

# **Neighbourhood Agreements in action**

**A case study of Foxwood, York**

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# 1 Introduction

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## **The growing interest in estate agreements**

This report brings together the findings of research undertaken over a three-year period by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The aims of the research project were to provide an independent evaluation of the Foxwood neighbourhood agreement in York and to assess its impact in the Foxwood area. Two key concerns for the research team were the extent to which the initiative was sustainable and the extent to which it might be transferable to other contexts and locations.

The essence of estate agreements or contracts is to provide a vehicle for a formalised arrangement between residents and those responsible for delivering local services over standards, response times, targets and, perhaps, resources. Many of the agreements introduced across the country in recent years have their origins in initiatives by local authority housing departments, or as an element of a wider programme of neighbourhood regeneration. However, as the following chapter will indicate, the origins, scope and purpose of agreements vary considerably, making any overall generalisations hazardous.

The thinking behind estate agreements chimes with several strands of the current government's programme towards neighbourhood renewal, local governance, service delivery and resident involvement. The experience of projects such as Foxwood therefore has a resonance well beyond the boundaries of York City Council. The chief elements of the thinking behind estate agreements, and their relevance to national priorities in policy, are outlined below.

## **A vehicle for resident involvement**

Estate agreements usually involve regular meetings between residents and service providers to raise concerns, monitor service performance and suggest new issues which might be addressed. While the development of individual service agreements is a time-consuming task, the ongoing claims on participants' time are, in theory at least, less demanding than through full-blown resident management. At the same time, it does not give carte blanche to local agencies to carry on without heeding residents' views. The core principle of the government's approach to resident involvement, enshrined in the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts (DETR, 1999) is for residents and landlords to promote participation at a level and a depth appropriate to the parties concerned. This approach reflects the diversity of local circumstances and does not involve central government setting down an 'ideal type' arrangement which all should strive to achieve.

In an area like York, where the local authority has acquired a reputation for well-run and responsive services, and where the record of forthright tenant activism and opposition is quite patchy, there has been little appetite for residents themselves to take over directly the running of particular functions or services. In this context, estate agreements offer a potential model for ongoing dialogue between service providers and residents in a manner that might not unduly stretch the capacity of active participants.

## **Making services more accountable**

Estate agreements are an opportunity for service provision to be opened up for resident scrutiny,

although, in the event of service ‘failure’, residents themselves have no direct legal sanctions to force through any changes. This aspiration towards more openness and accountability goes to the heart of the government’s project to ‘modernise’ governance at all levels (DETR, 1998). In particular, the introduction of the ‘best value’ regime at the local authority level has been premised on the four ‘Cs’ of challenge, compare, compete and consult (DETR, 2000). Estate agreements are potentially an opportunity for residents to *challenge* existing levels of service, to *compare* performance with other neighbourhoods and to be *consulted* on any changes that are made.

### **Developing a neighbourhood focus**

The government’s strategy for tackling social exclusion is centred on the concept of the ‘neighbourhood’ as a focus for action (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, 2000). The national strategy sets out the need for devising targets for core public services in deprived neighbourhoods that are ‘locally owned’ (SEU, 2000, 7.8), and for bringing together annual neighbourhood statistics to assist in this task. This sits alongside the commitment to developing systems of neighbourhood management in certain localities (SEU, 1999; Taylor, 2000). These ideas have clear links with the thinking behind estate contracts – which are founded on local diversity and responsiveness – even if, as we shall see, it is sometimes difficult to define the boundaries of the ‘neighbourhood’ in question.

### **Promoting ‘joined up’ governance and service provision**

While the number of services and agencies

involved will vary, agreements provide an opportunity for joint provision and local strategy development in a public forum. This has clear echoes in the general support for ‘joined-up governance’ and, more specifically, the promotion of local strategic partnerships (LSPs) to carry this forward. LSPs have been described as ‘a mechanism to help services work with each other, with communities, and with the private and voluntary sectors’ (SEU, 2000, 8.9) to achieve more responsive services, rationalise overlaps and help build a coherent local strategy (SEU, 2000, 8.9 and Annex D). Estate agreements have been founded on similar, if perhaps less ambitious, principles.

