here, in particular, it was clear that many of the residents had many contacts outside the area and could travel beyond the On Track area to meet friends, go shopping and enjoy leisure activities. A discussion in Meredith reflects the variety of responses and also differing concepts of community, when a group of three parents was asked about their links outside the immediate area:

> I'm not going to limit myself to just being in Meredith you know because I've got friends all over' (based on where she grew up and friends she met when working in Central London).

> You're really looking at different friendship groups (where she lives now, round her mum, round her mother-in-law's).

> Nearly everyone I know lives in Meredith. I've got keys to almost all the houses anyway.

Participation in the job market

Employment possibilities and training did not feature strongly in the interviews with residents, probably because most of those seen were single parents with fairly young children. Nevertheless, in Hightown, a number were working, although professionals stressed that many of the jobs were part time and at low wages and that there was a *"throw-away"* mentality along employers; companies could always get more workers and did not take much interest in their labour force. The problems for people seeking training, especially where there were also child care issues, were stressed by one resident and with the "local" Further Education college some 18 miles away, there is pressure to establish some courses in the town to make participation easier. The context of limited opportunities impacts on children and one professional reported low aspirations, particularly (unusually these days) among girls.

In Meredith also, a number of the parents seen were working and Parkland was described as being in an area of full employment. Here, however, a sizeable proportion of residents were not working, with the barriers to work identified as *"transport, skills, confidence"* [professional]. The Further Education college was nearby but it was pointed out that if single parents got a chance to go to college or night school, they might well not have a network for child minding.

Redstone is suffering from a dramatic decline in its manufacturing base leading to very high levels of unemployment among young people.

Housing and the immediate environment

The lack of care for the local environment (by the council and the residents) attracted comment from professionals but for adult and child residents, it was a major issue which came up time and time again. It is discussed more fully in Chapter 6, as physical disorder is one of the elements of neighbourhood risk associated with crime.   Specific issues were rats in Meredith, the smell in Hightown (associated with the town's sewage works and industry) and the back alleys in Redstone:

> *No-one lets the children out to play, some people do but its dirty in the back alley. There is a gully which gathers water and becomes dirty and smelly* [resident].

The different areas illustrate the links between the physical environment and social issues. In Redstone, the terrace housing itself was a serious problem, both in terms of its condition and the degree of overcrowding. This almost certainly contributes significantly to the local feelings of disaffection but it was a fact reported by professionals and not a topic of discussion in the interviews with residents. The On Track area also includes an area of public housing and there were indications from professionals of a clear divide between the two main parts of the On Track area.

In Meredith, the housing was seen by one professional as its greatest asset, as the houses were comfortable family sized dwellings. However, many of the houses were now shared so that children did not have access to a garden and were rented as short-term lets, leading to great concerns over the growing transience of the population which are discussed further in Chapter 5. The alleys between the houses were a cause for concern among residents as places where the troublemakers hung out, indicating the clear link between the physical environment and the opportunities for crime.

Parkland is divided into a number of smaller estates, each of which is seen as having its own character. Some families were said to *"'live on one estate and wouldn't dream of accepting a house on another".* [professional]. The whole area was designed to have a detailed intermixing of housing, although probably not as much variation as is now apparent. Where houses have been on the market, prices range from £250,000 for the pre Development Corporation houses to under £30,000 for unpopular two bed-roomed flats, meaning that *"there are fairly wealthy people living cheek by jowl with people who are pretty much socially excluded. The two communities don't mix. There seems to be very little contact between them although perhaps the planners thought there would be"* [professional]. The detailed lay-out of cut-throughs and walkways meant that there were *"a lot of hiding places and places where things can happen or you feel vulnerable because you're not close to a road"* [professional]. Another professional felt that the design might have worked where people got on well together but that where people were reticent about *"sharing and joining in, then it would be a positive hindrance to developing strong communities".*

One probable reason for the general enthusiasm in Hightown's *"worst"* estate was that there had been recent improvements. Front gardens had been created, new windows put in and the graffiti cleaned up, so that even though some people did not like particular changes there was a view that:

> *"Yes, it's had a bit of attention and people are respecting it a bit more, rather than just being a dive"* [estate resident].

Residents were strongly attached to their own estate and, in fact, probably rarely visit the other estates, unless relatives live there. This led to each of the two older estates being characterised as *"the druggie estate"* by those living elsewhere.

There is a strong link between neighbourhood and community. From three different areas, these conversations reveal the importance of familiar networks and places:

> *You've got your job here and your friends here.*

> *It's all I've ever known.*

And later:

> *It's not a bad place.*
> *I wouldn't like to move out* [different contributions in a Hightown parent focus group].

> *It's all right, nobody bothers me. My landlord lives on one side and they get on with my children…..I have my family and my landlord near. I would not move even if you moved my friend too.* [Redstone resident].

> *I feel I belong. It is the surroundings not the people. I am happy here* [Redstone resident who had moved back to the area to be part of the Church].

> *I've lived here so long. It's what I'm used to.*
> *I like to see people, there's people* (here), *real people.*
> *I'm a bit scared to move on.*
> *I want my kids to be around family and people they know. You need their support as well* [different contributions in the Meredith parent focus group].

However, attachment may well be partly out of necessity – "*I'm not going to leave the council house I've got, which is quite big, to go and live in some slum area or some poky little flat*" [Meredith resident] – and some people certainly felt trapped by the operation of the housing market:

> "*I do not have a sense of loyalty to the area, I want to move and I don't want to move. If we move we, husband and I, will lose my privacy… because we can't afford to buy a big house* [Redstone resident].

One of the most dissatisfied people among the Hightown parents had bought her council house and desperately wanted to move. However, she had been trying to sell the house for five years. There was not an overall lack of demand in the area but this would have been one the least desirable houses on the private market. In all areas, however, there were a variety of issues around the housing market with both public sector allocations and private sector supply and demand issues operating. The potential for "tipping" (Bottoms et al, 1992) appeared strongest in Meredith and Parkland where there were concerns about purchase for rent, specifically for short-term lets (see also Chapter 5).

Schools

Schools were not covered specifically in the interviews, although they featured strongly in the children's discussions. A head teacher pointed out that young children inhabit the two communities of home and school and learn to understand the different rules and standards, which apply in each community. There was a smattering of individual comments on education from parents. A traveller parent stressed the importance of being settled so that her children could get a good education and a Meredith parent expressed her pleasure at the schools encouraging children to do well. (Another said "*you have to give them that extra push as well, you can't leave it all to the school".*) In Parkland, one parent explained that her daughter would not want to get 'A' grades, as she would be stigmatised at school. Some concerns about schooling were raised in Hightown, by parents of young children, because other mums had told them about the bad reputation of the schools for the next age group. However, this was not a general view and may have been coloured largely by fear of the unknown. Two parents elsewhere reported current concerns around bullying and poor relations with the head teacher. This picture of social concerns rather than educational, which are seen as issues for professionals, reflects attitudes identified in previous work with similar groups of parents (ATD Fourth World, 2000).

Education did, however, feature strongly in the professional interviews. Firstly there were issues about the quality of the schools. In Meredith, this was partly a matter of retaining the middle class population. There were obvious anxieties over the standards of attainment, as people who had grown up in the area or brought up children in the area now noticeably hesitated when asked whether this was a good community to bring up children and schooling was one of the main reasons. It is worth noting that one of the schools visited here had just under 50 languages represented and a growing population of refugees and asylum seekers who did not speak English. Inevitably it was harder for the school to shine in terms of league tables in comparison with the leafier parts of the Borough. In Parkland also, there was an issue of mobility – the children who start the school year were at times 50 percent different from those who left at the end of the year, so that both those moving and those staying have had a disturbed year. In Meredith and in Parkland, parental choice meant that middle class families would take their children outside the area to school.

In Redstone, disadvantage is seen to be perpetuated through ethnic minority parents' lack of knowledge about the education system; they are, therefore, unable to interact and support their

children.[5] White children would often go out of the area to school. In the Year Nine group of children spoken to, it was the two white girls who expressed an ambition of going to university and getting good jobs. An Asian professional commented: *"I was lucky because my father knew how important education was and he encouraged us all to work hard at school".* In addition to migrant parents' lack of knowledge of the education system, there is the fact of racism in schools, which some professionals feel *"write ethnic minority children off before they have begun".* One professional wondered why it was that ethnic minority children from other parts of the Borough were refused a place in the better schools near where they lived and were bussed to Redstone's *"schools of segregation and disadvantage".*

Schools potentially have a strong community role. In a number of cases, the On Track projects are seeking to work with schools in a way which promotes this role and are sometimes frustrated by the schools' resistance to welcoming parents. It has to be acknowledged that many of the parents did not have very good educational experiences themselves and are easily put on the defensive, nevertheless, the school can in principle be an excellent community focus if there is the will. However, as one professional pointed out *"unfortunately, teachers have not been trained to do more than teach, so there is a need for the teachers to recognise their integral part in building relationships".* Some head teachers were fully supportive of this aim and talked about how they were working towards this. For example, in response to requests one had set up an IT class for parents.

In Parkland, where there were nine schools covering the youngest children, it was observed by professionals that each establishment created quite separate communities around themselves, depending on the head teachers' relationships with parents. The estate layout has an impact as *"children at four don't generally get brought to school …they can come through the rabbit warren effectively* (on their own)". This meant that the head teacher never saw some parents. Parents in the culturally diverse areas acknowledged the role of the schools in bringing together people of different backgrounds and helping everyone to appreciate the diversity of the area.

> *It's interesting, I've been in assemblies and I've seen all the songs, it's really interesting, how to say good morning. They all take part* [parent].

Shops

Shared spaces and meetings points are needed to bring people together, initially on the basis of casual and routine contact (Thomas, 1991). Shopping is one potential focus for such contacts, although paradoxically, as the setting for people's routine activities, shops may also be a focus for crime. Professionals were enthusiastic about the range of low cost shops in the main street in Meredith (although the overall appearance of the area was seen by the professionals as in need of enhancement) but the area around the station had a reputation for street crime. There were "*easier pickings*" at any interchange, one professional explained. The space by the local shops on the housing estates in Parkland also served as a focus for crime: in this case, apparently, drug dealing rather than robbery.

Shopping facilities were a major item for discussion in Hightown and there was real disagreement over the adequacy of the shops in the town centre. Some residents felt that *"there's pretty well every shop you want"* while others longed for Marks and Spencers, more shoe shops or more food choice, to supplement the two existing supermarkets seen variously as *"quite expensive"* and *"always running out of things".* On resident, born in the town explained that *"Twenty years ago you had everything"* (a department store, a hardware store, furniture). Now this had changed but *"If you've got transport, we're all guilty of shopping out of town because, you know, sometimes you just can't get what you want within town and you have to go further".*

The ten to twelve-year-olds were equally split. Some saw "town" and particularly the shops as the best thing about their area, enabling them to spend every Saturday shopping with their friends; others saw the gaps in shopping facilities as the worst thing about their area. Whatever the opinion expressed, the role of shopping or, at least, hanging out in the town centre and window shopping, emerged as a strong bonding activity, particularly among pre-teen girls.

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[5] Refugee parents interviewed in a separate piece of research also made this point.

