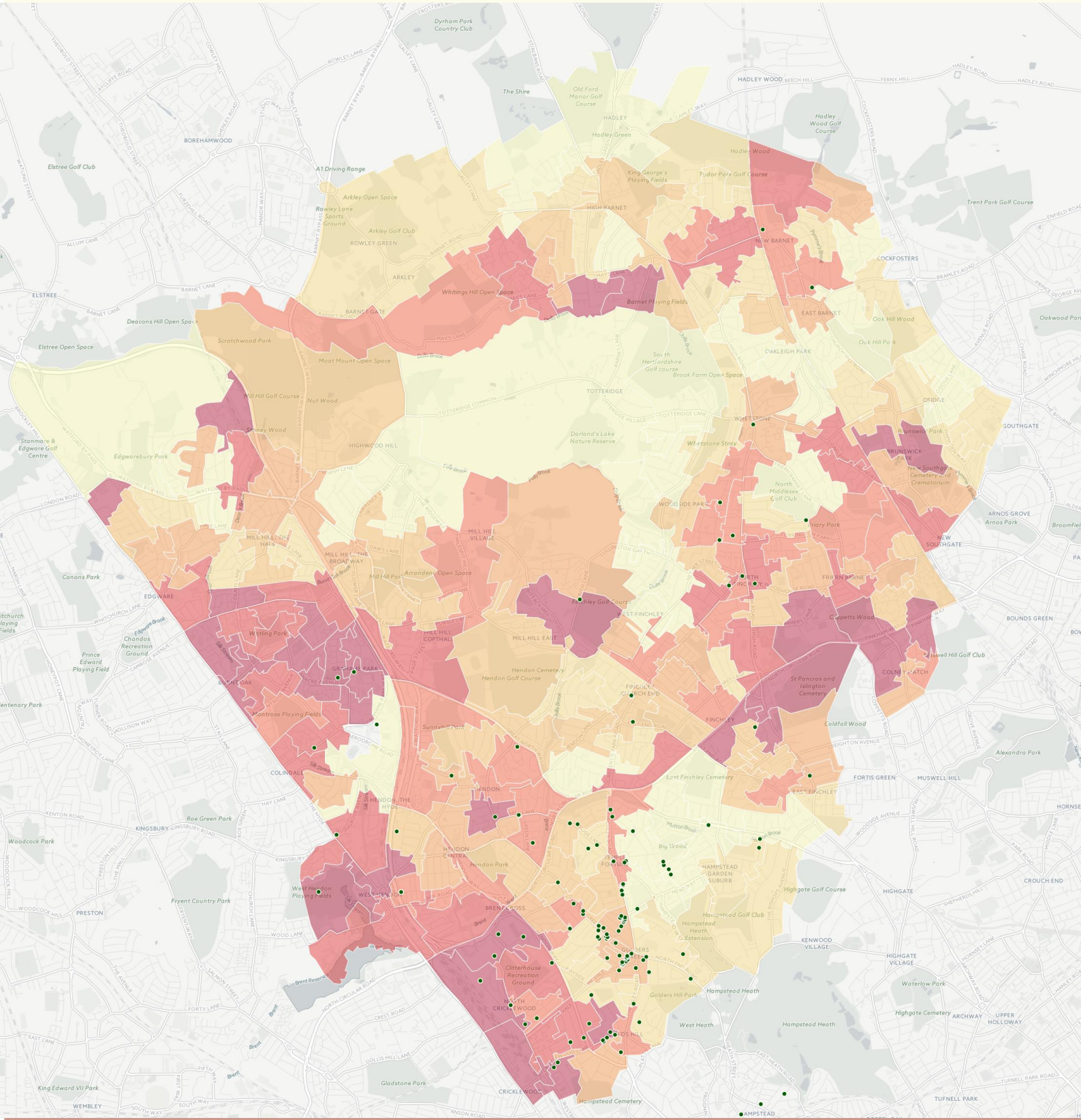


# ON THE GROUND: BARNET COMMUNITY MAPPING PILOT



**THE  
YOUNG  
FOUNDATION  
THINKING  
ACTION  
CHANGE**

**June 2015**

## **About the Young Foundation**

**We are The Young Foundation and we are determined to make positive social change happen. We pioneered the field of social innovation with The Open University, UpRising and Studio Schools. We work closely with individuals, communities and partners building relationships to ensure that our thinking does something, our actions matter and the changes we make together will continue to grow.**  
**[youngfoundation.org](http://youngfoundation.org)**

**This report was written by Megan Dragony, Peter Gerry and Victoria Boelman**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background to the pilot .....	4
Objectives of the pilot .....	7
Our Approach .....	7
The pilot area: .....	7
Phase 1:.....	8
Phase 2:.....	8
Mapping The Community Groups .....	9
Typology of organisations .....	9
The Value of Community organisations.....	16
The value of small and ‘below the radar’ community groups....	17
The Space Between Vertical and Horizontal.....	23
Implications for Barnet council .....	25
Replication .....	33
Annexe A .....	35

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the results of a pilot study conducted by The Young Foundation on behalf of Barnet Borough Council at the end of 2014. The project had three primary aims:

- Map the networks and relationships which exist between people and organisations within a particular area of the Borough, combining it with other existing data sets
- Identify and map the qualities of these networks and relationships which may contribute to the Council's desired outcomes but which are difficult to assess financially
- Produce a taxonomy of values which can be used to collect data on other networks and organisations.

To answer these questions The Young Foundation conducted street level mapping of community organisations in and around Golders Green. The methodology was based on a community mapping approach. This approach allows the identification of the maximum number of both formal and 'below-the-radar' groups, as well as engaging with local community group leaders to understand their activities, networks and values.

Through the street level mapping we found 319 organisations and activities. The quality of the data available is variable due to the 'messy' nature of community activities. When we found an activity it was often difficult to easily decipher who was in charge of it or how it was organised. The boundaries between organisations that run activities and those that rent out space were often unclear.

We classified the organisations we identified based on their size, structure and area of activity.

- Small-formal organisations are registered charities, or have some form of governing structure and a turnover of under £60,000.
- Large-formal organisations have a governing structure and turnover of over £60,000.
- Small-informal organisations have no governing or formal structure and a small number of core members.

We did not find any large-informal groups. Our classification of a large-informal group was those that have no formal governing structure but a large number of people actively involved.

We are primarily interested in the small-formal and small-informal organisation. We followed up our initial mapping by speaking to these organisations through workshops and informal conversations. These small groups share a number of important characteristics:

- Personal relationships built by committed individuals. They are led by committed and passionate individuals
- Trusted. These organisations have a trusted role in their community.
- Holistic approach. Many of these organisations can build on their trusted position within their community to provide holistic support to people's needs.
- Needs-based. Many are formed to meet a specific need that is evident in their community or to fill a gap in statutory services.
- Driving innovation and reform. Small community groups can be a strong force in challenging the status-quo through social-action. Because they aren't necessarily tied to a specific way of working or funding, they can take risks and campaign vigorously.
- Building Bridges. Forming connections is difficult for these groups, despite this some organisations have found success in forming relationships with other groups.
- Value for Money. Small community organisations do all of this with very little resource. Being volunteer-led means they have low management costs and overheads.

As with the strengths and values they share, small community organisations face several common challenges:

- Space. Finding an appropriate, reliable and affordable venue for their work is a common challenge for these organisations.
- Funding. Finding funding to keep going is a common concern for small community organisations. Although for smaller organisations reliant on volunteer time it is not a matter of 'life or death', but instead about the ability to improve their offer.
- Publicity/ Engagement. Publicity is seen as a challenge for some groups, especially those which are newly formed or seeking new members.
- Networking. Most groups have a desire to connect with other groups to share learning and identify partners, but find there are very few opportunities to do so.
- Influence and Recognition. Local influence and recognition from decision makers is a significant challenge and source of frustration for most small organisations.

# BACKGROUND TO THE PILOT

## Barnet Community Life

A 2010 report by CommUNITY Barnet<sup>1</sup> found that Barnet is home to over 1000 local charities and community groups. The 2010 National Survey of Charities and Social Enterprises found that there were 1,861 charities, voluntary groups, and social enterprises within L.B. Barnet. However, research has shown that these organisations and groups represent only a small fraction of Barnet's community sector, as there are significant numbers of groups operating 'below-the-radar'. The best estimates suggest that between 600,000 and 900,000 'below-the-radar' groups exist in the UK<sup>2</sup>. While there is no agreed definition for what it means to be 'below-the-radar', it is most commonly used to refer to groups which do not have a recognised legal structure and thus do not appear on the Charity Commission or other regulatory registers, or those that have registered and have low incomes or turnovers. These small, frontline groups and activities make a significant contribution to the well-being of communities and are a key part of the local infrastructure.

