

Views of New Deal for
Communities - Focus Group
Report

Research Study Conducted for:

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, ODPM

February 2005

Acknowledgements

MORI would like to thank the NDC Partnerships for their help and advice about the research design and recruitment in each area, and Sarah Pearson and Paul Lawless at CRESR for all their help and assistance in developing this project. We would also pass on our grateful thanks to all the participants for giving up their time to come along to the discussions and without whom the groups would not have been possible.

Publication of data

As CRESR/NRU have engaged MORI to undertake an objective Programme of research, it is important to protect everyone's interests by ensuring that the research findings are accurately reflected in any press release or publication. As part of our standard terms and conditions, the publication of the findings of this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of MORI, CRESR and NRU. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

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Executive Summary

Background

This research sought a qualitative understanding of how local residents judged the impact and success of the NDC Programme thus far. In order to assess and contextualise this, the research explored what factors informed participants' views of their local areas, NDC Partnerships and recent change. This will feed into the National Evaluation by providing a more in-depth understanding of resident perceptions, alongside other key sources such as the Household Survey. Reports on local findings have also been provided to each individual NDC area.

The research examined the views of a range of residents through two focus groups in each of the 39 NDC areas, resulting in 78 groups overall. One of the groups in each area was a 'general population' group that consisted of a cross-section of local participants, using reasonably mixed profiles based on age, gender, working status and ethnicity. These groups were designed to screen out people who were actively involved with, or very knowledgeable about, the NDC, such as Board members and volunteers, whose opinions are captured elsewhere in the Evaluation. The second group in each area was targeted at specific types of people, and involved one of four types of participants:

- beneficiaries of particular projects;
- volunteers delivering NDC projects;
- children between the ages of 11 and 16; or,
- a particular sub-section of the community such as those seeking work or people over 55.

The project ran from 19th July – 8th October 2004.

MORI's qualitative field recruiters were responsible for recruitment in most cases. For the general groups, addresses within the NDC areas that had been included in the Household Survey were screened out in order to prevent research fatigue. House-to-house calls were then made to the remaining addresses to find potential respondents meeting the quota for that particular area. With regards to volunteers and beneficiaries, in most cases Partnerships were kind enough to provide us with lists of named contacts, who were then telephoned and invited to take part in the relevant discussion. In the one or two cases where this was impossible due to Data Protection regulations Partnership contacts themselves facilitated the convening of suitable participants.

Perceptions of the NDC areas

Participants were asked what they felt the good and bad characteristics of their areas were, in order to help identify what they saw as the key problems facing their communities and to contextualise their overall perceptions about recent changes.

The most commonly cited positive characteristics for NDC areas related to what many felt were friendly, often diverse, neighbourhoods that were well located for access to the amenities of city centres and connected by transport links. Many participants also valued an attractive physical environment, and listed green space amongst the positive characteristics of their areas.

However, most areas were also thought to suffer from a range of problems, with several emerging as being of particular concern. Crime was identified by nearly every group as being a significant problem that had a negative impact on residents' sense of security and willingness to engage with the wider community, and on their area's physical environment. Most groups also characterised their area as having a neglected, unattractive appearance marred by derelict buildings, poor housing and littered public spaces. These were problems that participants most wanted to see improve and very often the perceived progress in addressing these concerns underpinned their judgement about the impact of local agencies. Many felt that any organisation working for change – including the NDC – needed to be seen to tackle these issues as a first priority.

Many also believed that the number of accessible community facilities, particularly those for young people, were poor and in decline, which they thought made it difficult for residents to establish and maintain connections with one another. Some felt that this lack of interaction was made worse by an increasingly transient population and a perceived influx of asylum seekers or refugees. This was believed to increase feelings of insularity amongst some residents, making it difficult for newer residents to feel part of the wider community. Gentrification was also raised in a number of areas. A few participants believed that their areas were increasingly divided into 'haves' and 'have nots', giving the impression that they were excluded from new housing or facilities.

Area image and identity

As well as suffering from a range of problems such as crime or a poor physical environment, most believed that their areas had negative reputations. Different factors were thought to impact on views of the areas, which created different local contexts within which change is judged. However, there was a tension between the perceived reality of an area and its reputation, which many participants felt was sometimes unfairly coloured by media coverage that overemphasised negative aspects. There was a common view that areas were often not as bad as their reputations suggested and that many of their problems were no different or greater than those facing other parts of the country.

Yet some participants felt that the identification as a 'regeneration area' influenced the area's reputation. Some believed that 'regeneration' was associated with poverty, a neglected physical environment, unemployment and other social problems that could act as a stigma for all residents. However, for others, the actual regeneration efforts and their impact on improving an area offset these negative connotations.

The economic history of an area also appeared to influence the way that people viewed NDC areas, particularly where traditional industries had collapsed. In some cases, participants expressed frustration with what they felt to be a lack of local job opportunities or other facilities or services, when generations of past residents had lived in largely self-contained communities.

The perceived level of community identity was another important factor that affected participants' willingness to engage with one another and participate in community-based activities. Strong social networks – which were felt to be more easily established in stable, self-contained communities – encouraged people to feel part of a wider community and take part in social events. Many believed that people from within the community often shared common experiences, such as having children in local schools, which gave them a greater understanding or ability to empathise with the needs of others. Good relations between different groups within the community were also felt to be important, particularly in more diverse areas. This was seen to encourage people from different backgrounds to interact with and identify with the broader community.

Finally, some felt that traditional geographical divisions within the NDC areas could impede residents' willingness to see themselves as part of a single community and made it difficult for initiatives to gain acceptance across the entire area.

Awareness of the NDC

Despite these perceived problems, most participants had noticed that change was happening in their areas over the last three years. Most were aware of at least one NDC-led or related initiative in their area – usually projects relating to reducing crime or addressing housing/physical environment issues – although they did not always link them to the NDC itself.

While awareness of the NDC Partnership was generally high, many did not associate change to them, particularly on crime or the physical environment. While most believed that it was more important to see that projects were being completed rather than know who was behind them, others wanted to be able to link the NDC to local activities in order to gauge its effectiveness and impact on the area. It was felt by some that the Partnerships could benefit from maintaining a high profile and taking credit for their contribution to successful local initiatives.

Many saw partnership working as evidence of a strategic, joined up approach to local regeneration efforts. In some cases, Partnerships were felt to benefit from their association with successful organisations (such as Sure Start) and were seen to be positioning themselves as key players in delivering valuable services to the community. However, for others, association with certain bodies was viewed more negatively (for example, the council or housing associations) and occasionally influenced participants' views of the NDC.

About half the groups had some awareness of the NDC Programme as a whole, and tended to link it to the Government, although some believed that it was related to European Union funding.

NDC communication and consultation

Most participants said that they regularly received some form of written communication from the NDC such as newsletters or leaflets, whilst only a few had received information from other sources such as a local NDC office or local press. Instead, it was much more common for participants to find out about change through word of mouth.

Participants identified a number of issues related to current information provision. The most common of these was that it was not detailed enough. They felt that communication could be more explicit regarding the organisational structure, the amount of funding remaining, the criteria for funding decisions, and the projects that the NDC was currently running or had planned. There was also a belief that written communication could be inconsistently distributed, in some cases missing out entire neighbourhoods, whilst other areas were seemingly bombarded with materials, particularly leaflets. Many believed that written materials were often confused with ‘junk mail’ and felt that they could be made more eye catching, although some thought that this would use money that could be better spent on local projects. There was also a view that the tone of written materials could be overly positive, particularly as nearly all participants felt that much work remained to be done. For some, this self-congratulatory slant undermined the authority of communication materials.

Participants in all groups felt that it was important to involve the local community in decision making. Most felt that this would help to ensure that local initiatives were meeting the community’s particular needs. It was also felt to help foster a sense of ownership amongst the community for local changes, by giving residents the feeling that they had played an important role in the regeneration process.

Many were aware of consultation exercises, although generally felt that such efforts were greater when the NDC was first introduced into the area. However, most believed that there were a number of barriers that prevented residents from getting involved, even where such opportunities were thought to exist. Apathy was seen as the biggest hurdle, with many feeling that local residents were not willing to take part in consultation unless there was ‘something in it for them’. Others felt that residents lacked influence with the NDC and believed that decisions were already made before consultation efforts were undertaken. Consequently, many felt that there was little point to getting involved if their voices would not be heard. Finally, some participants pointed to what they felt were inflexible consultation exercises that made it difficult for some people to share their views, particularly full time workers, parents or those who did not speak English as a first language. Many believed that active outreach work and ongoing consultation efforts through a range of approaches encourage a broader section of the community to share their views.

Volunteering

Four of the focus groups consisted of NDC volunteers who served in various capacities from helping to deliver specific projects to sitting on committees. These participants generally viewed volunteering as a way of accessing information about plans for the area and as a means of effectively influencing decisions. Many saw the NDC as a vehicle for change and felt that their involvement with it gave them greater leverage to bring about improvements that might help to make their communities better places to live. Some also appreciated the social element involved with volunteering, which they believed increased their personal involvement with the wider community and gave them the opportunity to learn new skills.

However, most believed that much work remained to be done to convince the majority of residents that the NDC was a worthwhile activity to get involved with. They felt that this often came down to increasing face-to-face contact with residents that could be tailored to meet individual needs and providing clear, consistent information that outlined a range of ways for people to get involved. However, they said that the most important factor to convince people of the value of involvement with the NDC was visible evidence of change, particularly in relation to housing or the physical environment which were viewed as the most obvious indicators of improvement.

Perceived change and the impact of NDC

Participants in the majority of groups felt that their areas were in the midst of changes that were generally helping to make their neighbourhoods better places to live – although nearly all believed that much work remained to be done. Most were not readily making the connection between the projects they saw happening around them and their local NDC Partnership, although many saw the NDC as one of the bodies working for local change. Successful projects were generally felt to be those that were brought to completion in a timely manner and that were thought to meet the community's specific priorities.

Successful regeneration efforts – even if outside participants' local area – made some more positive about the potential impact of the NDC. For others, proximity to regeneration initiatives in other areas made them resentful that such work was not taking place in their own neighbourhoods. There was also concern regarding the sustainability of projects delivered through the NDC Programme and recognition amongst some of the inherent difficulties in meeting the needs of all members of the community. Some volunteers, whose knowledge of and involvement with the NDC was generally greater than other participants, believed that the structure of the NDC Programme sometimes presented another barrier that made it difficult for Partnerships to deliver effective local initiatives.

Conclusions

The key factors that had the greatest apparent influence on perceptions about the NDC and recent change can be grouped into two broad headings: NDC actions and local context.

Key NDC actions

A number of NDC actions were generally felt to help contribute to a successful NDC Partnership. These can be split into three key areas, which each have a number of related priorities.

The first was *project delivery*. In order for projects to be judged successful, most believed that they had to meet a number of criteria:

- Timely completion: Most participants felt that it was more important for projects to be brought to completion than to have a wide range of initiatives running at the same time but seemingly without end, particularly large-scale housing or physical environment initiatives.
- Visibility: Visible evidence of progress was seen as important, especially in relation to large-scale housing or physical environment projects that were often viewed as crucial to an area's regeneration. However, there was also a recognition that smaller 'quick wins' could have an immediate impact on people's lives and help convince them of the potential positive impact of the NDC Partnership.
- Relevance: Successful projects were ones that were thought to address what participants felt were key local priorities; in most cases, priorities centred on crime reduction and/or improving the physical environment.

The second key area was *consultation/involvement*. There was a common belief that effective consultation had to consist of:

- A range of approaches: Individual consultation approaches undertaken in isolation were generally not considered to be adequate in gathering the views of the widest range of residents.
- Active outreach: Many also believed that proactive efforts – particularly face-to-face – on the part of the NDC were crucial in raising awareness amongst the community of opportunities to get involved and help them to overcome obstacles such as childcare costs.

The third area was *communication*, covering four key issues:

- Plans for the area: Knowing about plans for the area was thought to help set specific initiatives in a wider context of regeneration and give the sense that the NDC was working within an overall strategy, rather than involved a series of disconnected projects. However, it was also felt to be important that the NDC did not over-promise changes, as the perceived failure to deliver often undermined trust.
- Progress and partnership working: As well as plans for the area, many wanted to know information regarding the progress towards actually *achieving* such changes. In many cases, clear branding of the Partnerships' involvement with successful initiatives contributed to a sense that progress was being made.
- Funding information: Many were unclear about financial details such as the criteria for funding decisions or the amount of funding available. In some cases, this contributed to a sense of mistrust and exclusion from the NDC.
- Opportunities for involvement: Some participants believed that a lack of awareness about opportunities, such as consultation or volunteering exercises, prevented them from engaging with the NDC.

Key context factors

While the actions of the NDC significantly affected perceptions about the Partnerships, there were other contextual factors that also impacted on participants' expectations and judgements about the delivery of change. These can be grouped into three key areas, all of which have related priorities.

For many participants, the *experience of regeneration* – either locally or elsewhere – affected their understanding of the NDC.

- Neighbouring regeneration efforts: Regeneration efforts in neighbouring areas either made participants feel positive about the potential impact of such efforts or resentful when such efforts were thought to exclude their own neighbourhoods.
- Past regeneration efforts: Similarly, some participants were more sceptical about the potential impact of regeneration programmes when past initiatives were not felt to have made a significant impact on their lives.

There were also a number of *economic or social characteristics* that influenced participants' views of change and affected how easy or difficult a job the NDC faces in improving perceptions.

- Transience of the community: There was a common perception that more stable communities encouraged greater identification with an area and increased interaction between residents. This, in turn, was seen to increase feelings of safety and willingness to get involved.
- Economic divisions: In some cases, economic divisions between different members of the community were thought to be significant and increasing, which fostered a sense of exclusion from recent changes. In some areas, gentrification was a particular concern and led to feelings of ‘us and them’ between newer and more established residents.
- Economic history: The decline of traditional industry in a few areas removed many of the local opportunities once available. Participants in these areas were used to living within close proximity to amenities, which affected their views about the relevance of current opportunities.
- Reputation: Some participants believed that their communities had a negative reputation which was sometimes exaggerated by the media. Stigmatising the area in this way was often felt to undermine pride and confidence in the community.

Finally, there were a number of *physical characteristics* that affected how easy it will be for Partnerships to change views.

- Housing type and quality: Housing was one of the most important priorities for many and severe problems with the quality of housing stock often tainted participants’ views of all other issues. Additionally, areas with a high proportion of rented properties were also thought to have more transient communities and were seen as more liable to have anti-social tenants.
- Location/access to other areas: Areas that were seen to be more isolated than others or that did not have good transport links were thought to be more significantly affected by changes such as the closure of shops or the demolition of housing. In other cases, participants believed that their area’s proximity to more affluent neighbourhoods highlighted the relative deprivation of their own communities.
- Lack of amenities: Many participants believed that their communities had few local amenities such as parks, shops or community facilities. In particular, a perceived lack of facilities offering activities for young people was thought to impact on feelings of safety.
- Geographical identities: Identity for some participants was driven by traditional geographical divisions, which in some cases did not match the administrative boundaries of the NDC. In these cases, engendering a sense of local progress appears more difficult.

Introduction

Scope of the research

This report presents the key findings of a research project conducted by the MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of Sheffield Hallam University.

Research objectives/questions

The objectives of the project were to explore:

- What factors (both positive and negative) most inform participants' views of their local area?
- What factors (both positive and negative) most inform participants' views of the NDC Partnership?
- What are participants' attitudes towards change in their local area, and which, if any, changes do they ascribe to the NDC?
- How informed are participants about the NDC Partnership?
- What are participants' experiences and/or views about Partnership consultation?
- How do participants judge the impact and success of their NDC thus far? Which are the most – and least – important factors informing their views?

Research Design

Two focus groups took place in each of the 39 NDC areas, resulting in 78 groups overall.

One of the groups in each area was a 'general population' group that consisted of a cross-section of local participants, using reasonably mixed profiles based on age, gender, working status and ethnicity. These groups were designed to screen out people who were actively involved with, or very knowledgeable about, the NDC, such as Board members and volunteers, whose opinions are captured elsewhere in the Evaluation.

The second group in each area was targeted at specific types of people within the NDC area, and involved one of four types of participants:

- beneficiaries of particular projects;

- volunteers delivering NDC projects;
- children between the ages of 11 and 16; or,
- a particular sub-section of the community such as those seeking work or people over 55.

The full make-up of the targeted focus groups across all of the NDC areas is given in this report as an appendix.

The project ran from 19th July – 8th October 2004.

Recruitment

MORI's qualitative field recruiters were responsible for recruitment in most cases. For the general groups, the approach was to screen out addresses within the NDC areas that had been included in the Household Survey, compile a list of remaining addresses, and from these make house-to-house calls to find potential respondents meeting the quota for that particular area.

With regards to volunteers and beneficiaries, in most cases Partnerships were kind enough to provide us with lists of named contacts, who were then telephoned and invited to take part in the relevant discussion. In the one or two cases where this was impossible due to data protection regulations, Partnership contacts themselves facilitated the convening of suitable participants.

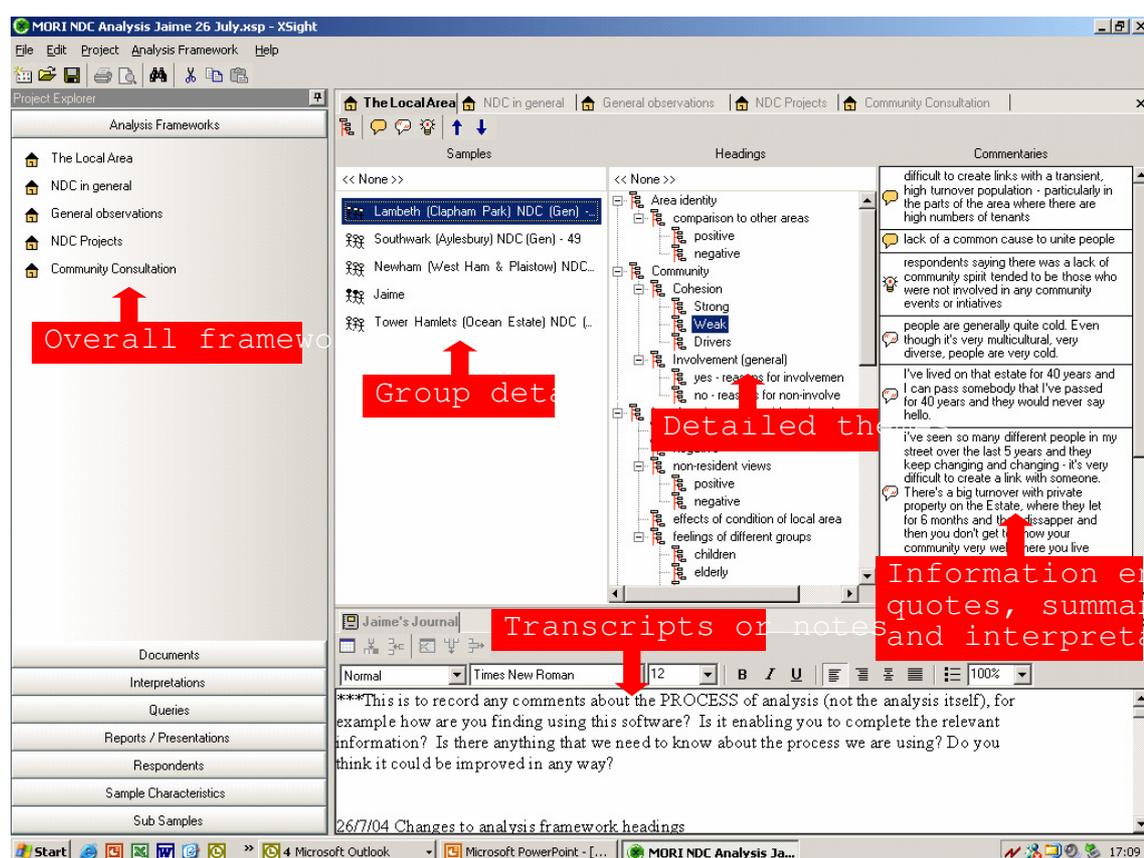
Analysis framework

Initial analysis of each focus group took place immediately after the discussion, when the moderator, listening to the audio recording of the group, made notes recording participant views, verbatim comments, and their own interpretations. The following day, all moderators then had a one-to-one debrief with the project manager.

At the mid-way point of the fieldwork, and then again once fieldwork was complete, full day debrief sessions were held with the entire project team. These were facilitated by an external qualitative analysis specialist and were used to identify and explore the key themes emerging from the research and test emergent hypotheses and findings.

These themes were then used to construct a series of charts or frameworks, against which each piece of data was plotted. This required revisiting the transcripts or recordings of the data and 'marking them up' systematically to make sure all relevant pieces of information were included on the framework charts. Information was recorded in both verbatim and summary form, with researchers careful to ensure that they differentiate between these as appropriate in order to minimise any innate bias they might bring to the task.