Community venues and activities

The potential for community activity and the level of social contact which move areas further up Thomas' "Ladder of Integration" (1991) are made easier or more difficult by the facilities available. In Hightown, the parent group interviews took place at a community centre, where these parents were already involved in regular get-togethers. Another parent was seen in the new On Track drop-in centre. Hightown residents also mentioned a gala in the summer and the bands on the Market Square. *"That's all free. They* (the council) *do try."* The Arts Centre was relatively new as well. *"That's good. People talk at work about what they've seen. Somebody there's doing their job."* There were also regular discos in town for young people, separate ones for the under 13s and the under 16s – *"you can hang out with friends and have fun".* All these things help to support the community by providing opportunities for contact.

Such facilities were not available to the residents within the Meredith On Track area itself, although the school was the focus for an On Track holiday play scheme and there was a council run youth club. One local professional thought that the local authority should be taking more initiative in providing a community centre and providing community activities, as he thought that areas in which he had worked previously had benefited from this kind of support. The different ethnic groups here appeared to have their own social centres and another professional expressed concern that there was no *"great opportunity for the different ethnic groups to mix. I don't know if there's a place open to all in one building if you like, encouraging that mix."*

On Track in Redstone is supporting work in community centres and the local facilities were particularly important for the elders in Redstone's Asian communities:

> *I was saying to my dad that we need to move because the area is getting bad but he said no because if I need to do anything I don't need a vehicle, all my friends from Pakistan just live around the corner and the Asian shops and mosque is on the doorstep"* [Redstone resident].

In Parkland, there were a number of halls run by the schools and also community centres, although one professional said *"they look a bit like you know the sorts of police stations that existed in Northern Ireland because they are so subject to vandalism".* There were comments about the churches in the area. It seems that none is traditional and all are charismatic, so that, although they did provide the basis of community for some Christians, others rejected them.

Churches were seen as an important focus in Meredith, attracting *"a massive community presence".* These were largely "black" churches and one church leader explained that the congregation was African, rather than purely African Caribbean, and included people from Nigeria and Ghana. The churches varied from being relatively closed communities to ones keen to provide a focus for all kinds of activities including On Track.

Pubs were mentioned as a community focus only once and that was by one of the few men interviewed. Since the majority of those interviewed and those carrying out the interviews were women, this serves to confirm Lowndes' focus (2000) on the gender specific circuits of social capital.

Play facilities and open space

The areas displayed most contrast in terms of open space and play facilities. Meredith totally lacked any open space within the On Track area boundary, with the sole exception of a school playground, now being opened for longer hours as part of the On Track programme. This meant that children had to go some distance from home and cross major roads to find any play space. The issue of safety in these shared spaces is relevant and is explored in later sections. Adults tend to forget just how important play spaces are to children. A resident living just outside the area reported that her local playground had been closed - *"there was no note or anything, just a big padlock".*

The issue of open space did not feature strongly in discussions in Redstone. Negative comments were made by residents about the large park in the heart of the area - *"rats…dead fish"* - and by children about a smaller play area where they said there were fights.

Parkland enjoys a beautiful environment. As one professional said: *"I imagine that many of the people that moved from overcrowded very dilapidated urban environments probably saw Parkland as the*

land of milk and honey when they moved here". Much of the woodland was retained when the area was developed and lakes were created within this "natural" area. However, in practice, these spaces do not provide the play and relaxation opportunities which the planners must have envisaged, because of concerns over the safety of the woodlands. The scale of the open space means that the different estates lie far apart, with the short cuts involving steps or paths through the woods, not popular or feasible for someone with a pushchair. There appears to be a lack of formal play-space for children, who rely on the housing "courts", which nowadays are packed with cars and where ball games are prohibited:

> *It doesn't say no ball games so we just play ball games and if someone gets annoyed then we stop.*

> *In our court we've got a sign on the garage but everyone plays it though anyway* [girls aged 12 to 13].

In general, residents of Hightown liked their environment. The parks received considerable praise from adults and children and there had been recent improvements. Six year olds, asked to talk about their journey to school, focused on "*trees, grass, fields, flowers"* as well as *"cars, houses, roads and other children".* In other group discussions, some older children said that they appreciated the quiet and those living near the edge of town liked their views of fields. Several mentioned the parks and the new nature park as the best thing about their area and, clearly, there had been a lot of recent improvements. However, a professional pointed out the lack of local space.

> *All sorts of open spaces where children might congregate, with notices saying no ball games, you know, all the safe lit areas are sort of no go areas for kids, for example in front of the shops or in the car parks.*

In both Hightown and Meredith there was an accessible leisure centre which was generally appreciated by the children. For Hightown a professional pointed out that *"if you're on a very low income some of those leisure facilities are almost beyond your reach"* and it may be that for some children the visit was a very special treat. In Meredith, there were concessions if you were not working and the children from one school clearly made good use of the centre, as it combined a library with the other facilities.

5. Communities within community

The views of a Redstone professional can be used to sum up the findings on community and the way in which it means different things to different people:

> When you start talking about the community it is very easy to generalise. You think the community is just the general public but when you start working with the community you soon realise it's ever growing and ever splitting into different niches, different groups and different sectors.

This chapter looks first at the views of children and their particular worlds and then explores the other segments of communities, before examining issues of neighbourliness and involvement.

Children's perspectives - five- to seven-year-olds

Young children were interviewed in three of the areas. At age five and six, as expected, their community is that of home and school and the immediate surroundings. In Redstone, they talked of their neighbourhood in terms of their street and most spoke of living in streets that were predominantly if not exclusively one ethnic and religious group:

> All the people on my street speak Punjabi.

> On my street there is mostly Muslims. There is one Christian (term used for all whites) but I don't know them.

> The Sikhs have moved from my street. Dad says it is peaceful without Sikhs.

In Parkland, the neighbourhood meant the housing "courts" which might have 20 to 30 houses. Here, children might know a few neighbours and some would be familiar with two courts, if the parents now lived separately.

For many children, their favourite place was school and sometimes their favourite people were teachers, highlighting the importance of caring people in the community (Wolkow and Ferguson, 2001). This may reflect the security offered or perhaps the excitement, as some children talked excitedly about the new things they were learning. The world appeared to be a welcoming place. Most children liked where they lived. The local shops were friendly and offered sweets and toys. The children were accepting of what they knew and could not think of possible changes, beyond improvements to the school itself, such as the playground or the décor. This may reflect a response to life's disappointments - one girl said "can't change anything. My wishes don't go true" - but most probably reflected their focus on their immediate environment.

Overall, for these children, the community is the people. The best thing about Hightown was "the people…the nice people". This could be a friend or a teacher. Asked what photos she would have taken to illustrate her area, a seven-year-old girl in Parkland mentioned her friends first, then the houses with the detail she had noticed of fancy windows and nice doors and then her friend's cat. In this area, many of the children interviewed were from large families with a wide range of cousins and aunts. The limited social networks referred to by some professionals did not seem to reflect the reality experienced by the children.

At this age, most children do not venture away from the immediate area of the house and are dependent on adults or older children for any wider horizons.

> I would like to go off *** but my mum will not let me. We go to *** [supermarket] and we go to town every Saturday but it is boring [Redstone child].

Beyond the immediate environment of home, school and local shop, many Parkland children enjoyed weekly visits to the local parks with their mums or cousins and occasional trips to McDonalds. They all recognised photos of the town centre (some five miles away) but in a number of cases, this seemed to be a rare visit – "last summer" for one boy i.e. six to nine months previously. "Town" was also associated with shops where you weren't allowed to buy things. Hightown is more compact and their local town centre was well known by the children. One boy was aware that his local shopping options

were limited because he had recently visited a major shopping mall when he visited relatives but, generally, children of this age are not able to make comparisons in this way.

Very few of this age group had any spontaneous criticisms to make of their area but, when asked about things that were *"not so nice"*, the occurrence of litter and rubbish was the most frequent complaint. One lake in Parkland was not liked because *"there's lots of toys in it – broken toys, bits of cars"*. Children in Redstone also had concerns about litter. When asked about the worst thing about where they lived, one child said *"rubbish"* and when asked what she would do to make it better *"I would stop people throwing rubbish"*. Another specified somewhere she would prefer to live – *"it is clean there"*. These findings confirm those of Woolley et al (1999a) but with a much younger age group.

In the Parkland interviews, the children's other concerns also emerged – cars, the lakes, the woods, strangers and the dark:

> Year 1 child: *I'm scared of roads. When the cars stop you have to cross the road. If you just go you be crashed by a car.*
> Interviewer: *Is there anything else that's scary?*
> Year 1 child: *Yeah, the woods are scary.*
> Interviewer: *What's scary about the woods?*
> Year 1 child: *They make funny noises.*
> Other child: *There's monsters in there.*

Trees in fact were seen as "bad" by several children both here and in Hightown – they are scruffy and get in the way.

Bullying was also mentioned, within school and outside school. At school (Parkland), one girl said that some children are *"horrible"* at playtime *"kicking, punching and pushing people"*. In Redstone, children of six and seven spoke of being picked on by other children in their neighbourhood: *"Children pick on me and say swear words. I tell Mum and she says stay away from them."* Here, they also talked about fighting. The worst thing about their area was that there was no one to stop the fighting and they identified one photo with *"people fight at that park. It is not nice there."* More troubled circumstances clearly lay under the surface in some cases. In one of the areas, a six-year-old girl had moved recently. She mentioned heroin and how horrible it had been at her last address: *"People were being horrible to each other"*. Now it was better *"because its quieter and I live near my Nan so I can walk round on my own"*.

There was one exceptional six-year-old boy among the children interviewed. He was fascinated by the photographs of different parts of the estate and tried to work out exactly where they all were and how they fitted together. It became apparent that he had great freedom to cycle around the area, with slightly older cousins, and his understanding of his area as a whole was certainly sophisticated and unusual for his age. His favourite place was a particular park where he went with his *"robber mates"*. He provided a detailed description of some apparently antisocial activities with his mates which including *"robbing"* the local supermarket and going by bus into town with his cousins *"nicking"*.

Children's perspectives - eight and nine-year-olds

At this age, although children's range of independent exploration is still generally limited, they do start to look more critically at their own environment, possibly encouraged by the school curriculum. This age group was interviewed at Parkland and Meredith. In Parkland, there was a striking difference in the interviews with the nine-year-olds, compared with younger pupils. In response to a general question which simply asked what it was like "around here", almost all of them spontaneously mentioned points relating to antisocial behaviour:

- One boy's new flat was nice because *"there ain't a lot of trouble"*. There used to be knives and motorbikes. A few days ago there was a police chase. The shop had had two recent burglaries.
- One girl complained about the *"rubbish flying around"*. Her next door neighbours were really noisy in the mornings. She didn't play out because of the boys around her area. They were about 15 years; they chucked mud at the windows and climbed on the garages.
- Another girl said that *"Most of the time all you see is cars"*. There was nowhere to play. Really nasty people went to the park. People hang about outside the shops and she didn't like going

there any more (since a recent ram-raid). People drive cars into the lake. The attractive photo of the lake was *"probably just after the council cleaned it up"*. Her "wishes" were to provide housing for the homeless sleeping in the doorways in town and to limit how much drink people could have.

- Another girl spoke of arguments outside her house (which she enjoyed listening in to) and also about fights at home and moving because their house was smashed up.