While the value of large charities and voluntary organisations is well documented, less is known about the value of small frontline and grassroots (below-the-radar) community groups. However, over the past 5 years a body of research into the distinctiveness and value created by this important part of the Third Sector has been growing.

The Council has a goal to support Barnet's communities to become more independent, self-reliant and resilient, by increasing community capacity across the borough, building stronger partnerships between the community and the Council, coordinating and improving the support the Council gives to communities, and helping the Council take more account of community activity when it makes decisions about how it delivers services and outcomes. This aims to realise benefits for the community, by helping local people increase their skills and capacity and by improving services, making better use of local capacity, tailoring them more closely to local need and making them both more responsive and more efficient.

---

<sup>1</sup> Manzano, Jessica and Mulandi, Ruth. 'An analysis of local voluntary and community organisations in Barnet as of September 2010'. [http://www.communitybarnet.org.uk/data/files/oyd\\_master\\_file.pdf](http://www.communitybarnet.org.uk/data/files/oyd_master_file.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Phillimore, J., & McCabe, A. (2010) Understanding the distinctiveness of small scale, third sector activity: the role of local knowledge and networks in shaping below the radar actions. TSRC Working Paper 33. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre. Available at:

## Objectives of the pilot

In support of its goal of supporting Barnet's communities, the Council wished to undertake research to:

- Map the networks and relationships which exist between people and organisations within a particular area of the Borough, combining it with other existing data sets
- Identify and map the qualities of these networks and relationships which may contribute to the Council's desired outcomes but which are difficult to assess financially
- Produce a taxonomy of values which can be used to collect data on other networks and organisations.

## Our Approach

Given the nature and challenge of the research objectives, The Young Foundation developed a methodology based on a community mapping approach<sup>3</sup>. This approach allows the identification of the maximum number of both formal and 'below-the-radar' groups, as well as engaging with local community group leaders to understand their activities, networks and values. However, given the time constraints on the project schedule and the need for an iterative and flexible solution which would permit us to respond to emerging insights, it was decided to pilot the research in one defined area of the borough.

### The pilot area:

There were several considerations when selecting our pilot area. Street-level mapping is very time intensive, but is by far the most effective way to identify below-the-radar activity. Given the high estimates for the amount of below-the-radar activity taking place, we needed to restrict our pilot site to roughly one square mile. Within that area we wanted a combination of commercial and residential areas, which didn't have high concentrations of extreme affluence or poverty. We also wanted an area with a relatively diverse population where there were no other community development initiatives underway.

Based on these specifications, we selected the area around Golders Green Tube station. This area includes parts of Golders Green, Garden Suburb, and Child's Hill wards. The area is economically diverse, including the more affluent neighbourhoods of Hampstead Garden Suburbs, as well as some of the more deprived neighbourhoods in Cricklewood. The area is also home to a diverse population. Golders Green ward is known from the 2011 census to contain a high Jewish population at around 37%. There has also been an increasing demographic shift in recent years; with migrant populations including Iranian, Eastern European, African and Japanese firmly establishing themselves in the area.

---

<sup>3</sup> Soteri-Proctor, Andri. *'Little big societies: micro-mapping of organisations operating below the radar'*, Third Sector Research Centre. 2011.

To create a more comprehensive picture of community activity on the large and small scale, we took a two-pronged approach:

1. Creating a catalogue of community activity through street-level mapping
2. In-depth interviews with a select sample

### **Phase 1:**

Using existing databases such as the Barnet Council and Community Barnet directories, and the Charities Commission register we created an initial map of charities and voluntary groups in the area. This was followed by a period of street-level mapping, exploring the pilot area on foot and identifying ‘below-the-radar’ activities. This involved:

1. Walking the streets looking for noticeboards and adverts for relevant activities;
2. Visiting buildings and open spaces that people might gather in such as faith buildings, community centres, leisure centres, parks and squares;
3. Conducting informal interviews with people who have knowledge about activities happening in the area.

### **Phase 2:**

Once the catalogue of community activities was completed, we selected a small sample of 25 community organisations, both large and small, to participate in an in-depth interview. The interviews aimed to explore the types of relationships and networks that existed between the groups and organisations we identified, and included questions about who they work with, their aims/objectives, beneficiaries, and current activities.

We understood the significance of this research as part of the longer term partnership building between the Council and the community. We delivered two Co-Design events where we presented our findings to the community and invited feedback and contributions to increase community buy-in.

It became clear very quickly in our research that the geographical boundaries of wards, and even the borough, had little relevance in terms of identifying communities. One resident said, “There isn’t a ‘Golders Green’ community, but there are a lot of communities in Golders Green”. Residents we spoke to tended to identify as belonging to communities based on values, activities, faith, ethnicity, and neighbourhood.

Although we discovered a great variety in terms of the types and volume of activity happening within this area, the majority of residents we spoke to felt there was a very strong ‘community spirit’. As one interviewee described, “It’s a very ‘do-it-yourself’ area. If there’s a problem, people will come together to deal with it.”



# MAPPING THE COMMUNITY GROUPS

Through the street level mapping we found 319 organisations and activities. While the mapping was restricted to the geographic parameters of our pilot area, our dataset includes some organisations and activities outside of it. These are either partners of organisations within our pilot area, or organisations recommended to us by more than one resident within the pilot area.

The quality of the data available is variable due to the ‘messy’ nature of community activities. When we found an activity it was often difficult to easily decipher who was in charge of it or how it was organised. The boundaries between organisations that run activities and those that rent out space were often unclear. For example, if a church hall decided it wanted to put on a public Zumba class and brought in an independent instructor – is this as an activity of the church or a new organisation? Issues such as this were a frequent difficulty with the research.

## Type of organisation

Based on the information we were able to collect we categorised 211 of the organisations based on their organisation size and type. The remaining 108 organisations on the long list we were unable to classify. People referred us to 47 organisations that were not relevant to our main task – 9 schools, 10 local government organisations, and 28 commercial organisations.

Organisations were then classified according to their size and structure.

- Small-formal organisations are registered charities, or have some form of governing structure and a turnover of under £60,000, for example Memory Lane Singing Club and the Farsophone Association.
- Large-formal organisations have a governing structure and turnover of over £60,000. This group includes all of the churches and synagogues that we found.
- Small-informal organisations have no governing or formal structure and a small number of core members. This includes a large range of different groups, from senior circles, toddlers groups, film clubs and many others.

We did not find any large-informal groups. Our classification of a large-informal group was those that have no formal governing structure but a large number of people actively involved. This would have included networks of individuals, such as religious or secular communes, or political/campaigning groups.

Our research suggests that as organisations become larger they tend to become more formalised, creating structures which would move them into our formal categories.

The largest group we found were large formally structured organisations (84 organisations). Many of these organisations are hubs for small-informal activities, which we were unable to classify as discussed above. This means that the number of small-informal organisations is likely far higher than the 44 we were able to classify.

Type of organisation	Count of organisations
Large - informal	0
Schools	9
Local Government	11
Commercial	28
Small - formal	34
Small - informal	44
Large - formal	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>

We then classified these organisations based on the type of activity that the organisation carries out. The classification is based on the Charity Commission's list of charitable purposes. Often organisations conduct a range of activities; we then classified on the most prominent. For example, many religious organisations put on activities for a range of ages and needs, these were classified under Religion as this is their primary activity.

The three largest groups are those conducting arts, culture, heritage or science activities (37), health (31) and religious activities (30).

Type of activity	Count of organisations	%
Age	14	7%
Arts, culture, heritage or science	37	18%
Children	16	8%
Citizenship or community development	7	3%
Disability	5	2%
Education	19	9%
Environmental protection or improvement	4	2%
Financial hardship or other disadvantage	1	0%
Gender	4	2%
Health	31	15%
Human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity	1	0%
Other	20	9%
Poverty	6	3%
Religion	30	14%

Sport	9	4%
Youth	7	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>	

The largest single type of organisation and activity within the whole sample is large-formal religious organisations (13%). The distribution of activities within each organisation type is otherwise widely spread.