In order to analyse and interpret the information collected thoroughly, we used QSR Xsight software. This is new to the field of commercial qualitative research and provides a means of constructing a structured and searchable framework within which to categorise data. Xsight is also designed to work as a knowledge management tool to formally capture and organise data from a variety of different moderators and markets, meaning that it is ideally placed to assist researchers in their analysis of large-scale qualitative projects. An example page is shown below:



Each moderator had their own version of the software in which they could write up their findings from each of their groups, including their own interpretations, and verbatim comments made by participants. This was reviewed by the core team at stages throughout the fieldwork to ensure consistency of approach by all moderators. Each moderator's own version, once complete, was merged into a master copy, containing findings from every focus group in the study.

Once all the data has been entered into Xsight, the research team then began to identify underlying patterns and themes within the data, e.g. looking at the characteristics of participants who were positive about a particular thing and seeing if this positivity was reflected in other responses or areas of the analysis. Contradictions and connections within the data were explored, and explanations sought as to why variance might be occurring.

Finally, the deliberative debrief meeting was reconvened after the thematic sorting and coding had been undertaken, in order to test the conclusions with the rest of the team before the writing of the report began.

Interpreting qualitative research

Qualitative research involves an interactive process between the people carrying out the research and those being researched. It provides a way of probing the underlying attitudes of participants, and obtaining an understanding of the issues of importance. The real value of qualitative research is that it allows insights into the attitudes, and the reasons for these attitudes, which could not be probed in as much depth with a structured questionnaire. The flexible nature of this research method allows participants to define their own issues and raise their own problems.

However, it must be remembered when interpreting these results that they are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. The findings are based on a small sample of those living in an NDC area and are therefore illustrative rather than statistically representative. In this report we record *perceptions*, not facts; participants may hold views that are based on incorrect information. These perceptions are reported here.

Similarly, we include a number of charts throughout the report which illustrate some common themes that emerged throughout the groups. These were devised by retrospectively coding participants' responses as recorded by moderators in order to get a rough count of how frequently certain issues were raised and help to illustrate the strength or scale of different views. However, it is important to bear in mind that these are indicative only and are not based on a quantitative methodology. Moreover, it must be remembered that while some themes emerged throughout the discussions which are explored throughout this report, participants' experiences varied widely across the NDC areas and were shaped by their unique local context. It is therefore quite common for apparently contradictory views to be expressed, although we have tried throughout this report to give an idea of how widespread different views were.

Throughout the report, use is made of verbatim comments from participants. These have been selected to exemplify a particular view of a body of participants, although it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of all the participants as a whole.

1. Perceptions of the NDC Areas

Participants were asked at the start of the discussion what they felt the good and bad characteristics of their areas were, in order to help identify what they felt were the key problems facing their communities and to contextualise their overall perceptions about recent changes.

The most commonly cited positive characteristics for NDC areas related to what many felt were friendly, often diverse, neighbourhoods that were well located for access to the amenities of city centres and connected by transport links. Many participants also valued an attractive physical environment, and listed green space and good local amenities amongst the positive characteristics of their areas.

However, most areas were also thought to suffer from a range of problems, with several emerging as being of particular concern. Crime was identified by nearly every group as being a significant problem which was felt to have a negative impact on residents' sense of security and willingness to engage with the wider community, and their area's physical environment. Most groups also characterised their area as having a neglected, unattractive appearance marked by derelict buildings, poor housing and littered public spaces.

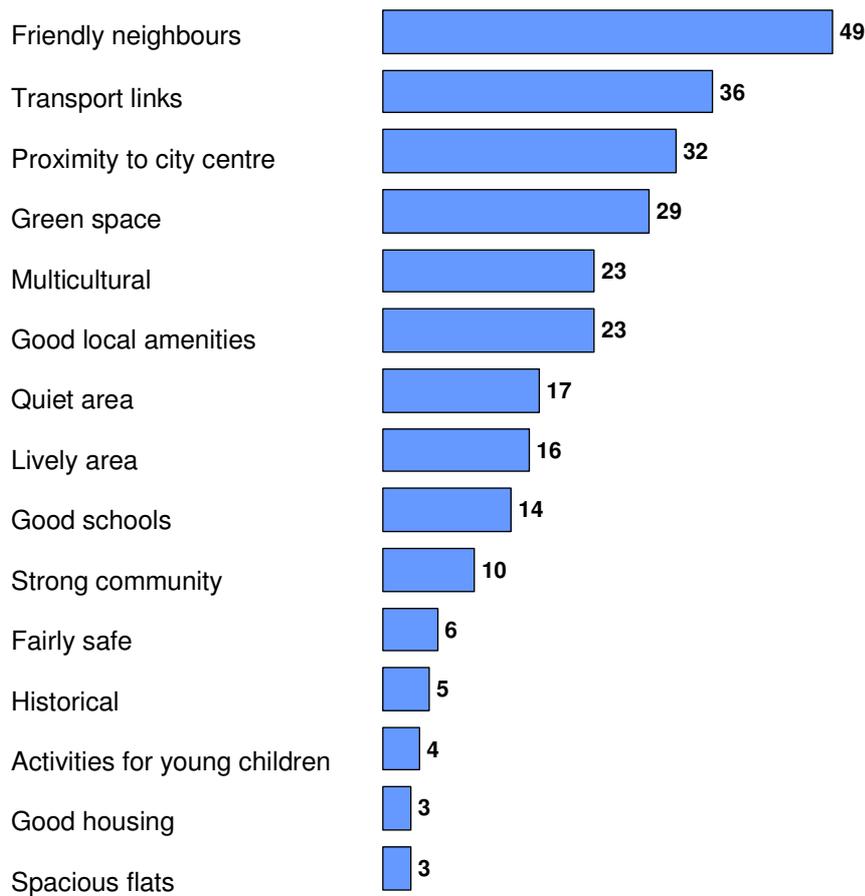
These were areas that participants most wanted to see improve and very often the perceived progress made by various organisations in addressing these concerns underpinned their judgement about the impact of local agencies. Many felt that any organisation working for change – including the NDC – needed to be seen to tackle these issues as a first priority.

Many participants also believed that the number of accessible community facilities, particularly those for young people, were poor and in decline, which they thought made it difficult for residents to establish a connection with one another. Some felt that this lack of interaction was made worse by an increasingly transient population and a perceived influx of asylum seekers or refugees. In turn, this was believed to increase feelings of insularity amongst some residents, making it difficult for newer residents to feel part of the wider community. A few participants believed that their areas were divided into 'haves' and 'have nots', giving the impression that they were excluded from new housing or facilities and, they believed, further fragmenting their communities.

1.1 Good things about the areas

Participants were asked to identify good and bad things about their local area in order to stimulate thinking and uncover unprompted perceptions. The following chart illustrates the broad range of positive characteristics cited by participants, along with the number of groups where each quality was mentioned. Several factors emerging as being particularly significant.

Good things about the areas
Top 15 positive characteristics cited by participants



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

1.1.1 Friendly neighbours

The presence of friendly neighbours was the most commonly cited positive characteristic. For some, such as those in Rochdale, this contributed to a strong sense of community:

Where I am, it's nice, it's quiet and the neighbours are lovely.

Rochdale General Group

I've lived here 11 years and I love the place...and it's the people that make it.

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

It's a brilliant area and I've got brilliant neighbours.

Oldham General Group

Basically any house within 500 yards I can go visit and find a friend.

Southwark Worklessness Group

1.1.2 Good transport links

Participants in nearly half of the groups thought that good transport links were one of their area's key strengths. Many viewed these links as providing them with mobility both within their immediate area and outside it, ensuring they felt connected to neighbouring towns or cities. Public transport was particularly valued for its role in providing this, particularly as car ownership was felt to be lower than average in NDC areas:

We've got good bus services and we've got the Tube.

Brent Beneficiary Group

In one example, participants in Hackney saw the new 394 Shoreditch Hoppa as a vital 'lifeline' for residents and a valuable service that increased people's mobility, whether this meant access to the hospital or a handy route to Islington; nearly every participant in both groups had used it:

The route it takes is excellent. That bus route is a godsend for some people.

Hackney Community Cohesion Group

It's a really valuable service, goes to the hospital and you never used to be able to get the bus to the hospital.

Hackney General Group

1.1.3 Proximity to city centre

Nearly as important as good transport links for many participants was how close their local area was to the amenities and services provided in the city centre:

It's well placed...it's commutable to the city centre and if you want to go shopping in Manchester.

Oldham General Group

It's a very good area to live for City and West End, with services.

Tower Hamlets General Group

1.1.4 Good local amenities

Following on from this, access to good local amenities was also a key strength for participants in just under a third of the groups, who believed that places such as shops, markets or leisure centres were important positive characteristics of their areas. Lower car ownership made many feel that it was even more important for quality shops and services to be located nearby. Moreover, there was a feeling in some groups that local shops or markets often served as an important gathering point for the community:

My local shop caters for everything - you name it and it's got it, and the good thing about it is that it's two minutes from my door.

Brent Beneficiary Group

I think it's getting better than Sheffield for amenities. It's brilliant; the shopping's brilliant.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

1.1.5 Green space

Accessible parks and green space were also seen as important by participants in more than a third of the groups and often heavily influenced their satisfaction with and pride felt for their neighbourhoods. There was a common view that green space helped to make areas more attractive and provided the community – particularly young people – with an important local amenity. Areas that were described as having parks or open space nearby, such as Luton or Oldham, were generally viewed in a more positive light than areas that were seen to lack green space, for instance Nottingham or Southwark:

My favourite part about Marsh Farm is it's very green, it has a lot of greenery in Marsh Farm and I like that.

Luton Beneficiary Group

I like the greenery and the space.

Brent Beneficiary Group

1.1.6 Multicultural

Participants in around a third of the groups thought that their area's diverse cultural backgrounds also brought a wide variety of influences to the area. These were believed to not only enrich the local neighbourhoods, but were also felt to foster a sense of tolerance between different communities:

We stopped in this area because of the multicultural, because we adopted mixed race Afro-Caribbean children... we stopped in this area purposely and I've always liked living round here.

Sheffield General Group

Red, yellow, black and white - we all get on together.

Brent General Group

1.1.7 Quiet area

Seventeen of the groups described their areas as fairly quiet, which they felt was a good thing. Participants believed that this contributed to their overall enjoyment of the area by creating a comfortable, peaceful environment in which to live:

It's not bad in all the area - where I live it's really nice, really quiet.

Lambeth General Group

You could forget on a Sunday that you were in the middle of London. When you get away from the traffic and you do feel like it's quite peaceful.

Lewisham General Group

1.1.8 Lively area

However, a similar number of groups felt that their area's vibrancy and liveliness was a key strength. Bars, restaurants, nightclubs or other cultural activities were seen as indications of the area's thriving culture or symbols of local investment:

It's quite lively, there's always something to do.

Nottingham General Group

West Brom has a thriving nightlife.

Sandwell General Group

1.1.9 Other factors

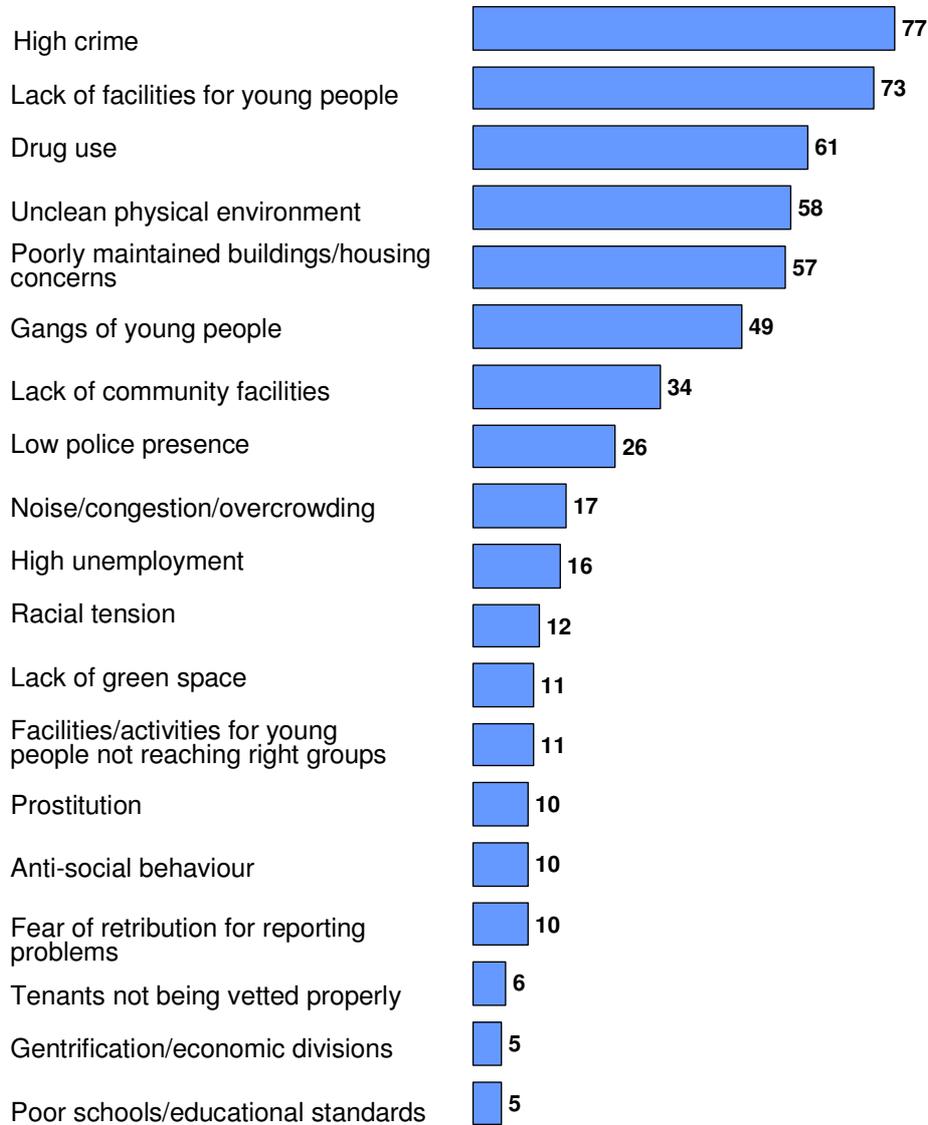
Other positive characteristics about their local areas that were mentioned by participants included good local schools, a strong local community, a feeling that the area was fairly safe, rich history, activities for young children, good employment opportunities and spacious flats.

1.2 Bad things about the areas

In addition to identifying what they felt were good things about their local area, participants were also asked to identify what they felt were the negative things. As with the positive characteristics, this served to contextualise the discussion and helped to identify the issues that participants felt existed in their areas. Some of these were viewed as being of particular importance, and were felt to have a significant impact on local residents' satisfaction and identification with an area, as well as on the perceived level of cohesion within the community. Often, these were the issues that participants most wanted to see addressed – which in turn then impacted on the way that they judged changes in the local area and the related work of the NDC.

The chart below illustrates the range of concerns that emerged from this stage of the discussion.

Bad things about the area
Negative characteristics cited by participants



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

Whilst participants mentioned a range of issues, these can be grouped into six broad categories: high crime levels; lack of youth and community facilities; poor physical environment; housing; unemployment and economy; and, racial tension and asylum seekers. Each of these is discussed in detail below.

1.2.1 High crime levels and fear of crime

Crime was identified by participants in every group bar one (the young persons’ group in Lewisham) as being a significant issue in their area. Most felt that their neighbourhoods suffered from a range of criminal activity which they believed had a considerable impact on their quality of life:

I don't feel safe leaving my car and I don't feel safe even just walking around.

Knowsley General Group

Most felt that problems relating to crime had such a significant impact on their communities that they would need to be addressed and resolved before other improvements or changes could have a long-term impact. For example, participants in Doncaster and Wolverhampton thought that most residents would not benefit from recent improvements to the physical environment as on-going criminal activity was believed to either spoil the changes or make people too afraid to take advantage of them:

Without them sorting the crime part out of it, the violence, the drugs, all that [effort is] wasted because they're tidying up and they're just ruining it.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

It's pretty pointless giving them the most fantastic parks with football grounds or a basketball court if it's not safe for them to use.

Wolverhampton General Group

I don't know what's happening because nothing seems to have got any better with the youth disorder problem and the problem neighbours or anything else.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

One of the most common effects of high crime or high fear of crime was felt to be a reduced level of interaction between residents. Many participants believed this often prevented people from engaging with their wider community and sometimes made them feel isolated and insular:

This area is so full of trouble, you just don't know who you can trust.

Wolverhampton General Group

Certain groups within the community were thought to be particularly vulnerable and concerned about being the potential victims of crime. For example, many participants felt that older people were often afraid to leave their homes for fear of verbal or physical abuse, a view confirmed by some of the participants in the focus groups conducted with people aged 55 and over:

We are afraid to walk down the streets.

Walsall Health Group

You don't often see older people out at night because they're afraid.

Knowsley General Group

Old people don't walk around at night - they're scared to death.

Bristol Beneficiary Group

Similarly, many parents in the groups also felt particular concern for both themselves and the safety of their children, who they felt were vulnerable to the influences or effects of gangs operating in the local area:

[You need to] provide something for the kids to do to keep them off the street and away from the influence of yobs.

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

I grew up around here but have got to a stage where I don't want my children going out.

Southampton General Group

A few disabled participants also said that they felt particularly exposed to acts of violence that they felt were commonly perpetrated by gangs of anti-social youths:

To be honest, I feel like easy prey.

Bristol Beneficiary Group

Participants' experiences of *actual* crime often underpinned this high level of fear. Across all of the groups, many had either been the victim of crime or knew people who had, which they said had an effect on their own sense of security. This was illustrated in Southwark, where more than half of the participants said that they regularly adjusted their behaviour in an attempt to avoid being the victim of crime in their local area by not going out at certain times or altering their routes home:

Do you think I ever go home the same way twice? I never do that. I go home a different way every time I go home. It doesn't matter if I've only just gone down the road.

Southwark General Group

In some cases, participants said they felt desensitised by the level of criminal activity in their area, saying they tended to accept it as a way of life:

There's lots of violence, but that's just the way it is. It's part of life.

Wolverhampton Volunteer Group

Other participants said that regular experience of crime made them feel reluctant about turning to the authorities, partly because they said they feared retribution from the offenders if they reported them. Indeed, roughly one group in ten said that intimidation and the fear of retribution prevented them from going to the police:

We want to report things [to the police], but we won't for fear of the backlash, the retaliation.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

Indeed, participants in roughly a third of the groups felt that many of their area's problems were not being effectively addressed by the police, who many believed had a low profile in their communities. Some felt that the police sometimes lacked control over local youths or drug dealers, which they said turned a few neighbourhoods into 'no-go' areas:

It's a criminal area. It's a no-go area. Don't go in there because you're not guaranteed to come out with your life.

Nottingham Beneficiary Group

The police will not come anywhere near Whinney Banks.

Middlesbrough General Group

Participants across the groups identified a number of factors that they thought contributed to the problems with crime. For example, some felt that a poor physical environment, such as derelict buildings and poor street lighting, encouraged crime. Boarded up properties and derelict land were often seen as unsightly focal points for criminal activity (e.g., drug dealers, gangs or squatters) that both degraded the area's physical environment and contributed to high crime levels. Participants in some of the groups said they had noticed an increase in the number of local properties that have been boarded up, ready for demolition or refurbishment. Most believed that such efforts would ultimately help to improve the area's overall appearance, but also felt that perceived delays between demolition and rebuild left derelict buildings and land that attracted criminal activity such as drug dealing, gangs or anti-social behaviour:

[Boarded up properties are a] hooligan's paradise.

Liverpool General Group

They just leave houses empty for so long while they're doing them up and they just seem to be falling down half of them. And it gives all the kids an incentive to go into them houses that are boarded up and set light to them.

Oldham General Group

It's just awful now, the state of some of the properties. And then the properties are getting burned down and that's just because they're standing empty forever. There's houses ...where the backs are all smashed in and that and they're going in and sitting drinking and taking whatever drugs they're taking, and then going and raising hell basically about 11 o'clock on a night, wherever they can just go and do it.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

Some people don't live in this area, they're going on to the estate just to take their drugs and then go.

Southwark General Group

Other groups, such as the general group in Birmingham Kings Norton, believed that the design of some housing estates made them hard to effectively police. They attributed this to their networks of small, poorly lit alleys and pathways that left some participants feeling vulnerable:

I think people feel a bit vulnerable, especially at night.

Birmingham Kings Norton General Group

High drug use was also seen by participants in more than three quarters of the groups as a significant contributing factor to crime levels. Many linked drug use to other forms of criminal behaviour such as prostitution and robbery, which they thought increased residents' fear of crime in an area and consequently prevented people from engaging with the broader community:

I don't go to the post office anymore because you see them [drug dealers] all around there...and it's scary.

Coventry Community Cohesion Group

There was a common belief that drug misuse often compounded an already poor physical environment with discarded needles, vandalism or neglect:

We have drug users - it's not so much needles as slovenly, there are mattresses on the stairs.