However, it was certainly not all gloomy and the children had very positive things to say about their area. Most talked about groups of friends they played with and things they enjoyed such as going swimming, getting sweets from the shop, going into town with cousins and going to McDonalds.

In Meredith, a group of children of this age discussed and then drew the good and bad things in their area, indicating very serious issues:

> *The worst thing about this area is the guns, lots of people have guns.* (When questioned about who were those people), a*dults and teenagers have them. I have seen guns twice and both times I got really scared.*

> *The park is my worst place because gangs hang out and bully people and take their money.*

At a different Meredith venue, the discussion among children of a similar age focused on rubbish, again reflecting more serious issues:

> *People do not clean up and they throw rubbish everywhere and it doesn't get cleaned up.*

The consequence was that most of the children present had seen rats. This made them feel *"angry"*, *"unhappy"*, *"really upset - I want to move house"* and *"frightened".*

However, both groups liked their community:

> *Because my family and friends are around me and there for me.*

> *My street is very quiet and I have family and friends that I can visit and feel safe.*

Good things included the school (*"I get praises and a good education"*), the local football team, the parks and the leisure centre. They were also very aware of living in and belonging to an area with a wide range of races and cultures and named at least a dozen different countries where people came from.

Children's perspectives - ten- to twelve-year-olds

As children grow older, family recedes in importance and they want to explore independently and establish their own space. However, they run up against the major problem of teenagers, again reflecting the findings of Woolley et al (1999a).

> *If you try to play, like the big kids will come along and like nick your football.*

The ten-year-old boys in Parkland found it hard to identify a space where they could play. The various possibilities discussed were either in the control of older children or disrupted by dangerous objects, burned out cars etc. Discarded needles also appeared to be a major problem in the play areas. Girls in a parallel focus group suggested different parks for the different ages:

> *A big park for old children, 16 years old, the 18s and 20s and then a little park for the babies.*

One lad's environment had improved considerably recently as a family who had terrorised the street had been removed.

There were similar issues in Hightown – *"older kids on motor bikes wreck all the fields and that"*, *"teenagers smash bottles and things".* The boys tended to want more things to do – *"parks…swings… entertainment"* but, for most, the area did offer *"places to go, things to do".* Because the town is small and generally considered safe at least during the day, boys and girls can go off their estate and down to the town centre:

go down with friends. I won't go on my own, cos there are people there that will hurt you. Like police, like people who look tough.

For girls in particular, *"it has all the shops you can want, nice place to go about and hang out and all that"*.

One could feel their frustration (interviewing in mid March) at the dark nights and the constraint this placed on their activities. *"There's very rarely things going on in the winter, hardly any club*s *going on in the winter"* and *"my dad could go out at one-o-clock in the morning and not get hurt but if we were to go out then we could get snatched or something"*.

At the age of twelve, the discussions were reflective, as the young people could make more comparisons and realised that other people might see their area (Parkland) as rough. The issue of bullying was still very important but they now suspected that the *"bullies"* were also involved in burglary, getting drugs and nicking cars. Nevertheless, the boys were attached to their area and somewhat nervous at the thought of moving away:

> *If you move away you have got to find new friends and like you know this area so well and you go away you get lost like.*

The parallel girls' group compared the different courts, the different estates, the different corner shops and the different options for more serious shopping.

> *If they've got no money and they're bored they go up *** (district shopping centre) but if they've got money they go up town.*

They reiterated the need for separate play areas:

> *You've got a park and it's all like screaming five year olds or there's like all the bad boys isn't there and you don't want to go in there because you know you're going to get teased.*

and they were philosophical about how they now felt about their area:

> *It's where you live isn't it, you've seen everything, you've been everywhere, you're going to be bored after a while.*

Segments of community - ethnicity

The use of the term ethnicity is often really a shorthand for a range of factors covering culture, faith, customs, language and ethnic and national origin, leading to very distinct communities within communities. Two of the areas were extremely complex in this respect.

In Redstone, Asian professionals explained:

> *You have got the Mirpuri community who have their own language as do the Pathans who speak Pushtu. There is a small community called the Azara and they speak Hinky. Then you have the white people who are scattered in amongst.*

There can be tension even within the same communities of faith due to how strict they are in observing their faith. For example, the Pathans (from the border of Afghanistan) are Muslim just as the Mirpuris from Pakistan, but the former are more strict than the latter and this can cause division:

> *The Pathans are very religious but the Mirpuris are not so that can cause friction.*
> *Everyone's segregated into their own community and over little things it's blame attaching between the communities oh, it's them Pathans or Mirpuris that are causing the problem.*

However, when the wider community of the neighbourhood is threatened in any way they act together for protection.

A white resident observed that the "*Asian children did not play out much. When they did it was in their garden. The white children play with others but the Asians and Afro-Caribbeans prefer their children to*

play with their own kind. Indians and Sikhs are more open." The comment was also made that *"they all mix in school but not out of school".* However, this is one view and the situation is obviously very complex.

Meredith had well established white and African Caribbean communities and was seen as having received people from every war zone in turn. The Greeks were also well established, Turks and Kurds had been in the area about 15 years and most recently arrived were refugees from Somalia, Eritrea and the Balkans. Everyone interviewed mentioned the diversity and would probably have agreed with one professional who said *"everybody is in it together – I don't think people see the differences as marked as strangers or the media might…you don't pick up any tension as you walk through the area".* There are some problems around the newest arrivals, which are covered in the next section. Certainly some people spend most of their time with their own community and find it difficult to integrate.

Amidst the celebration of diversity, one of the schools planned to hold Jubilee celebrations so that the white community could feel that their culture was not being ignored. A parent who came originally from India described the advantages of living in a multi-cultural city as she was able to go to special Asian events run in a number of different areas of the city. An African-Caribbean parent explained her perspective, as part of her reason for staying in the area:

> *You could move to an area that your child goes to a school and they're not going to feel comfortable – it's important for my child to be brought up around children who are the same ethnic group that she is – it's very important – I'm not going to move out into the sticks where she's the only black child there – its not nice for her.*

The ethnic minority in Parkland constitutes about ten per cent of the population. The local shops are run by Asians. The five-year-olds were the only diverse group encountered and, interestingly, had several discussions about people who didn't speak English – the people who ran the local shop and the new (brown) neighbours of one of the little girls. However, the two ethnic minority girls in the group were not like these people because they spoke English. In fact, the education service is facing a new requirement to meet the needs of non-English speaking refugees and asylum seekers. One professional felt that at present this was *"an invisible community … behind closed doors and quiet".* An older girl in a focus group mentioned *"Pakis"* and was quickly frowned into silence by the other girls there and professionals talked of some anecdotal evidence of racism. Another professional said:

> *I've no doubt that racism exists* (here) *but it is not an issue as such. People have racist views and they keep them to themselves. They are not campaigning about it …and it's never raised itself in public meetings. Having said that when we did try to put a mosque, not a mosque, a Hindu centre* (here) *some ten, 15 years ago … there was a huge uproar* [professional].

Hightown has an almost wholly white population. As residents pointed out *"people who are black, you know who they are".* It has an Irish community, said to be based around the Catholic church, but this does not appear to be very obvious to the population as a whole. *"There's a Paddy's club ..I do know a few Irish"* was one response after probing. Some of the take-aways are run by Asian or Chinese families – *"you don't hear of racist taunts, smashing of* (shop) *windows or anything".* One local estate shop was run by an Indian and the community policeman said he had never heard comments or had any complaints about racism.

Segments of community - the incomers

The issue of transience and the need to absorb and keep absorbing newcomers into the area was crucial for both Meredith and Parkland, although with different causation and different impacts. In Meredith, there was considerable comment from the professionals about the new communities, with reference to the most recent arrivals – refugees and asylum seekers. No refugees or asylum seekers or even recent immigrants were interviewed in the course of the research but it was clear that among the long term residents there was some resentment:

"At the top of the road there's some [thought to be Kosovans]. *They keep to their own, they don't really mix."* This lady accused them of chucking all their rubbish everywhere. Asked about people who might be excluded, another parent said:

There's lots of things, they have interpreters, they've got a lot of help, sometimes they forget the people – charity starts at home – sometimes they forget the people that's been here and give too much.

It must be relevant that she and her husband and four children have just two bedrooms and she felt "*cheated – there's people coming down our road, just moving in".*

The issue of stability and transience was also seen as very significant in Parkland, where professionals felt there were two distinct communities, those who were settled and those who *"get moved in…look around at what they see and make a choice that they don't want to be part of it".* Figures on the number of children who had experienced many schools and several homes was very high in comparison with other On Track areas and the electoral roll was said to change by about a quarter every year.

In Hightown, the issue is whether the incomers will ever form part of the community, the new people being a group with the ability to choose. The basic population is relatively stable and a professional identified this as one of the area's greatest strengths. However, new estates are growing up at the outskirts and this attracts some resentment:

It was a village, then they made it a town and now they are trying to make it a city. There is too much new housing [resident].

People who live on the outskirts now, because it's got so big, they've got a [local] *address but some of them rarely even come into town* [resident].

A recent report about the potential further expansion of Hightown identifies the possibility that the town will become polarised, housing an affluent commuter workforce, who have no links with the town other than their place of residence, alongside a group who are largely confined to the town and do not share in the general prosperity of the area. To some extent this had already happened as far as two new estates were concerned (Chater and Hood, 2002).

Segments of community - the generations

There seems to be a clash between young and old in Parkland, reflecting another of the cross-sectional themes discussed by Forrest and Kearns (1999). The councillor referred to the lack of maintenance of play equipment which meant that it had been taken away. When there was local consultation over its possible renewal, the majority (whose children had now grown up) were not in favour of it being replaced. This was confirmed by the former resident:

All of a sudden as my boys were growing up you have got no ball games, no this, no that springing up all over the place. The swings taken away and a lot of animosity from old to middle aged people whose children have grown up towards children.

From a professional reporting the old people's perspective:

Many of them are frightened by you know the levels of violence even though all the evidence suggests that older people are least likely to be victims of violence, it has that impact so you know you have people who feel very much imprisoned within their own homes.

Age differences also emerged strongly in relation to the villages outside Hightown. An eleven-year-old said there were lots of old people in his village. One effect was that *"the youth club had got a bad name before it started"* and there were differences of opinion on handling issues around smoking, alcohol and drugs. Younger parents felt that these were important issues which needed to be handled practically, while a *"just say no"* approach was favoured by most people in the village.

Children's understandings of community

There were a number of discussions about community with the Meredith children. A group of eight to nine year olds defined community as "*where you live, your environment, your home, stuff that belongs to you".* Their understanding centred on location, for example, Scotland was not part of the community

because it was too far. *"It has to be close to be a community."* They included their secondary school and church in their community – these were important because you do things there.

This idea of community embracing places where you did things was echoed by a group of ten to eleven year old boys in Parkland. Community was: *"where you live"*, *"churches, youth clubs"*.

Did they consider themselves members of a community? "*No, not really … I suppose me because I'm a member of a youth club."*

With slightly older children, the themes moved from doing things together to getting things done together. In Hightown, a group of eleven-year-old boys talked about:

> *A bunch of people doing the same thing…getting things sorted.*

And similar age girls in Parkland said:

> *Community is when all the neighbours get together.*
> *Community is when people set clubs or something like that.*

Girls of 12 to 13 in Parkland talked about:

> *People getting together ...talking about what they can do to make it better.*

And in reply to communities round here:

> *Yeah...cubs and that, neighbourhood watch, mum goes to weight watchers … they do loads of stuff at the church.*

In Hightown:

"When people discuss things with the town" (which led to a discussion as to whether the Mayor was elected and whether the current Mayor was a man or woman).