### **Devising responsive local strategies**

A central challenge for neighbourhood agreements is the extent to which their policies and procedures are transferable to other settings and areas. There may be a tension between the claims of local diversity, on the one hand, and the need for overall consistency and equity between areas, on the other. The Local Government Act 2000 includes a framework for local authorities to draw up community plans in consultation with local partners in order to align neighbourhood aims and future strategy with resource and policy commitments on a multi-agency basis. At present, most estate agreements are in an early stage of development, and operate more as reactive than as proactive mechanisms for service delivery and intervention. However, the maturation of such agreements, and their integration into local authority-wide practices, could inform the future development of community plans.

The plethora of policy documents, initiatives, projects, zones, strategies and plans



which has emerged in the past three years may have outstripped the capacity of local authorities and other agencies to keep pace. There are even now only scattered examples of multi-service partnerships, enduring initiatives for ongoing resident involvement, fully fledged neighbourhood management and area budgeting regimes. Many local responses to the agenda sketched out above are in their infancy. There is a pressing need to learn from experiences at neighbourhood level, especially where they are not sustained by the injection of additional 'special' funds and programmes which, by definition, cannot be widely extended. The relatively modest resources committed to the Foxwood project therefore render it a particularly valuable testing ground for all those seeking to apply principles of participation, accountability, neighbourhood orientation and 'joined-up' action to services locally, not just confined to those 'flagship' schemes receiving additional resource support.

### **The research approach**

The applicability of the estate agreement idea to the Foxwood area was particularly interesting in view of the multi-tenure nature of the neighbourhood and the fact that the agreement was *not* linked to any major programme of neighbourhood renewal. This gave the opportunity for the research team to compare the experience of Foxwood with that of Bell Farm elsewhere in York (Cole and Smith, 1996) and, more generally, with the development of estate contracts or agreements in other parts of the country.

The research approach was similar to that adopted on the Bell Farm project. The research

team undertook ongoing monitoring of the project through attendance at the Foxwood project Steering Group over the three-year period. A series of interviews was undertaken with stakeholders – officers from key service departments and voluntary agencies – and local residents who had been active in the process, to monitor the development of the partnership. Changing perceptions of the estate were mapped through in-depth interviews with a small household panel drawn from different parts of the estate. Towards the end of the project, an estate survey was undertaken to assess the views of a broader range of residents from across the estate.

### **Interviews with stakeholders and residents' representatives**

Stakeholders were interviewed in December 1998, December 1999 and March 2000.

In 1998, the interviews explored issues of primary concern on the estate, including youth, parenting, drugs, alcohol, crime, policing, employment and training, housing and issues emanating from the mixed tenure nature of the estate. The stakeholders interviewed included representatives from: York City Council (both officers and members), local schools, Community Play Group, police, crime prevention, Community Development Worker, Future Prospects, Health Promotion, York Safer Cities and residents' associations.

In 1999, stakeholder interviews focused on perceptions of the initial impact and future development of the neighbourhood agreement. Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed: officers and members from York City Council, police, Future Prospects, Detached Youth Work Project, Joseph

Rowntree Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, Bradford and Northern Housing Association, Foxwood Community Centre, Community Play Group, residents' associations, Foxwood Community Action Group (FCAG).

In 2000, stakeholders and active residents were asked their views on the sustainability of FCAG and the neighbourhood agreement in the longer term, and how they saw their role in relation to monitoring, developing and sustaining the agreement. Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed: Bradford and Northern Housing Association, Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, Railway Housing Association, Leisure Services, Future Prospects, York City Council (both officers and ward councillors), police, the community worker and members of Foxwood Community Action Group.

### The household panel

The household panel was interviewed between January 1998 and March 1999. The panel included four local authority tenant households, three owner-occupied households, three Bradford and Northern Housing Association tenant households, and two Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) tenant households. The second phase of interviews also included two young people contacted through the Detached Youth Work Project. In-depth interviews with residents on the panel gave the opportunity for them to reflect on services provided to the estate, the environment and community on Foxwood, their awareness of the neighbourhood agreement and its probable impact. The household panel was also important because it gave a voice to the 'silent majority' on the estate. Most of those interviewed were not active in

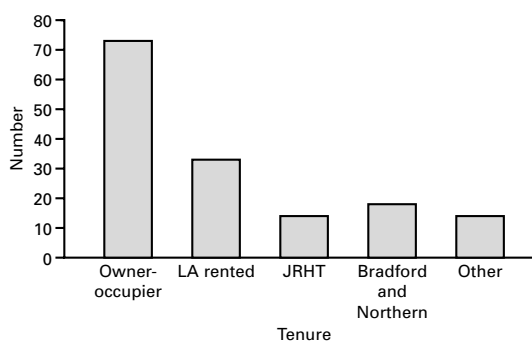
community groups or in developing the agreement, and this gave a valuable indication of the likely impact and potential durability of the initiative.