Lambeth General Group

Drugs are the reason why the houses are like that; drugs are the reason there is crime...heroin is destroying this area.

Hartlepool General Group

However, the most significant and widespread issue was thought to be youth crime. Participants in the vast majority of groups thought that youth crime was one of the most pressing issues, whilst nearly two thirds felt that their areas suffered from the presence of gangs of young people. Many believed that disaffected youths often demonstrated anti-social behaviour (itself identified as a

particular problem by participants in roughly one in ten NDC areas) and engaged in a range of criminal activities such as vandalism, drug use or theft.

Nearly all groups mentioned problems with large groups of youths gathering in areas such as parks, street corners or in front of shops, deterring other members of the community from using them:

I feel scared walking past them where the Ladbrokes is on the corner...they all lined up and I was thinking what you going to do? Mug me? I walk past the same group and they all come up beside me and harass me.

Newham Worklessness Group

You can get groups of lads that accumulate on the end of the street and you don't feel safe to go out of your own house.

Oldham General Group

The young kids are spoiling everything. You can't walk down the street without getting abuse.

Walsall General Group

1.2.2 Lack of youth and community facilities

The key cause of these problems was felt to be that there are simply not enough local facilities or initiatives providing positive activities for young people. Whilst some areas were felt to lack such facilities completely, others were felt to be losing existing facilities through a perceived lack of funding:

There's not that much to do round here, that's why people end up getting drunk and sticking needles in their arms.

Oldham Beneficiary Group, Age 11-15

All the cemetery's knocked down all the head tombs everything's just ruined with kids they just play football in there because there's nowhere else for them to go.

Sheffield General Group

I think the biggest problem is there's no place for the kids to play. There are no facilities for them whatsoever.

Knowsley Housing / Phys Env Group

I think some of the kids do hang round the corners and that but what else have they got to do? They've got nont else to do, there's nowhere for them to go, there's nothing for them here for them to do. I mean if your local corner shop's trying to sell them booze and things like that, they're just going to stand around on the street corners or wherever they can. They've got nothing to do, that's what it is.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

If the council takes the swimming pools away and things for the kids to do, then they tend to give up and think, 'well I might as well smash this'.

Sandwell Crime Group

Green space was viewed as being particularly important for children and young people and for the parents of young children. Many participants with children in areas where there was little green space said they were frustrated at feeling that there was nowhere nearby to take their children, even if only a simple playground. In some cases, parks were felt to have been taken over by local anti-social elements such as drug dealers or gangs, and were felt to be unsafe to walk through or play in. Even in areas where improvements had been made to local parks, many participants complained of finding drug equipment or used condoms littering the green space which made some unwilling to use it themselves, let alone send their children there:

I wouldn't let my daughter go to the park on her own.

Luton Beneficiary Group

In Elmfield Park, we're forever finding syringes and that.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

In the park down by the school, we find needles.

Knowsley General Group

However, in a few areas, the young people we spoke to were more positive about the availability of parks and open spaces than adult participants, which illustrated how different groups viewed and used the same areas in different ways. The Lewisham case study below illustrates this in more detail: although young people generally felt that the open spaces provided them with ample opportunities to enjoy themselves, adults were more concerned that young people were not being offered enough supervised or formal programmes to keep them occupied and out of public spaces. There was a sense amongst adults that parks alone were not enough to convince them that children were being provided for; instead, they felt that organised projects were necessary to meet the perceived needs of local youths.

Lewisham: Different uses of green space

Nearly all adults in the general group believed that the area lacked facilities or, perhaps most importantly, safe and supervised activities for young people which many believed had a detrimental effect on the area's physical environment and crime. Large groups of young people were thought to loiter in local parks, making other members of the community feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Many adults, particularly parents, believed that young people were offered few opportunities to keep them off the streets and engaged in positive activities:

They're worried, because their children ain't got nowhere to go. (General Group)

However, in contrast, the majority of young people we spoke to in the Education Group felt that they had plenty to do in the area, particularly at the local park which they believed was a particular attraction. Many spoke of bike-rides, football games and 'adventures' that made them feel happy about living there and nearly all the young people had taken part in some kind of organised local activity or event. Whilst most believed that more could be done, for instance, increasing the opportunities available for young people through organising more sports teams, day trips or visits to local museums, they were generally satisfied with the activities currently available:

I can have adventures round my area. (Education Group, Age 11-15)

In addition to this, many of the existing services (including some new facilities or activities) were viewed as being inappropriate for their users. Older children in the young person group in Middlesbrough, for example, complained that the local youth club ran activities that appealed more to younger children rather than those around 14-15 years old, who they said had nothing to do. Similarly, participants in Luton felt that although local activities were on offer, they were not attracting the teenagers who they thought were the 'problem youths':

They're not spending enough on the youngsters; it's a lot of the youngsters that are causing the problems. I'm not talking children, I'm talking teenagers.

Luton Beneficiary Group

Other participants thought that current services for young people were either too expensive or not close enough to be practical options, particularly for less well-off families:

They've built go-karts they're called, motorbike track here, £10 for 15 minutes. Who on Preston Road can afford £40 an hour for the kids to go on that?

Hull Community Cohesion Group

I think the kids and the young people need things to do because it's not fair there's nothing for them to do and everything's so expensive.

Hammersmith & Fulham General Group

One parent families live on the bread line anyway, so there's nothing really [for young people]. It's probably cheap for some people who can afford it, but for one parent families it's hard.

Sunderland General Group

Some participants, including the young people we spoke to in the targeted groups, also believed that young people were not being consulted about what kinds of activities they were most interested in so that facilities could be most effectively targeted:

They came and they tried to modernise the parks...they didn't really take into consideration what the kids around the area would like in the park.

Haringey General Group

They should have a day when loads of kids come and they write down on a piece of paper what they would like in Thornhill.

Southampton Housing / Phys Env Group, Aged 11-15

However, many participants felt that the lack of facilities was not just an issue for young people, but for the wider community as a whole. There was a common perception that local facilities such as community or leisure centres were being closed down which meant that people had to travel outside the area to access services. Indeed, many said that they were unhappy that, within their neighbourhoods, they had 'nowhere to go' or 'nothing to do':

We've not got a picture house, a swimming pool.

Salford Beneficiary Group

This perceived lack of local facilities was sometimes made worse by the view that poor public transport could make it difficult for some residents (e.g., people with mobility issues, people on low incomes, etc.) to access services outside their immediate locality. More generally, many thought that public transport could often be unsafe or unreliable, which participants said made people less inclined to use it:

One area that I find particularly intimidating and aggressive [is] public transport, which is really quite horrible to travel on most of the time, particularly the buses.

Lambeth General Group

Some felt that this could foster a sense of distance and isolation. Furthermore, several participants argued that the cost of transportation, particularly when coupled with childcare and other associated expenses, made it too difficult to find work or access services outside their neighbourhoods:

Its like going to different places all the time to go and get on a course somewhere...its just travel and time and expenses, it's just not worth it. It's just not worth it to do it.

Manchester General Group

I'm in a situation where it's not worth my while going and getting a job.

Oldham General Group

However, in some groups, participants had a very narrow understanding of their local area (sometimes only a few streets or a particular neighbourhood) and therefore did not feel that amenities or facilities in nearby areas were accessible to or intended for them.¹ Several participants in Sheffield, for instance, perceived the local bank to be inaccessible, despite it being a ten minute walk away. In another example, participants in Norwich discussed a particular project that offered free places for local residents to participate in arts, drama, dance, circus skills, music and public speaking programmes supported by the Theatre Royal and based in the city centre. However, most were critical of the fact that it was based outside of their immediate area and believed that this excluded them from using it.

The perceived lack of community facilities was not only thought to force residents to go outside their areas to access services, but many also believed that it made it difficult for residents to interact with one another, as people lacked a common focal point where residents could gather and community events could take place:

I feel as though we're alienated from a community. The lack of shops that exists will always keep us alienated. Shops is where you meet people, where you meet your neighbour and that should be the first thing that is regenerated: a nice little shopping centre that has everything in it.

Plymouth General Group

For some participants, community facilities acted as a physical 'heart' to the community. Whether this was a high street with a shop parade, a central square or seating area or a community centre, they felt that such locations helped to engender attachment and engagement with an area. Participants in a few groups were particularly critical of the loss of such focal points, which influenced their perceptions of the NDC if they thought the local Partnership was behind the move.

¹ The issue of boundaries and perceived geographical divisions is discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Bristol: Losing the ‘heart’ of the community

The recent closure of local shops was seen by many participants in both groups as part of the planned redevelopment/building of new housing in the area which they associated with the council and the local NDC Partnership. However, most viewed this change in a negative light, as it was felt to have removed one of the few amenities in the area that traditionally served as a focal point for the community. The shops were not only viewed as the place where people did their shopping, but also the location where people could meet, chat and socialise – they were a central, well known and well used part of the community.

Some participants were all the more unhappy with the closures as they felt that there had not been adequate notification or prior consultation and did not understand the purpose of such a perceived loss to the community:

They’ve taken the soul out of the community. (Beneficiary Group)

1.2.3 Poor physical environment

Participants in around three quarters of groups thought that their area had a poor physical environment. Many felt that streets and green spaces were littered and ill maintained and that buildings and houses were neglected and in a state of disrepair (the latter factors were also specifically identified by nearly three quarters of the groups). Such an environment was thought by many to give their neighbourhoods a neglected, deprived appearance which, as we have seen, was felt to contribute to an overall fear of crime. This impacted on the way that some participants viewed their areas:

*Well I’m ashamed anyway; I tell [people] I’m temporary.
I’m embarrassed, I’ll be honest, I’m embarrassed...on my
particular estate it’s very run down.*

Tower Hamlets General Group

I’m actually ashamed to say I come from Hawksley.

Birmingham Kings Norton Community Cohesion Group

An area’s physical appearance was also thought to have the most influence on visitors’ perceptions of the area:

*It’s not the people; it’s the actual buildings themselves.
They’re vacant and boarded up and it makes the place look
scruffy and untidy and god knows what else. And people
drive by and think, ‘what a dump’ and it is a dump.*

Coventry General Group

Those living in the less well-maintained areas tended to feel that others from outside the area were likely to view the area – and, by association, the people living in it – in a negative light. This was particularly the case for areas which

were bordered by other places that were felt to have a better physical environment, such as South Kilburn in Brent.

Brent: Contrast with neighbouring boroughs

South Kilburn NDC is bordered by Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea and many participants in both groups made comparisons between these boroughs and their area. Most believed that these areas were much better than South Kilburn in terms of general upkeep and appearance, and this brought the negative aspects of the area's physical environment into sharp relief:

If you walk down the Westminster side, which is just the other side of the road, Maida Vale, there's a big difference. It's so clean and the way they upkeep their area is great - they take care of their properties and it's great. (Beneficiary Group)

Some participants believed that the contrasting physical environments not only gave the area a shabby, unkempt appearance, but also reflected negatively on the local residents. There was a perception amongst some that the people who lived in such a 'scruffy' area were often thought by other people to be as 'scruffy' as their streets and poorly maintained buildings would suggest:

I live on the point where I look out at Kilburn from one window and Westminster from the other, and believe me, the difference between the two is very obvious. The place I live in, on the streets, it's never clean enough. And it does have an effect - when people come to visit you it is one of the things that they notice and they'll say 'god, isn't it scruffy?' and it goes back to that point of 'god, it must be awful living there'. Well no, it's not awful living here, but I can see what they see when they drive in from what could be a nice town or part of the country and see the filth on the street, it does not look good, and we do not look good because of it. (Beneficiary Group)

Some also believed that a neglected physical environment had a negative and depressing effect on residents' state of mind and thought that this often made it difficult for them to take pride in the area. As a consequence, some felt that this made some local residents less inclined to look after any improvements, thereby perpetuating a cycle of neglect:

Around here, you can see the doom and gloom on people's faces.

Haringey Housing / Phys Env Group

People have more respect for the area if it looks nice...If it looks a dive then nobody will care.

Doncaster General Group

A lack of green space was specifically mentioned by eleven groups as a negative characteristic of their local physical environment. Many participants felt that there were not enough parks that were accessible to the community where they could go to exercise or relax. Even where parks were available, many were thought to be unsafe. Participants in a few areas thought that existing green areas were being increasingly lost due to development demands:

There used to be a nice green down our road but then they destroyed it by putting walkways all over it.

Newham Worklessness Group

1.2.4 Housing, landlords and tenants

Housing was an important and recurring concern throughout the groups; indeed, participants in nearly three quarters of the groups identified it as a major issue. Housing was largely seen as having the most direct and visible impact on the lives of nearly all residents and many participants understood ‘regeneration’ to mean tangible improvements to the standard and quality of housing stock. As suggested above, well maintained housing is also central to an area’s image:

Everybody seems to be blinded by [housing concerns]...they don't care that they can have health advice, sport, education, lots of things...all they can see is housing. It's tunnel vision. They've heard the words housing, regeneration, demolition.

Hartlepool Volunteer Group

You do kind of judge things by what you see and if you drive through an area and I see houses that are clean and well kept I'll think, 'it's a nice area, I'd like to move to that area'.

Birmingham Aston Housing / Phys Env Group

There were two main issues that participants believed had the most significant impact on the poor state of housing in their local area. The first, touched on earlier, was a perception that major demolition and rebuilding schemes were left half finished, which often resulted in an increase in boarded up properties or derelict land. Although most groups were generally positive about the potential impact that such initiatives could have on the area in the long-term, participants in some areas felt that delays between demolition and rebuilding left ‘eyesores’ that they believed were worse than what was there before:

It just a looks a total mess now though, the other tower blocks. Some of them that are left, they've boarded it all up with metal - massive metal sheets - boarded up the windows; it just looks even worse.

Newham General Group

It [housing demolition] hasn't done any good because they've done nothing about it. They've just torn it up and then it's left there.

Liverpool General Group

The second issue related to a perceived poor level of maintenance of current housing stock. This was a criticism levelled against social housing estates in particular by participants of all tenures. Many described their area’s housing

stock as sub-standard and believed that it suffered from underinvestment resulting in dirty common space, broken lifts, doors or windows:

It [the estate] is quite dirty as well, as in rubbish and furniture and rats.

Nottingham Beneficiary Group

I live on the twelfth floor and if you go out shopping you never know if the lifts are going to work when you get back...the lifts are old, and the worst thing is that there are two lifts and if one breaks down then no-one comes out to mend it because they think 'oh, there's another one' but if that one goes as well then you've had it. And there are people living on the top floors in their 70s and 80s.

Brent Beneficiary Group

Participants were often confused about who the bodies responsible for housing were, and tended to assume that any actions taken were the work of the council. This lack of clarity was seen as a problem by some, who said that they did not know where to turn to for help with maintenance problems or who was responsible for what, particularly in areas where there had been a transfer of housing stock:

The problem in Sheffield is, Sheffield Council have opted out...they let these other companies take over. They shoved the responsibility onto somebody else and it's 'something homes' they call it, and this is where it's going wrong.

Sheffield General Group

It's as if the council just couldn't give a damn.

Coventry Community Cohesion Group

Liverpool: Participants unhappy with the stock transfer

All participants in both the general and the targeted groups in Liverpool were aware of plans to redevelop and transfer housing stock from all registered social landlords (including the council) within the NDC area to Community 7. Most participants did not readily associate this project with the NDC but said that it was one of the first initiatives that they were told about in 2000.

Although most said that they supported the plans in principle, believing that tearing down old properties to make way for new buildings was part of the process of revitalising Kensington, there was concern over the amount of time the process was taking. Four years on, most participants felt that they had not been adequately informed of details such as where and when demolition and rebuilding would take place or whether their homes would be directly affected. People did not know where to go for information and said they were distressed at the perceived lack of communication.

This lack of clarity about what was happening, coupled with what many felt to be a lack of progress and community involvement in the scheme, had resulted in most participants in both groups now opposing this initiative – which they said they had originally welcomed:

At the moment, I don't know if my house is going to stay or get demolished and this is 4-5 years after the regeneration was started. To be honest, it's a farce. (Beneficiary Group)

While many participants believed that no one was taking responsibility for property maintenance, others felt that no one was taking responsibility for vetting tenants or managing anti-social behaviour amongst current residents. Some believed that the council or other registered social landlords often used their local areas as 'dumping grounds' for disruptive tenants who needed to be re-housed from other areas:

They [the Council] think they move the people out, do the properties up and think by moving the same people back in they're going to respect the area but the people haven't got respect for themselves never mind the property, so you're not going to get anywhere with it.

Newcastle Beneficiary Group

It's the people they put in them. They're not, what they call, vetting them properly. They're not going into their background. They're getting kicked off an estate for being rowdy and they're just putting them on ours.

Rochdale General Group

Although most participants believed that these problems occurred predominantly in social housing, some felt that private housing often suffered from the same problems. There was a perception that some private landlords failed to adequately screen their tenants and were more concerned with filling their vacancies than with ensuring quality tenants:

We have certain landlords who will let their tenants run riot and wreck the properties...I think we need to get the landlords to be a little more strict with the people they are letting in, maybe vet them better.

Newcastle Beneficiary Group

Similarly, in some areas where social housing stock was undergoing significant investment and improvement (often with NDC involvement), private housing was seen to be falling into a relative state of disrepair.

These issues were explored with private landlords themselves in the beneficiary group in Newcastle, where participants were all either landlords or tenants involved in the Private Renters project. Most shared the view that the actions of a few landlords could have a significant impact on the appearance and reputation of an area, as discussed in the case study below.

Newcastle: The impact of rogue landlords

Participants in both Newcastle groups believed that some private landlords were increasingly allowing anti-social tenants into the area, who were then felt to degrade the area's physical environment and increase crime levels. There was also a perception amongst both landlords and tenants in the beneficiary group that many 'buy-to-let landlords' often failed to comply with requests from the council to bring their properties to a decent standard which was thought to negate attempts by others (whether private owners, housing associations or the council) to improve the area's physical environment. However, there was a feeling amongst some in the group that there was little to no financial support for private landlords to make these improvements which meant that change to the physical environment would necessarily be inconsistent across the area.

Landlords in the group were particularly concerned with the negative reputation that 'rogue' landlords were felt to give property owners and the damaging effect that unkept property or problem tenants could have on property values and their ability to attract tenants:

My biggest threat as a landlord is other landlords. If I've got a house that can be absolutely perfect, if there's a landlord next door who brings in 'scummy' people, it can make my house unlettable. It can really affect me. It affects the residents the same, but that's a big threat: landlords. (Beneficiary Group)

Such was their concern about the negative impact that such unscrupulous landlords could pose to their investments that many banded together with the support of the Private Rented project to form a privately organised Landlords' Association. This group sought to set standards on vetting procedures and property maintenance. Many viewed the Private Rented project not only as an effective means of raising the standard of homes and decreasing the number of void properties, but also (and perhaps even more crucially), as a tool by which effective reference checks could be undertaken to help screen out potentially disruptive tenants:

One of the best things about this Landlords' Association is the reference checks [for tenants], whereas before there was no such thing. (Beneficiary Group)

[I got involved] to try and remove my biggest threat which is bad landlords. (Beneficiary Group)

There was also a perception in some areas that many new residents were often only in the area for a short time, which some felt made it difficult for them to engage with the wider community. Many believed that the more transient a population, the more difficult it was for people to get to know one another, and the less likely they were to share a sense of identity and common purpose and engage with the process of regeneration. There was a common belief that these more transient residents, with a particular focus on students, asylum seekers or people in temporary accommodation do not connect with the rest of the community as much as residents who had lived in the area for a long time:

You've got a large transient population who only spend nine months a year here, and then leave after three or four years. They've got no sense of community, they're not interested

Nottingham General Group

On the other hand, some participants – particularly in areas with a largely stable population – felt longer-term residents were unduly suspicious of new residents. Some participants who had recently moved to their areas felt that long-term residents could sometimes appear to be ‘cliquey’ and make it difficult for them to feel part of the community:

I've only been here five years and the street I'm on is very cliquey and it's very hard to feel part of that when it's all so very well-established.

Middlesbrough General Group

1.2.5 Unemployment and economy

High unemployment was cited by participants in just under a quarter of groups as a particular problem in their area. They believed that local job opportunities were very limited or that people were not motivated to seek employment, particularly young people or those on benefits:

There's nothing in the area so we have to go outside it to get anything, including job opportunities.

Newham Worklessness Group

There are a lot of youths in the area, when they leave school they don't want to work.

Salford General Group

Participants in a few areas (for instance, Hackney, Brent and Brighton) believed that their areas were divided along economic lines into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ that only gave some residents access to new housing, services or facilities. This raised a number of important issues regarding participants’ perception of changes. In particular, there was a feeling that some improvements were ‘not for me’ which led to a sense of alienation from regeneration efforts or mistrust about the motivations underlying recent changes.