There was also a concept of an ideal community. If the teachers were not stressed that day, the school could be considered a community. Twelve-year-old boys in Parkland saw community as *"basically a good place to be"* and in answer to the question as to whether they thought of their estate as a community, there was a chorus of *"No".* The same kind of idea lay behind responses to the question of who is not included in the community. This produced answers on who should be left out – "*bullies, druggies and wasters".*

The teenagers in Redstone also debated the subject. They felt that there was not a sense of community:

> *No community, no-one gets on.*

> *Whites throw bottles.*

> *Afro Caribbeans fight with themselves.*

> *People think if you look at them you are staring at them.*

> *Little children get on and play in the street in the summer. It's when you get to teenagers that they do not get on.*

A sense of community

Children tend to be based in one locality for home, school and play and therefore are almost obliged to experience their community far more intensively than adults. For adults, the issue of community starts right at the bottom of Thomas's (1991) "Ladder of Interaction" – do they actually know people in the community? As one Meredith professional said: *"People do like to feel that they are living on the same street as people they've known for a time."* When she walked with her African Caribbean neighbour, "*every black child greets her and she knows every black child".* In fact most of the children

interviewed spoke to at least one neighbour and felt safe to go to a neighbour for help if in trouble. One professional considered that there was a good community feel and that people would know if a neighbour's child had been unwell. There was some collecting and taking other people's children to and from school. However, another thought that a lot of working mothers had to pay for their children to be collected because they had no network and the "*majority of people are very isolated*". In general, here and elsewhere the picture of sociability revolving around family with a small set of friends identified by Goldthorpe (1987) and Procter (1990) is supported.

In Meredith, the mothers stressed their commitment to family and friends but beyond this, did not find much neighbourliness:

> *It would be nice to go out your door and be able to say hello to everybody. It's your ideal world but it's not happening.*

> *Years ago, like with neighbours, I remember when you'd always get your neighbours if they don't see you, they knock at the door to see if you were all right.* [She talked of a new family next door] *never spoke to me at all, then their car broke down.. there was a knock on the door "Excuse me, I'm your new neighbour, could you lend me a jump start?".*

There was one more upbeat mother:

> *Even up where my mother lives, everybody knows each other and even where I live everybody knows each other so I'm sure we would look out for one another if something was to go wrong.*

However, the issue of a changing neighbourhood was also very relevant here. As explained half jokingly, neighbours had a habit of moving out:

> *They don't give you notice, they leave. You're thinking - how many people do I know now?*

In Redstone, the Asian professionals felt that there was a strong community spirit in certain areas but a white professional felt that, across the Borough as a whole, communities were struggling to find a common purpose:

> *The feeling is they know everyone round there and if you are in trouble your neighbours are there for you.*

> *I do think when the community need to stand together, when they have got a cause against the outside they will stand as one but otherwise they are divided.*

The young people they worked with had said that to them "*it's all about belonging*". That's their world and they do in it what they want.

In Hightown, one resident explained:

> *In my little cul-de-sac, you know, we all get on. You know, it's just everybody will help each other out. You're not in and out of each other's houses all the time. It's not like how it used to be where it used to be doors unlocked and everybody used to be in for tea and coffee …but where we are everybody's friendly and want to help each other.*

and at a residents' focus group, when asked whether people look out for each other:

> *Where I live, they don't definitely. And nobody speaks to anybody but that's fine …people live very much their own lives.*

> *We're always in each other's houses. In summer we sit out with all the children and have a bottle of wine or tea depending on the time.*

> *Where I live, it's very sort of clique-y, you just get a nod as you go out, but when I go to my sister's, everyone's like, oh, hello.*

People who had lived in Hightown for a long time seemed to disagree as to whether things had got better or worse but it was really a disagreement over certain elements of community. When people

had first moved from London there had been considerable mutual support among neighbours. This was less true now but, on the other hand, most people now enjoyed extensive family networks. A couple in one of the surrounding villages said, not entirely seriously, that you had to live there 30 years to be accepted. Apart from the issues around age, the parish council and the *"worthies"* that ran everything were *"from the same school … all in the same circle".* Nevertheless, they had found their way into the community and contrasted it with the urban part of Hightown where *"you go to work, come home and close the door".*

Parkland had similar issues to Hightown in that people lost extended family relationships when they first moved from London but that there were now family networks across the area. One parent found the area neighbourly and improving. Perhaps not surprisingly, the former resident had not found it a friendly place and spoke of apathy. This contradiction was shared by the professionals, some of whom spoke of apathy, while one thought the residents were now getting more active themselves and caring about changes. *"They do feel they're part of a community and they're all in the same boat."* The views of one professional who wrote a report on the area after in-depth discussions with residents (Woolham, 1995) emphasised the apathy:

> Professional: *It is the only piece of work I have ever done that has kept me awake at night because the implications of what the report was telling me.*
> Researcher: *I felt you had pulled out the poverty and the lack of community, is that fair?*
> Professional: *….it is a long time since I wrote the report but yes the absence of community, and I think I used the word anomie …I thought it was important to refer to anomie rather than you know the other concept of alienation because clearly the term seemed more appropriate and the situation facing some of the people who lived in that area was one of normlessness rather than you know a sense of alienation.*

Community involvement

Professionals seem to have a different view of community than residents. The latter are thinking in terms of their day to day needs for neighbourliness and mutual support while the professionals are thinking more strategically and have a focus on participation and the community working together with policy makers to achieve change. From one professional view, "*the community is everyone working together and that takes time"* and this is seen as an ongoing involvement, not just a response to a common threat. There were, in fact, only limited examples of formal community involvement in terms of participation in either decision making or activities, other than On Track.

Not surprisingly, and confirming Lowndes' (2000) views on the gender specific circuits of social capital, the kind of activities the parents tended to get involved in centred around their children. In Parkland, a professional commented that:

> Young mothers who have nowhere else to go with their young children sometimes get together and run a local mother and toddler group or play group … very much from the grass roots.

Some of the residents did mention attendance at parent-toddler groups or other clubs but active involvement in community affairs was limited. One of the residents interviewed (a single parent) did involve herself actively in the Hightown community, taking up people's problems with the council. *It's known in the Council what I want I get. I'm not an expert or a professional but I know what people want".* Another resident said that if she wanted to complain, she had neighbours who were "*on a committee and they'd bring it up".* It was in this On Track area that one professional expressed the view that there was "*a high level of volunteering, far more people around with time to spare and willing to devote that time to some community involvement than you would find in a city".* Because of the size of the town, it was felt, by another professional that people can get to know each other, so that *"if you're looking at issues it's not a big step for them to find who's making the decision"* and it was here that the local beat constable held monthly meetings on the estate. Nevertheless, in spite of the efforts made to involve people in formal consultation, not that many people got involved.

A number of professionals in Hightown observed that there was an expectation that the services would be provided from the top i.e. by the council and somebody else's responsibility. (This was in contrast to the experience of the village residents who could see local people taking responsibility to ensure that a fete or a concert actually happened.) This led to an attitude where people saw their role primarily as *fighting* the council to get their rights. They frequently complained about the slow

response. In terms of civic infrastructure, Hightown itself is relatively isolated as it lies on the border of three counties and 18 miles from the main centre of its district council, leading to a feeling of being distanced from decision making:

> *It always goes back to the council ..it's the way everyone speaks at work ..if the council was (Hightown) we might have a bit more luck. [It is, in fact, a town council, with the ability to raise around £150,000 per annum.]*

The expectation that professionals "*were here to do it for them"* was also raised in Parkland. The difficulty of ensuring the representativeness of the people who got involved was also raised. The Residents Associations were "*highly unrepresentative"*. Most of the people who were active were elderly and were the people who had been in the area longer, reflecting Hall's (1999) work on associational membership. A former resident explained why she had not got involved:

> *Sometimes the police did some focus groups but they were held in town and in town of course there's buses, the buses are all full, I couldn't afford the money to go into town with children and I strongly feel it didn't take into account people who were elderly, disabled, one parent families…*

On the police organising a meeting with the MPs in the area: *"why didn't the people of the area know? but it was all for officials, agencies and professional, the ordinary people weren't invited'.*

On Residents Councils: *"Yet again, they are held at night. They are. I think they are fine in a limited way. I don't know much about them but the meetings are at night."*

A Meredith parent did not want to get involved:

> *They put notes and that through. Like I say, I work so I can't get to them* [meetings]. *When you're working and you've got kids as well, when you've got a moment to yourself you're taking that time to yourself.*

However, in Meredith, examples were given of collective action. Residents had come together over a traffic rat run and had put pressure on the councillors to do something about it. (Speed reducing humps etc. were now in place.) A group had also approached the local councillor over trouble from a local café:

> *A whole variety will turn out* [by class and ethnicity]*, of course, you won't get the people who are just finding their ways of surviving.*

Inevitably, the communities do contain a number of very isolated individuals, who would not be easily contactable for research of this kind. However, among those interviewed, there were parents who would have been described as hard-to-reach only a short while ago. One had been on drugs, another was suffering from extreme anxiety and On Track had been available at the right time for them to move out of their isolation. Others reasons for shutting oneself away were suggested by the young people. The Meredith children talked about "*mental problems"* (which, in the context it was mentioned, may have meant winter depression). The Redstone teenagers suggested "*people who owe money, they do not come out of the house".*

A Parkland parent described another situation*: "With the impact of the [child protection] system and the impact of the effects on my family I lost my confidence, I didn't feel safe and I shut myself [out] for some years." She also talked of her day-to-day struggle to survive: "I was very tired and worn down …one of my biggest frustrations and struggles was with poverty, with being heard"[former resident].*

The professionals gave a number of examples of hard-to-reach groups. Those who did not speak English were a major issue for Meredith in seeking to support people in the new communities. It was not just not speaking English that might keep them away but lack of confidence over reading and writing. In Parkland, there was a small group in this position who were in danger of being excluded from services because the support structure and the ability to work with non English speakers was not in place in the county.   The traveller community in Redstone is the focus of special On Track interventions, acknowledging the different culture pertaining and the particular difficulties for them in joining in mainstream society. These difficulties were emphasised by the fact that *"gypsies"* attracted opprobrium in two of the areas visited. One of the groups of Meredith children raised the topic. They did "*bad things"*, they would *"beg for money and when they don't get it they will stab you".* The

researcher noticed that not far from this school, the local pub had a sign up "No travellers". Parkland children wanted change that would "*stop travellers putting their horses outside our school and making the place smell*". *"Gypsies, yeah, stop travellers and gypsies."* These examples serve to confirm the social exclusion experienced by gypsies and travellers as described, for example, in Jordan (2001).

As the National Foundation for Educational Research point out, increasing social inclusion by engaging the hard-to-reach will tend to strengthen communities but it is not inevitable. That requires an articulation of social exclusion as a problem for the community, with the whole community sharing responsibility for addressing it as an issue.