### The estate survey

The community worker for Foxwood produced a report on the salient issues for the local community, *Expressed Needs in the Foxwood Area*, in 1997. This was followed by a more formal estate survey carried out by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) in April 1999. Interviews were conducted with a sample of 152 residents representing the different tenures in the project area (see Figure 1). The survey was able to take a broader look at residents' changing perceptions of service provision and community dynamics on Foxwood. It also asked specifically about the neighbourhood agreement and the Foxwood Community Action Group to gauge what impact the project was having in the wider community.

Taken together, these sources of information provide a solid basis to judge the development of the agreement on the Foxwood estate, and to

**Figure 1 Estate survey: total returns (of 152)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

assess its strengths and weaknesses. To set context to this analysis, however, the use of similar kinds of estate contracts and agreements in other local authorities is explored first, in Chapter 2.

## 2 The use of estate agreements

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### Introduction

The use of estate agreements has developed fitfully in the social housing sector in recent years, and there is not as yet a consolidated database that identifies the use of such initiatives.

However, on the basis of associated research undertaken by CRESR (notably analysis of local authority Housing Investment Programme returns in 1998 and 1999, and a study of ‘on-the-spot’ management) and other suggested contacts, it was possible to identify seven local authorities and 12 registered social landlords (RSLs) that had introduced arrangements broadly similar to the Foxwood agreement. The list is no doubt far from comprehensive and many other organisations may have developed arrangements similar to estate agreements, but used different terms to describe their initiatives. Officers from each of the 19 organisations identified were interviewed in a brief telephone survey, and 12 sample estate agreements were sent to the research team and analysed.

Table 1 identifies the source of the agreements sent to the research team, and summarises the scope of issues covered.

### Coverage of agreements

Partners to the various agreements listed in Table 1 included tenants’/residents’ groups, housing, cleansing and environmental services departments in local authorities, RSLs, police and voluntary groups. Only one agreement involved all of these as partners. Three others were relatively comprehensive and involved different landlords. However, the formal involvement of the police was evident in only three agreements; the same was true of cleansing services.

The extent of partner involvement obviously reflects the intended scope of the agreements. Eight of the agreements had a provider focus, centring on service standards and accountability. Four agreements were intended as extensions of the formal landlord–tenant contract, with the aims of explaining obligations in more detail and of fostering a sense of ‘neighbourliness’.

Although one agreement covered training and employment services, the approaches generally had not gone beyond a ‘housing and estate services’ focus. There was little coverage, for example, of services for young people, or education issues.

In interview, a senior officer from Bethnal Green and Victoria Park Housing Association noted that, while their agreement for Huddleston Road was focused on specific management issues, it at least served to reassure the tenants that ‘small picture’ problems were not forgotten and that they were being listened to. With hindsight, the officer felt that the agreement might have benefited from the involvement of other services, but neighbourhood-wide ideas were not an influence at that time.

Three of the agreements had involved owner-occupiers alongside social housing tenants from the outset, reflecting the mixed tenure nature of the neighbourhoods and including properties transferred into private ownership under the right to buy. These agreements – Broadwater Farm, Haringey; Old Fold Estate, Gateshead; and Manor Local Agreement, Sheffield – were all local authority initiated programmes. They covered a wide range of council services relevant to all tenures and emphasised the accountability of the