There was also a perception that little interaction existed between the different economic groups in these areas. Where the ‘have nots’ were often identified as social renters or long-term residents who had built up well-established networks of friends or family nearby, the ‘haves’ were commonly described as relative newcomers who frequented different pubs or shops, socialised outside of their immediate neighbourhood and often stayed in the area for only a short time (as is the case with students, for example). This was felt to have a fragmenting effect on the community and in some areas, this perceived division was not a new trend. For example, in Brighton, older, long-term residents were often resentful of the students that came to live there every year who they felt benefited from local investment more than established residents.

This town lives for the university, that's where [all the investment] goes.

Brighton General Group

In other areas, relatively recent investment had resulted in what some felt was the increasing gentrification of their areas. For instance, some long-term residents in Brent (largely social renters) believed that new restaurants or housing initiatives were driven by a desire to attract wealthier residents to the area rather than to improve the lives of local people:

I'm in Princess Rd which is at the end of the precinct and it's coming on, people are buying their houses there and it's a different class of people.

Brent General Group

This sense of division and apprehension about gentrification was clearest in Hackney, where many participants believed that investment over the last few years had resulted in pockets of expensive housing and trendy bars near Hoxton that were juxtaposed against relatively unaffected blocks of estate housing in other parts of the area.

Hackney: Economically divided

Many participants in Hackney referred to what they perceived as a division within the community between long-term residents and new, wealthier residents attracted by the area's proximity to the City or by its trendy, bohemian reputation (particularly in areas around Shoreditch). Participants who had lived in the area for many years felt that these new residents had contributed to a rapid increase in property values and the building of leisure amenities that were beyond the financial reach of most of the community.

Two issues arose out of this perceived economic division. The first was that of exclusion, with many feeling that the area's new bars, restaurants, clubs and galleries were 'not for them':

The people who can afford to use those bars are [in a] totally different price bracket and a lot of us are on income support...the people who have lived here for so long are not benefiting as much as maybe they should. (Community Cohesion Group)

The Council community, the traditional community, gives the area its character. It stops it from just becoming another Islington. But at the same time, the two don't really mesh together. (Community Cohesion Group)

The second issue related to a perception that new housing and rising prices were forcing long-term residents out of the area or locking them into social housing. As many of the area's residents had lived locally for generations, many were reluctant to move away from the strong networks of friends and family that they had built up over the years:

The top of the market is kicking us out. (Community Cohesion Group)

1.2.6 Racial tension and asylum seekers

Racial tension was spontaneously mentioned by a minority of groups (less than a quarter) as a negative aspect of their area. In most of these cases, tension stemmed from what some felt was an influx of asylum seekers or refugees into their local area. When probed, however, there was generally a lack of specific information about the issue in local areas, and views seemed to be shaped by local and national media. Most did not make a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers and were not aware of the varying legal status of the different groups. This helped fuel the perception that the 'original' community was missing out and that 'asylum seekers' were getting extra local benefits, particularly housing, material goods (e.g., colour televisions) and benefits without having to contribute to the local economy/area:

I come from here, I have to go and bid for a flat. They [asylum seekers] come here, they get everything; they just move in, get everything. I got my son to look after [and] nobody give me nothing... They just come here and get everything, brand new telly, brand new everything.

Sheffield General Group

What I heard was that with the immigrants and that, what the landlords are doing is they're getting grants because they're immigrants and they get grants to do the houses up. So what they're doing is like they're letting, how can I put this, British people go and they're putting the immigrants in, and I don't think that's fair.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

More generally, participants in the Birmingham Aston groups believed that strong cultural, religious or ethnic identities within the community often made it difficult for different groups to relate to or communicate with one another. Language barriers were felt to compound deep-rooted cultural practices or beliefs that were seen to occasionally act as barriers to community cohesion:

We segregate ourselves even though we're very similar, whether we like it or not.

Birmingham Aston General Group

2. Area image and identity

The largely negative reputations of many of the NDC areas were thought to be primarily based on actual problems such as crime or a poor physical environment. However, there was a tension between the perceived reality of an area and its reputation, which many participants felt was sometimes unfairly coloured by media coverage that overemphasised negative aspects. There was a common view that areas were often not as bad as their reputations suggested and that many of their problems were no different or no greater than those facing other parts of the country.

Some participants also felt that the identification as a ‘regeneration area’ influenced the area’s reputation. Some believed that ‘regeneration’ was associated with poverty, a neglected physical environment, unemployment and other social problems that sometimes acted as a stigma for all residents. However, for others, the actual regeneration efforts and their impact on improving an area offset these negative connotations.

The economic history of an area was also thought to influence the way that people viewed NDC areas, particularly where traditional industries had collapsed. In some cases, participants expressed some frustration with what they felt to be a lack of local job opportunities or other facilities or services, when generations of past residents had lived in largely self-contained communities.

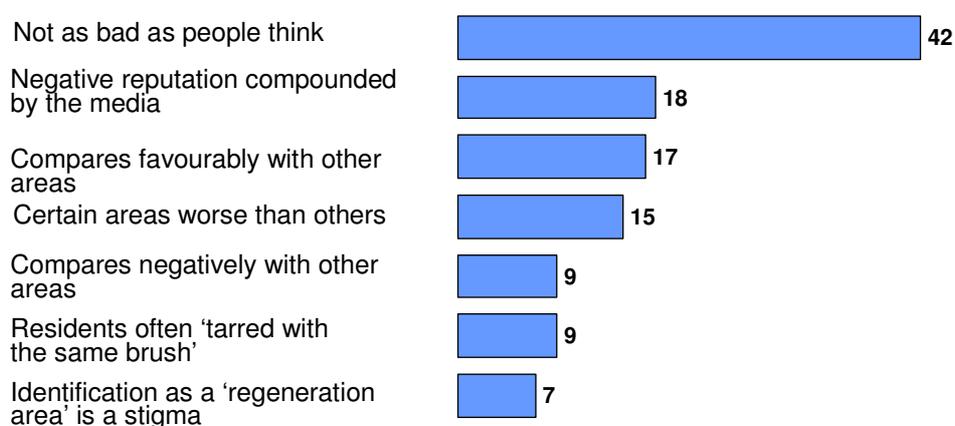
The perceived level of community identity was another important factor that affected participants’ willingness to engage with one another and participate in community-based activities. Strong social networks – which were felt to be more easily established in stable, self-contained communities – encouraged people to feel part of a wider community and take part in many common social events. Many believed that people from within the community often shared common experiences, such as having children in local schools, which gave them a greater understanding or ability to empathise with the needs of others. Good relations between different groups within the community were also felt to be important, particularly in more diverse areas. This was seen to encourage people from different backgrounds to interact with and identify with the broader community.

Finally, some felt that traditional geographical divisions within the NDC areas sometimes impeded residents’ willingness to see themselves as part of a single community and made it difficult for area-based initiatives to gain acceptance across an entire area.

2.1 Reputation of the area

Participants were asked to discuss what they thought the reputation of their local area was, and the factors that they thought contributed to this. As previously discussed, an area’s negative image was often linked to what participants themselves identified as problems, such as high crime and a poor physical environment. However, as illustrated in the chart below, there were many cases where participants in the group felt that their area’s reputation did not accurately reflect the mixed nature of their neighbourhoods or fairly represent the reality of their day to day lives.

Reputation of the Area



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

2.1.1 Reality versus Perception

There was reluctance from participants to view their own area as being particularly bad, let alone one of the most deprived areas in England: participants in twice as many groups thought that their neighbourhoods compared favourably with nearby areas than negatively. There was a strong feeling that the areas were ‘not as bad as people thought’, with more than half of the groups spontaneously expressing this view:

Well there’s good and bad in every area you go. Marsh Farm has got a hell of a name for itself. There are worse areas in Luton than Marsh Farm, believe me.

Luton Beneficiary Group

It’s the same as any other area - you get drugs and violence in other areas.

Newham Worklessness Group

In some cases, participants who were fairly new to the area said that they were surprised at how much better the reality of living in the area was compared with

what its reputation had led them to believe. Even within the NDC areas, participants in 15 of the groups believed that certain parts of the area were worse than others, and several participants felt that regeneration efforts had gone some way towards improving some of their area's worst problems:

I used to see [the area] pre-Canary Wharf, and they showed how poor and degraded and horrible it was. So when I heard I got a place to live in East London I was really dreading it. I was surprised; it wasn't that bad actually...it's not as bad as I'd made it out to be.

Tower Hamlets General Group

When I came to live down here I was pleasantly surprised at the community spirit that there was, especially the people that lived directly around me, and how helpful they were and how secure you felt with them.

Sunderland General Group

2.1.2 Role of the media

Linked to this idea is the perception amongst 18 of the groups – nearly a quarter – that the media often overemphasised the negative aspects of their areas, particularly crime levels. They felt this strengthened and exaggerated their area's bad reputation. There was some frustration about this, especially when they believed that their areas were being highlighted when other areas nearby were thought to be worse or similar:

They [the media] don't look at the good the community has to offer.

Birmingham Aston General Group

I think there's a lot of bad things go on in Hendon but I think it gets a lot of bad Press, it really does. It's in the Echo every night there's something happened in Hendon and they really want to tell you about it. Something can happen up the road in another estate and you'll not get to know about it, but if it happens in Hendon that will be pressed

Sunderland Worklessness Group

If anything goes wrong...they blow it up in the papers so it's a major thing. If it happens anywhere else, it doesn't get mentioned.

Brighton Health Group

There was a common opinion that this kind of negative media treatment compounded negative reputations and reinforced stereotypes about the type of resident who was thought to live in the area:

The reputation is worse actually than what the area is. I don't think it warrants, but as soon as you say where you live...I mean, my daughter and her husband, they're both professionals, they've got good jobs, but they chose to buy a house on our road and people say, 'well, why do you live there?'

Sheffield General Group

There's some clubs when you say you're from Canning Town, they won't let you in.

Newham Worklessness Group

You tend not to put Braunstone down on application forms. You just put the address.

Leicester Beneficiary Group

When you tell people you come from Chad, they all look down their nose at you. They just think of violence and drug addicts.

Derby General Group

2.1.3 Identification as a regeneration area

Although only specifically mentioned by seven of the groups, some participants thought that the area's identification as a regeneration area also fostered a negative reputation. It was viewed as a classification that, by definition, labelled it as a 'bad area'. For these participants, 'regeneration' was thought to be loaded with connotations of poverty, a poor physical environment, high crime, etc.:

Everywhere is chained up or knocked down because it's in a regeneration area so the area is a total disaster zone. There's nothing nice about it.

Liverpool General group

I don't know if that's the key theme or whatever, but when they put New Deal into an area the government's actually saying it's a deprived area, it's socially exclusion, there's poor education, there's poor opportunities for people that live in the area, there's no work, there's no training, there's no education.

Sheffield General Group

Harlesden, Willesden, Stonebridge, South Kilburn – they're all poor areas. If you get regeneration then it's a poor area, you don't have regeneration in a great area.

Brent General Group

However, in contrast, for participants in many of the groups, the actual regeneration efforts and their impact on making an area a better place offset some of the negative connotations²:

I've moved to Balby and everything seems to be happening, and I thought that was a good thing. Even though maybe I was moving to a worse area, that's why New Deal have come into it, it seemed to me like it wasn't because everything seemed to happen.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

As a community I think all these things that have been improved make people want to live here and make people feel wanted.

Nottingham Beneficiary Group

2.1.4 Economic history of the area

The economic history of an area also impacted on how people thought about it. Some areas have witnessed a dramatic economic decline over the past generation as many blue collar or manual industries have disappeared and jobs have moved out. In some instances, whole communities had been founded on particular industries that no longer exist:

This area suffered a lot from Thatcher, when the recession came about. The manufacturing industry just disappeared from this area.

Manchester Beneficiary Group

To make any sort of money, the only way I do it is I have to work away. I have to go to Sunderland [city centre] to work. I don't want to do that.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

Consequently, participants in these groups thought that their area was viewed as being in a state of decline, with little or no local opportunities for residents.

2.2 Area identity

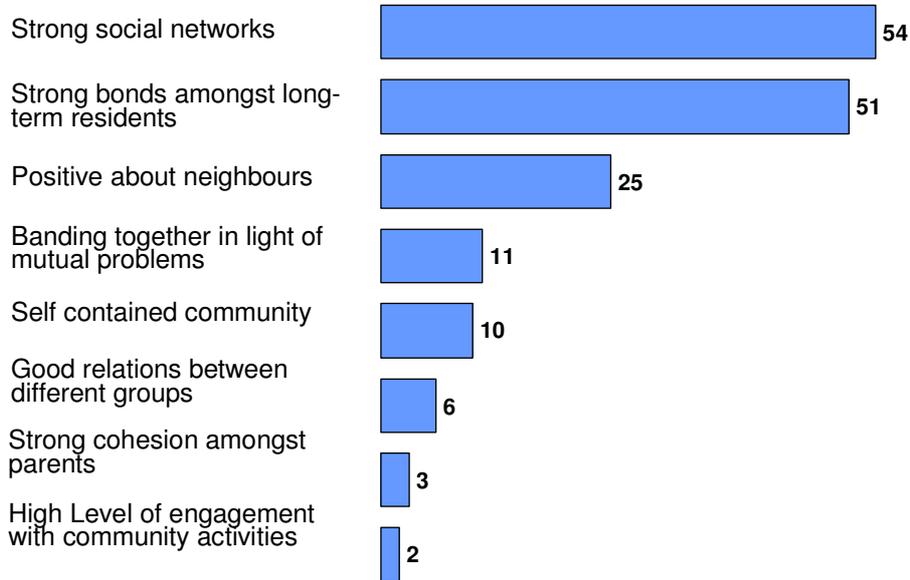
It is important to understand how people define and identify with their communities in NDC areas, as this is likely to have an impact on how easy or difficult it is for Partnerships to engage local people and encourage involvement.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, many participants identified the presence of friendly neighbours as a positive aspect of their local area, reflecting the importance they placed on strong communities. Although participants' sense of community cohesion often depended on their length of residence, age and whether they had

² This is explored in further detail in Chapter 6.

children living at home, some common themes emerged that shed light on what they thought made a community strong. These are illustrated in the chart below.

Community
Factors contributing to a strong community as mentioned by participants

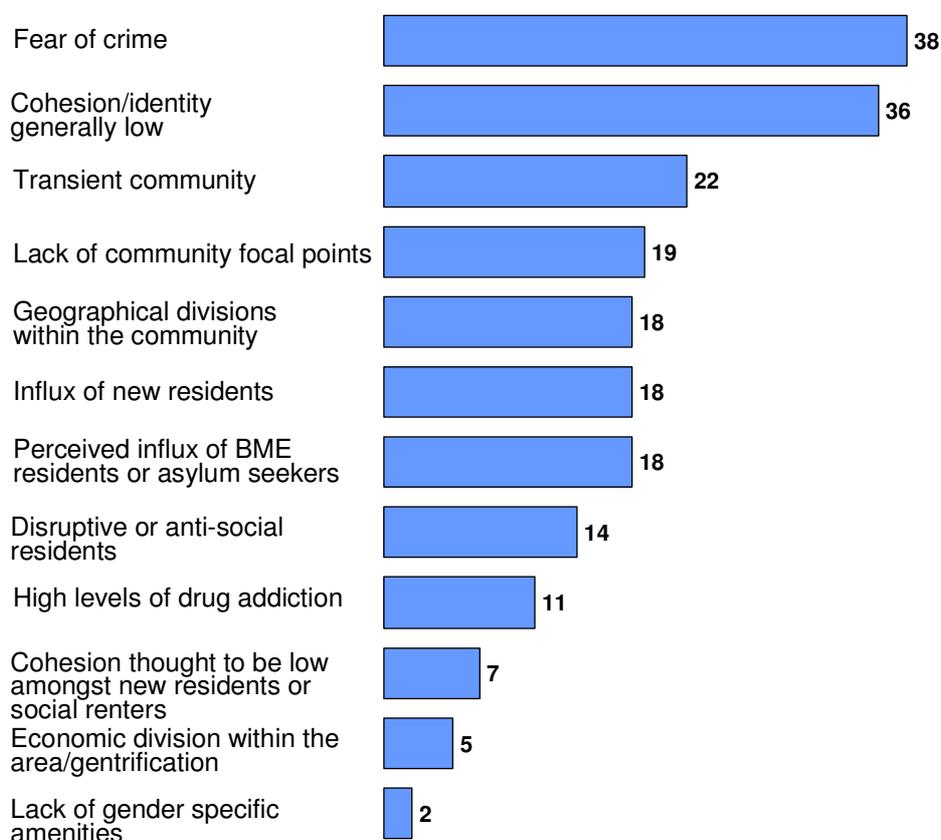


Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

Conversely, almost half of the groups thought that feelings of community in their area were low. Although this view often stemmed from a unique combination of factors in each area, again some aspects emerged over the course of the discussions as having an impact on this perception. These are illustrated in the chart below.

Community
Factors contributing to a weak community as mentioned by participants



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

We have grouped these factors – both positive and negative – into four key elements that participants thought needed to be present to create a strong community. These are discussed below.

2.2.1 Social networks

As we often find with community-based research, participants who were long-term residents in an area were most likely to believe that it has a strong sense of community. Indeed, long-term residents in more than 50 of the groups said that they had built up strong networks of friends and family in their local area upon whom they could rely for support. These participants felt that their area’s sense of community and identity was strong and well-founded, with residents knowing and ‘keeping an eye out’ for each other and regularly engaging with one another:

It feels like a large village instead of a town... because you can very seldom go out and not find people that you know to chat with... it’s just a nice feeling altogether I think to live here.

Rochdale Volunteer Group

More generally, participants in over two thirds of the groups we spoke to felt that their areas were typified by strong social networks and nearly a third said that they felt positive about their neighbours, often counting them amongst their close friends. Although this tendency for participants to view themselves as part of a broader community was not confined to long-term residents, it was particularly strong in very stable areas where families or networks had been established for a couple of generations or more. Many believed that it took time to build relationships between residents and generally thought that having a stable community encouraged people to put down roots in the area and engage in common social activities:

It's very family orientated, this place. Families go to school together, they've married each other, they're still together. It's great for families.

Middlesbrough General Group

2.2.2 Mutual experiences

Participants in some of the groups also believed that their communities were bonded together through mutual experiences. For eleven of the groups, this referred to shared deprivation and a sense of 'we're in this together'. There was a sense that people from within the community had a greater understanding of the kinds of experiences that residents go through. Some felt that this could sometimes mitigate against some of the hardships experienced by residents in NDC areas, and could also act as a strong counterbalance to the negative effects of the physical environment of an area. Even where areas were perceived by some participants to be particularly problematic, a sense of shared experience and strong family or friendship networks meant a far greater commitment to an area, and was felt to make people feel much better about living there:

It makes you feel less stressed knowing that you've got some good people around you. We're all in the same boat, as they say.

Lambeth Education Group

Middlesbrough: keen to stay in their local area

Nearly all participants in Middlesbrough – including the young people from the targeted group – described the area as having a strong, close-knit community where people looked out for one another:

It's a close community. Everybody knows each other. (Education Group, Age 11-15)

Many believed that the powerful emotional ties between neighbours made residents reluctant to leave the area. There was a sense that despite the perceived lack of access to amenities and the consequential negative impact on residents' quality of life, people did not want to leave the area and the strong relationships that they had built up with one another. Many residents had lived side by side for years, gone to school together, worked in the same industry and raised families together and did not want to give up the comfortable, supportive environment that these shared experiences engendered:

What it is with people who are set to go out, is that they don't want to move; they like it here.
(General Group)

Parents in some of the groups also felt connected to one another through their shared experience of having children in local schools. For example, in Lambeth, parents spoke of attending parents' meetings and coffee mornings, whilst others talked about attending classes for mothers and children where they could socialise with people with whom they had something in common:

One of the keys for a lot of people in this area as well, regardless of boundaries, is children and schooling and community activities that revolve around children.

Lambeth General Group

When I had kids at school, I felt like I was involved in a community, I met all the mothers and children and I felt like I was in a real community, but now I'm retired, I don't.

Lambeth General Group

Participants in a couple of the groups also thought that their communities had a high level of engagement in activities such as classes, meetings or other social events that brought them together and united them in a common experience.

2.2.3 Self contained communities/geographical divisions

Participants in roughly one group in ten thought that the strength of their community was in part due to the self-contained nature of the area. They believed that most residents lived, worked, shopped and socialised locally, utilising services or facilities nearby, which meant that the bulk of their daily experiences were focused on the immediate community. It was thought that this proximity enabled people to establish a sense of identity with their areas and interact with each other on a frequent basis.

Islington: A self contained community

Most participants described Islington as a largely self-contained community. Most of those in the groups who were in employment worked within walking distance or a short bus journey of their homes and remained in the immediate vicinity for the majority of their day to day activities. Some said that this closeness enhanced their sense of community and gave them an increased incentive to get involved in local activities.