Community leaders

Regeneration programmes have sought to involve community leaders in partnerships as a way of involving the community (Purdue, 2001). Understanding of the notion of community leaders was therefore explored. Outside the culturally diverse areas, where Purdue had found ethnic community leaders to be comfortable within the team, this appeared to be a little understood concept. When residents were asked whether there were community leaders, there were mentions of On Track staff, a link made with figures of authority such as teachers and a misunderstanding in interpreting the concept by referring to local council workers, who seemed to fulfil a neighbourhood warden role. Parkland residents responded in terms of action in the community. They knew a local mother who was involved in a good neighbour scheme and someone who worked for the church. Children identified people who ran community centres or youth clubs and, in one case identified a police officer whose work was based in the school. Authority, action and achievement were the common underlying themes. Not surprisingly, since children are distant from most civic activities, "position" dominated over "reputation" in terms of identifying community leaders. In Hightown, professionals commented:

> *I'm a bit wary of the concept. There is nothing quite as clear as that … various people with various influence.*

> *The sort of people who really have a lot of influence are not the people who are obviously leaders, more like *** who has been influential in achieving lots of quite small changes.*

In Redstone, the Asian communities were seen to have clear leaders but approaching the right people at the right time was crucial. *"One has to be careful that people are not offended and that the right people are spoken to. It could create mayhem if you don't do the groundwork* [and you need to] *ensure that working with one group doesn't then* [inadvertently] *exclude any other group."* Another professional talked in relation to the Borough as a whole about *"the lack of political leadership, lack of leadership in institutions*" saying that *"leadership in communities had happened in the past"*.

Caution was also expressed in Meredith. It was "*difficult to know whether the community groups were representative of the community that lives in the area".* Nevertheless, approaching community leaders was a well-tried approach to getting in touch with families in, say, the Turkish or Somalian communities. The communities might well also be able to offer support. This approach seemed to be particularly strong amongst the faith groups. The different Christian leaders met regularly and through the peace alliance were also meeting representatives of the Muslim community and Turkish and Kurdish groups. The former MP was cited as a well-known community leader who had gone on to parliament.

6. Crime, deprivation and community

These four localities have all been selected for On Track, as identified deprived, high crime communities. The framework set out by Sherman (1993), adapted to include sections arising from the interviewing, is used here to discuss the findings. The starting point is areas' community composition and social structure, matters typically covered in the professional interviews:

- Parkland – there were high numbers of people out of work, a higher proportion of single parents than in other parts of town and a very high level of domestic violence often from former partners. There was a high level of transience. When the estate was first established, four extended families known for widespread criminality moved in and it retains the crime culture. The long established gypsy population nearby also featured in police comments.

- Hightown – incomes were very low, stemming from part time work or poorly paid jobs and there were "jigsaw families", some of whom were characterised by extended family feuds or grievances against other families. In the early days of expansion, it was a town with a particularly high proportion of young people. Here there was a feeling that things had improved, particularly on the "worst" estate as certain well-known families *("you didn't mess with")* had been re-housed on another estate. One resident had her own evidence of improvement as she worked at A&E in the local hospital and had observed fewer people being brought in from her own area in recent years.

- Redstone – here, professionals felt that deprivation and risk of crime were synonymous. The loss of the manufacturing base and high levels of unemployment among young people particularly affected the Asian community. There was a major concern that within the On Track area the cycle of deprivation was being perpetuated, as reflected in the high concentration of ethnic minorities in the area, which is characterised by substandard housing, high levels of unemployment rates and poor education. Tension between the different ethnic groups living within and adjacent to the area was also an issue.

- Meredith – the transience of the population was one of the major concerns here with an increasing number of houses bought by private landlords "*who are there to get as much money out of the asylum seekers as they can".* There were a large number of single parents and issues around school attendance and truancy, as younger children hung out with older children who did not go to school. Here were the longest pauses when professionals were asked if it was a good place to bring up children. "*It's hard to know now. We brought up our children here. Its really quite hard to know."*

These comments illustrate the elements of community composition and social structure, which make it more difficult for parents to bring their children up and ensure that they do not become involved in anti-social behaviour. All areas house the population groups most strongly associated with crime and display to a greater or lesser extent the basic factors of low socio-economic status, ethnic heterogeneity and residential mobility which Shaw and McKay (1969) argued led to the disruption of social structure.

Physical disorder

Physical disorder was discussed in the literature review (Wilson and Keeling, 1982) both as an indicator of community risk and as a possible cause (as people respond by withdrawing into their private spheres). Perhaps the most obvious item in common among the neighbourhoods studied, from both children and adults, was the lack of care for the physical environment. Most frequently the complaints are about rubbish. (Graffiti was sometimes mentioned but not as worthy of additional comment.) For children, the rubbish lying around leads to their first awareness that their area is not as good as they would like it to be and they feel unhappy about it, blaming *"horrible people",* expanded further as "*grown-ups".* Almost everyone complained about the amount of rubbish lying around and the time taken to clear it.

> *People are not proud. There is litter everywhere and people just drop more litter* [Redstone professional].

You pay the council tax and they don't clean the streets. The council is very slow' [to follow up complaints] [Meredith parent]. It was acknowledged by professionals that there had been enormous problems with the council's waste management contract.

The problem is not simply one of litter. People complained about sofas left in the streets and abandoned cars:

The other aspect of this turnover issue is that more rubbish is created…and I don't mean litter, I mean armchairs, fridges, everything – all domestic furniture [Parkland professional].

People take sofas out and throw them on the street and the council need to clean up, there should be a fine for anyone making a mess. You cannot get out in the back alley-way because of the rubbish [Redstone parent].

The residents round here are trying to keep it clean and tidy. People from the other side [of the town centre] *or up the top of the estate think it's a good place to hide a car. They're dumped here because it's out of the way* [Hightown father].

In Redstone, children were upset by fires in the street and a non-teaching assistant confirmed that people often burned rubbish on the street, especially restaurant owners, because they did not want to pay the council to clear the rubbish.

Anti-social behaviour

Youth nuisance was another repeated feature in all areas. Much of this has already been described by the children in their reflections on their community and many examples were discussed in the interviews. There is no need to distinguish between areas or interviewees, because these points were universal and people usually did not require any prompting beyond being asked what were the worst things about their area. In some cases, the complaints stem simply from children being out and about, playing in the only places available to them. In general, however, the problems were serious and persistent and can be described as invasions of personal space – "*harassment, banging on the door, kicking on the doors, fireworks put through letter boxes, threats, children running about on garage roofs, cars with ripped tyres and badges ripped off, swings and slides vandalised".* The dumped cars mentioned above become the source of further problems as they become burnt out and broken up. Redstone 14-year olds said that *"people set fire to cars, vandalise things. Cars are burnt out nearly every day"* and researchers saw several examples on their visits to Parklands, together with vandalised bus shelters.

Usually teenagers were blamed for the anti-social behaviour but some people identified younger children among those causing problems. The children running on the garage roofs were identified by a resident as:

three and a half and four and up to 16.

I have seen with my own eyes seven year olds stealing from supermarkets for little things like sweets [professional – who felt that poverty was the underlying cause of this].

Young children are allowed out until very late and parents are not aware where they are [professional].

Children can be unkind to each other, both in school and out of school and bullying amongst children was a cause of concern to parents – *"I pick the little boy up. Sometimes he has walked to school on his own but children have spat at him"* [Redstone]. Elsewhere, the location just outside school was identified as an unsafe place. "*If someone wants to pick a fight then outside the gates is where it is going to happen"* [Hightown professional].

From the professional perspective too, there was increasingly physically aggressive behaviour in schools. Family feuds were brought into schools and problems "*which in days gone by would have been sorted out by neighbours discussing things and working them out themselves"* nowadays tended to require police presence to resolve them.

Troublesome teenagers

In every area, discussions on antisocial behaviour led to comments about the need for facilities for teenagers because they were bored and had nothing to do. This is explored further in chapter 7. It also needs to be remembered that "teenagers" is often used as a generic term for trouble-makers. When one boy complained about teenagers letting off fireworks and was asked about their ages, he replied 15, twelve and nine. The *"big boy"'* keeping kids off the parks were 16, or maybe 14 or twelve. It seems likely also that people in their early 20s were among the groups hanging around and implicated in fights outside pubs and, in one case, outside the local church. Additionally, trouble was not always caused by local people. In particular, for Meredith, a major football ground in the locality was blamed for some of the vandalism and racism.

Chapter 5 showed how teenagers become a problem for the age group just below them, as they tend to dominate the public spaces (see Woolley et al, 1999a; ESRC, 2000a). It was not always clear how threatening the groups of teenagers were in practice. As the learning mentor leading the discussion in Meredith pointed out to the nine-year-olds, perhaps the teenagers were just hanging out with friends and had nothing else to do. (The nine-year-olds had just said that one of the things they did themselves was to walk up and down the street with friends.) A Hightown professional mentioned that the teenagers may not be welcome in the home when mum had a new partner and, in Meredith, a teenager whose bedroom was the living room (because of overcrowding) was, according to his mother, going out more and more.

Some teenagers in Meredith were said to have a gang mentality and two sets of gangs had turned up at a primary school because ten and eleven-year-olds were also involved. In Redstone the teenagers mentioned gangs from estates outside the On Track area coming in to fight. No further evidence was gathered on gangs (described by a Hightown parent as rivalries between particular estates, "*a couple of little skirmishes .. .nothing really to write home about")* but then the research focused in the On Track age group and did not gather many views from teenagers.

The work in Meredith explored further the nine-year-olds' views on teenagers. *"Some were good and some were bad."* This view was corrected by one girl to *"some were good and most bad. They think they're clever but they don't do their work."* They hung out in gangs around the park and in the alleys, *"drinking alcohol and smashing car windows".* In the school group, the discussion turned to *"hoodlums"* and one girl said that they wouldn't do anything to her because they were in her family. In fact, half the class agreed that they had *"bad boys"* in their family. They "*caused trouble, taking people's bags and things"* and *"should get a job".* One boy said that he did not feel safe when he went to the community centre and saw the bad boys. His mother says *"Look at them and don't show you're scared".*

The eleven-year-olds agreed that adults were scared to talk to teenagers and there were certainly reports from adults about feeling intimidated:

> *I used to take old people to bingo. When we come back groups of people are kicking footballs at the shop windows. They are 15. I was not bothered but the old people were and they stopped going* [Redstone resident].

> *Gangs of teenagers (Asian) the area is mostly populated by Asians. But there are gangs of white lads from other areas. You feel intimidated by them* [Redstone professional].

More serious crime

There was plenty of actual experience of serious crime as well. Car-jackings and associated under-age drivers in the residential areas were a worry in Meredith. There were many accounts of people having had their mobile phones snatched, cars stolen and being victims of burglary.

> *We are going to move. My husband is sick of this area, but can't move at the moment because we had the money and a lot of jewellery stolen the day after we got the money to set up our business…* [Redstone parent].