Table 1 Scope and source of agreements

	Repairs	Nuisance/good neighbour	Street cleaning	Grassed areas	Lettings	Rubbish	Crime	Empty homes	Security	Lighting	Rent collection	Animals/pets	Jobs/training	Feedback/complaints	Source
Monsall, Manchester	x	x	x	x	x	x		x						x	Guinness Trust
Cheetwood	x	x			x			x			x			x	Guinness Trust
Old Fold,	x	x	x	x			x	x						x	Gateshead MBC
Gateshead															
Huddleston Close, London	x	x							x				x	x	Bethnal Green and Victoria Park HA
Fordyce Estate	x	x													Home Group
Broadwater Farm	x	x	x	x		x			x					x	Haringey Council
Blackbird Leys, Oxford	x	x	x	x											Ealing Family HA
Norton Grange, Teesside	x	x	x	x			x			x	x	x	x		Tees Valley Housing Group Endeavour HA
Zsara		x				x	x					x			SPACE
Runcorn	x	x	x		x	x	x	x							Liverpool Housing Trust/ CDS
Gipsyville Manor, Sheffield	x	x	x	x	x					x		x		x	Sanctuary HA North British HA

council to all residents as the provider of those services.

### Monitoring arrangements

The agreements in place for Monsall; Old Fold Estate; and Norton Grange Estate, each specified the requirements on service providers to supply monitoring information against targets or service level agreements. This information was then considered on a regular (often quarterly) basis at a forum meeting with residents. The Blackbird Leys agreement, Oxford, allowed for annual monitoring reports to be considered by the Estate Forum, alongside regular meetings for ongoing discussion. Other agreements, such as Broadwater Farm, Haringey and Cheetwood, Manchester, focused on the need for service providers to respond to performance issues raised by residents and to allow for regular meetings for discussion.

One aspect of monitoring noted in some agreements was also mentioned in interviews as of significant benefit where it had been introduced. This was a commitment from partners to a regular 'walk around', providing the opportunity for feedback without a formal requirement for providers to report, or for residents to complain. This type of awareness can supplement the information found in more formal reports.

Those agreements focused more on residents' responsibilities and tenancy obligations were not generally monitored, and it was not clear how their effectiveness was assessed. Success is less easily measurable here than in service level agreements, and the success in promoting adherence to tenancy obligations was not measured.

### Links to a wider neighbourhood strategy

A number of the agreements developed following capital investment in the regeneration of the neighbourhood. For example, the Zsara residents' agreement (under discussion at the time of the survey) followed two years of planning a programme of investment with residents. All parties were hoping an agreement would help to avoid any future decline in the area. The Norton Grange estate agreement also followed on from a programme of capital investment and the high profile of estate issues at the time helped to maintain interest. It was possible to develop the agreement around residents' concerns with crime and Cleansing Services, rather than relying on the priorities of the providers.

Some agreements had clear links with other aspects of community or neighbourhood development. The Monsall agreement, while focusing on estate and housing services, was linked to a 'community declaration' dealing with nuisance and good neighbour issues. On Blackbird Leys, the Housing Association Consortium, partner to the estate agreement, also employed a tenant participation worker to help with community development. The consortium had links with SRB2 projects in the area and helped to fund a community charity.

On Broadwater Farm, the local community demanded that the estate agreement, which was under review, should include a wider range of services – going beyond housing and estate services to cover issues such as childcare, employment and training, drug-related problems and crime. The local authority was developing a multi-agency approach with the residents' association, providing a community

plan for the area to accompany the estate agreement.

In the other examples, however, estate agreements tended to focus on specific local service issues, or on attempting to achieve consistency between different landlords providing services in an area. Links to broader conceptions of service provision and to strategic plans were becoming more relevant as landlords and local authorities considered the best value framework, and anticipated changing demands from residents. But most agreements tended to develop on a 'one-off' basis. While experiences elsewhere may have provided a model, each agreement was shaped by the interests of its partners in the neighbourhood, and therefore did not provide a template for linking into authority-wide strategic planning.

### Neighbourhood management and tenant compacts

At the time of this survey (February 2000), the future development of estate agreements had begun to be influenced by the introduction of tenant compacts and emergent thinking on neighbourhood management and community planning.

In Rochdale, for example, it was suggested that current estate agreements covering housing and environmental services were being overtaken by the production of local tenant compacts. Tenants, local members and council officers were trying to improve the overall quality of life on estates by setting out agreed plans to address residents' concerns.

In Gateshead, the agreed aims of the tenant participation compact included:

- involving tenants in local service issues
- supporting activities that helped to build communities
- creating neighbourhood partnerships with tenants and other agencies to improve the quality of life at a local level.

The Old Fold estate agreement was mentioned as one possible structure for tenant involvement, where explicit overlaps were being made with neighbourhood management.