There was a feeling amongst some participants that this led to frequent interactions within Islington's public spaces which in turn helped people to identify with the area. Consequently, many of the participants in our discussions had built up wide and well-established networks of friends and family in the area and were very positive about Islington as a community:

I've been here for seven years and I wouldn't choose to live anywhere else. (General Group)

Linked to this idea of a self-contained community is the idea of geographically based identification. Participants in nearly a quarter of the groups believed that their communities were divided along geographical lines, which they felt made it difficult for most residents to identify with the area as a whole. This in turn may have implications for participants' perceptions about local initiatives and affect the NDC's ability to bring the population together in initiatives that cover the area as a whole.

In these areas, the administrative boundaries of the NDC did not match the perceived 'natural' boundaries of the area that participants held, based on the area's cultural history and physical divisions. Indeed, issues relating to boundaries recurred throughout these groups: who defined them, on what basis were they determined and how were they managed? These tended to be the groups where the NDC area contained two or more disparate communities, with smaller pockets of residents tending to have their own communities and identities, and often feeling that they did not share any common cause with other groups in the area. These smaller units were founded on many grounds - ethnic or family groups, historical boundaries or, even area rivalries such as football teams:

I don't think that there ever can become a joint Devonport community because it's two entirely different places.

Plymouth General Group

Those who did not identify with the NDC area as a whole tended not to view the projects in other parts of the area as having any particular benefit to themselves and sometimes felt that their immediate neighbourhoods were being excluded from regeneration efforts going on elsewhere.

Two areas in particular highlighted the way that the perception of boundaries could influence views about area-based programmes: the discussion in Manchester detailed below shows how artificial boundaries can sometimes lead to feelings of exclusion, while Newcastle illustrates how boundaries that coincide with traditional understandings can lead to people identifying more with their community.

Manchester: A geographically divided community?

Participants in Manchester thought that past and current regeneration efforts in their area meant that it was in the midst of change. However, the majority of participants did not view the geographical area of the NDC (Beswick and Openshaw) as a single community, but rather as two distinct communities that people identified strongly with, and felt that there was little cross-over between the two areas:

Beswick and Openshaw are far, far apart I think now – it's divided. (General Group)

Consequently, when noticeable improvements and investments such as the new football stadium, Asda and Matalan were opened in Beswick, those participants who lived in Openshaw did not view them as improvements benefiting them as they were outside their immediate vicinity:

What they've done is put everything in Beswick and they've forgotten about Openshaw. (General Group)

Newcastle: Geographical identification

Most participants felt that the West Gate area had a noticeable community spirit and a strong sense of identity. Many believed that part of this unity was based on its geographical location in Newcastle's 'west end'. This area was thought to have a traditionally negative reputation and long-standing levels of deprivation which many believed gave residents shared experiences and concerns. For many, being from the 'west end' was loaded with connotations about the type of person you were and the experiences and opportunities available to you, which acted as a unifying force for some residents:

Something that unites people across ethnic and social divides is that we come from the west end....it forges a kind of bond because we're all in the same boat. (Beneficiary Group)

The geographical NDC area roughly aligns with this traditional spatial understanding, which encourages the sense of shared identity and experience.

2.2.4 Relations across different groups

Participants in three of the more ethnically diverse areas (Brent, Tower Hamlets and Sheffield) felt that the different ethnic groups within their communities generally got along well with one another. Indeed, many participants in these groups felt that the different cultures enriched their areas and, as discussed in Chapter 1, often viewed this as a key strength. Relationships bridged across different groups which made participants feel as though they were part of a more unified community.

Where these relations between different groups were not believed to exist, participants felt that there was a negative impact upon the way that residents viewed one another and influenced their willingness to interact together. It is important to note that these divisions were often not related to ethnic or cultural differences. In a few groups, different types of housing stock appeared to be key.

In Wolverhampton, for instance, two types of social housing were combined in one area, with one part consisting of low-rise houses and the other of high-rise tower blocks. Some participants felt that this division fostered a sense of territorialism amongst residents and carried very different messages about the types of residents that lived there. Those from the low-rise houses described themselves as ‘family people’ and said they did not feel any sense of identification with the ‘single people’ who they thought occupied the high-rise estate; most said that there was very little cross-socialising between residents from the two types of housing. Indeed, some general group participants thought that the tower blocks were full of ‘trouble makers’ and several said that they tended to avoid those areas when possible:

I only socialise with my friends and I know where to go and when not to go out.

Wolverhampton General Group

The following case study exemplifies the factors that participants felt contributed to a strong community.

Tower Hamlets: An example of a strong community

Tower Hamlets was one of the areas that most clearly illustrated all the factors that participants thought were important when establishing a strong, cohesive community. Many of the participants were long-term residents in the area who had wide networks of friends and family nearby who made them feel supported and comfortable in their neighbourhoods. Even those new to the area said that they felt supported and positive about their neighbours:

We’re just starting to find out that our neighbours are quite nice. (General Group)

There was a common view that residents of different ethnic, cultural, religious and demographic backgrounds got on well with one another and, indeed, many saw this as one of the area’s key strengths. Moreover, participants all lived on and strongly identified with the Ocean Estate. Many attended the same schools, worked or shopped at the same places and socialised in the same locations. Similarly, as all were residents of the same estate, there was a common view that residents also shared the same problems and local concerns which acted as a unifying force within the community. As such, most were positive about the targeted efforts to make the estate a better place to live and, as the NDC boundary roughly aligned with the boundary of the estate, many believed that these improvements were meant specifically for them and those who lived on the estate with them.

3. Awareness of the NDC

Broadly, awareness and knowledge of NDC activity amongst participants was highest at project level, with nearly all recognising at least one NDC led or related initiative in their area. These were usually projects relating to reducing crime or addressing housing/physical environment issues.

While awareness of the NDC Partnership was generally high, fewer were aware of the specific projects that the NDC was involved with. Many did not link change to the local Partnership, particularly relating to crime or the physical environment, which most felt were the key issues facing their communities. While most believed that it was more important to see that projects were being completed rather than know who was behind them, others wanted to be able to link the NDC to local activities in order to gauge its effectiveness and impact on the area. It was felt by some that the Partnerships could benefit from maintaining a high profile and taking credit for their contribution to successful local initiatives.

Indeed, many saw partnership working as evidence of a strategic, joined up approach to local regeneration efforts. In some cases, Partnerships were felt to benefit from their association with successful organisations (such as Sure Start) and were seen to be positioning themselves as key players in delivering valuable services to the community. However, for others, association with bodies were viewed more negatively (for example, the council or housing associations). Occasionally, such associations influenced participants' views of the NDC and in some cases lead to mistrust.

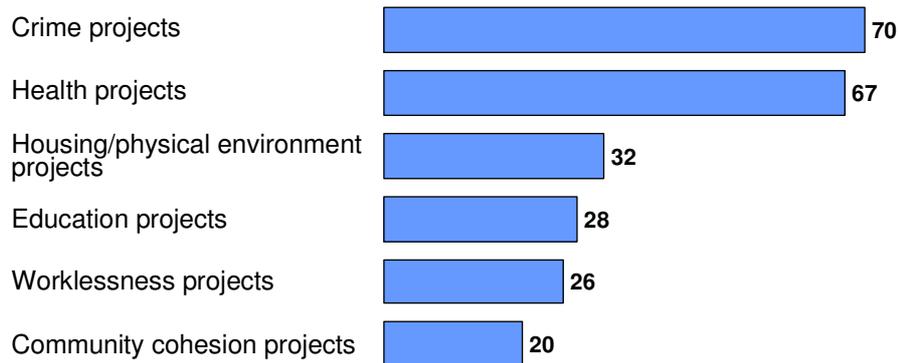
About half the groups had some awareness of the Programme as a whole, and tended to link it to the Government, although some believed that it was related to European Union funding.

3.1 Awareness and knowledge: Projects

Awareness of NDC projects across the groups varied, but in most areas at least some participants were aware of local regeneration activity.³

³ Twelve of the targeted groups involved beneficiaries of particular NDC initiatives, which will somewhat affect the types of projects that participants were aware of. However, as the projects selected covered the full range of theme areas, only a few groups were carried out with beneficiaries for each theme (between one and three). As such, the influence of beneficiary groups on the types of projects that participants were aware of will be minimal.

Awareness of NDC projects



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

Participants tended to be most aware of projects addressing problems with crime and of the work taking place in the areas of housing or improvements to the physical environment. This could be partly because participants generally placed greater importance on addressing these issues than any others, so tended to be particularly aware of projects that sought to tackle these problems. It could also partly be due to the highly visible nature of such initiatives, for example, houses being demolished or built, parks refurbished or wardens patrolling the streets. There was lower awareness of projects that aimed to address health, education, worklessness or community cohesion, with these initiatives tending to be recognised by people with a particular need or interest (e.g., unemployed people, parents with children in school, etc.).

3.2 Awareness and knowledge: Partnerships

Most groups were aware of the NDC, even if in some cases this amounted to no more than knowing the name of the local Partnership. More than half linked their Partnership with some regeneration activity in the area:

They put money into the community.

Sandwell Crime Group

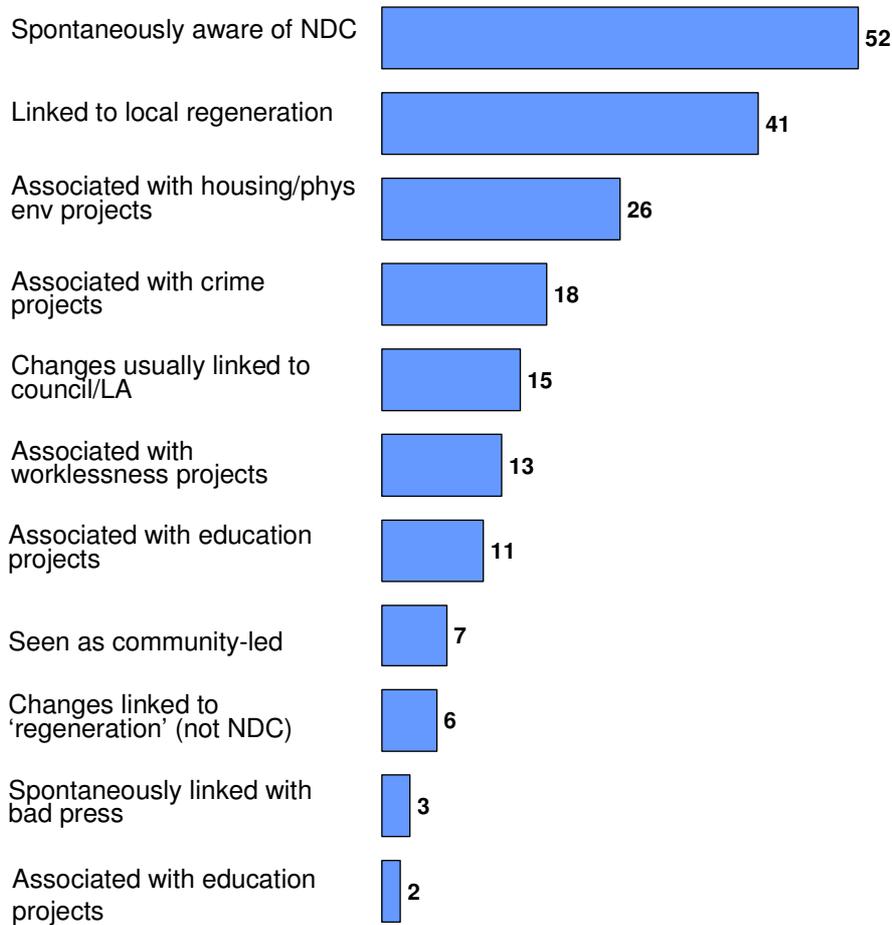
It's supposed to be the regeneration of Hendon.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

As far as I knew, New Deal for Communities was about keeping the community together and improving housing.

Hartlepool General Group

Awareness of the NDC Partnership



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

However, most participants did not make a connection between the local NDC and initiatives relating to improving housing/physical environment and reducing crime, which most saw as the key issues facing their areas: just over a third of those aware of the NDC linked it to housing or physical environment improvements while only a quarter connected it to crime initiatives. Although participants were aware that such projects were happening in the area, there was a lack of clarity about who was responsible for them:

If they promoted themselves better, I think they would be able to do a lot more things.

Hammersmith & Fulham Crime Group

In many cases, participants automatically assumed that 'the council' was the main body involved in implementing local changes. This was particularly true in areas with a high proportion of social housing, and where participants were more likely to have regular contact with council officers over local matters. This led to a

number of different service providers working for change being lumped together under the banner of ‘the council’:

It [the NDC] used to be the Council but they've now given themselves a fancy name - they've changed their name but not their character.

Brent General Group

3.2.1 Partnership working

The council was not the only body often confused with the NDC by participants. Many were also unclear as to what degree their local Partnership was working together with other local bodies:

You don't really pay any attention to the names underneath. You just read what they're saying that they're going to do and then you say right, OK, and you just, I mean you've got Jobcentre plus, New Deals, all the other, Eastlands and the city council.

Manchester General Group

What's the difference between all these, between the Housing Office, the Neighbourhood office?

Sandwell General Group

For some participants who did know who their NDC was working with, this partnership working illustrated a sensible use of resources and show ‘joined up’ thinking on the part of local organisations. This gave the impression that local projects were driven by a coherent strategy of regeneration rather than a series of disparate or isolated initiatives. Partnerships that positioned themselves as key players in developing and delivering such co-ordinated strategies helped to raise the NDC’s profile and contribute to a more favourable view of themselves amongst participants:

I think they've been a big factor in turning the area around. They've coordinated the landlords, the police and various other bodies together so that we can cooperate and work as a bigger force.

Newcastle Beneficiary Group

It needs to be an overall plan for everything and it needs to change the area drastically.

Manchester Beneficiary Group

Yet the type of body the Partnership was seen to be working with did make a difference. For instance, Partnerships often benefited from their association with Sure Start, which tended to have a particularly strong and positive brand in most areas. Most parents in the groups had used their services and felt that they offered local people valuable assistance that was tailored to meet the specific

needs of parents and children. Partnerships that were seen to help fund or deliver such services were generally thought of favourably:

I think there's lots of potential around here, bodies like NDC and Sure Start and that get together and they've opened up lots of things for children.

Brent Beneficiary Group

In other cases, NDC Partnerships in some areas were believed to be involved in housing redevelopment initiatives alongside other bodies such as the council or housing associations. The reputation of those partner organisations – who were often more familiar to participants than the NDC Partnership – tended to rub off on the NDC and colour their perception of its role in implementing change.

Consequently, in areas where the local housing trust or council were poor, participants tended to share a similar view of the NDC. For example, many participants were negative about Brent Council, particularly regarding a perceived lack of clear information about housing initiatives, which most thought involved the NDC. Many were suspicious about this work and believed that the NDC was in collusion with the Council, only providing a more 'friendly' front:

NDC are coming in and is in caboots with Brent Council - the NDC is being the nice front and the Council is doing all the background crap.

Brent Beneficiary Group

There was also a concern for a few participants that the NDC was stepping in to provide services and facilities that the local Council should be providing but was not:

The Clapham Park Project is in receipt of £56 million of EU money to disperse throughout the community to give the community what it wants. But what the community wants is what the Council should be doing, so that's where the confusion sets in.

Lambeth General Group

3.3 Awareness and knowledge: Programme

Participants in around half of the groups had at least some awareness of the wider NDC Programme as a whole, even if this was only a general understanding of it as a formal Programme or source of funding intended to improve local communities:

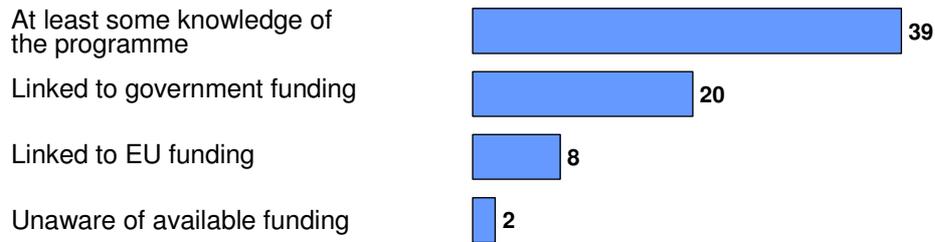
It's an initiative to spend money in the area to improve it.

Middlesbrough General Group

My understanding is that there was a lot of money given to this area to make it better and that's why NDC was set up.

Nottingham General Group

Awareness of the NDC Programme



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

While there was certainly some awareness that the NDC Programme was related to government money intended to revitalise deprived areas, most participants were not familiar with the Programme's national objectives, timeframe and structure. In addition, participants in a few groups linked the NDC Programme to European Union funding.

4. NDC communication and consultation

Most participants said that they regularly received some form of written communication from the NDC such as newsletters or leaflets, whilst only a few had received information from other sources such as a local NDC office or local press. Instead, it was much more common for participants to find out about change through word of mouth.

However, participants identified a number of issues related to current information provision. The most common of these was that it was not detailed enough. They felt that communication could be more explicit regarding the organisational structure, the amount of funding remaining, the criteria for funding decisions, or the projects that the NDC was currently running or had planned. There was also a belief that written communication could be inconsistently distributed, in some cases missing out entire neighbourhoods, whilst other areas were seemingly bombarded with materials, particularly leaflets. Many believed that written materials were often confused with ‘junk mail’ and felt that they could be made more eye catching, although some thought that this would use money that could be better spent on local projects. There was also a view that the tone of written materials could be overly positive, particularly as nearly all participants felt that much work remained to be done. For some, this self-congratulatory tone undermined the authority of communication materials.

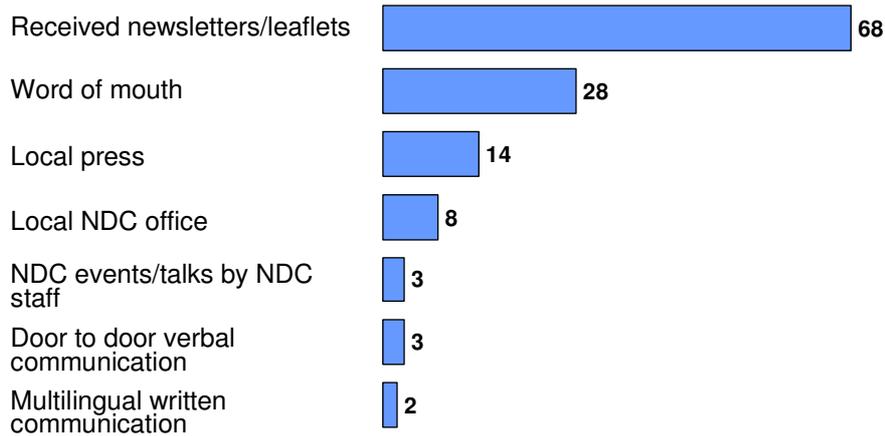
Participants in all groups felt that it was important to involve the local community in decision making and believed that it was important to have a clear, open dialogue between the community and the NDC. Most felt that this would help to ensure that local initiatives were meeting the community’s particular needs. It was also felt to help foster a sense of ownership amongst the community for local changes by giving residents the feeling that they had played an important role in the regeneration process.

Many were aware of consultation exercises, although generally felt that such efforts were greater when the NDC was first introduced into the area. However, most believed that there were a number of barriers that prevented residents from getting involved, even where such opportunities were thought to exist. Apathy was seen as the biggest hurdle, with many feeling that local residents were not willing to take part in consultation unless there was ‘something in it for them’. Others felt that residents lacked influence with the NDC and believed that decisions were already made before consultation efforts were undertaken. Consequently, many felt that there was little point to getting involved if their voices would not be heard. Finally, some participants pointed to what they felt were inflexible consultation exercises that made it difficult for some people to share their views, particularly full time workers, parents or those who did not speak English as a first language. Many believed that active outreach work and ongoing consultation efforts in a range of areas could encourage a broader segment of the community to share their views.

4.1 Views on communication

Participants said they recalled receiving communication about the work of their local NDC and changes in their area in a number of ways. These are outlined in the chart below.

Communication received



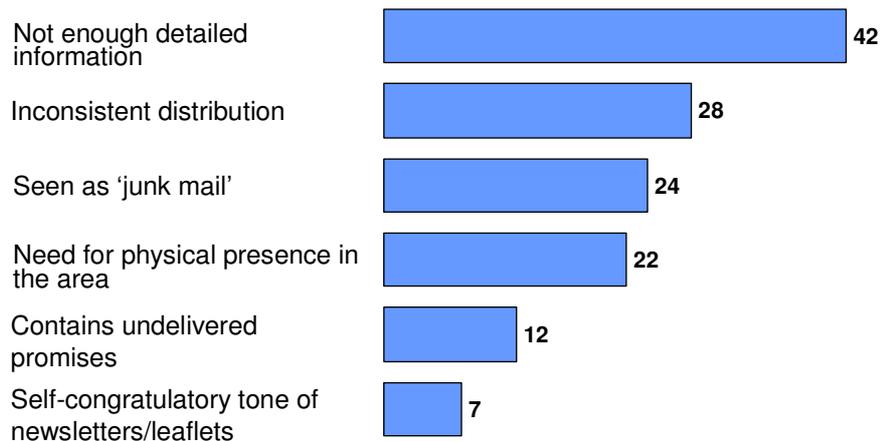
Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

The vast majority of participants across the groups said that they recalled receiving some form of written communication, usually in the form of leaflets, magazines or newsletters. Participants from only a few groups said that they received information from the NDC through alternative methods, such as through the local Press, visiting a local NDC office, attending NDC-sponsored events or through verbal communication at meetings or door-to-door. Instead, it was much more common for participants to find out about change via informal networks of friends, family and neighbours who discussed local projects.