In Parkland, the children's local shop had been ram-raided two weeks before the researchers visited the school and a recent attempted robbery at a Meredith Post Office meant that it was closed at the

time of the research visit. There had also been a recent car-jacking incident in this area. Someone reported a stabbing the previous week in Hightown and in Parkland, the youth club girls had a lot to say about a well-known local character who had been murdered the previous year. Meredith, however, was distinguished by the fact that people actually interviewed (and their close relatives) had been stabbed or had a knife pulled on them. Perhaps not surprisingly, about half the children in the school group there were scared of the possibility of serious harm to themselves. One professional said that he had been mugged quite a few times whilst he grew up in the area. It "*happened during my school period. It hasn't happened since I left for college and university which suggests that it might be more of an issue for young people even and the fear of that could be great amongst young people."*

A recurrent feature was the temporal aspect of the crime. Antisocial behaviour on one Hightown estate occurred as parents dropped their children off for school at 8.00am. "*They break the swing, or go into the shop and steal, to steal a sweet, or to go and play football where they shouldn't be'* (the On Track supported breakfast club had greatly improved the situation). In Meredith a lot of the street robberies were said to be committed between 3.00pm and 5.00pm by young people (of school age) on other young people as they left school. Generally, however, the time of concern was at night:

> *Come night-time you get the rogues out.*

> *During the daytime when everybody's out with young children it's fine, come 7.00pm …*[Parkland parents].

In Meredith, a professional who was visited at home at 11.00am on a quiet rainy morning explained that "*all the kids are at school and the ones not working are in bed. At 7.00pm it's totally different. It's a shame really."*

Very few of those spoken to were happy to go out at night but one lady in Redstone was comfortable with her surroundings:

> *I feel safe, nobody bothers me. Some people might feel unsafe. I do not mind walking at night after I have baby-sat.*

The hobby of the local councillor in Parkland was running. He ran round the estate and through the woods at night and did not worry about potential violence.

It was interesting that when the Meredith parents discussed serious incidents, they tended to preface their remarks with phrases such as "*you get crime everywhere, …it's all over, all over".* They either did not know or did not want to admit that their area did have more serious crime than elsewhere. They described their strategies for personal safety:

> *I feel safe …you've got to be vigilant anywhere, if it's late at night ..you're never safe, you've just got to be aware'.*

> *It's not down to an area, it's down to common sense at the end of the day .. you don't as a woman on your own go for a walk late at night.*

And at another interview:

> Mother: *I make sure I'm aware of what's going on.*
> Researcher: *Do you think it stops you doing things?*
> Mother: *No it doesn't stop me.*
> Researcher: *Do you go out at night?*
> Mother: *Yeah*
> Researcher: *Much the same is it?*
> Mother: *I wear less jewellery.*

Risk

Risk as perceived by mothers is primarily about their children's safety and particularly over whether they come home safely. In some cases, this fear is overwhelming. The possibility of their children being kidnapped formed a significant part of the interviews with Meredith parents:

You worry as a parent, you send them to school and they don't come home, you read it all the time.

Always one that goes off.

Someone talks to you, you look away for a moment. It's the people out there that you can't trust.

Whether this reflected the then current television publicity about a missing teenager or concerns about small children in a large city or whether there were other reasons for the dominance of this issue was not clear. Children in that area had the same worries – *"Most of the children are getting kidnapped"* [nine to ten year old]. Other reports (ESRC, 2000b; Woolley et al, 1999a) suggest that children can often confuse strangers and looking strange. Tramps and *Big Issue* sales staff are therefore seen as a threat and perhaps gypsies and travellers as well.

Danger from cars also arose in the discussions, although probably not as frequently as the danger warrants.

Age seven, eight, I would not allow a child out. (Not on the street?) *No, not at all. My son asks to play with the little boy over the road. Not allowed. Cars. Everything. The way things are going today, read everyday in the paper about children being kidnapped. The cars speed round the corner* [Meredith parent].

However, children were well aware of traffic dangers: *"loads of kids on my road have been run over"* [Meredith] and girls in Hightown welcomed a new zebra crossing.

It was really only parents who also had teenage children who expressed wider concerns. The Parkland parents, for example, saw drugs as a danger for their children in the short term, with needles in the play areas, and, in the long-term, as users. A parent in Meredith with both teenage and young children expressed her concerns in response to a question on what she worried about:

Just their safety really and who they mix with. Who they mix with really counts a lot. If they're going with bad company where there's like smokers ... but they should have their own mind but they don't….It's just the teenagers peer pressure now … it's not nice … don't forget a lot of them have got little brothers and sisters they all follow. The young take the older brothers like role models, they tend to look up to them and then this is how to behave that's why I sort of always have to nag my big ones, you know.

These findings echo those of the Economic and Social Research Council programme: *Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st century* (ESRC, 2000b). Strangers, drugs and traffic were identified as the main risks to children by both parents and children. Parents could recall risk-taking from their childhood but, generally, had little experience of drugs and few sources of information.

Availability of alcohol, drugs and weapons

The extent to which drugs, alcohol and weapons are readily available is likely to impact on crime levels. It is interesting to see at what age these different items were mentioned by children.

- Alcohol – the Meredith nine-year-olds talked about the football crowds getting drunk. In Parkland at ten or eleven, "*they're all fighting all the time outside of the shop because there's the *** (pub name) there as well and they're drunk and everything"*.

  The worst thing in the whole world is pubs because they get drunk and they start doing like bad things. I just don't like them when they're drunk and our Dad's an alcoholic.

- Drugs – drugs attracted more comment, including a six-year-old who had experience of heroin use within her own family. The Redstone 14-year-olds talked about drugs and the fact that people steal money to obtain their drugs and a ten-year-old girl in Meredith explained the breaking into cars as a bid to steal radios and obtain money to buy drugs. Girls aged ten in Hightown said that they did not like the town centre at night – *"drug dealers hang out near the pubs and everything*" and boys of ten in Parkland gave detailed accounts of finding needles. They understood the health issues around needles but did not know which drugs were being used.

- Weapons – the murder of a local man the previous year led to discussion of his stabbing in Parkland among the 12 to 13 old girls and, in Meredith, a nine to ten-year old referred to the big boys having knives. Several drawings produced here featured guns as the worst thing in the area.

Drugs were seen by local residents as the source of many of the problems:

> *You've got the usual scumbags and trouble-makers.* (For example?) *Youngsters who use drugs and haven't got jobs. Kids are well known. The police know who they are [Hightown parent].*

The women acknowledged that they had had their rebellious years but *"we didn't do the things they do now. I think it's drugs"* Hightown parent].

In Parkland, the former resident having described the various aspects of youth nuisance ended with *"Oh and drugs".* She went on to explain *"you could actually see from my children's window heroin being taken in the cars and I was frightened because sometimes there were scenes, there were problems, nastiness, aggression going on".*

In general, people involved with drugs were to be avoided, as these Meredith parents explain:
> *I try to stay away from it. If it is happening on my doorstep, I tend to phone the police because I don't want it going on. I don't get involved with it. It's obvious it's happening.*

> *Sometimes you see groups of people together and you can tell something suspicious is going on but you're not going to get involved.*

> *You can see some people walking along the street and you know they're on drugs, you can tell by the way they walk … I talk to my kids and tell them if anyone comes to you and gives you anything at all, 'cos I've heard they do it in schools now…it was in the paper the other day, the way they get young kids to sell.*

They get hold of this kind of weed and stuff. I've noticed the smell and it's terrible. (Teenagers or younger children?) *I've seen parents doing it. I know some neighbours that do it and children ..I don't know how they get hold of these things.*

Previous sections have described the views on the two Hightown estates, where the "other" estate tends to be described as the centre of drugs. In general, people seemed to be talking primarily about cannabis. However, it was only in this area that an interviewee discussed the detail of heroin-taking among people he knew. The owner of a local hairdresser's shop had lost his business through addiction and subsequent crime and prison and he knew a lad who had been at primary school with his son. *"They hadn't spoken for ages ..[his son had been invited round] – he came home, he came straight in and said 'you won't believe that he's sitting there with heroin, he's on heroin .. injecting' a 15 year old, that's happening on your doorstep".*

The professionals were very concerned about the drug situation but, as with the parents, it was not always clear which drugs were being discussed. In Parkland it was thought that a high proportion of people on the estate used drugs and that children were involved in running drugs back and forth between houses. In Redstone, one professional thought the problem was seen largely as one of hard drugs *"because that's where the money is"*. Generally however, in spite of probing, there was a hesitation to talk about the issue in this area, except among the 14 year-olds. Mostly, the response was that drugs were on the increase in the area but no worse than anywhere else. In Meredith, children were openly smoking joints during lunch breaks, hanging round street corners. "*They would then try amphetamines and ecstasy*" though "*the real danger, the real frightening drug is crack-cocaine*" [professionals].

Oppositional culture

Oppositional culture is the extent to which groups or particular sub-groups adopt different values from mainstream society. (This raises the issue of whether using cannabis is part of mainstream or oppositional culture these days – some adult interviewees clearly thought that this was the norm and nothing to worry about.) As one parent in Hightown said about the kids on the "worst" estate *"If you've got the reputation you might as well go out and do it"*.

A Parkland professional explained his assessment of young people's thinking:

> *Children can sometimes see literally what they perceive as success and are prepared to go down different pathways / alleyways to achieve this success. Because the children's definition of success has changed over the years (from a good job and pension to material possessions) the method they use to achieve this success has also changed.*

And another said that people are seen as living in difficult circumstances but wanting "*all the advantages, the money, the house, the car, right now*".

As a Meredith professional said, "*If you can't afford the cinema you go out and try to get the money. You know what I mean.*"

Here it was felt that crime was tolerated in the youth community. "*There's a culture of it doesn't matter, it's cool to be a bit of a street gangster whatever*".

There was a detailed contribution on this issue from a police officer for Parkland who felt that the culture was changing. There had been a culture of anti-social norms but they had turned it around.

> *We not only managed to cap the crime problem but by a very good policing operation, we managed to put away a lot of the problem criminals for a significant amount of time to buy ourselves some breathing space ..up to two years' breathing space. And that has allowed us to get in there and work with these people and show them what can actually happen if they don't have this constant drip, drip of crime occurring on their doorstep. … There has been a change of attitude about crime .. it has taken us six years, quite a long time. .. We are now seeing a reduction in crime, which we are now seeing is sustainable, the community are able to sustain it without necessarily a massive impact and intervention by the police.*

A professional in Redstone had concerns that the young people were being forced into an oppositional culture. "*The local area is known as 'the Bronx'. After 12 at night police will not go into the area alone and the locals know that they rule the roost. They consider themselves downtown America.*"

Most of the comments below were from Asian professionals about Asian youth. It is not clear to what extent these remarks apply to white youth. They felt that poor educational attainment and high unemployment rates meant that the youth of the area had time on their hands to *"brood about things together"*. The second factor was that the deprivation of the minority ethnic communities is evident for all to see. Within the two to three mile radius of Redstone and the surrounding areas there is a stark contrast in the type of housing. There are clusters of some very nice large semis around the corner from the run down dilapidated terraces where ethnic minority families are concentrated. Thirdly, the Muslim youth of the area feel that they are being victimised by the media every time something happens in the area, they are the first to be blamed and *"splashed across the pages"*. Concerns were expressed that the young people of the area feel *"trapped in the middle"* with two predominantly white estates with known National Front activity on either side:

> *Here we have *** and *** with race issues and NF activity on both sides. So this area when you talk to the youth, they will say they're trapped in the middle especially. People are on their guard. Parents and businesses in the area are very worried and asking us what we are going to do.*

Though the young children of six and seven years old seemed to have a sense of what was right and wrong, some of the older children at aged 14 showed signs of compliance: *"if you can't beat them join them"*. This was particularly noticeable amongst boys who were trying hard to be "macho" and tough. For example, when asked what they wanted to be in the future, one of the boys said under his breath *"a drug dealer"* then changed it to *"a big person in the community"*.