A senior officer from The Guinness Trust noted that a growing and genuine spirit of partnership had been one of the key positive outcomes from involvement in the Monsall estate agreement. Providers faced the challenge of no longer deciding for themselves the way ahead, but were moving instead to a focus on tenants' own priorities. This philosophy, it was claimed, underpinned approaches to neighbourhood management.

The interdependence of providers was also emphasised by an officer from North British Housing Association in Sheffield, who pointed out that it was not in the organisation's long-term interest to work in isolation. If one landlord were managing an area of blight, it would soon directly affect others in the neighbourhood. The Manor agreement therefore provided something of an 'early warning system' for all partners.

Tenant compacts are concerned with local authority tenants and will therefore have the greatest impact on council estates, where the primary focus of the agreement is resident involvement. It is too early to judge how local compacts will affect those estate agreements already in place, which are often premised on

multi-agency scope and input. However, for the increasing number of estates and neighbourhoods with mixed tenure (whether through right to buy, renewal and redevelopment, or stock transfers), agreements offer the potential flexibility to promote consistency of services across different tenures. The promotion of neighbourhood management and the development of local service partnerships and community plans may likewise help to bring in new services and providers to enhance joint working.

### Sustainability

The sustainability of neighbourhood agreements was a recurrent area of concern. In Broadwater Farm, for example, planned reviews had taken place and as a result agreements continued to grow and develop in response to changing issues. Some, such as the Old Fold and Norton Grange agreements, included from the outset the means to involve additional services, opening up the prospect of extending the range of provision open to residents' scrutiny.

Other agreements had, it was claimed, virtually fallen out of use, or were at best floundering. Several factors were at work here. Where agreements had been established to deal with specific residents' concerns, it became difficult to maintain involvement when these issues subsided or were resolved. While the forms of accountability under the agreement tended to maintain provider interest, it had often proved more difficult to sustain resident involvement. Resident participation often rested on a few key individuals and, when they moved on, further investment in capacity building was required to support new representatives.

Resident involvement tended to ebb and flow around specific issues, and it was often difficult to maintain a general interest in the ongoing management of services.

Some agreements had fallen out of use for more positive reasons, as new initiatives had taken their place, such as estate management boards or the self-management of estate services.

Many providers wanted to ensure that their agreements continued to be resident-led. To be sustainable, an agreement had to anticipate that issues of concern would change and that the arrangement would need to foster new links and partnerships. If there were no dominant issues to drive the agreement forward, the question arose whether it would need to be sustained, or whether future involvement could be better achieved in another way. This scenario underlined the need for agreements to be developed as constructive and dynamic responses to local problems and concerns, rather than as a 'once and for all' statement that would eventually fall into disuse.

### Summary

This brief review based on a modest research exercise can provide only tentative evidence of the range of practice across the country. Nevertheless, it has indicated the extent to which neighbourhood agreements such as that developed as Foxwood are still in their relative infancy. There is little consistency over scope, aims and function, and much depends on the enthusiasm of specific partners. Some may be eclipsed by the development of local tenant participation compacts, though these are likely to be focused primarily on council housing services. In many cases, agreements have formed in



response to a regeneration initiative, raising questions about their long-term sustainability.

The broader based agreements may provide valuable lessons for the subsequent development of local service partnerships, as envisaged in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. It shows that residents' groups have been at the heart of the development process and, as a result, the focus of the local agreements has reflected their concerns. This may not make for neatness, or offer direct comparability between neighbourhoods, but it does demonstrate the virtue of having a flexible vehicle to redraw the relationship between service providers and consumers.

One difference between neighbourhood-

focused and housing-focused agreements is that the former are often better placed to take on new problems, and involve other services. They tend to be less constrained by the heritage of an enforceable landlord-tenant contract. The key task for the further development of such initiatives will be to strike a balance between ensuring agreements have sufficient 'bite' to engender a response from service providers, while retaining enough flexibility to adapt to changing needs. This was one of several dilemmas arising from the development of the Foxwood agreement described in the following three chapters, and it also has relevance to similar local initiatives such as community plans and tenant compacts.