However, participants in fewer than a third of the groups said that they felt well informed about local changes, and nearly all expressed a desire for improved communication from their NDC Partnership. The perceived problems with current information provision are detailed in the chart below.

Problems with current information provision



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

4.1.1 Not enough detailed information

The most common criticism about the information provided by the NDC was that it was not detailed enough in a number of different areas:

- Partnership organisation:** Participants in some areas felt that more information was needed about the people working for the local Partnership, how they came to do so and how they could be contacted. Participants often had many questions about how the NDC Partnership was organised locally and who was making decisions on their behalf. A lack of information in some areas led to a suspicion that people working for the NDC were in some way also working for 'the council', or involved for less than altruistic reasons:

I don't think it [the NDC] is representative of Marsh Farm. Elected by whom? It's meant to be elected by the people of Marsh Farm. I don't know anybody who was elected.

Luton General Group

Too many people have got too many jobs out of it...and they don't always deserve it.

Sandwell General Group

If you need to know something, you've got to go and dig. The information is there, but they are not forthcoming at all.

Hartlepool Volunteer Group

This was mitigated somewhat in areas with a local NDC 'shop' which was seen as easily-accessible sources of information that could be easier to access than other means such as phoning or writing:

You can go into the office [for information]...at one time if you had a problem, it was hard to get through and you used to have to keep phoning or writing over and over again.

Manchester General Group

- **Transparency about funding decisions and current finances:** Many participants said they were also concerned that they were not aware of the financial structure of the Partnership, i.e. who held the funds, how funding decisions were made, and how much money was left for local improvements. Consequently, some were concerned that there may not be enough funds left to continue the regeneration of the area:

There are a lot of decisions made behind closed doors.

Hartlepool Volunteer Group

Something we really need is a breakdown of the money that is actually spent and what it's spent on. We don't know what it's spent on.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

Well you're not seeing where the money's going, it's like it's not like put down in print and saying well we've spent X money on that, X money on that. They're just saying oh we've got £54 million, but where's it gone...[we're not] given even some literature saying, like written proof where the money's gone.

Sunderland General Group

I wouldn't say that it was as transparent as it could be. It would be good to have clear, honest facts and figures. When did the money come in and exactly what was it spent on? Pie charts and graphs and spell it out and make it very transparent.

Newcastle Beneficiary Group

- **Current or planned projects:** Participants' views were divided regarding the timing of information provision. Some were critical that information was often retrospective, which they felt made it difficult for people to raise issues or feedback thoughts about proposed initiatives. There was some demand amongst participants for more information about what was currently happening and planned in the area:

We don't see enough plans. These plans are made years ago and then they say yeah they're going to do [it], but by the time they do it, it's too late for us to do anything about it.

Leicester General Group

I think there are lots out there, courses and the like, but no one tells us about them.

Sheffield Beneficiary Group

However, there was a feeling from others that information provision focused too strongly on planned improvements and so people are unable to get an overview of how much progress had been made. An overly strong emphasis on planned changes that was not thought to be balanced by details outlining current or completed initiatives was felt to sometimes undermine trust in the NDC to deliver on its promises:

It's [the newsletter] full of lies. They say they're going to do this, they're going to do that. How long does it take?

Coventry General Group

We get magazines in the post saying we're doing this and this but I don't see it happening.

Birmingham Aston General Group

4.1.2 Inconsistent distribution of written communication

Many participants felt that written communication could sometimes be inconsistently distributed, either missing out certain neighbourhoods or failing to be circulated in a regular, timely fashion. This was often thought to prevent residents from accessing projects or services that may be useful to them and from keeping abreast with local initiatives:

I just got one the other day [newsletter] that was two months old. I just don't know what's going on half the time. I'm just not interested anymore, to be honest.

Bristol Beneficiary Group

4.1.3 Written communication seen as junk mail

Another criticism was that written material, particularly leaflets, was too often overlooked as 'junk mail' and therefore failed to raise awareness amongst most residents. In some cases, participants believed that the NDC had flooded the area with written communication – particularly leaflets and flyers – which meant many now do not take any notice of them:

Everyone's desensitized to leaflets now. You go in your door, there's a pile of them on the floor. You don't even look at them no more; they go straight in the trash.

Lewisham General Group

They've drowned us in leaflets; I think they've gone overboard with the leaflets.

Brent General Group

There were some suggestions that leaflets and other materials could be made more eye catching in order to differentiate it from the barrage of pamphlets they regularly received (e.g., take away menus, advertisements, etc.):

If it's a little black and white leaflet, no one is going to be interested in it, but the other [magazine] is a colour booklet that people can flick through.

Wolverhampton General Group

Some participants felt that a well-presented, professional appearance could suggest that the NDC took its job and the local residents seriously:

I think it's really important to make it look nice. The first newsletters they used to send, they were full of mistakes and I used to throw them away. I swear they came across as amateurs. But now the presentation has really improved so I believe that they care.

Lambeth General Group

On the other hand, a few participants also felt that the NDC had spent too much money on making flashy magazines and flyers when funding could have been better used elsewhere:

They're sending leaflets through the door, glossy things, more likely costing about £1.50 each, which is money they could be spending on these things they're supposed to be doing for these kids and [now they've] run out of money, just wasting money ad-lib, totally wasting money.

Tower Hamlets General Group

I'd like to see them advertising in a different way so it's less expensive.

Lambeth General Group

4.1.4 Self-congratulatory tone of written communication

There was also a view amongst some participants that their local Partnership newsletter could be too self-congratulatory. Although residents welcomed information about projects and Partnership plans, in most areas there was a view that despite making a good start, there was still a long way to go before significant, long-lasting developments were recognised more consistently within areas. Therefore, for some participants, it was thought to be unseemly for the Partnership to 'blow its own trumpet' too much, as one participant in Manchester asserted:

They [newsletters] just say, 'well, look what we've done, aren't we good'.

Manchester General Group

In some cases, the perceived self-congratulatory tone undermined trust in its legitimacy and candour:

They tell us what they want us to hear.

Lambeth Education Group

They've given things a sugar coating at the minute.

Brent Beneficiary Group

4.1.5 Face to face communication

Participants in more than a quarter of the groups felt that face-to-face contact was the single most effective means of communicating information and engaging the community:

I think what tends to happen when you get a leaflet, it's different than having someone actually coming to your place and explaining something...the personal touch sort of gives you the impression that this person is really interested. When they push leaflets, hundreds of leaflets, through your door, there's nothing 'people' about it...so you just look at the leaflet...and you put it away and you immediately forget about it. That is what it means to have an individual to actually spend a little bit of time to talk to you about an issue, you tend to be more interested in it because it's the personal touch, which is generally missing.

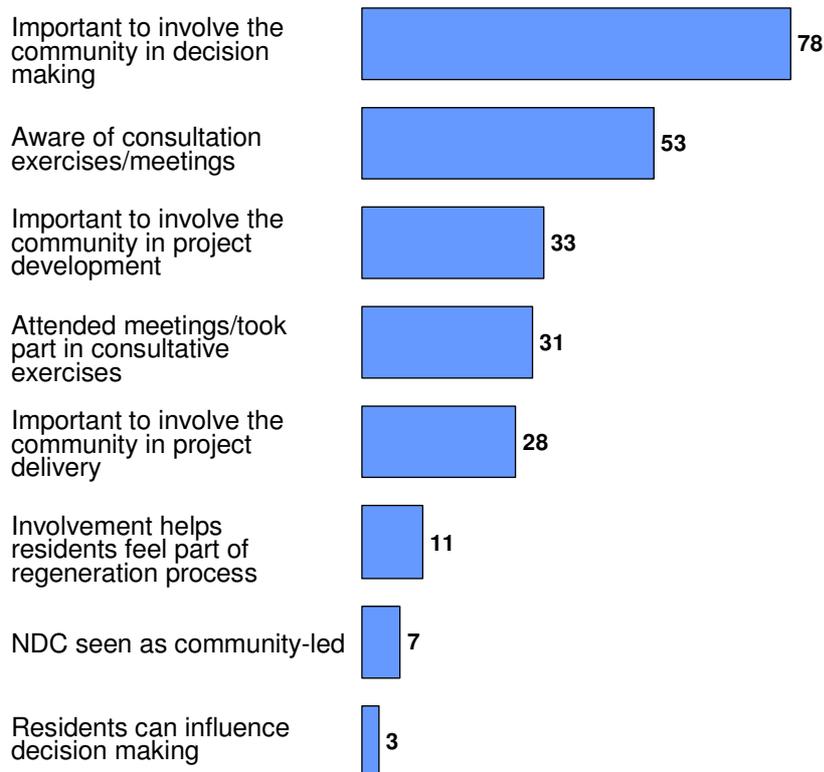
Newham General Group

These participants welcomed the idea of door-to-door contact by NDC representatives, particularly for those who perhaps had mobility or childcare barriers, and felt that this was a positive step in ensuring that a wide range of views from the area were canvassed.

4.2 Consultation

Participants discussed the degree to which they or residents they knew had been involved in consultations, discussions or meetings regarding change in the area and whether or not they were happy with the level of involvement that they experienced. They were also asked to consider how important it was to involve the local community in planning or delivering projects. Some similar sentiments emerged across all the groups which are outlined in the chart below.

Community consultation



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

4.3.1 The importance of consultation

Participants in every group felt that it was important to involve the community in decision making and to have the opportunity to feed back their thoughts or concerns, even if they chose not to. They believed that residents were best placed to identify and address the area's particular needs and concerns:

We are local people, we all live in the area, so we know what's happening, we live here.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

The benefits of involving the community raised by participants can be broken down into two broad themes:

- Provision of appropriate priorities/projects:** One of the most common perceived benefits from regular community consultation was the view that this helped ensure that local projects met the needs and priorities of residents. There was a view amongst some participants that people from outside the community did not have the insight and understanding that residents did. Indeed, as seen in the chart, more than one group in five went further to say that residents should be involved in project development as well in order to help ensure that

projects were able to most effectively address the needs of the community:

We don't want someone coming in from Chelsea who doesn't know what's going on round here.

Southwark Worklessness Group

It's important that we are asked what we think, because otherwise the money isn't meeting the real needs of the community. How can they understand what we think are the priorities if they don't ask us?

Islington Beneficiary Group

- **Ownership of changes:** There was also a perception amongst some that such direct involvement could encourage residents to take ownership of decisions and changes, which could perhaps help such improvements to take long-lasting root in the area:

If they [residents] don't have ownership [of improvements], then the improvements won't stay. So they need to have more sort of cohesion between what is going on and what people want. So they need to listen and say what's going on.

Tower Hamlets General Group

If they [the local community] don't take ownership of what's going on, then you're back to the same problems you've started with.

Wolverhampton Volunteer Group

This was particularly true where participants had seen tangible improvements in the area. For some, this had instilled a greater sense of pride for their communities which encouraged several to become more active in maintaining those changes:

For me, it's a certain pride, but it's also a certain amount of refusal to let it go back to how it was...We're just coming out of a refurb and certain elements within our block are just not respecting and looking after what we've just been given or paid for. So, you become very proud but you also want to make sure it stays looking how it now looks, so I'm the person who goes down the Council now to try and make sure we get what we want.

Lambeth General Group

4.3.2 Awareness of and involvement with consultation exercises

Participants in more than two thirds of the groups were aware of consultation exercises taking place in their local area, although many believed that such efforts were greater when the local Partnership was first introduced to the area. Some participants viewed this in a negative light, particularly as many believed that progress in delivering planned changes had been slow:

When it first started off we used to have plenty of meetings. But then once it got going and all these people got in on it we didn't have it any more. They asked what people wanted in the area then they went away.

Derby General Group

You come along to these things [meetings] and talk about things you want done, when they don't happen, you lose faith in them.

Brighton General Group

When, five years down the line of a 10 year Programme, you perceive that there is absolutely no improvement whatsoever, and in certain respects, it's actually worse, your confidence about what is going to happen in the next 5 years is completely removed. You give up, you don't want to get involved because it's not going to do any good.

Liverpool General Group

Many participants across all the groups recalled having seen surveys taking place locally, either postal questionnaires included in newsletters or face-to-face.⁴ Participants were generally happy with this as a means of gathering residents' opinions, as many felt it helped overcome some barriers to attending meetings and events, such as mobility or childcare issues. However, surveys were not seen as sufficient on their own and a few participants also questioned the validity of some survey research techniques, particularly when response rates and the numbers involved are low:

This is what the consultation exists of - you've got a block of flats with say 200 people in it and x amount of people. They send a questionnaire through to the flats and say 10, 15 people answer it. They say that's 98% say yes in that block, even though it's only 10, 15 people who answered it. So like 15 people say yes and that's enough to carry it, that's 98% as far as they're concerned.

Brent Beneficiary Group

⁴ It should be noted that those who had been sampled to take part in the National Evaluation Household Survey were removed from the sample frame for the focus groups. This was to ensure that residents were not over-burdened with research requests, and to avoid influencing the Household Survey results.

Some participants were positive about public meetings and saw them as potentially useful fora where residents could ask questions and discuss issues. Many had attended meetings in the past, particularly in relation to planned housing improvements, and some said that they felt a greater sense of responsibility and empowerment when they believed that their views were being listened to:

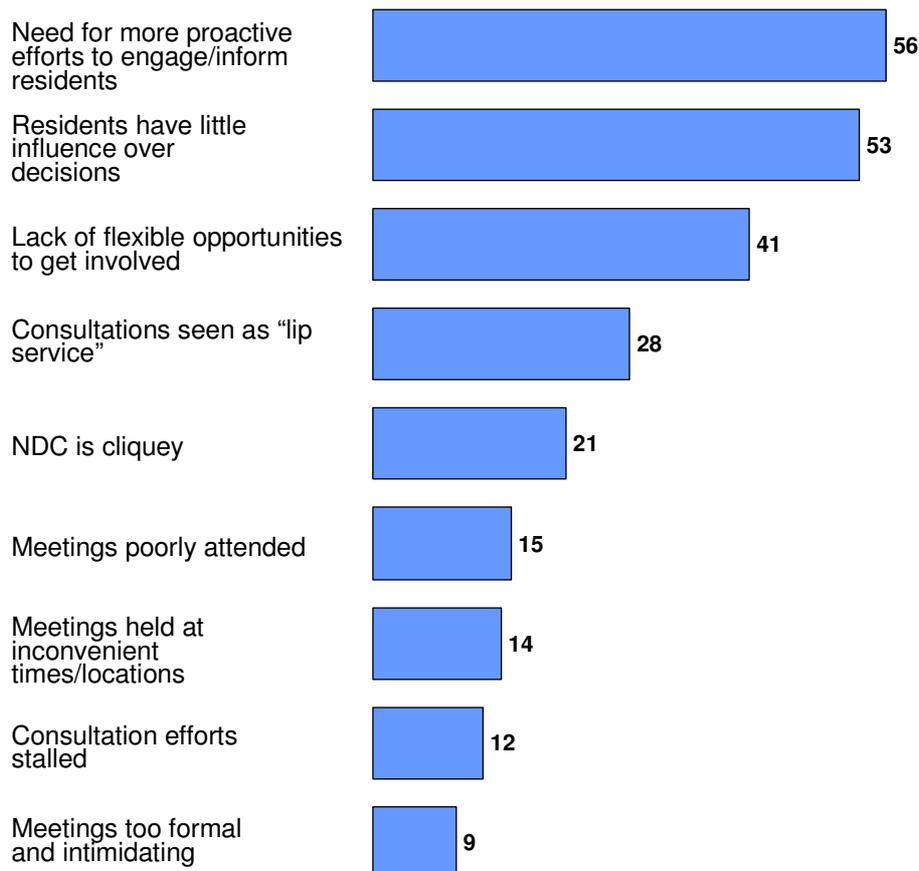
People think somebody's listening to me, and if they have listened to me on this one issue, they're going to listen to me again.

Lewisham General Group

4.3.3 Perceived barriers to involvement in consultation

However, there were also a number of criticisms of consultation approaches as well as barriers that participants felt discouraged people from getting involved, illustrated in the chart below.

Perceived barriers to involvement in consultation



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

These issues can be summarised into three key areas:

- **Apathy:** There was a strong feeling in almost all of the groups that residents were often apathetic, and participants in nearly one group in five said that meetings were usually poorly attended. Most believed that the majority of residents would not be interested in taking part in consultation exercises unless there was ‘something in it’ for them. Even some of the participants who had attended meetings in the past said that they had only done so because they were directly affected by a particular initiative (usually a housing initiative):

People can't be bothered unless there is something in it for them.

Wolverhampton Volunteer Group

This led to a fairly common view (held by participants in roughly a quarter of the groups) that only a few vocal, usually older, residents were likely to regularly take part in consultation exercises, which meant that they often carried disproportionate weight with the NDC in terms of decision making. There was a perception amongst some that the NDC could be ‘cliquey’, a view sometimes exacerbated by a lack of knowledge regarding how it made decisions about the area:

It's like a little clique.

Norwich Beneficiary Group

You'll usually find that it's only a certain few people that do it all the time.

Rochdale General Group

If you're in that little group you get the money, if you're not you're pushed out.

Norwich General Group

Many believed that a more proactive approach would be useful in encouraging more people to get involved in consultation or decision making and tackling apathy. Indeed, participants in nearly three quarters of the groups said that outreach work could help convince local people of the importance of their contribution:

I'd be up for it [taking part in consultation exercises]. And I think a lot of my neighbours would but there's nothing there to grab us all together, although we're all up for it. There doesn't seem to be anybody coming round... You kind of want someone to drag you out of the doorstep, but there's no-one there to do that.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

- **Cynicism about residents' influence ('lip service'):** Another significant barrier identified by participants was the perception that most local people had little real influence over decision making. Some believed that decisions were often already made before the NDC engaged in any consultation exercises and that they were simply paying 'lip service' to the local community in order to appear to gather people's views. They did not feel that their voices were sufficiently taken into account when making decisions about funding allocation or project development, a view which sometimes coloured their opinions about the NDC and their willingness to engage in consultation:

I think that's why people don't go to meetings, because everything's already cut and dried.

Sandwell General Group

It's paying lip service to the people who live here. A lot of the decisions are already made.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

I feel that when these things come out asking for your opinions, the decisions have already been made. It's a procedure that they have to go through, but the decisions have been already made.

Bristol General Group

- **Lack of flexible opportunities:** Roughly half the groups felt that the NDC did not provide enough opportunities that would allow the broadest range of residents to contribute their views. There was a perception that consultation should take a variety of forms such as door knocking, questionnaires and meetings rather than rely too strongly on a single means that may be difficult for certain people to take part in:

If you were to go round and ask people at their doorsteps or put questionnaires in and then go and pick them up rather than expecting them to post them or walk them back to the shop you'd probably get a good response if you did it like that. But I don't think you can ask people to actually get up and do anything.

Hammersmith & Fulham General Group

In many cases, the timing of consultation events, such as public meetings, was seen as inappropriate for parents or full time workers. Indeed, participants in 14 of the groups mentioned inconvenient meeting times or locations as a barrier that they felt prevented people from taking part:

If you're at work you can't get to those meetings to find out what's going on.

Sandwell General Group

If they haven't got transport they can't come [to public meetings].

Rochdale Volunteer Group

Some participants, mostly from areas with high levels of ethnic diversity, also believed that cultural barriers sometimes made it difficult for women to attend public meetings and felt that a more flexible approach would allow greater involvement. Others believed that language barriers could deter people from engaging in consultation exercises, not just in terms of written consultation, but also in relation to meetings, where they felt that some residents may be uncomfortable sharing their views if English was not their first language:

[People] may not speak the language and they'll need an interpreter to help them get their views across.

Birmingham Aston Housing / Phys Env Group

However, this feeling of discomfort about sharing views in a public forum such as a meeting was not limited to those with language barriers. Participants in nine of the groups believed that some residents were discouraged from taking part in such events by the formality of the situation, and felt that people could sometimes feel nervous about putting themselves in situations they are unsure of or have not experienced before:

I would [like to get involved], but I just feel, well, I feel intimidated.

Doncaster Worklessness Group

Some suggested that a more informal, discussion group setting could be viewed by some residents as less intimidating and encourage them to get more involved:

We need discussion groups like this. I think it should be open, get all the different people together.