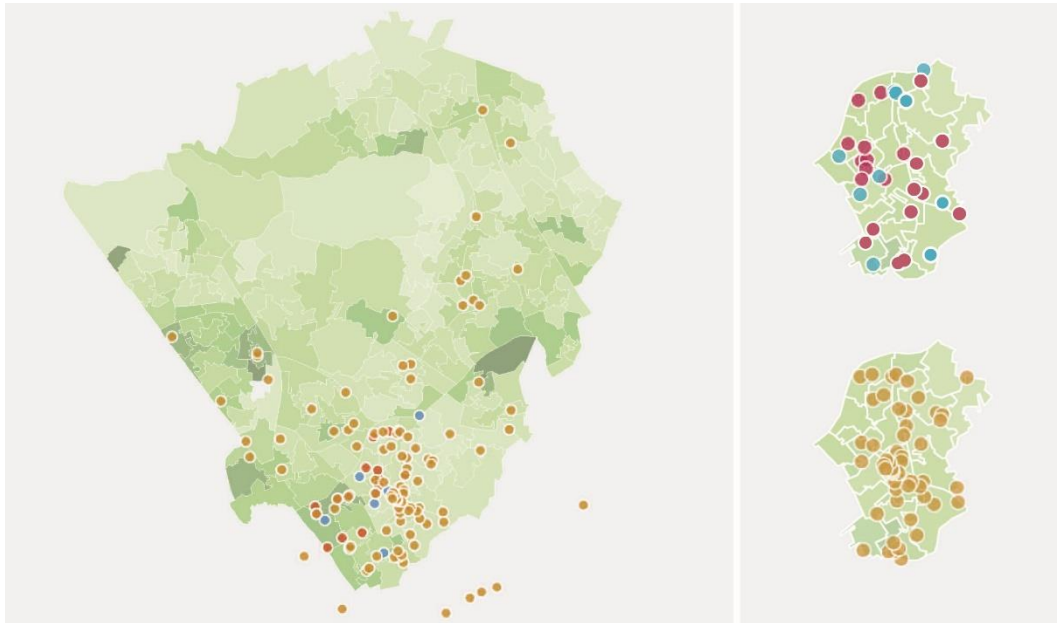
Large-formal organisations are predominantly religious (33% of the total large-formal organisations), or operating in arts, culture, heritage or science (13%) or health (12%). Small-formal organisations we found are predominantly arts, culture, heritage or science (21%), health (15%), or sport (12%). Small-informal organisations are dominated by arts, culture, heritage or science (33%), children (21%), health (12%) and youth (10%).

Arts, culture, heritage or science organisations constituted a wide range of different groups. These were mainly centred on entertainment of some kind (music, dance and theatre) and cultural organisations. Organisations that focused on health activities also encompass a wide range of different types. Many were GP surgeries, or NHS run services. Others were commercial gyms, or other health related activities such as Weight Watchers.

The low-level of youth-specific activities was recognised by many people we spoke to in the area. They commented on the lack of dedicated space for youth activities. It was an area of great concern. However, based on our conversation we would surmise that there are many youth activities associated with local religious groups which were not explicitly observed in our research.

41% of groups and organisations funded through the Grassroots Grants programme were set-up to fill a gap in service provision. Without further in-depth research we cannot draw conclusions, but it is likely that this distribution provides insight into where there are gaps in service provision in the area.

Figure 1 displays the geographical location of the organisations that our mapping found, compared to two existing Barnet databases entries for our target area, the Community Barnet database in blue (14) and the Barnet Council database in red (26).



*Figure 1: Barnet Street Level Mapping Results. Colours refer to the different types of organisations.*

From this map the volume of activities uncovered through our process is clear. It also displays the 13 organisations that we were referred to outside of the Borough; interestingly these are predominantly large organisations (11) with one commercial and one small-informal organisation.

The concentration of organisations also becomes apparent from figure 2. Most organisations we found are concentrated around the centre of Golders Green and near to, or on, main roads. They are predominantly situated in marginally less affluent areas, but not the least affluent areas.

The existing databases entries are focused in the West of our search area whereas our mapping found organisations all over.

## Relationship mapping

Simply mapping the location and nature of organisations at the street level does not reveal the network of relationships between the organisations. In order to better understand this we conducted 25 in-depth interviews with a sample from our longer list of organisations. These were selected to be largely representative of the whole database – a degree of pragmatism was also required in the time frame. There are two important issues to note with the data collected on relationships between organisations.

Firstly, collecting data on the relationships between organisations was very difficult – interviewees frequently forgot, or misclassified their partners, giving us an incomplete picture. This is a reflection of the changing and complex nature of the web of relationships between these charitable organisations. For example, the programmes they run stop and start based on insecure funding. So where they may have previously partnered with one organisation, after losing funding they may no longer work formally together. This changing picture means that classifying the types of relationships between organisations is also problematic.

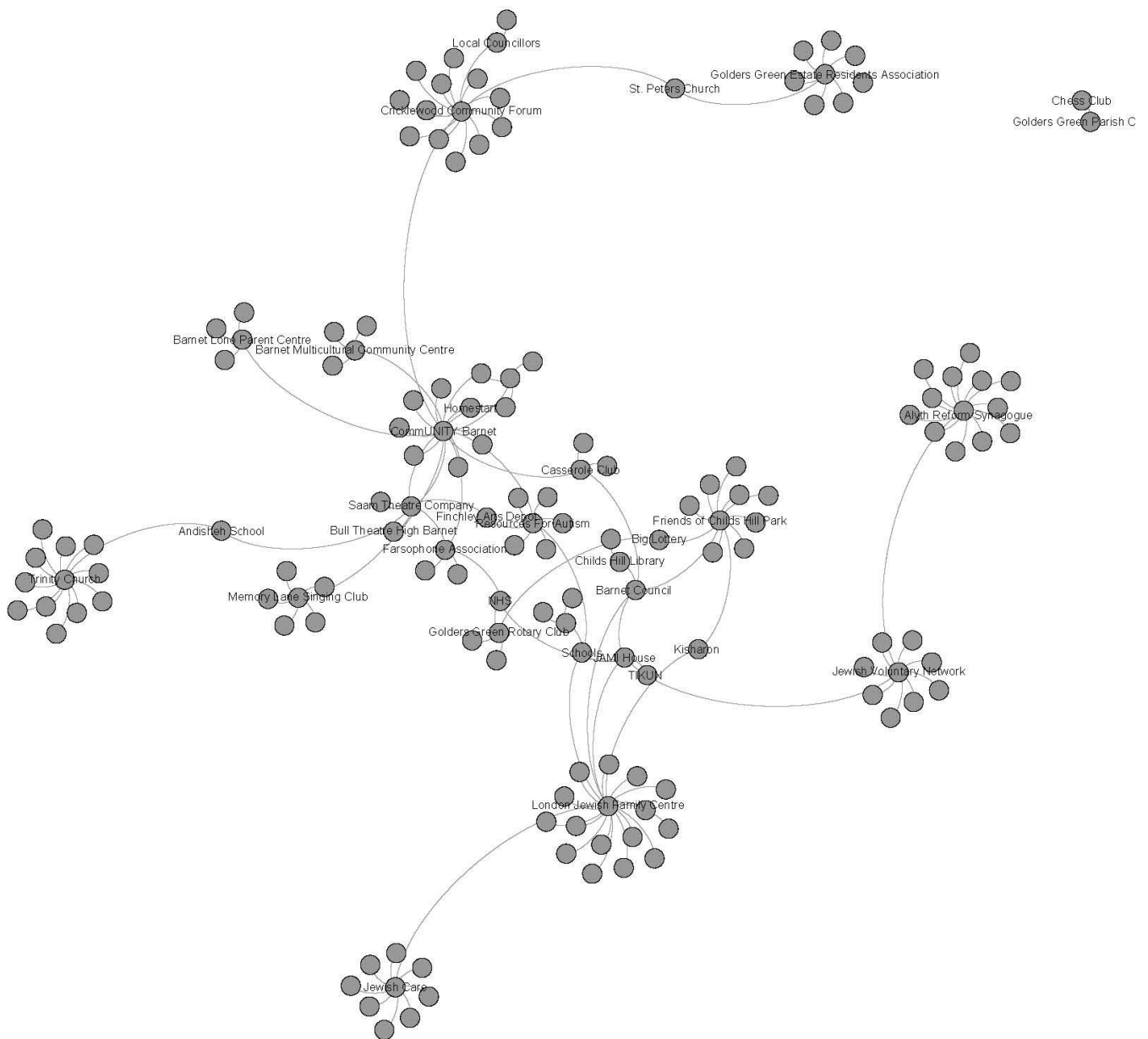
Understanding and definition of what constitutes a relationship and partnership also varies. Some relationships are formal (e.g. joint service provision, rental of space, referrals etc.) but others are much less so (e.g. borrowing resources, helping to publicise activities, etc.). The difference between an organisation that rents space from a larger organisation, or works in partnership with them, or simply collaborates is often open to question. To quote another Barnet resident, Karl Marx, for these organisations “all that is solid melts into air”.

We have where possible attempted to classify the relationships we found. This was simple for those involving funding, and many of those renting space. For others it was more difficult.