# 3 Perceptions of Foxwood

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## Foxwood

Foxwood is a mixed tenure neighbourhood of 1,487 properties to the south west of York. In 2000, the project area included 326 local authority homes, 126 Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust properties (88 rented and 38 shared ownership), 103 Bradford and Northern Housing Association homes and 889 privately owned dwellings. Railway Housing has a scheme of 43 properties and joined the partnership in 1999. Anchor Housing also has a scheme in the project area but it had not become a partner to the agreement during the research period.

The estate grew from a small nucleus of local authority properties built over 20 years ago, and new private, RSL and local authority homes were developed subsequently. There is a mix of houses and flats on the estate, their design reflecting the different ages of the stock.

The Foxwood area is served by a small number of local shops, and the main shopping area is in Acomb, a bus journey away. Local children attend several different primary schools, none of which is located in the project area. The only recreational facilities on the estate are children's playgrounds and a sports field. The Community Centre offers a range of social activities and is a focus for community events on the estate.

## The views of residents

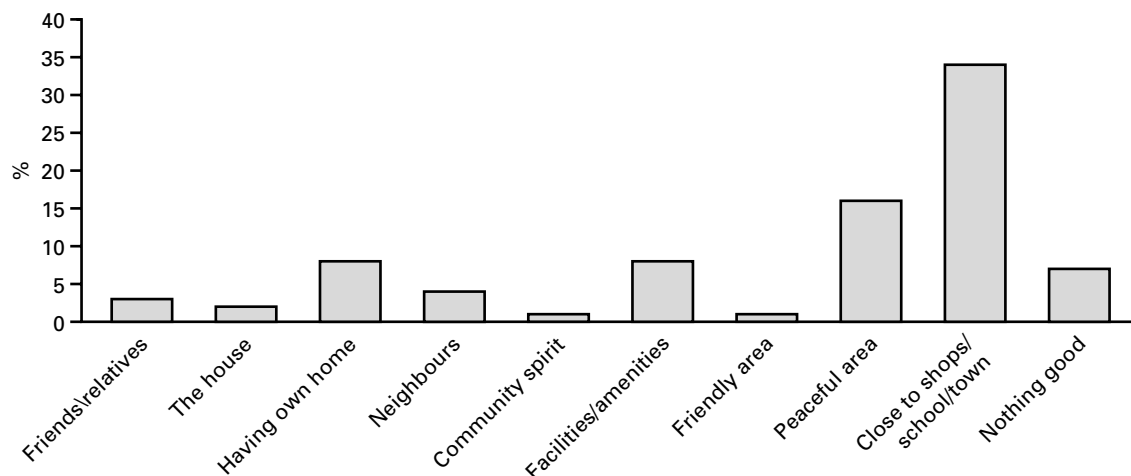
Overall, the household panel interviews and the estate survey showed that most people had a positive view of Foxwood and a commitment to the area. In the estate survey, for example, 73 per cent of those interviewed said they had never tried to move away from Foxwood – this

included 82 per cent of owners, 70 per cent of local authority tenants and 68 per cent of RSL tenants. In the household panel, seven of the 12 members said they had never tried to move away from the estate and eight said they planned to stay in their current accommodation for the next five years. There were several reasons why people felt positive and committed to the area, in spite of the fact that they also identified some problems about living there.

Positive factors mentioned in the household panel that influenced the desire to stay included having friends in the area (ten responses) and seeing Foxwood as a friendly place to live (ten responses). Both the household panel and estate survey respondents said the best thing about living on Foxwood was being close to shops, facilities, school and town (Figure 2).

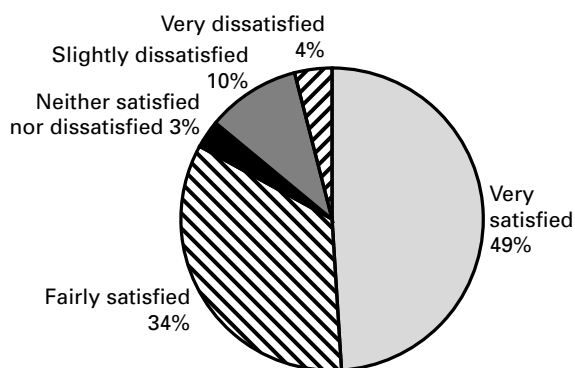
The sense of commitment and stability may also be seen as a function of the stage of development of the estate. Many households had grown up in the area and developed an attachment to it – especially to their own homes. It is possible to make brief comparisons here with residents on Bell Farm, making due allowance for the fact that the surveys were undertaken at different points in time and that slightly different terminology was used in questions. On Foxwood, 83 per cent were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with their home, and 54 per cent were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with Foxwood as a place to live (Figures 3 and 4). In comparison, on Bell Farm, 93 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with their homes and 86 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with their estate. However, the Bell Farm survey had been undertaken shortly after a major modernisation programme had been completed (Cole and Smith, 1996); Foxwood, by contrast, had received few