Derby Beneficiary Group

5. Volunteering

This section explores the views of volunteers such as NDC projects or committees, whom we spoke to in four of the focus groups. These participants generally viewed volunteering as a way of accessing information about plans for the area and as a means of effectively influencing decisions. Many saw the NDC as a vehicle for change and felt that their involvement with it gave them greater leverage to bring about improvements that might help to make their communities better places to live. Some also appreciated the social element involved with volunteering, which they believed increased their personal involvement with the wider community and gave them the opportunity to learn new skills.

However, most believed that much work remained to be done to convince the majority of residents that the NDC was a worthwhile activity to get involved with. They felt that this often came down to increasing face-to-face contact with residents that could be tailored to meet individual needs and providing clear, consistent information that outlined a range of ways for people to get involved. However, they said that the most important factor to convince people of the value of involvement with the NDC was visible evidence of change, particularly in relation to housing or the physical environment which were often viewed as the most obvious indicators of improvement.

Four of the focus groups consisted of NDC volunteers who served in various capacities from helping to deliver specific projects to sitting on committees. The discussion focused on their motivations for getting involved and how they thought that the NDC could increase involvement amongst the wider community.

5.1 Motivations for participation

The motivations driving volunteers' decision to get involved in project delivery fell into five key areas:

- **Improve the area:** Most volunteers liked the area and said that they wanted to see it improve as a place to live. The NDC and many of its projects were seen by most as tools by which problems facing the area could be addressed and people could give something back to the community, although some were more focused on improvements for themselves and their families:

It's a love for the area, you want to help out. You have a love for the area and you want to see change.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

[I got involved] to make Heywood a better place.

Rochdale Volunteer Group

[I got involved in volunteering] to improve things for my family and my children.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

- **To have their opinion heard:** Some thought that volunteering would give them some influence over how projects were developed and delivered in the area. There was a perception that involvement with NDC projects or committees would give weight to their voices and help them to achieve tangible change:

When you are involved with something, you are in a better position to find out what's going on and to do something about it.

Hartlepool Volunteer Group

- **Access to information:** Participants' desire to know what was going on in their area was one of their primary motivations behind their decision to get involved in volunteering. There was a feeling amongst many that this level of engagement was an effective way to both 'keep their fingers on the pulse' of plans for the area and gain a better understanding of how and why decisions were made:

We definitely feel more informed about things. Sometimes we're quite shocked about what we were originally promised, but at least we have an idea of what to expect and we know why we're not getting what we were promised in the first place.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

- **Increase personal involvement with the community:** A few volunteers, particularly older people, said they were motivated by a desire to feel part of the community and to engage with other residents. It was seen as a worthwhile activity and a way of being part of their local community:

I think getting involved makes, as you get old, makes life interesting and exciting really and that is what keeps you healthy.

Rochdale Volunteer Group

- **Learn new skills:** A few participants felt that volunteering with the NDC would provide them with an opportunity to learn new skills, or that they expected to find the experiences personally fulfilling.

5.2 Increasing participation

Volunteers offered some suggestions about ways that they felt local Partnerships could increase participation amongst residents, which echoed some of the suggestions raised in the other groups:

- **Improved communication about opportunities:** There was a view amongst some participants that the NDC's were not providing clear enough information regarding volunteering opportunities. Some believed that the NDC could work more effectively with other service providers to co-ordinate opportunities and information about involvement, particularly the council as many residents still turned to them as a first port of call. For example, one participant in Brent who was interested in getting involved in volunteering in South Kilburn told how he went to Brent Council for information about possible opportunities. However, they failed to provide him with adequate information and did not mention the NDC as a possible opportunity, so he ended up going to Kensington and Chelsea instead:

Q: Why did you go to the Council? A: Because I thought that anything to do with this area, there would be someone or a department within Brent Council that would be able to help me or point me in the direction of one person to talk to. I'm not saying they should go, 'welcome, welcome', but there was not one person to even talk to.

Brent General Group

- **Outreach/face-to-face support:** There was a common view that face-to-face support or outreach work was required to help people overcome their specific barriers to involvement, whether it was a lack of confidence, skills, childcare or whatever. There was a view that residents often have the desire to get more involved, but often needed assistance to do so. Outreach work was seen as a way of alerting people to initiatives such as education bursaries, training programmes or free crèches, that would give people the chance to volunteer:

You need someone actually going to speak to people and tell them that it's important for them to get involved.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer group

Some thought that outreach work could also help to raise the profile of some of the potential practical benefits of volunteer work (such as training, work experience, etc.) and help to overcome people's apathy:

You get a lot further by being asked [to participate] personally than you do putting an advert in the paper.

Rochdale Volunteer Group

- **Visible progress:** Most importantly, volunteers thought that their local NDC Partnership needed to highlight the progress made in delivering promised changes. There was a common view that people wanted to see tangible improvements happening in order to be convinced that the NDC was a worthwhile activity to get involved with. This particularly related to housing initiatives or efforts to improve the physical environment generally, as these were often the most high-profile and salient issues for local communities:

Q: What could the NDC do to overcome this barrier of apathy that prevents people from getting involved?

A: Give people the houses they want.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

When NDC first came about, everyone's first priority was the housing. They all had this image of a big house, nice gardens, but 95% of people still don't have this. So if you go around and ask them what their objective is, the aim they want from the NDC, they'll say housing. So, I don't see the point of targeting all the other areas until you've targeted this one specifically. Then, you will get people involved, people being happy, being satisfied. Then, they will say you have done something for me, and I will do something for you.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer group

6. Perceived change and the impact of NDC

In general, most participants felt that the NDC was having some positive impact on their areas. Participants in the majority of groups felt that their areas were in the midst of changes that were generally helping to make their neighbourhoods better places to live, although nearly all believed that much work remained to be done. Successful projects were generally felt to be those that were brought to completion in a timely manner and that were thought to meet the community's specific priorities. Consultation and communication were often seen as crucial elements to ensure that projects addressed appropriate issues.

Almost all participants were aware of specific projects, although not necessarily which organisations were behind them. Most were not readily making the connection between the projects they saw happening around them and their local NDC Partnership, although many saw the NDC as one of the bodies working for local change. While the clear priority for the majority of participants was the delivery of change rather than knowledge about the organisations responsible for this, participants tended to be more positive about the NDC when they were clear about its role in bringing about local improvements. Indeed, in some cases, a lack of clarity often led to misunderstandings and suspicions that influenced their perceptions of the NDC.

Successful regeneration efforts – even if outside participants' local area – made some more positive about the potential impact of the NDC. For others, proximity to regeneration initiatives in other areas made them resentful that such work was not taking place in their own neighbourhoods. There was also concern regarding the sustainability of projects delivered through the NDC Programme and recognition amongst some of the inherent difficulties in meeting the needs of all members of the community. Some volunteers, whose knowledge of and involvement with the NDC was generally greater than other participants, believed that the structure of the NDC Programme sometimes presented another barrier that made it difficult for Partnerships to deliver effective local initiatives.

6.1 Views of recent change

Most participants across the groups believed that their areas were in the midst of widespread change. They felt that steps had been taken to improve their area and that some of the problems were starting to be dealt with, but that more visible evidence of progress was needed:

It's happening, but very slowly.

Sandwell General Group

Some of the problems have been addressed and they are starting to show results, but it will take a long, hard slog.

Hartlepool Volunteer Group

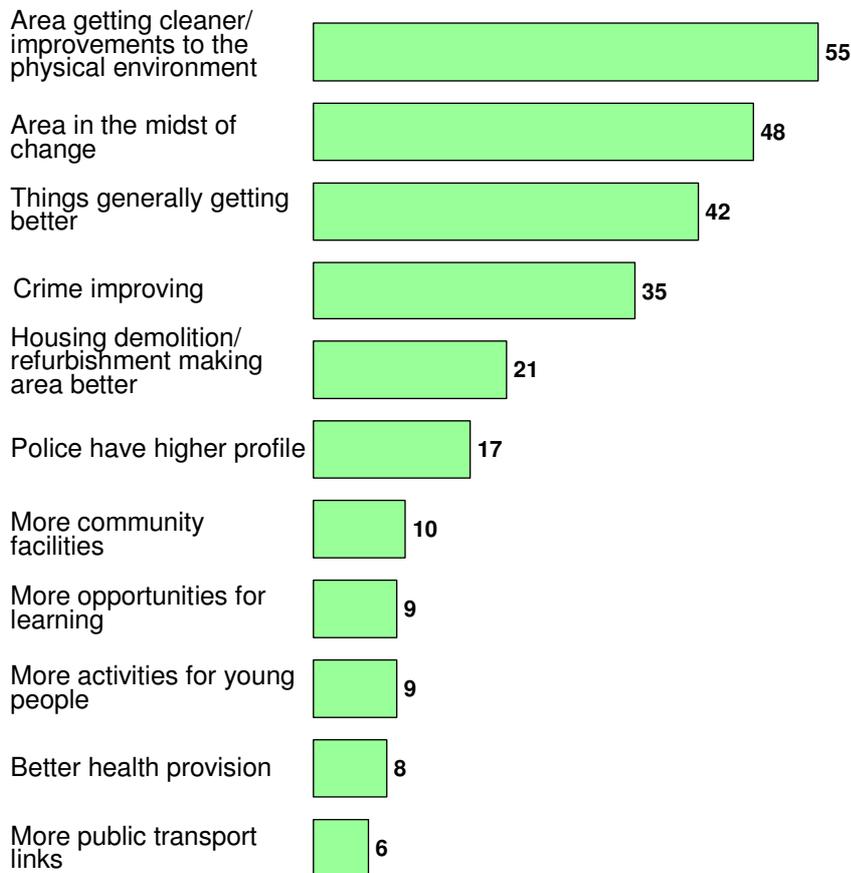
It is [a long process], but it should be happening quicker.

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

The changes noticed by the groups over the previous three years are shown in the chart below. Although the range of experiences varied across the NDC areas, the changes noted by participants were largely positive and fell into five key themes, each of which is dealt with in turn.

Local changes noted by participants

Positive changes



Negative changes



Base: All 78 focus groups

Source: MORI

6.1.1 Physical Environment

Participants in 55 of the groups spontaneously described their physical environments as being cleaner or having improved over recent years. Even those who did not think that their areas were undergoing widespread programmes of change, for example in Sunderland, generally thought that their environment was 'better than it was before':

I've noticed that it's certainly cleaner.

Southampton General Group

I think our area has certainly got better.

Sunderland General Group

It's looking better at the moment, since the last year.

Bradford Housing / Phys Env Group

Participants felt that environmental improvements had contributed to the area's improved appearance and reputation and helped make residents feel better about living there. Many believed that this raised residents' sense of satisfaction about their neighbourhoods and increased interaction between residents:

People have changed around our area, more open and friendly, you can talk to people. The place is cleaner and people feel better about it.

Bradford General Group

It does look nice now. People aren't so scared to come down. People didn't come down because of the reputation it had but people from outside are coming in now.

Plymouth Crime Group

Specific initiatives such as the Clean Up Squad in Salford or improvements made to walls in Knowsley were cited by participants as examples of successful efforts to clean up their neighbourhoods:

It [improvements to walls] makes a big difference. It looks cleaner; it just makes a complete difference.

Knowsley Housing / Phys Env Group

They were dumping [rubbish] in the entries and in the side streets and making the area look really bad. So now this [Clean Up Squad] come out, they clear it up and everywhere looks nice again.

Salford Health Group

Improvements made to local parks were viewed in a particularly positive light – as shown earlier, many highly valued access to clean, safe green space. While there was some concern that continuing anti-social behaviour could possibly lead

to damaging the improvements that had been made, most believed such efforts would encourage wider use amongst the community:

You go down that park now on a nice sunny day, that park is packed.

Sunderland Worklessness Group

Views regarding the impact of housing demolition and rebuilding initiatives were more mixed. Participants in roughly a quarter of the groups believed that such initiatives were part of an overall process of regeneration and would ultimately help to make their communities better:

It [houses being knocked down] is to improve the area. Getting the scruffy things knocked down.

Middlesbrough Beneficiary Group, Aged 11-15

However, the more common view was that short-term problems with the implementation of housing demolition and rebuilding initiatives often outweighed the potential positive long-term outcomes. These were felt to include a degraded physical environment, an increase in criminal activity, the closure of local amenities, the break up of well-established communities and the influx of sometimes disruptive residents. Such views often coloured participants' perception of the NDC in cases where they were associated with such initiatives:

They're [the NDC] supposed to be making it better, they're making things worse. I mean round here there was shops open at one time. There was a pub across the road ...they're ruining everything, don't ask me why but they are...they seem to be ruining the place instead of building the place.

Sheffield General Group

6.1.2 Crime

Participants in many of the groups believed that crime levels in their local area were beginning to improve. They felt this was at least partly due to improved physical environments, a perceived increase in police presence (itself identified by one in five groups) or, according to roughly one group in ten, an increase in activities for young people, which they believed offered them positive outlets to channel their energy.

Many referred to specific initiatives they had noticed or taken part in which they thought helped people feel safer in their homes and on their streets. One of the most commonly known projects in most areas was neighbourhood wardens, which were sometimes associated with the NDC, but more often with the police or the council. Some participants, particularly older people or victims of crime, said they felt reassured by the presence of wardens and believed that their local insight and on-the-street presence made them well placed to tackle problems immediately and effectively (e.g. fly tipping, reporting graffiti, dispersing large

groups, etc.). They were also seen to be able to elicit a more prompt response from the police than other residents:

I think people like to see the wardens going round because they feel more secure.

Lambeth General Group

I think the wardens have made a difference. I feel more secure with the wardens coming round.

Liverpool General Group

They are the eyes and ears for the police...they know the movements [of criminals] and with drug dealers that's what you need.

Hartlepool General Group

Some initiatives, such as a curfew or the installation of new lighting, CCTV cameras or alley gates, were also thought to deter criminal activity. However, again, much of this work was attributed to other providers – such as the council – rather than the NDC itself:

They had a curfew on the young ones, yeah, and that significantly improved where they lived. It got all the crap off at night time.

Sheffield General Group

If you go into your back garden, you can see it's not pitch black like it used to be.

Middlesbrough General Group

I think that's why a lot of the crime has fallen, because of the cameras, because they're dotted all over the place.

Plymouth Crime Group

It used to be that they kids would drive through the estates on their bikes and so on, and now they can't all congregate there [in the alleys].

Islington Beneficiary Group

In other cases, security measures such as new door and window locks were viewed as having a significant impact on making people feel safer in their homes, particularly amongst those who had been the victim of crime in the past. This was illustrated by the comment made by one participant in Bristol who had been the victim of numerous burglaries:

It makes me feel much safer in my house, knowing the locks are there.

Bristol Beneficiary Group

Despite this general positivity towards crime reduction initiatives, participants in 32 of the groups said that they felt crime had increased in their areas; this was the most commonly cited negative change. As previously highlighted, this perceived increase in crime reflected the wide range of experiences across the NDC areas and was often related to the side effects of other initiatives such as housing demolition:

I've always liked living round here, but lately I don't feel as safe as I did.

Sheffield General Group

There is too much trouble round now that they've knocked the houses down.

Middlesbrough General Group

However, it is also important to note that unlike the physical environment concerns, most participants did not view problems with crime as being unique to their area. Instead, they were seen as being symptomatic of issues facing the country as a whole:

It's the same as any other area - you get drugs and violence in other areas.

Lambeth Worklessness Group

6.1.3 Worklessness and learning

Although the dominant view in most groups was that job opportunities were fairly limited, there was some awareness amongst participants (largely those currently seeking work) of local initiatives to help people into employment. Some felt that these provided important sources of support that were starting to have an impact on levels of unemployment. Many were aware of or had made use of practical services such as free ICT access or assistance with writing CVs or filling out job applications:

It's useful for interviews and application forms. Everybody needs help filling out application forms because they can be a nightmare.

Southwark Worklessness Group

Several participants believed that some new job banks or placement services, such as Job Net in Sheffield, provided a valuable resource that was often more effective than traditional placement services in helping people find work:

People who want jobs go to Job Net, those who don't go to the Jobcentre.

Sheffield Beneficiary Group

Most participants thought that skills training or educational courses were important in reducing worklessness and roughly one group in ten felt that local

opportunities for adult learning and training had increased. However, as with the crime related projects, many were not aware that such initiatives had been provided by the NDC. Most who had taken part in such courses felt positive about the knowledge they gained and believed that this was often a vital factor in their ability to find employment, particularly if they had been out of work for some time. For some, such as participants in Liverpool who had used the Kensington Community Learning Centre, their involvement was viewed as an empowering experience that gave them the skills to improve their lives and the area:

I've been out of work for a couple of years and I started last year on computer courses. I recently started work, but I don't think I would have got it if I didn't [attend those courses].

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

Most of my colleagues on the course have got a job now. So there are social benefits as well.

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

However, most learning projects discussed were related to post-16 education or job-based training. There was generally limited awareness of changes at school level, apart from new infrastructure or after-school tutoring services, noticed by parents in a few areas, although these were welcomed as positive changes.

6.1.4 Health

As with worklessness/learning, the impact of health initiatives was generally gauged by those with a particular need for these services, such as parents with young children or older people. These users were largely positive about efforts to improve health service provision in their area, and participants in eight groups said they had noticed an increase in local services, even if, once again, these were not spontaneously linked to the NDC. Of these, some felt that new health centres or additional GPs gave local people much needed access to services, which was thought to be particularly crucial for older people:

It's brilliant for older people; you never know when you are going to need a doctor so you can hardly plan it.

Islington Beneficiary Group

The really good thing in the area is the new health centre...this is a good thing because it's needed.

Walsall General Group

Others felt that some initiatives that worked to promote healthy living, such as the Healthy Hearts programme in Walsall or the exercise programmes in Lambeth not only helped to improve people's fitness, but provided opportunities for people to socialise with one another:

They [walking groups] are smashing. You get a book that you stamp every time you do a walk and you get something like a fiver when you fill it up, which is a bit of an incentive. They go all over, into the countryside and all sorts - it's lovely.

Walsall Health Group

Anything that will get mums out on a night together having fun is good!

Lambeth Education Group

Across the groups, participants with children believed that the services provided by Sure Start had a particularly beneficial impact on their ability to care for their children, for example, by providing useful advice and services. However, most were unaware that the NDC often worked in partnership with Sure Start to deliver such initiatives:

[Sure Start was] the best thing that's happened this year to me. I had my new baby in February and the support that was available this time, I got a lot more.

Newcastle General Group

6.1.5 Community

Although feelings of community were still felt to be fairly strong amongst long-term residents, many believed that this was generally in decline in most areas. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was felt to be largely due to problems with crime, a lack of community focal points or an increasingly transient population – all changes which participants in some groups said they had noticed over the previous three years:

I've seen so many different people in my street over the last 5 years and they keep changing and changing - it's very difficult to create a link with someone. There's a big turnover with private property on the Estate, where they let for 6 months and then disappear and then you don't get to know your community very well where you live.

Lambeth General Group

It's changed because there were predominantly British white in Sheffield. That's all gone, that's all gone. You've got a large Kurdish community – all sorts. Pakistani, whatever, and even Afro-Caribbeans are in.

Sheffield General Group

There used to be a sense of community spirit, but you just don't get that anymore. People are afraid to go out of their front doors and do anything.

Wolverhampton General Group

I think the biggest problem is the breakdown of community spirit. It's older generations...there was a greater sense of community, the neighbours communicated but now they just keep themselves to themselves, don't want to know.

Oldham General Group

The impact of community activities were generally less obvious than projects in other themes, although participants in ten groups thought that the number of community facilities was on the increase, whilst those in six groups believed that improved public transport helped people to access such facilities. Others were aware of NDC-related community events such as festivals, fun days, sports clubs or outings, which they believed helped encourage local people to engage with one another:

There was a fun day and that was quite good. People seemed to be getting together then.

Coventry Community Cohesion Group

F: From an early age they were involved in sport. You don't hear about football teams now. It used to be on Saturday the Racecourse was full of people playing football - it's empty now.

M: But I think that is being addressed now though, isn't it? There is now Derwent Community football club.

F: And, they are taking people fishing, and people in Derwent like fishing.

Derby General Group

6.2 Perceptions of the overall impact of NDC

Although awareness of the local NDC Partnerships was generally high and many participants were familiar with some initiatives and changes in their area, most did not spontaneously link these two things together. Once prompted, nearly all participants believed that the wider NDC Programme's aims were good and thought that it was important to have a community-led initiative that was responsive to the concerns of local people. They also believed that their local Partnerships were working to bring about positive improvements.

However, most recognised that reconciling the needs of different groups could often be a difficult challenge:

[It's] a good idea in principle, but very difficult to implement.

Oldham General Group

Although the particular issues facing each NDC area varied between areas, some common challenges emerged from the discussions.⁵ For instance, many believed that the NDC often ran too many projects concurrently, without bringing enough of them to successful completion. For some, this led to a feeling that the NDC was not being strategic enough in their approach to implementing changes:

They [the NDC] have tried to work on too many subjects at one time rather than concentrate on one, [and say] 'right well, we'll do this and then we'll do that'.