Secondly, this picture is only partial. Inevitably, if we had more time to map the relationships we should have and would have found more and could have explored the relationships between the second wave of organisations. So for example, where our first organisations named another as a partner, we could have followed up with their connections to obtain a wider view of the networks in the borough.

Figure 2 shows the network of relationships between organisations. Each dot represents an organisation, and each line a link between them. Only those that we interviewed, or who have a number of connections are labelled. The closer an organisation is to the centre the more central to the network it is, e.g. it has many connections with many different organisations. Groups of organisations are located together if they share similar connections. From the 25 initial interviews we found 127 additional organisations with 161 connections. This meant that the majority of organisations had only one connection in the network.

Figure 2: Network of relationships from 25 selected Barnet community organisations.



From the diagram it is clear that the larger organisations have links to many smaller organisations and fewer to other larger organisations. For example the Jewish Voluntary Network is connected to a large number of smaller organisations as well as the Alyth Reform Synagogue, and JAMI House. In contrast smaller organisations tend to only connect to one larger organisation; for example the Chess Club, which only connects to Golders Green Parish Church. It is of course possible that some smaller groups would link to other larger organisations and some smaller organisations as well, but the picture of our sample is clear.

The large organisations not only link to other large charitable organisations but also to statutory organisations. For example, London Jewish Family Centre is linked to both local schools and Barnet Council, but none of its smaller links are.

The network also shows that some of the Jewish organisations are separate from the main network, connecting primarily to each other and statutory organisations. The same is true for Cricklewood Community Forum, St. Peters Church and Golders Green Estate Residents Association which again only link to each other and Community Barnet.

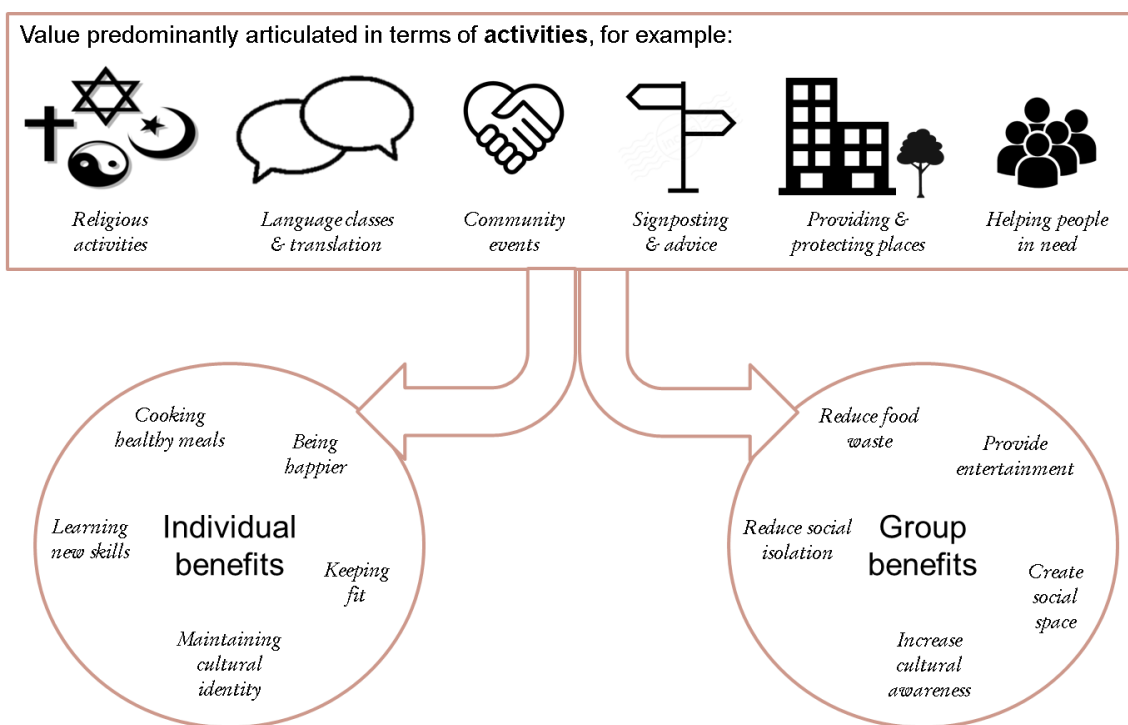
Community Barnet sits at the centre of a range of connections, but interestingly quite a different set of organisations than the council. Associations based on type of activity are also clear as arts organisations group together in the bottom left, centred on the two theatres.

# THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Throughout the street-level mapping and in the in-depth interviews we asked groups and organisations about their aims and the value they create in the community. It is evident that this is not something that most organisations, and particularly the smaller groups, are accustomed to articulating.

The majority of groups describe their work in terms of the activities they offer and to which groups, for example “mums and babies play group”, or providing faith-based activities, singing and performing etc. If described, the value of these activities is then typically positioned as either an individual or group benefit, for example “keeping fit” or “reducing food waste”. Figure 4 illustrates the types of activity and associated benefits. A complete list of the values used by the small-formal and small-informal organisations engaged in this study can be found in Annexe A.

Figure 3 Self-described value of community organisations.





## **The value of small and ‘below the radar’ community groups**

The street-level mapping and community conversations clearly indicate that it is not only groups that are not formally constituted or registered with the Charity Commission which are operating ‘below the radar’; even small and ‘micro’ charities are often operating below some kind of radar. That is to say, they may be outside certain ‘spheres of influence’, within their local area. Our observations of small informal groups and small formal groups suggests that they create value in much the same way and experience many of the same challenges.

These small groups share a number of important characteristics:

### **Personal relationships built by committed individuals**

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of all of the small organisations and groups that we spoke to were the committed people behind them. Staff and volunteers have a personal connection to their beneficiaries and the causes they support, which motivates them to work tirelessly. Most groups often pointed to just one or two individuals responsible for most of their activity. These people often dedicate a great deal of their time and personal resource to establishing and maintaining their organisation, publicising and coordinating activities, applying for funding, and managing other volunteers and members. They are highly regarded within their communities and are described as passionate, champions, activists, and motivators. One member spoke of the founder of Friends of Childs Hill Park saying, “Nothing would happen around here without her,” a sentiment that was common towards those who ran other groups as well.

These strong personal relationships are the root of many values unique to small and ‘below-the-radar’ organisations. Most of these groups are embedded in a specific community and have deep, personal connections with the people within them. For many, their relationships are so significant that the boundaries between their personal and civic lives are blurred. As one person described it, “We don’t have ‘beneficiaries’. These are my friends. We’re part of the same community.”

### **Trusted**

Strong personal relationships breed trust and respect, which enables many groups to support individuals with sensitive issues, from financial troubles to violence and abuse. As one interviewee described, “People who are afraid of authorities or who have had bad experiences with them in the past will often turn to ‘their own’ first.” The coordinator of a local women’s group described how, with the support of the group, one of their members and her children were able to escape an abusive relationship. The members helped her get legal advice and sheltered her while she was seeking new accommodation. She and her children never engaged with any statutory services.

It is often the case that volunteers or staff working for community groups are people with first-hand experience of the issues facing the people they work with. This could include having an illness, experiencing substance abuse, being a carer, or experiencing domestic violence. This gives volunteers and staff in these organisations more credibility and trust with beneficiaries. One person we spoke to had a history of mental illness and now volunteers with a local mental health group. They described

their relationship with the group members by saying, “They open up to me because they know I’ve been there, too.”

## **Holistic approach**

Similarly, this in-depth and personal knowledge gives groups a better understanding of highly complex needs so they can respond in a more holistic way, providing more tailored support.

Many small community organisations provide an important foundation to help people orient themselves and navigate communities and systems. Community forums and residents associations are particularly important in helping residents navigate the sometimes bewildering channels of local government and linking people to mainstream services. For groups who cater to a specific cultural or ethnic community, this is especially significant. As one participant explained, “People who arrive in the UK are scared, don’t speak English, are worried and confused about what services to access and how. By literally speaking their language and acting as a new diasporic community, we can support them better than other larger organisations.”

## **Needs-based**

Small community groups are also unique in the way they run and the types of activities they deliver. Many are formed to meet a specific need that is evident in their community or to fill a gap in statutory services. Because of this, they are often the first to identify emergent needs or to spot potential problems before they reach crisis point. Friends of Childs Hill Park was formed by a small group of residents who were concerned by the increasing deterioration of their local park and the potential hazards it presented to the community. Many groups are formed as a result of demographic changes in the local area. Farsophone association and the Somali Community Group both formed to support growing immigrant populations in the area. Two local churches have started renting their halls to small Korean and Pilipino congregations within the last few years.