**Figure 2 'What is the best thing about living on Foxwood?' (per cent of 49 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 3 'How satisfied/dissatisfied are you with this house/flat?' (per cent of 152 cases)**

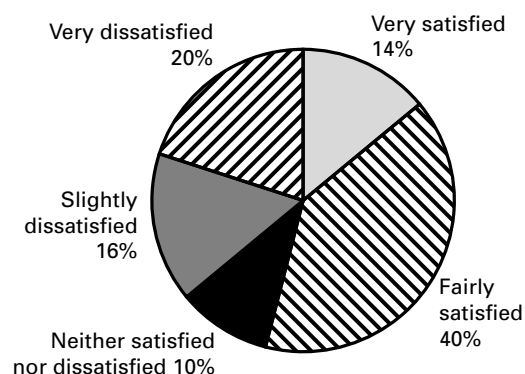


Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

'special measures'. Seen in this light, the views of Foxwood residents may be taken as a broadly positive measure of satisfaction.

Residents in Foxwood also attached more importance to their home than to the area itself. Given the choice, most respondents in the estate survey said they would choose the same house but in a better area, if they were to move

**Figure 4 'How satisfied/dissatisfied are you with Foxwood as a place to live?' (per cent of 152 cases)**

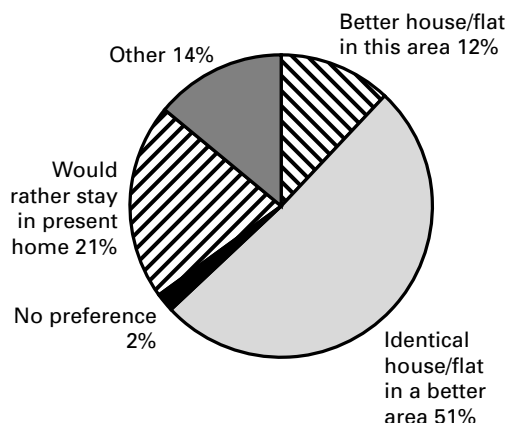


Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

(Figure 5).

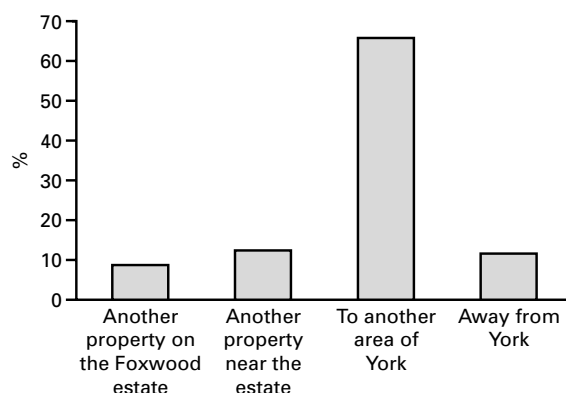
Of those who did want to move house (43 respondents in the estate survey), the majority wanted to go to another area in York (66 per cent, see Figure 6). Reasons for wanting to move included: to get away from bad neighbours, wanting a bigger house and needing to move for work.

**Figure 5 'How much importance do you attach to your home compared to the area?' (per cent of 151 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 6 'If you have tried to move, where did you want to go?' (per cent of 43 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

### The reputation of Foxwood

Despite the positive views of the residents, the first round of household panel interviews suggested that Foxwood had a poor reputation, perpetuated by bad press reports and the association of a few 'problem' families with the estate. Respondents felt Foxwood was far from

the worst estate in York and that its negative reputation had been exaggerated. The Bell Farm study had uncovered a similar pattern of views, although the image was more negative than on Foxwood. A review of press coverage in 1995 had compared local reports on Bell Farm with those for Foxwood and the nearby area of Dringhouses. The review found both the nature and extent of negative reporting had been far higher on Bell Farm than in the other two neighbourhoods (Cole and Smith, 1996, p. 30).