Reporting crime

Although, an oppositional culture was not widespread, there was generally a sense of people "*turning a blind eye*" [professional]. If there had been a strong feeling of community, the literature would suggest support from neighbours in dealing with crime but more typical is the comment:

> *We were burgled at seven at night, but nobody is telling though they know* [Redstone Resident].

A few people tried to stop antisocial behaviour: "*Most of them are 18 who should know better. We've had five windows broken at the front … you go out and say politely, would you stop playing because of the windows. They hit the balls at the adults and they swear at you*" [Hightown parent]. If the children were younger, people expected abuse from the parents as well.

Even in taking action to report incidents to the police, people were afraid of retribution. One Parkland parent mentioned her worry that the children might overhear her phone call (about local drug dealers) and perhaps "*letting out the fact that she had reported it*". In general, children are well aware of the situation. "*If they got arrested and went to jail and when they got out they might come after you*" [Meredith eight to nine year old].

The Meredith parents were asked what they would do if they saw a gang of youths breaking in somewhere:

> *I wouldn't speak to them. You do not know what they would do, pick up a brick, hit you in the face or stab you. I would give the police a ring.*

> *They might stab you and smash your house up. Not worth it to get involved. My family is more important. Each to their own, sort of thing.*

> *You've got to think about your own safety. Best thing you can do is get on the phone and dial 999.* (This parent said that she definitely would get involved if a member of her own family were attacked.)

However, a Redstone parent felt that she would have to do something if they saw a crime being committed:

> *Someone in the area said she saw an Asian lad kick a white boy, I asked why didn't you do anything, she said she was scared, I would have done something. I saw a couple fighting in the street, I rang the police on my mobile, they rang me back to say they will sort it out, they didn't get me into trouble.*

7. Findings

While the four areas covered in this research have unique features and characteristics, there is a number of important themes which occur everywhere:

- Importantly, there is much to celebrate in these communities. Many parents bring up their children successfully in very difficult circumstances.

  Reflection: As one professional commented on the strength of her area: "*The fact that these families deal with the complexities they do and they still get out the door. The tenacity that exists in this community should be acknowledged.*"

- Professionals, resident adults and children viewed the areas differently – all perspectives are necessary for a true understanding of the area.

  Reflection: Professionals tend to focus on the problems of the area, often with an approach delimited by their professional skills. Adult residents generally like their area, confirming the views of previous research (Forrest and Kearns, 1999) that people are more important than place. Children also like their area but from around age eight, they are critical and have suggestions for change.

The changes suggested by people in the areas are covered first, followed by implications for On Track and policy generally.

Improving basic service quality

These areas are generally suffering from low standards of basic services:

- The single most important improvement, demanded by children and adults alike, is a clean up of the area and a continued high standard in terms of street cleaning and the rapid removal of bulky items and abandoned cars.

  Reflection: it is clear that residents and non-residents contribute to the problem and that there is an education issue as well as a public service issue. A number of primary schools work very hard on this, installing litter bins in the playground and making sure they are used. The broken windows theory is supported (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Looking around them, people are confirmed in their view that their area is in decline and that no-one thinks highly enough of them to do anything about it.

- High on the children's agenda is more places to play, more parks, more swings, more exciting equipment and more entertainment. They want these places to be safe.

  Reflection: As other researchers have found (ESRC, 2000a; Morrow, 2001) and, perhaps not surprisingly, these are consistent demands from children. The emphasis on safety is important and this may mean adults being around or CCTV cameras being installed. Boys generally wanted to talk about football, as did most of the men interviewed. There was a long discussion in Parkland between the boys and the male interviewer about the importance of being in a team. A culture where a range of leagues operates to incorporate a wide range of ability would enable more boys to be involved and it seems that many would value this. Playgrounds were an example of cuts in existing provision, probably reflecting sites closed because they did not meet health and safety regulations. There was also evidence in Parkland of older people not wanting play areas reinstated and their views taking precedence. However, children's views are not accorded due weight in this democratic process. A further issue is one of maintenance, as one can understand the authority's reluctance to provide facilities if they are swiftly vandalised but this illustrates the need to tackle issues simultaneously.

- Children and adults are troubled by teenagers and want improved services to meet the needs of this age group.

Reflection: The visible problem is generally teenagers and this is almost always interpreted as teenagers needing something to do. As discussions proceeded, a few parents acknowledged that the issue was not quite as simple as this. *"They've got all the youth centres, it's just they don't want to go"* (Why?) *"prefer to hang out with their friends on the streets on in their houses"* (noted that they can't smoke at youth club) [Meredith parent]. A professional here commented that it was "*not cool*" to use the council youth club and, in Redstone, there were reports (outside the On Track area) that the young people prefer to hang out in bus shelters. *"They say they feel safer. They have a youth centre but they do not use it. They like the bus shelter because they do not have others setting rules"* [Redstone professional]. There is a need to start from the perspective of the teenagers, to treat them as experts in their own lives, enable them to articulate their need and respond to them.

- Residents want somewhere to meet, an easily accessible, neutral facility.

Reflection: In Parkland, a local group are currently putting forward proposals to take over an empty shop and provide a toy library, coffee shop, drop in and IT training. In Hightown, the On Track drop in centre has just opened. People are unlikely to come together readily if there is nowhere for them to meet and these kind of facilities assist the process of community involvement (Thomas, 1991). In multi-cultural areas a neutral space where the different groups can mix in a safe environment is vital.

- Residents seek empowerment, in the form of advice services and, where relevant, language skills.

Reflection: advice services and advocacy can form a key part of a drop in facility. Hightown, for example, plans to offer a Citizens Advice Bureau session in its centre. Refugees, in particular, want more opportunity to learn English and to learn about their rights.

- Adults and children want to feel safe and free from nuisance, harassment and street crime. They want visible policing.

Reflection: children are unhappy about fighting and want it stopped and residents believe that local policing, where there is personal knowledge of those causing the problems, would serve to reduce the persistent nuisance and occasional harassment which they suffer. Much of this is probably seen by the police as low level crime and Ratcliffe and McCullagh (2001) suggest that even car crime receives low priority, as the police do not believe that the public are very concerned. Fear of street crime after dark prevailed in all areas and, in some locations, street crime was also an issue during the day.

Localised issues

Each On Track will have issues peculiar to it which need addressing locally. Examples from the four areas studied are set out below:

- Hightown: there is an issue around policing here, in part because this is a rural area. The police station in town is not open at night and the area is served by a mobile patrol from the base 18 miles away. The policeman interviewed here described a town centre fracas outside a pub where he and his colleague had to withdraw as they could not possibly have dealt with it. Residents want the police station open during the evening when they feel it is most needed.

- Parkland: adults and children living here on low incomes are severely restricted in their options because of the low density of the area and the distance of many of the estates from both the local shopping centre and the town centre. The way in which bus services are currently funded virtually precludes thoughts of subsidy, which is probably why no-one suggested a cheap or free service. However, this would have a major impact on people's quality of life.

- Meredith is in danger of "tipping" as a consequence of the increasing numbers of short-term lets and a potential change in the balance of long term residents committed to the area compared to transients. The situation is also exploitative in that "*landlords make an enormous amount of money by providing a bed and sending down a box of cornflakes a week*

or something like that" [professional]. The local MP is campaigning to change the law on this issue.

- In Redstone, the Ouseley report (2001) has set the scene for making diversity work. However, there were many concerns in the On Track area, particularly among Asian professionals. Communities were reported to be living as though they were in Pakistan, knowing little if anything about western culture and systems, with their children caught between two conflicting cultures and being victimised by racist stereotypes. The same professionals, who were generally anxious to stress the positive, also expressed real concern about the potential for riots.

On Track

This research did not specifically seek views about On Track but inevitably they were given. Everywhere parents were very enthusiastic. In some cases, praise was received for universal interventions – holiday play schemes and parent groups – but the most moving were the comments on the targeted work. One parent explained that she had learned new ways of dealing with her son and would feel more confident now about accessing support on her own in the future. Another said that On Track *"took a lot of stress from me. It's really good, it's helping".* The main criticism was that people felt the services were not sufficiently well publicised. They had found out about them through word-of-mouth and not via, say, a health visitor or a directory of services. This may, however, reflect the stage of development of the local programmes and the need to avoid overloading the service and being unable to fulfil expectations. The various issues raised confirm the difficulties of operating a programme of this kind:

- On Track is only likely to be fully effective where it offers services, which are additional to good quality basic provision. The model of multi-agency working needs to address a wide range of services if On Track areas are to see substantial overall improvement.

Reflection: there is a danger that special programmes become a substitute for basic provision. The residents' demands are frequently for services which the more affluent are able to take for granted, either within a more responsive public sector or by purchasing them commercially. People are aware that communities can reach a point in their decline where gradual decline is suddenly intensified. On Track needs to work with other agencies to create a spiral of improvement.

- On Track places a lot of responsibility on young children to counter the role modelling of older children in their communities and On Track teams need to reflect on appropriate means of support.

Reflection: Without positive teenage role modelling for young children, they may well find it more protective to join the "deviant" teenage culture than to resist it. However, there will be positive teenage role models in all areas, although they are less obvious than the negative ones. Interventions linking the age groups in a positive way and linking the relevant agencies could be valuable.

- Engaging individuals with services is part of the process of engaging communities; many On Track interventions are successfully fostering community development.

Reflection: On Track teams have given considerable thought to engaging hard-to-reach groups (NFER, 2002). Watherston (2002) has identified the reasons why people may be hard to engage - poor past experience, inappropriate services etc. - and discussed ways of breaking down the barriers by establishing a position of trust, if necessary working with organisations who have been working in the area and already have the confidence of local people. Professionals need to work with the community to develop relevant services but then to respect people's own decision as to whether to participate or not. As individuals become involved, the word will spread. Interventions that bring people together to share problems and offer mutual support are particularly important in furthering community development. Many On Track interventions are of this nature, especially where volunteers or community centres are involved or where a drop-in centre forms part of the On Track programme.

Other policy issues

As well as issues specific to On Track, the research has highlighted a number of issues relating to area based initiatives and to community engagement and community development:

- Area based initiatives, while enabling a focused service to be developed, bring with them the potential for conflict over resource allocation and for confusion over the area served. The actual area specified can appear arbitrary to residents and professionals.

Reflection: Most project co-ordinators had experienced some resentment over their area receiving special treatment. This was intensified where different ethnic groups were involved. Putting money into ethnic minority areas can build resentment and feed racial tensions between the communities due to the white working class communities feeling deprived of valuable resources. Areas receiving many initiatives often find that there are different boundaries for each initiative and this is confusing to professionals and residents alike. In practice, it is likely that service delivery boundaries will be fluid, and, while this may pose problems for service delivery and evaluation, it accords with the way people live their lives.

- It must be recognised that achieving community engagement in the strategic sense of the community owning and taking decisions about the programme is a very long-term process.

Reflection: Relationships of trust first have to be built up. Residents need to be supported in articulating local needs and considering ways in which a particular programme might be geared to meet those needs. It is difficult for people to break away from a mind-set where the expectation is that professionals provide services. In this situation, the residents' role is to fight for their rights and this is a far cry from identifying needs and planning services.