## **Driving innovation and reform**

Small community groups can be a strong force in challenging the status-quo through social-action. Because they aren’t necessarily tied to a specific way of working or funding, they can take risks and campaign vigorously. Barnet Friends of the Earth, after observing that the 406 was one of the most polluted areas in Barnet, has started campaigning to get it cleaned up. A member of a local carer-support organisation said “We will challenge what does not appear to be right as many others are scared it will affect their funding from the authorities if they criticise.”

## **Building Bridges**

While small community groups can be quite insular or fragmented for reasons discussed below, there are some who are making great strides in building bridges with other groups. The Alyth Reform Synagogue has delivered several community events and activities with Christian and Muslim groups in the area. The Saam Theatre

Company, while established as an Iranian cultural organisation, is now actively engaging members from other backgrounds.

## **Value for Money**

Finally, and perhaps most impressively, small community organisations do all of this with very little resource. Being volunteer-led means they have low management costs and overheads. 95% of community-based organisations nationally have an income of less than £2,000<sup>4</sup> and 51% of registered charities fall into the ‘micro’ category of less than £10,000<sup>5</sup>.

Many groups rely on their members or other groups to provide tools, equipment, and resources. Group members may donate resources, or absorb costs by using their own tools and materials for activities. There is a small but significant sharing economy among local groups. Many frequently shared tables and chairs for events, craft materials, toys, and other resources. Sites like Gumtree, Freecycle, and Edgware K were used by many groups to find important resources for free.

## **Disadvantages of Below-the-Radar organisations:**

While their lack of formalised structure is often an asset, it also represents a potential risk. Without a formalised structure some groups may not adequately address regulatory frameworks such as health and safety and child protection. Similarly, without formalised training or management structures, there is no guarantee of the effectiveness of the people involved.

Many groups are self-funded and are accountable to no one but their members. This means that they may represent the needs of only a specific group, rather than serving the wider community. Some groups may be quite insular, given their strict focus on a single cause or their relationship with a specific group. For example, many Jewish organisations expressed concern about opening their activities up more widely, as non-Jewish people may not respect important cultural customs and traditions. That is not to disregard, however, the strong body of interfaith activity that happens in the area as well.

## **Challenges**

As with the strengths and values they share, small community organisations face several common challenges.

### **Space**

Availability of space is by far the most frequently cited challenge. Nearly all below the radar groups are dependent on access to community space in which to deliver their activities, hold meetings, and store supplies. In our pilot area the most common venues

---

<sup>4</sup> McCabe, A., & Phillimore, J. (2009) Exploring below the radar: issues of theme and focus. TSRC Working Paper 8. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre. Available at:

<sup>5</sup> NCVO (2014) How big is a typical voluntary organisation? [online] Available at: <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac14/how-big-is-a-typical-voluntary-organisation-3/>

are religious buildings – churches and synagogues. Larger charities or voluntary organisations also sometimes provide space for small groups. For many of these venues the fees for renting their space provides income crucial for their own survival. Many small groups feel this dependency makes them vulnerable, and many have even been forced to leave locations due to increased fees.

There is no bespoke community centre within our pilot area, and this absence is felt very strongly by many people we spoke to. This was frequently brought up in relation to the perceived lack of youth activities, which was reflected in our mapping as well. One resident said, “There is nothing productive for [young people] to do. There is nowhere for them to go. The shopping centre, but what can they do there?”

Alternate uses for commercial properties may prove a valuable option in areas where no ‘community’ spaces exist. One organisation delivers a successful digital literacy project using commercial venues outside of their office hours. They suggested that more small businesses might be willing to make their premises available to community groups outside of their regular hours if they were offered a small incentive or tax rebate. Indeed, informal groups without funds for hiring spaces are already making use of commercial spaces. In our research we encountered a group of Pilipino women who meet weekly at a high-street fast food restaurant for socialisation and support.

Such repurposing of commercial space is supported by research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>6</sup>, which explores ways that public and commercial space can be made more sociable, and how efforts to ‘design out crime’ may in fact ‘design out people.’ Where there are more accessible and open social spaces in a community you tend to find more community activity. Reclaiming derelict or unsociable spaces to be renovated or handed over to the control of community groups could prove a valuable spark for increased informal community activity.

## **Funding**

Funding is also a common concern. However, for many small groups who are predominantly funded by their members or donations, it isn’t a question of “life or death”, rather a question of being able to undertake new projects or invest in new resources. A local forum hoping to build a new website said, “We’d like to do it someday if the money comes in, but it’s not a priority.”

While large organisations feel confident they are informed of funding opportunities available to them, many small organisations who seek grant funding find the system very difficult to navigate. Capacity is another challenge, as many small groups would rather use their time and energy to do activities that offer a direct benefit rather than spending it on administrative activities.

For small groups, deciding whether to apply for grant funding can be complicated. With grant funding comes the pressure to be more accountable. Usually this requires increased capacity and formalisation, which, for many, carries the risk of pulling them away from their local mission. One resident said, “If we take their money then we’re signing up to their agenda.”

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2050-public-space-community.pdf>

## **Publicity/ Engagement**

Publicity is seen as a challenge for some groups, especially those which are newly formed or seeking new members. One participant expressed their frustration, saying, “You want to do good and so you put the message out there, but no one shows up. What are you supposed to do?” One participant suggested that the Council’s regular mail outs could include small adverts for local groups as a cost-effective way of supporting them.

## **Networking**

Most groups have a desire to connect with other groups to share learning and identify partners, but find there are very few opportunities to do so. Feedback from our Co-Design events showed that many attendees had made connections there with other local groups who they had never encountered, despite working just around the corner. These opportunities can be a source of great momentum and energy for small community groups working towards similar aims. One attendee said, “Networking with other groups would help us connect and support one another. If someone can just bring us together, we can take it from there.”

The same is true to some extent for larger organisations as well, but in contrast they are generally better at identifying other local opportunities to link in with. For example, the London Jewish Family Centre is a hub for a variety of family activities, providing family support, counselling, legal support, as well as social and play activities under one roof. The organisation has extensive networks with other Jewish organisations, such as JAMI and as well as statutory services.

## **Influence and Recognition**

Local influence and recognition from decision makers is a significant challenge and source of frustration for most small organisations.

Communication with relevant people in the Council was frequently brought up in our interviews. Several groups feel that while they have tried to engage the Council on several occasions, their requests and suggestions were ignored. This ranged from attempts to change parking restrictions near their facilities, to influencing local policy.

Where there have been public meetings with Council representatives, one participant feels these were dominated by individual residents’ concerns and that there was not enough time to address issue affecting the ‘common good’. They feel separate meetings for concerned citizens to discuss local as well as global issues would be useful in supporting groups and the Council to work together to achieve joint aims.

One organisation, which is largely funded by the Council, expressed surprised that they were not promoted to relevant social and health services who would be best placed to refer people to their service.

For some groups, perceived poor communication is linked with recognition. As one participant said, “We are happy to do it, but sometimes it feels like we are being taken for granted.” Many large and small organisations who have stepped up to fill gaps in existing services feel taken for granted and unappreciated. For a few, this resentment progressed to the point that they decided to discontinue their services. Appropriate

recognition from the Council and other local stakeholders is an essential part of supporting these organisations to continue doing the valuable work they do.

# THE SPACE BETWEEN VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL

This report and research that it is based on is part of the Barnet Council's attempt to bridge the gap between themselves and the voluntary and community sector. Our research suggests a number of things.

Given their position, there is huge value in the Council having a relationship with small or below-the-radar groups. However, many groups feel they have been neglected in this respect and that previous efforts to consult with them have been largely tokenistic. One participant said, "They don't acknowledge 'the way things really are'." One member of a local residents association described Council representatives on a site visit as "aloof and just plain rude. They'd get paid just for going, whether or not they actually talked to us." Some people also cited the use of external people to engage with and gather community views as particularly frustrating.

Many groups feel they are disconnected from people who have the power to make more systemic changes. Their limited 'horizontal' networks with other small local organisations can compound this by leading to a lack of collective voice; in turn, this limits the extent to which their understanding of local issues has wider influence.

These communication challenges speak to fundamental differences between statutory bodies and community organisations in terms of their structures and aims. Generally, large public sector organisations tend to have hierarchical relationships where people are recruited to specific roles and relationships with other organisations are contractual for the purpose of service delivery.

Small community organisations in contrast tend to have horizontal networks – that is, relationships with other small organisations and individuals in their local community<sup>7</sup>. These relationships have their roots in shared interests and experiences rather than contractual agreements. For many small organisations, the extent of these networks tends to be quite limited. This was reflected in our analysis of the relationships between the groups we interviewed, with smaller organisations being connected to fewer nodes and isolated from larger networks.