Manchester General Group

They won't put money in projects they have already got going, they scrap the projects that are happening and start something else.

Sandwell Beneficiary Group

Most felt that change was happening very slowly. As such, some believed that the impact of the Partnerships should be judged over the long-term and felt that more time was needed before its initiatives could bring about substantial change:

If we have 'Kensington Regeneration', that means there is something that we have to put back on track. So, let's give them some time and see what happens.

Liverpool Beneficiary Group

They have made a big difference here and it will carry on making a difference in the future, but there is always more that can be done.

Islington Beneficiary Group

However, there was also a concern amongst some participants that the time limited lifespan of the Programme meant that successful projects delivered through the NDC would not receive sustainable funding:

With government money, at times, they do a project to improve an area and then the funding isn't there to keep it; they run out of money.

Middlesbrough General Group

In some cases, participants felt that the NDC had done more to bring about local improvements than other service providers, often through small-scale projects such as the Locks and Bolts project in Bristol or the installation of alley gates or new fencing. However, as seen earlier, some believed the NDC should focus on publicising these activities more:

⁵ Reports have been produced separately for individual NDC Partnerships which detail the particular views of participants in each area.

Nearly all of [the changes have] come from NDC because without NDC, the council would've just let this estate just carry on mouldering away...but now they're going to sit up and look.

Hull General Group

They have done lots of small things that I don't think they get credit for.

Bristol Beneficiary Group

This illustrates a connection between participants' knowledge of the NDC's role in delivering change and their perceptions regarding the impact that it was thought to have on the area. Although most participants placed far greater value on the changes themselves, a lack of clarity regarding the NDC's contribution to the area's overall regeneration and the plans and resources available to achieve this sometimes led to confusion and concern.

For instance, some were unsure about whether or not there were still sufficient funds to finish work that had been started, particularly as many participants felt that projects were often started before current ones were finished:

They say they've got enough money to do all the estates. They've said they've got enough money to do most of the estate. They've only done about three blocks and they say they've no money...So where has the rest of the money gone?

Southwark General Group

For others, lack of information regarding funding decisions and overall strategy led to suspicion about the motivations driving some changes, particularly in certain areas where perceived economic divisions within the community were felt to be widening. Some participants, for example in Hackney or Brent, believed that investment in private housing or leisure amenities such as restaurants and bars were often financially inaccessible to much of the traditional community. This led to the belief amongst some that such initiatives were driven more by a desire to attract wealthy inhabitants than to improve the lives of long-term residents:

They seem to only be doing it in certain areas for certain people or blocks...to my way of seeing things, any improvements are not for us, they're not updating the area for the poor people who live there, it's for the people they want to move into the area who've got money.

Brent General Group

Some volunteers also believed that the Programme's structure was overly bureaucratic, which they felt could often pose an additional hurdle that made it difficult for local Partnerships to deliver effective improvements:

There is too much bureaucracy, too much paperwork, too many barriers to actually achieve something.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

6.2.1 Impact of other regeneration schemes

Participants' experience of other regeneration schemes often significantly affected their views of the potential impact of the NDC Partnerships. If they had witnessed the successful completion of projects – even if these were not in their immediate neighbourhoods – they tended to be more willing to believe that change could and would happen. As we have seen throughout, visible regeneration in the areas of housing, the environment or new facilities were generally viewed as the most effective signs of progress and positive change:

Things like that [a new school] are actually regenerating the area because it's a new, modern building.

Coventry General Group

For example, participants in Tower Hamlets thought that the regeneration work in nearby Canary Wharf had transformed it to a thriving economic centre with luxury housing and a wealth of amenities. For some, this seemingly complete transformation served as evidence that regeneration initiatives could have a substantial impact on an area:

The Isle of Dogs, and Westbury Road, we used to go there years and years ago to pick up stuff for jobs...I'm talking 30, 35 year ago, and it was a very poor, run down place, it was the pits. It really was. I mean...you could buy a place for £1,000, I believe you could, because it was that bad, but have a look what's happened now...It's just taken off. I mean any bit of land over there now, you're not talking thousands, you're talking millions.

Tower Hamlets General Group

Even the Council parts of Canary Wharf are nice - I went walking one day and I went into this Council estate and it looks private, it looks very nice and clean.

Tower Hamlets General Group

However, the effect of neighbouring large-scale regeneration schemes was not always a positive one - indeed, it made some participants feel resentful and excluded from change. Some participants felt that the proximity of successfully revitalised areas emphasised the exclusion of their own neighbourhoods:

We've got a bigger population than Newcastle and when you think what they've done for Newcastle, it's sad really... the ironic thing about the whole thing was that it was Sunderland that suggested this having a footbridge over the River Wear in the first place, and it was rejected, and lo and behold, Newcastle put in for one and believe it or

not they actually had that passed and it's now the Millennium Bridge they've had built, which is a spectacular sight. And I'm thinking here hang on, Sunderland asked for one of these first and we got ours rejected.

Sunderland General Group

All this regeneration of the different areas really hasn't helped the people of Stepney because they've not been out and moved with the times.

Tower Hamlets General Group

Regeneration is focused on the city centre rather than these areas where it is needed most.

Birmingham Aston General Group

Direct experience of regeneration schemes was also a significant factor in forming judgements about the NDC. Some participants in a few areas such as Southwark or Manchester believed that past funding streams (Single Regeneration Budget, City Challenge or the European Social Fund, for example) had not resulted in significant improvements to their individual lives or living conditions. Consequently, some were sceptical about the potential impact of such initiatives that often promised changes that were either undelivered or ineffective:

It's just another Programme. We hear it everyday.

Tower Hamlets Volunteer Group

The improvements that have been made aren't for the local people - it's kind of face value, isn't it. They've tidied it up but they've not dealt with the underneath. Give it a lick of paint and it'll be alright...

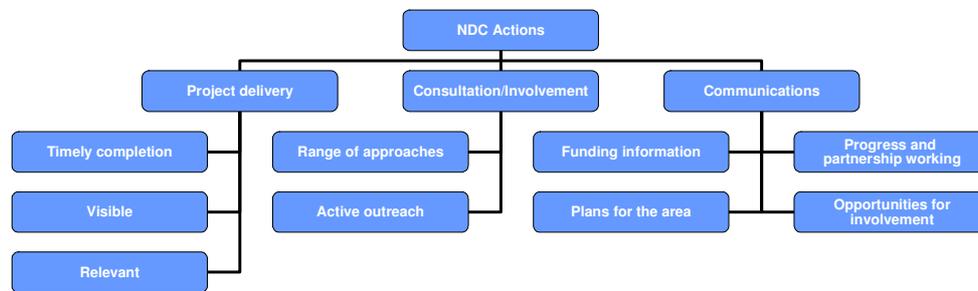
Manchester General Group

7. Conclusions

The key factors that seemed to influence perceptions of the NDC and recent change can be split into two broad headings: NDC activities and local context, which we go through in turn below.

7.1 Key NDC actions

Across the groups there were a number of actions that NDCs were seen to take which participants believed contributed to a successful NDC Partnership. As illustrated in the chart below, these can be grouped into three key areas: project delivery, consultation/involvement and communication, which each have a number of related priorities.



7.1.1 Project delivery

Most participants associated ‘regeneration’ with changes that they noticed in their everyday environments and through their individual involvement with initiatives. As such, the perceived success or failure of local service providers to deliver effective projects had a significant impact on their judgement regarding their ability to bring about substantial local change. A number of key criteria for successful projects emerged over the course of the discussions:

- Timely completion:** Most believed that it was more important to see a project through to timely completion than to have a range of projects running concurrently but seemingly without end. Large-scale housing/physical environment initiatives that were thought to be left incomplete were particularly damaging to participants’ views about the capability of the NDC (or other service providers) to adequately address local needs and undermined trust in their commitment to improving the area.
- Visibility:** Visible evidence of progress, particularly large-scale housing or physical environment projects, was important in providing participants with tangible proof that their area was improving. However, it did not always follow that the bigger in size and budget the project, the more meaningful it was for participants. Despite the recognition that large-scale projects were often necessary to revitalise an area, smaller, ‘quick win’ projects often made an immediate impact on participants’ day to day

lives and helped to convince them of the will of the NDC Partnership to deliver change.

- **Relevance:** Most participants judged the success (or otherwise) of projects by how far they were seen to address what they felt were the most important local issues and priorities – which tended to relate to reducing crime and/or improving the physical environment.

7.1.2 Consultation/involvement

Nearly every participant felt that it was important that residents had a chance to share their views and raise concerns about local initiatives, even if they chose not to do so. Many believed that the NDC could take actions to help ensure that the views of the widest range of residents were taken into account when making funding decisions or developing projects.

- **Range of approaches:** Individual consultation approaches undertaken in isolation were not considered to be adequate by many participants. For example, public meetings were not considered suitable for those who had difficulty attending (either due to time or physical limitations) or who were uncomfortable with such situations. Likewise, questionnaires were thought to exclude people with literacy problems or language barriers. Consequently, many participants placed a great deal of importance on having a range of flexible opportunities available for residents to share views through which they felt a sense of collaboration would be encouraged amongst the community. Such a holistic approach was also felt to help balance out the perceived disproportionate influence that a small number of more vocal residents were thought to wield in relation to decision making or project development.
- **Active outreach:** Many believed that proactive efforts from the NDC were often necessary to help people overcome individual barriers to involvement. There was a common belief that many residents were interested in sharing their views, but often did not know how to go about doing this or were not aware of ways that they could overcome obstacles such as childcare costs. Most felt that proactive, face to face efforts by the NDC to meet residents and talk through their concerns could highlight ways to get further involved and encourage more people to take an active role in decision making.

7.1.3 Communications

Clear, regular communication – both written and face-to-face – was also seen as being key to building faith in the NDC's ability to deliver significant, long-term change in the area and in raising awareness about and engagement with NDC projects. Participants felt it was important that the community was kept up to date regarding local changes and generally believed that it was the responsibility of the NDC to take a proactive role in ensuring that regular, consistent information was distributed.

Many were critical that current information was not explicit enough about the Partnership or its planned initiatives. There was a common view that clear information needed to cover four key issues:

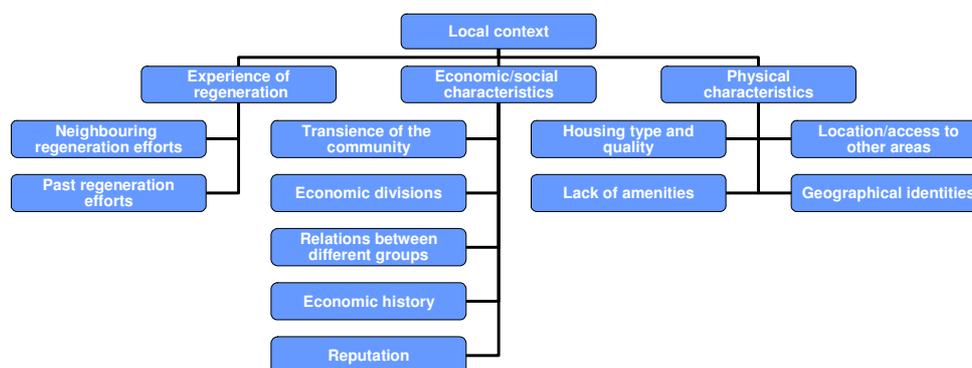
- **Plans for the area:** Knowing about plans for the area was felt to help set specific initiatives in a wider context of regeneration and was seen to help residents see projects and initiatives as part of a greater whole. Participants were often more positive about the NDC if they felt that there was an overall strategy for the area rather than a series of disconnected projects. However, it was felt to also be important that the NDC did not over-promise changes for the area, as the perceived failure to deliver on such promises often undermined trust.
- **Progress and partnership working:** For most participants, it was not enough to know about plans for the area – they also wanted this to be followed up with information regarding the progress towards actually *achieving* such changes. Participants were generally aware that significant change cannot be affected overnight, but wanted evidence that at least some projects were being completed and delivered as promised.

In many cases, clear branding of the Partnerships' involvement with successful initiatives contributed to a sense that progress was being made. Partnership work with Sure Start was a good example of where the NDC benefited from ensuring that its name was associated with the successful services provided to local parents.

- **Funding information:** Many were unsure of how funding decisions were made, which in some cases fostered a sense of mistrust and exclusion from the NDC. Participants were often unclear about why certain parts of their communities received investment whilst others did not or were suspicious of the motivations driving certain types of investment such as new housing or leisure amenities. Similarly, there was felt to be a lack of clarity regarding the amount of funding available, which was particularly important in areas where housing initiatives were thought to have stalled; participants felt 'left in the dark' about progress.
- **Opportunities for involvement:** There was also some demand for more information regarding the opportunities that were available to local residents to get involved with the NDC, such as consultation exercises or volunteering opportunities. Some participants said that a lack of awareness prevented them from engaging with local events or initiatives. They believed the NDC should take a leading role in providing a clear, consistent source of information for residents in order to encourage greater engagement with the wider community and help people to feel part of the process of change.

7.2 Key context factors

While the actions of the NDC significantly affected perceptions about the Partnerships, there were other contextual factors that also impacted on participants' expectations and judgements about the delivery of change. These contextual factors can be clustered into three key areas, all of which have related priorities.



7.2.1 Experience of regeneration

For many participants, the legacy of regeneration efforts – either locally or elsewhere – affected their understanding of the NDC.

- **Neighbouring regeneration efforts:** Some participants were generally more positive about the potential impact of regeneration efforts when they had seen successful work to revitalise an area happening close by, as, for example, in Canary Wharf. In other cases, however, nearby regeneration work had led to resentment for some when such efforts were thought to exclude their own neighbourhoods.
- **Past regeneration efforts:** Similarly, some participants became more sceptical about the potential impact of regeneration programmes such as the NDC if their communities had been the recipient of past regeneration programmes that they felt had not made a significant improvement to their quality of life.

7.2.2 Economic/social characteristics

A number of key economic and social characteristics of the areas also had a strong relationship with views of change, and can be seen to influence how easy or difficult a job the NDC faces in improving perceptions.

- **Transience of the community:** The level of transience within the community often affected participants' ability to feel a shared sense of purpose or experience. More stable communities were felt to encourage greater identification with an area and increased interaction amongst residents, which, in turn, increased feelings of safety and willingness to get involved.

- **Economic divisions:** In some cases, economic divisions between different members of the community were thought to be significant and increasing, which fostered feelings of exclusion from recent improvements. Gentrification was a particular concern in some areas and led to an ‘us and them’ situation between relatively new residents and more well-established communities.
- **Relations between different groups:** Tension between people of different ethnic, social or cultural backgrounds sometimes increased divisions within the community. In some cases, this led to greater insularity amongst different groups and little understanding of the area as a unified whole, which made some residents less willing to engage with community-wide initiatives.
- **Economic history:** In a few areas, feelings of deprivation were heightened by the decline of traditional industry that removed many of the local opportunities that had once been available. Participants in these areas were used to having very local opportunities, which influenced their perceptions of the relevance of opportunities currently available to them.
- **Reputation:** There was a feeling amongst many that their areas often had a negative reputation, which was sometimes over-exaggerated by the media. Although most believed that their communities suffered from many problems, there was a sense in some areas that their neighbourhoods were no more dangerous or deprived than others in the country. However, this stigmatising often undermined residents’ pride and confidence in their local community.

7.2.3 Physical characteristics

A number of physical aspects also appear to affect how easy it will be for Partnerships to change views.

- **Housing type and quality:** Housing was one of the most important priorities identified by participants in a number of areas. Indeed, areas that had severe problems with the quality of housing stock could colour views of all other issues. Some areas with a high proportion of rented properties were also seen to have more transient communities that made it difficult to establish bonds and more susceptible to the arrival of anti-social tenants.
- **Location/access to other areas:** Some areas were seen to be more isolated than others or that did not have good transport links into neighbouring areas. Consequently, changes such as the closure of shops or demolition of housing often had a more pronounced impact on the community than in areas that were better linked to surrounding areas. In other cases, some participants believed that their area’s proximity to more affluent neighbourhoods highlighted the relative deprivation in their own communities.
- **Lack of amenities:** Many participants viewed their areas as having a limited stock of amenities, for example, few safe, clean open spaces or shops. Where community facilities, particularly those offering activities

for young people, were thought to be limited, it was seen to be difficult for the community to come together and to be more difficult to increase feelings of safety, as young people were more likely to be ‘hanging around’.

- **Geographical identities:** Traditional understandings of boundaries often impacted on participants’ perceptions of local changes. Identity was often driven by long-standing geographical divisions, which in some cases did not match with the administrative boundaries of the NDC; in these areas engendering a sense of local progress appears more difficult. Some participants did not view initiatives in one part of the NDC area as relevant to their own neighbourhoods and hence felt excluded from efforts to improve the area.

Appendix: Targeted group composition

NDC Area	Group type	Theme	Quota
Brent (South Kilburn) NDC	Beneficiary	Community cohesion	Beneficiaries of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the Home
Hammersmith & Fulham (North Fulham) NDC	General public	Crime	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, people of black and minority ethnic descent
Hackney (A new deal for Shoreditch)	General public	Community cohesion	Demographically representative
Haringey (Seven Sisters) NDC	General public	Housing/ Physical Environment	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, currently unemployed / seeking work
Islington (Finsbury) NDC	Beneficiary	Health	Users of GP surgeries with additional doctors
Lambeth (Clapham Park) NDC	General public	Education	Mixed age, mixed gender, single parents
Lewisham (New Cross Gate) NDC	Young people	Education	Children aged 11-15
Newham (West Ham & Plaistow) NDC	General public	Worklessness	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, currently unemployed / seeking work
Southwark (Aylesbury) NDC	General public	Worklessness	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, people of black and minority ethnic descent
Tower Hamlets (Ocean Estate) NDC	Volunteers	N/A	Volunteers for the NDC
Norwich (North Earlham & Marpit) NDC	Beneficiary	Community cohesion	People aware of the Family Matters project
Luton (Marsh Farm) NDC	Beneficiary	Worklessness	Beneficiaries of the Turning Corners project
Brighton (East Brighton) NDC	General public	Health	Mixed gender, parents of children under 16
Southampton (Thornhill) NDC	Young people	Housing/ Physical Environment	Children aged 11-15
Bristol (Barton Hill) NDC	Beneficiary	Crime	Beneficiaries of the Locks and Bolts project

NDC Area	Group type	Theme	Quota
Plymouth (Devonport) NDC	General public	Crime	Mixed gender, parents of children under 16
Birmingham (Kings Norton) NDC	General public	Community cohesion	Aged 55+, mixed gender
Birmingham (Aston) NDC	General public	Housing/ Physical Environment	Aged 18-35, Asian women
Coventry (Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm) NDC	General public	Community cohesion	Aged 55+, mixed gender
Sandwell (Greets Green) NDC	General public	Crime	Mixed age, mixed gender, range of ethnic backgrounds, single parents
Walsall (Blakenall) NDC	General public	Health	Aged 55+, mixed gender
Wolverhampton (All Saints and Blakenhall) NDC	Volunteers	N/A	Volunteers for the NDC
Derby (Derwent) NDC	Beneficiary	Crime	Beneficiaries of the Burglary Reduction project
Leicester (Braunstone) NDC	Beneficiary	Worklessness	Beneficiaries of Braunstone Working
Nottingham (Radford) NDC	Beneficiary	Crime	Beneficiaries of the Safe as Houses project
Bradford (Little Horton) NDC	General public	Housing/ Physical Environment	Aged 18-35, Asian women
Doncaster (Doncaster Central) NDC	General public	Worklessness	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, currently unemployed / seeking work
Kingston-upon-Hull (Preston Road) NDC	General public	Community cohesion	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, currently unemployed / seeking work
Sheffield (Burngreave) NDC	Beneficiary	Worklessness	Beneficiaries of the Jobnet project
Knowsley (North Huyton) NDC	General public	Housing/ Physical Environment	Aged 55+, mixed gender
Liverpool (Kensington) NDC	Beneficiary	Education	Users of the Kensington Community Learning Centre
Manchester (Beswick & Openshaw) NDC	Beneficiary	Community cohesion	Beneficiaries of the Eastserve project

NDC Area	Group type	Theme	Quota
Oldham (Hathershaw and Fitton Hill) NDC	Young people	Health	Children aged 11-18
Rochdale (Old Heywood) NDC	Volunteers	N/A	Volunteers for the NDC
Salford (Charlestown and Lower Kersal) NDC	Beneficiary	Health	Users of the Health and Wellbeing Centre
Hartlepool (West Central Hartlepool)	Volunteers	N/A	Volunteers for the NDC
Middlesbrough (West Middlesbrough) NDC	Young people	Education	Children aged 11-15
Newcastle-upon-Tyne (West Gate) NDC	Beneficiary	Housing/ Physical Environment	People taking part in the Private Rented project
Sunderland (East End and Hendon) NDC	General public	Education	Aged 18-45, mixed gender, currently unemployed / seeking work