- People are more likely to participate when things are improving and where there are indications that they have been listened to in the past (Docherty et al, 2001). This confirms the importance of quality services and responsiveness from all local programmes.

Reflection: In this context, the Hightown parents were generally feeling positive. It is not so clear elsewhere. A professional who did detailed qualitative work in Parkland six years ago recorded a lack of expectation there. People said "*oh well, I will talk to you, but I don't suppose anything will happen".* He said that there had been a number of initiatives, which had stalled leading to "*a kind of indifference bordering on cynicism. Little things like people telling me that it is difficult to seek redress or to have an issue satisfactorily resolved."* However, in the light of the views of the police (see Chapter 6) and indeed of the two current residents interviewed, things may have changed. In Meredith, universal On Track interventions were seen as responding to local needs but in Redstone, it seems that significant improvement at local authority level may be needed before there is a general feeling of optimism.

- Community development needs ongoing professional and financial support.

Reflection: There will be an ongoing need for support, both in terms of skills and in terms of finance. A couple interviewed who were running a youth club felt that they should have been offered training – '*"It's like starting up a big hill with a rucksack, when someone could easily take that rucksack off, at least when you get started".* There is then a different issue about keeping things going. Talking about the community proposal for a shop in Parkland, a professional said "*if the key person goes away, I wonder whether it would be sustainable".* He felt that it was possible to get things started but keeping them going was the real challenge. It is in these situations (and during the inevitable fallings out) that professional support is needed. In Meredith, a professional acknowledged that their local neighbourhood assemblies would only keep going if they were allocated a small budget. "*People don't want to be consulted for ever. They want to change things."* It is quite likely also that some initiatives will fail and professionals, politicians and residents need to be willing to accept this possibility. (This also implies the need for a different attitude from the media.)

- In all the communities, there was a feeling that people wanted "*things to be better, they want their kids to have the best chances, the best opportunities"* [professional].

Reflection: People valued neighbourly support and there was a widespread wish to get on together. On Track teams and others can use this as their source of inspiration, knowing also that people who get things done are respected.

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Appendix

Picture 1:   The Journey to School – Parkland – drawn at school

Picture 2:   The Journey to School – Parkland – drawn at school

Picture 3:   The Journey to School – Redstone – drawn at school

Picture 4:   The Journey to School – Redstone – drawn at school

Picture 5:   The Best Things in the Area – Meredith – 2 pictures from holiday play scheme

Picture 6:   The Worst Things in the Area – Meredith – 2 pictures from holiday play scheme

Picture 7:   The Best and Worst Things in the Area – Hightown – youth club activity

(Drunk)   Men (drunk)   Bad

                              no top
                                 or
                           (crazy) Trousers
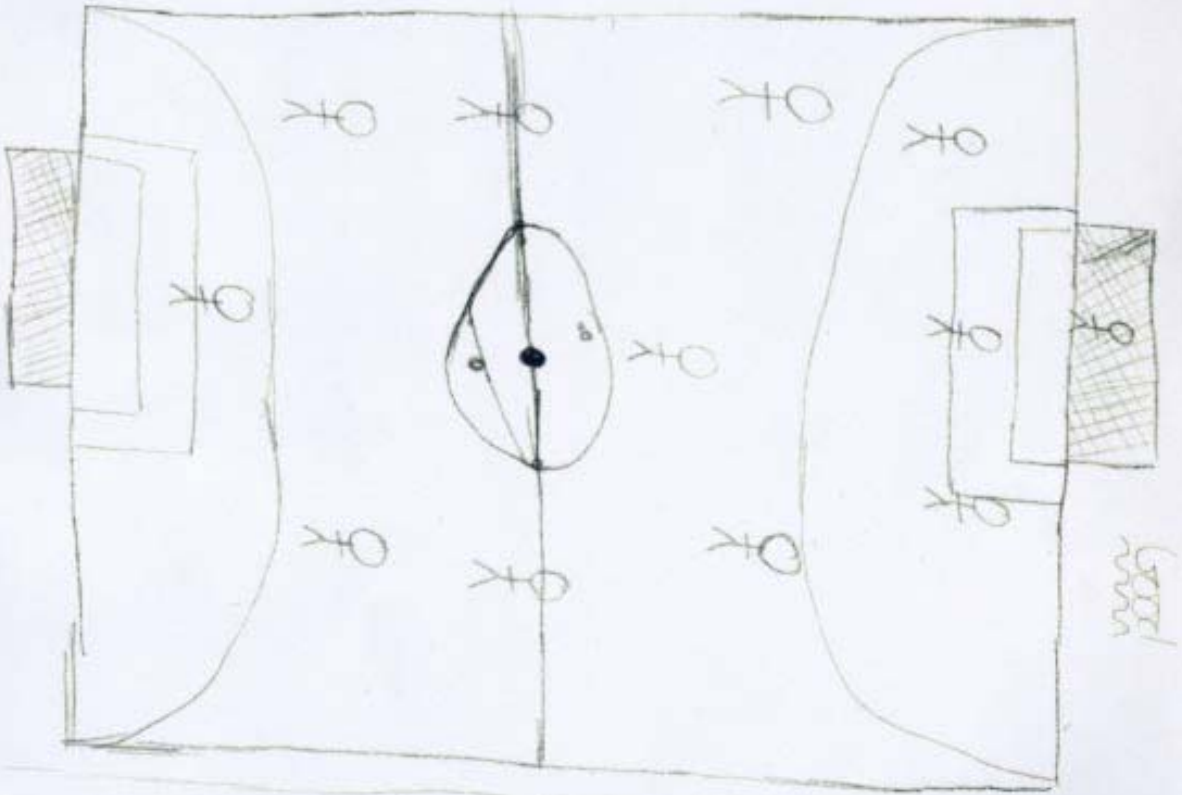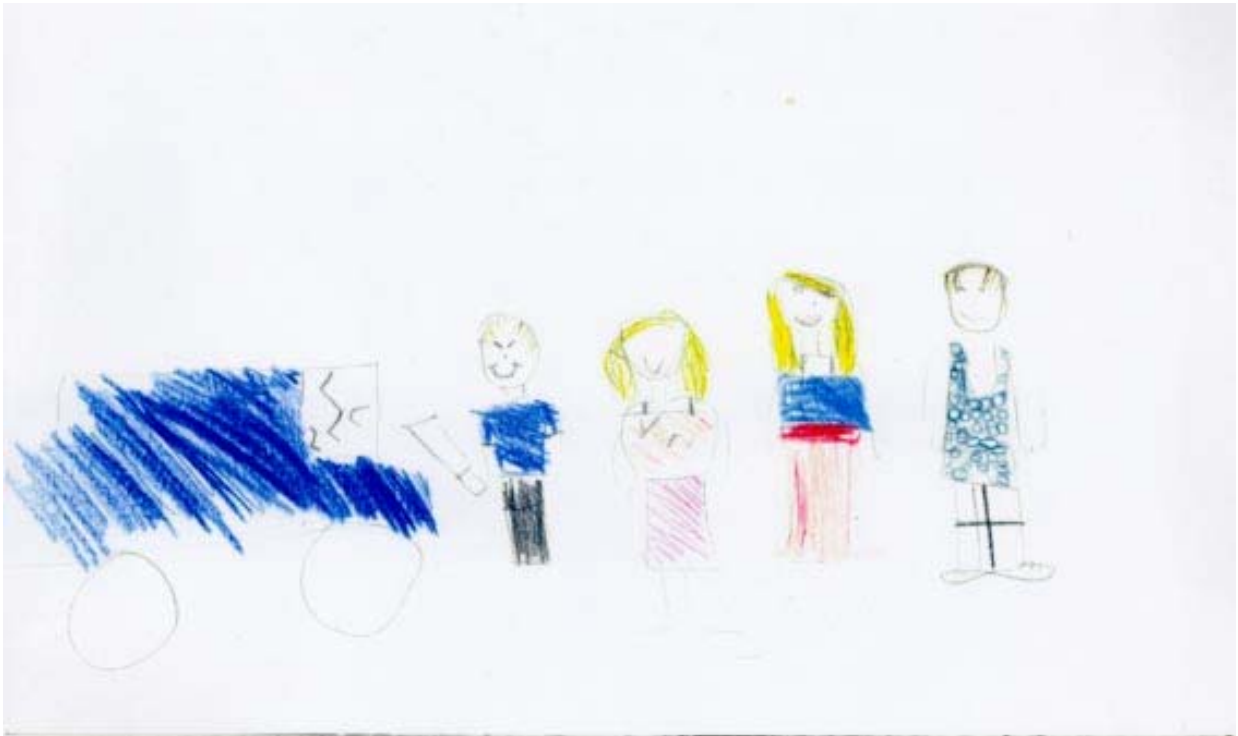
The Best Thing About My Area

Girls

- I like the shop. I like pizza!! [age 10]
- The best thing is there is lots of parks. [age 11]
- I like the way they've sorted out the traffic jam at ****** school. [age 11]
- Best thing is you get to hang around with friends. [age 12]
- The best thing is there's a park nearby. [age 12]
- The best thing about ****** is that u can get a bus to ****** (*nearest large town*). [age 12]
- I like the kids up on the ****** (*name of estate*). [age 12]
- The best thing about ****** is you can get a bus to ****** (*nearest large town*). [age 12]
- I like the kids up on ****** (*name of* estate) [age 12]
- Best thing is town, cinema, woollies ect. [age 13]
- I like the library. [age 13]

Boys

- I like the best thing about where I live is that I skateboard. [age 10]
- Prawn <porn> shop. A car for kids to drive on. [age 11]
- *******(*name of club*) down ******. [age 11]
- Not to big. Not too many shops. Not to crowded. [age 12]
- Lots of shops. [age 12]
- There is a big field so we can play football. [age 12]
- The best thing protect sex and johny club. [age 12 and 13]
- It got quite good parks. It has lots of green. It has lots of shops. It has clubs all over. [age 13]
- The best thing is the way out of ******. [age 13]

The Worst Thing About My Area

Girls

- Don't like ****** because everything smells. [age 9]
- I hate the traffic. [age 10]
- I don't like ****** because these no decent shops. [age 12]
- There is nowhere for us to play apart from here + not a lot of shops. [age 12]
- The worst thing is we don't have much activities in ******. [age 11]
- Worst thing is the boys. [age 12]
- I hate the bikers up on the ****** (*name of estate*). [age 12]
- The worst thing is there is lots of vandilism like graffiti and break in's. Oh and dog poo. [age 12]
- I hate the motor bikes on the green! [age 12]
- Need more shoe shops. [age 12]
- Worst thing is 2 much dog pooh. [age 13]

Boys

- The ****** (*name of estate*) has no green. [age 11]
- You could get lost. Need more upper schools. [age 12]
- There is hardly anything to do. [age 12]
- The worst thing about is drugs and ****** the Tramp. [age 12]
- ****** smells. I Hate it! [age 13]
- Bad teachers. Too many people. Too many deaths. [age 13]

Age and Gender Not Specified

- Need more street lights on the rec.
- No thing to do for kids.

Note: These are exact quotes from children's work therefore spellings and grammar have not been corrected.

Field Work at a Youth Club