Essentially, these two systems have very different internal dynamics and governance systems. As a consequence, it appears that in Barnet, as in many other places, the public sector is most likely not benefiting from the voluntary and community sector's local knowledge, and particularly that of 'below the radar' groups where links are weak.

---

<sup>7</sup> Conn, Eileen. (2010) "Community engagement in the social ecosystem dance." TSRC Working Paper 33. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre. Available at: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/discussion-papers/discussion-paper-b-community-engagement.pdf>

## **Public sector engagement of community groups**

Many people we spoke to express a feeling that community engagement by statutory bodies has been lacking in genuine commitment. It seems this is at least partly due to attempts to mould community organisations to fit the structures and vertical systems of larger organisation, disregarding their horizontal 'roots'. This can leave participants on both sides feeling frustrated and disappointed, as neither are likely to see the results they expect.

Yet despite their differences, these two systems are constantly influencing one another within their shared social ecosystem. The adaptive moves of one alter the environment so that the other must adjust their actions and behaviour in response. It is a fluid and ever-changing environment. The recent cuts to public sector funding are the most obvious example of this. The cuts have led simultaneously to reduced funding for third sector organisations and, for many, a simultaneous increase in demand for their services as local communities feel the effects of austerity and a difficult economic situation.

## **Bridging the gap**

Within the gap between these two systems is a space for developing new ways for individuals and groups from the two systems to work together. Investing in this space can give rise to a collaborative problem-solving approach, involving citizens and the state working together to generate new ideas, tap into latent community capacity and make better use of local assets.

It requires both parties to be more fluid, flexible and responsive in their ways of working, and be open to innovation and a slightly larger degree of risk.

Commissioning this Community Mapping Pilot is a significant step towards creating new connections, channels for communication, and ways of working between the public sector and local community groups. And these insights are being taken forward in a variety of initiatives as part of Barnet Council's broader Participation Strategy.

The Community Participation Strategy aims to help residents, voluntary and community groups to get more involved in the design and delivery of public services, recognising that communities hold valuable knowledge about local need and how best to meet it and may, in some cases, be better placed than the public sector to deliver services and outcomes.

In the next section we outline some recommendations for tools and processes that can have a significant impact in this space.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR BARNET COUNCIL

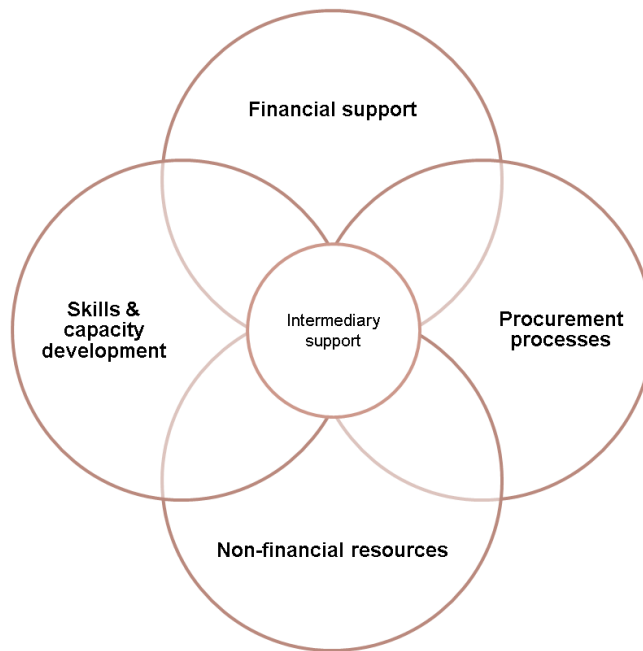
In order to build a sustainable and well-functioning social sector that has strong relationships with the local authority and other public sector organisations, the appropriate local ecosystem needs to be in place and supported to flourish.

Figure 5 illustrates the four key dimensions of such an ecosystem, along with the role of intermediaries. Barnet Council is working on a number of these areas already. Building on this work they can support and work more closely with the voluntary and community sector in Barnet in a number of ways:

1. By providing financial support and making it easier for smaller organisations to access that support
2. By providing non-financial resources, such as space, facilitation of networking, or professional services
3. By helping the local voluntary and community sector to build its skills and capacity, for example through formal training opportunities, secondments or providing other informal learning opportunities
4. By reviewing and amending as necessary its procurement processes to enable a wider range of local organisations to apply for contracts and not unduly prejudiced by their smaller/ less formal/ less experienced status.
5. By creating and/or working with intermediary individuals and organisations who can help make the necessary connections between the two systems and sectors, and help to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge, ideas and practice

*Figure 5 Ecosystem of support for community groups*

(Adapted from “Ecosystem for Innovation Social Purpose Organisations”, Tepsie, 2014).



## Financial support

While many small community organisations don't currently receive a majority of their funding through grants, small grants with minimal restrictions are immensely valuable in the establishment, maintenance, and growth of small community groups.

Several successful national small-grants programmes have demonstrated the extent of the demand for and potential impact of small grants.

The Grassroots Grants programme<sup>8</sup> offered approximately 19,000 groups grants between £250 and £5,000. 59% of funded groups had an annual turnover of less than £5,000. The funding had significant impacts on the growth and stability of the groups. On average, five more volunteers joined each group which received funding, and 93% of groups indicated that they would continue into the future beyond their grant funding.

Similarly, 44% of small grants funded by the Big Lottery led to improvements in Health and Wellbeing and 52% of projects funded by Community First encouraged people to be active and healthy<sup>9</sup>.

Our research in the pilot area clearly indicates that many small organisations don't have the capacity or expertise to complete lengthy, complicated funding applications. Excessive bureaucracy takes time and resource away from their front-line activities. Simple application processes ensure that funds are accessible to groups of all size and level. The Big Lottery Fund recently ran a small micro-grants pilot for start-up

<sup>8</sup> Pearmain, D. Hatamian, A. and Khor, Z. (2011) Grassroots Grants: Final Evaluation Report. London: Community Development Foundation. Available at: [www.cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CDF-Grassroots-Grants-Finalevaluation-report.pdf](http://www.cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CDF-Grassroots-Grants-Finalevaluation-report.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/supporting-the-sector.pdf>

funding. The process was light-touch, with applicants undergoing a screening interview over the telephone to assess their eligibility.

The same goes for monitoring and evaluation. Recipients of Community First Funding were asked to complete a single sided feedback form and asked for pictures from their activities. Some organisations have experimented with innovative forms of monitoring like blogging and pre-payment cards to reduce time wasted on bespoke monitoring reports.

Not only does funding need to be more accessible, it needs to be allocated for specific purposes based on where groups are in their development. Start-up funding can reduce the strain many people face when starting up a group. As one participant put it, “Everything costs money. Printing flyers, renting halls for meetings, even your time costs money. A little bit of money to help you just get going would make a big difference.”

Barnet Council has identified this as an area of need and is working to streamline the funding streams available to the voluntary and community sector. This is an area of work which will be developed over the coming year.

### **Tackling the ‘language gap’**

Our research also clearly identified that small (and even some larger) community organisations in Barnet articulate their outcomes and impact differently from how Barnet Council sets out its priorities – usually this is not indicative of a mis-match, but simply that organisers are not used to thinking about or framing their work in such terms.

To explore how the values which groups identified themselves (see earlier, “The Value of Community Organisations”) aligned with the Council’s priority areas, we asked interview participants to identify which of the Council’s criteria for the Corporate Grants Programme they fulfil.

Larger organisations were much more confident to articulate their value in terms of the Corporate Grants Programme criteria, while smaller and medium organisations struggled. This may be due partly to the fact that they have much more experience applying for grant funding, while smaller groups tend to be funded by their members or donations.

Many smaller groups found the language off-putting or hard to engage with. For example, some preferred to describe the impact of their activities as ‘improving’ or ‘increasing’ positive outcomes, rather than ‘reducing’ or ‘decreasing’ negative outcomes. One person said, “‘Reducing anti-social behaviour’ is possibly the wrong term from our point of view, as we aim to ‘help address challenging behaviour’.”

Furthermore, outcomes relevant to Barnet borough as a whole (for example “help to make sure that Barnet remains a safe and healthy place to live, work and study”) created confusion and were not perceived as relevant to groups whose activities are highly localised.

While it's easy to see how many of the benefits identified are related to the Council's aims, the emphasis on outcomes rather than activities or outputs, as well as the borough-wide rather than neighbourhood focus, causes confusion.

There is clear potential for:

1. A review of the Barnet outcomes, particularly from the perspective of asset-based vs. deficit-based definition
2. A guide or tool to help smaller organisations match their activities such as "Keep-fit" or "cooking classes" into wider outcomes such as "Promote health and health outcomes". Similarly, explicit clarification that not all activities need to be Barnet-wide to contribute to the borough's objectives would be beneficial.

A simple tool as described above could be implemented online as a short survey using SurveyMonkey.com or similar. Given that many small informal groups prefer face-to-face support, this could also be supported by regular surgeries where groups could talk through the questions with an individual. By asking participants a series of questions about their activities and who benefits, they could be matched within a specific Council priority and directed towards relevant funding opportunities. Initially this matching and directing process could be prototyped offline, with staff at local infrastructure organisations or the Council reviewing surveys and communicating with groups manually. If this proves effective, the Council may consider investing in new online platforms automating some aspects of the service.

For small organisations with limited capacity, navigating the range of funding options available and identifying which are the most promising for a given organisation and project can be difficult and time consuming. Support organisations like Community Barnet have a key role to play here. However, working in a targeted way could prove beneficial. By appointing staff and volunteers to be responsible for a specific geographic area or focus (i.e. arts, youth, education, sport, etc.) as opposed to working across the entire borough or across all focus areas. This may allow for the development of more in-depth knowledge of this constantly changing environment.

## **Alternative models of funding**

Many groups feel core funding is very difficult to come by but that it is essential in order to free up other resources to allow them to take on new and innovative work. For those groups who do want to grow and expand, a grant to help them become 'enterprise-ready' would be valuable. This would be a one-off grant specifically for the purpose of strengthening an organisation's core management functions to enable it to start bidding for local contracts.

Finally, 'challenge funds', which invite groups to submit ideas for addressing local issues rather than meeting predetermined outcomes, are a great means of driving innovation and new approaches. They can also encourage greater collaboration as seen in the GeniUS! York<sup>10</sup>, a platform that engages residents, businesses, charities, students, and public services to collaborate and develop new ways to solve the city's problems.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://geniusyork.com/>

In Barnet the Big Society Innovation Bank was a project run along similar lines. Established in 2011, it gave Barnet's communities an opportunity to identify local solutions to local challenges by designing and running new community-led projects. The council invested £600,000 over three years to tap into the wealth of creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and know-how in Barnet. The Innovation Bank allowed residents and not-for-profit groups to submit bids for sums of up to £40,000 to help turn their ideas into a reality. This was a popular programme with high take-up from local voluntary and community groups.

## **Procurement**

Many of the larger organisations we spoke with expressed an appetite to work directly for and with the Council as a commissioned provider of services, but many feel that current procurement models work against them.

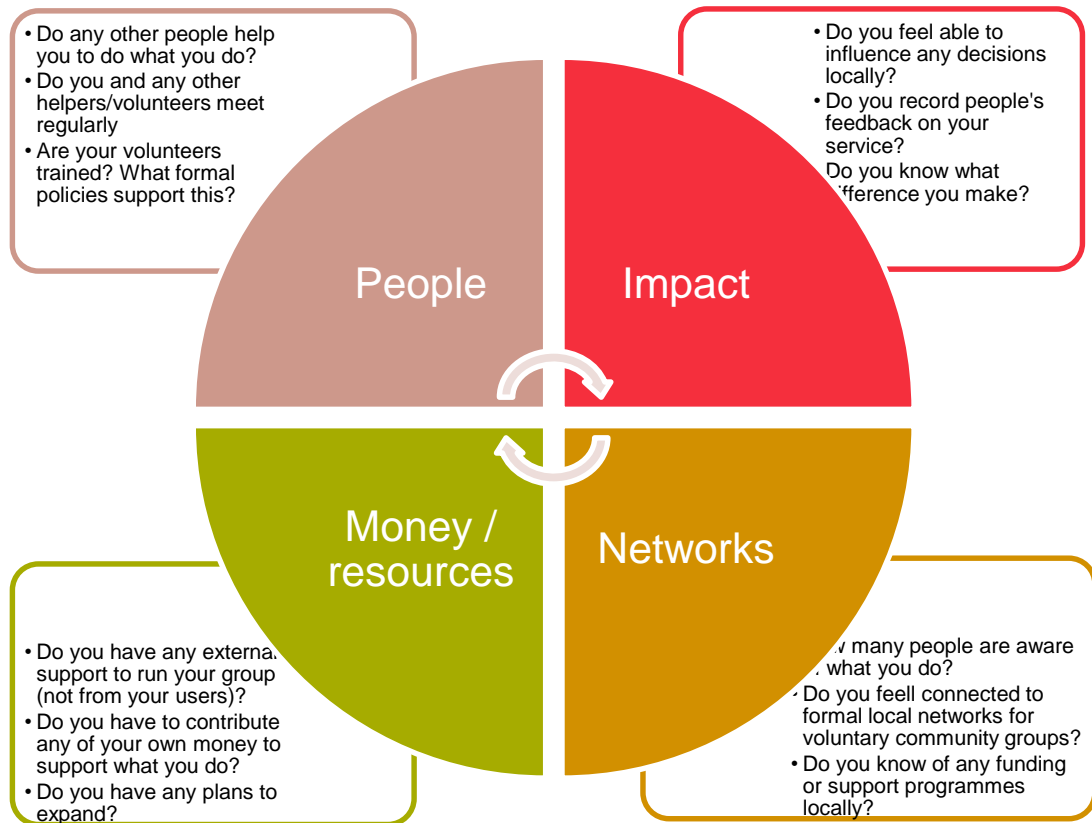
Barnet Council has been reviewing its commissioning and procurement processes as a result of feedback from local VCS organisations, including a review workshop that took place last year to better understand what the current barriers are and how they can be overcome. This work will continue, in collaboration with the local voluntary sector, in response to the findings of this report. The Social Value Act (2013) provides a useful context for this.

Further, where there is the expectation that community organisations should bid for commissioned services, an investment in capacity building at the borough-wide level is most likely necessary to get them 'commission-ready'. Small community groups are less likely to be in a position to bid for commissioned services; however, their knowledge and expertise can prove useful to those developing and commissioning new services. Many organisations would benefit from support in meeting the requirements of council tenders.

## **Non-financial resources & skills and capacity development**

Many small front-line groups would benefit from non-financial support and capacity development, a finding confirmed in this research as well as being a key area of the Council's Community Participation Strategy. However, many attempts at capacity building have been ineffective because they have assumed a linear, vertical model of development. That is to say, they assume that groups want to become larger and more formal. However, while some of these groups hope to grow and become more formalised, most want to strengthen their skills and knowledge so they can continue to deliver their existing activities. They aim to be more confident to access grant funding, receive signposting to practical advice, and increase their networks so that they can access new information and influence the local scene. When offering opportunities for capacity building it is important to engage small informal groups on their terms and where they are. A simple tool, similar to the one described above, could be used to help them identify areas where they would like additional support.

The Organisational Health Scorecard is a tool the Young Foundation has used all of our venture support programmes for the last five years. We have completed almost 1,000 diagnostics based on this approach working at a local and national level to align support needs with support services. Giving appropriate consideration to the issues of language, values, and aims we have discussed, we envision this tool could be adapted to enable BTR groups and organisations to assess their support needs. An example of an online OHS used in the Realising Ambition programme can be seen at <http://ohs.youngfoundation.org/>. Some possible assessment questions are listed below.



There are a large number of ways in which Barnet Council could help build the skills and capacity of the sector, but we highlight here those identified as most important by the people we spoke with the pilot area.

### Provision of space

Many small organisations expressed concern that there was not enough appropriate community space available to support their activities. However, in our research we identified several commercial and voluntary organisations with space for hire, many of whom said they were struggling to get people in. Community infrastructure organisations could play a role in bridging this gap in supply and demand. And, as one resident suggested, the Council may be able to provide incentives to encourage businesses to make their spaces available to community groups outside of their opening hours.

For some areas there may indeed be a significant lack of suitable space. Indeed, our observations indicate that Cricklewood residents have fewer local venues than their Golders Green and Garden Suburbs neighbours within in the pilot area. Lack of available community space has been shown to negatively affect the amount of community activity in an area and should be a key consideration for all future community development initiatives. The Council has commissioned CommUNITY Barnet to increase access to and use of community assets, and the Council's Community Asset Strategy aims to help it use its own asset portfolio to support voluntary and community groups, in recognition of the social and economic value these bring to the borough.

## **Networking**

There is a strong feeling that there should be greater emphasis on strengthening citizen capacity and building resilience in the sector by facilitating connections between groups and individuals working at the community level.

In discussing relationships and connections, nearly all groups we spoke to, regardless of size, expressed a desire to be more visible and to have a better sense of what other organisations in the area are doing.

Among small organisations in particular, there is a preference for support to be provided in person and tailored to their individual needs. All organisations valued the opportunity to meet other local groups at the Co-Design events and expressed a desire for more, similar opportunities.

We also feel there is great potential for using digital tools to achieve these aims. Many groups turn to Gumtree and Freecycle to find equipment and resources at a low cost or for free. Streetbank.com may represent a more community-minded alternative. It is an online platform to facilitate the sharing of practical items as well as skills at the neighbourhood level.

## **Online communication with the Council**

The Young Foundation's Listen, Participate, Transform framework<sup>11</sup> provides a simple structure for helping local governments engage with communities online in a meaningful way. Effective social media use is not about simply broadcasting messages. It involves monitoring, influencing, and engaging.

**Listen:** Listening to online conversation is easy to do and arguably involves no risk. By listening first, councils can begin to get unfiltered insight into local issues. Listening will help determine the best channels to engage with residents in a tailored and engaging way. Local forums and blogs are a great window into local discussions. Searching locally relevant hashtags on Twitter will also uncover important local discussions. For example, #EpicBrum is a hashtag being used by Birmingham residents and voluntary sector organisations to share what they like about their city and how it can be improved.

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Listen-Participate-Transform-A-social-media-framework-for-local-government-June-2010.pdf>

**Participate:** While responses to social media questions may not necessarily be delivered via social media, participating in these conversations can be immensely valuable. The most meaningful conversations address both positive and negative comments, are mutually beneficial, and focus on issues. An easy first step is to ensure you are following most of your Twitter followers back. Barnet Council currently has over 8,400 followers, but only follows 652. These are people who have indicated that they are already keen to hear what the Council has to say and will likely be interested in dialogue. Seeking out existing communities on platforms like Facebook and Twitter is a good way to start to identify new ‘fans’ – or residents willing to get out behind a particular issue or cause. Coventry City Council maintains a Facebook page that asks users to become fans of the city, rather than the council as an institution. By doing so, they have asked residents to connect with something that resonates with their everyday life rather than an institution which may not. As a result, the Council has accrued over 33,000 fans.

Social media can be a fundamental tool for helping residents and service users support one another. It helps people solve problems, share information, and mobilise for action. If social media is not already doing this, councils could consider whether they are best placed to instigate it or encourage its development by other groups or organisations. This could be a neighbourhood website in a place where residents don’t have capacity to create one for themselves, or a platform for service users to exchange information and advice. The High Wycombe Community Facebook Group<sup>12</sup> has over 13,000 members. It is a place for residents and groups to advertise their activities and discuss local issues.

**Transform:** The implications of using social media can go far beyond better communication with residents. It can bring about significant changes in ways of working, including:

- Redesigning services based on deeper and wider feedback from users
- Replacing or complimenting existing ways of working
- Remodelling services or business models around social media and web technology

Barnet Council’s use of fixmystreet.com to allow residents to report problems with the urban realm quickly is a great example of such a change.

## Intermediaries

Our community researchers found themselves playing the role of brokers throughout the project, making connections between local groups, suggesting contacts and sharing information about available spaces and resources. This could represent a very valuable formalised role which could be filled by a designated community outreach worker or organiser.

For example, the Community First programme encouraged local panel representatives and Community Organisers to proactively seek out people who might benefit from

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/highwycombe/?fref=ts>



the programme. They often found that residents needed a ‘bit of a push’, but with help and support they were able to put their ideas into action. This on-the-ground support had a positive effect on community networks, with seven in ten saying strong links between different local organisations and groups are more common after the programme<sup>13</sup>. The power of such embedded, hyper-local local engagement should not be underestimated.

## Replication

The informal community sector is fluid and rapidly changing. By their very nature, ‘below-the-radar’ activities are difficult to find. Furthermore, small community groups come and go, sometimes moving to different venues or disbanding altogether, with new groups popping up in their place as new needs arise. Without substantial investment of time and resources, the best you could hope to capture is a slightly blurry snapshot in time, as we have done here.

Furthermore, the question of how we assign ‘value’ in this changing landscape remains complex. There is a huge degree of variation in the way small organisations articulate their own value, and discrepancies between their descriptions and the way in which the Council’s aims are set out. Furthermore, given the constant influence of the two systems on one another, the nuanced nature of these ‘values’ and which ones are most ‘evident’ or ‘relevant’ in any given context are also constantly in flux.

Nonetheless, our approach uncovered a wealth of information about community organisations in our pilot area. While it is not feasible to conduct research of this depth across the entire borough, a second pilot in a different area would help confirm if our findings hold true more broadly. While we would expect to uncover some variation based on the unique local landscape (for example, available community space may not be a problem in some areas), we anticipate that our findings about the characteristics and needs of small community organisations in general would be consistent.

The council therefore needs to consider whether it can balance the benefits and limitations of such an approach, without seeking to directly replicate this project. Regular snapshots of this nature would provide valuable insight into trends and issues affecting communities on a hyper-local level so it may be worthwhile to explore the possibility of a yearly community audit. This annual exercise could be overseen by Community Barnet who could enlist local civic groups like Girl Guides or Rotary Clubs to carry out a light-touch street-level audit of community activity in their area. A tool-kit could be provided to maximise consistency of approach and data gathering. Rather than seeking to uncover values, it could focus on gathering information about the number and types of organisations, and the barriers and enablers to their work. This would be a valuable resource for navigating the ‘space of possibilities’ and facilitate new ways for Barnet Council and citizens to develop more collaborative ways of working.

---

<sup>13</sup> [http://cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Community-First-Evaluation\\_Spring-2014-bitesize-report\\_final.pdf](http://cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Community-First-Evaluation_Spring-2014-bitesize-report_final.pdf)

## Conclusion

This pilot study set out to map the networks and relationships between residents and community groups in a small, densely populated area in Barnet: the square-mile around Golders Green tube station. The study uncovered 319 organisations and activities, a wealth that surprised us all. We found this rich array of activity by going beyond existing datasets and by physically walking the streets, studying local notice boards and adverts, visiting the buildings and open spaces where people gather and by interviewing local people. Many of the groups and activities identified operate ‘below the radar’, with little and sometimes no funding, and using highly flexible operating models which respond to specific local needs and opportunities.

It is clear from this work that these groups make a very significant contribution to the quality of life in the local area. They are driven by highly committed individuals with a personal connection to the individuals and the causes they support and this motivates them to go far beyond the quality of service paid staff usually offer. As one person described it: “We don’t have ‘beneficiaries’. These are my friends. We’re part of the same community.”

It could be argued that this type of support is the bedrock of communities and cannot be replicated by public services. This study does however identify ways in which local authorities and other public services can act as enablers, supporting the ecosystem that these organisations need to flourish. These groups do seek small amounts of funding but they often have a volunteer-driven model which means that they are often able to continue without funding, but only with funding would they be able to improve their offer. So if local authorities and other public services want these groups to deliver a better quality service, they will need to fund them to improve. But there are other ways these groups could be supported, beyond funding: by providing easily accessible spaces and venues; by facilitating channels for publicity for their activities, by providing easily-accessible training and capacity-building support; by providing networking opportunities where community groups and voluntary sector organisations could come together to share learning and explore collaboration; and by listening to them, providing recognition and opportunities for influence.

This mapping exercise demonstrates the huge wealth of resource that exists in the community sector in this one patch in Barnet. These groups undertake work that the public sector simply could not provide. Barnet Council’s Community Participation Strategy has begun a process of drawing these groups into the design and delivery of public services and we hope that the findings of this pilot study will support this process.

# ANNEXE A

## Values as described by small-formal and small-informal groups

### Activity-based Values

Provide space for other groups to deliver activities

Support Jewish parents and families

Legal advocacy

Supporting families with complex needs

Worship and faith-based activities

Translation services

Signposting people to mainstream services

Connecting people

Provide networking opportunities

Providing meaningful play opportunities for mums and their toddlers

A safe space for women

Supporting homeless people

Providing necessities for homeless and those in need

Maintaining green spaces

Education

Providing advice and guidance

Language classes

Filling a gap

### Individual benefits

Help people stay fit

Increasing people's confidence and self-esteem

Being happier

Helping people cook healthy meals

Greater appreciation for the arts

Improving mood  
Meeting new people  
Learning through art  
Improved quality of life  
Maintaining their cultural identity  
Better communication  
Increasing skills

### **Community Benefits**

Provide entertainment for the whole community  
Reducing social isolation  
Bringing people together  
Create a social space for all ages  
Greater cultural awareness  
Helping communities organise themselves  
Connecting people  
Building friendships  
Raising awareness of the history of the area  
More intergenerational contact  
Increased local networks