The follow-up household panel interviews showed little change in attitude. Residents said that friends and family living in other parts of York had negative perceptions about Foxwood, and tenants reported difficulties finding mutual exchange partners from other parts of the city when they wanted to move. The bad reputation ranged from fears about 'druggies', to a general complaint about noise and disruption. Residents thought these external attitudes had not really changed over the duration of the Foxwood project.

Residents were asked how they felt about Foxwood before they moved on to the estate, and how their attitudes had changed since. Four out of the 12 on the household panel had heard the estate was 'rough'. Residents felt more positive once they moved on to the estate, and their positive attitudes had not changed over the years. Initial impressions therefore included:

*No problems, the estate seemed quite quiet.*

(Local authority tenant three years ago)

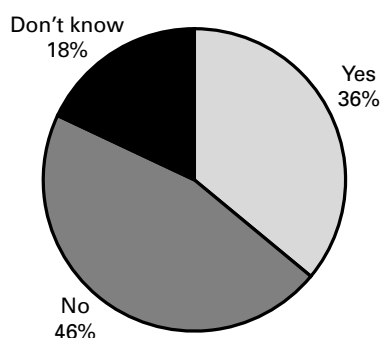
*Thought it was OK.* (Bradford and Northern tenant four years ago)

*Really nice area.* (Local authority tenant speaking about her street 23 years ago)

There was, however, some discrepancy between views expressed in the household panel, where members were given the opportunity to expand on their attitudes and feelings, and the estate survey. Eight members of the second household panel thought there was greater community spirit on the estate now than five years ago. The Bradford and Northern Housing Association tenants felt that community spirit had increased; and that their own area, 'Acomb Wood', was friendlier than before. The owner-occupiers interviewed also thought community spirit was increasing. One said she had got to know people from all over the estate because of her involvement in events at the Community Centre.

These improvements need to be set in a relative context. In the estate survey, 36 per cent of respondents had thought there was a lot of community spirit on the estate (Figure 7). This response varied by tenure, suggesting that views might be a proxy measure for overall satisfaction with the neighbourhood. Those thinking there was community spirit on the estate ranged from 42 per cent of local authority tenants to 33 per cent of owners and 25 per cent of RSL tenants.

**Figure 7 'Is there a lot of community spirit in the area?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

## Problems on Foxwood

The estate survey revealed that the two main problems on Foxwood concerned the lack of provision for young people, and issues of crime and vandalism. There was an above-average child density in the neighbourhood. In 1996, 39 per cent of the population of the Foxwood Ward (3,731 people) were under 24 years old, compared to 31 per cent across York as a whole. The proportion aged under 14 in the Foxwood Ward was 24 per cent compared to 17 per cent in York overall.

For younger people, term-time provision for under-11s was considered good, but there was a lack of activities for over-11s. The teenage members of the household panel were part of a group of about 50 young people from Foxwood, Chapelfields and Woodthorpe who met together. They complained that there was not much going on for young people on the estate. In their free time, they tended to hang around the shops and Community Centre, attended the youth club, or went on trips organised with the Detached Youth Work Project. The main practical demand from young people was for a place to meet:

*If it's fine we sit out from 4.30–10.00 p.m. If it's raining we have nowhere to go. If the Centre is closed we sit outside and get wet.*

What they want is:

*... somewhere warm and dry to sit and socialise  
... somewhere to be where you don't feel people will criticise you.*

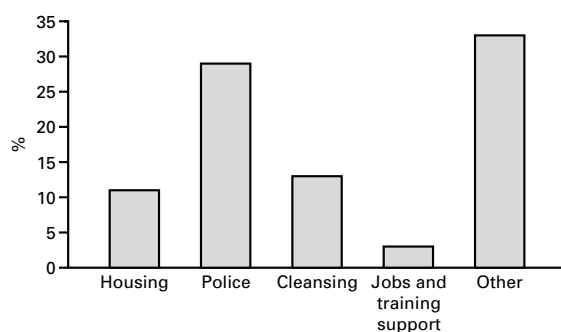
In response to these demands, young people worked with the Detached Youth Work Project and FCAG, and a youth shelter was opened on Foxwood in February 2000.

Respondents to the estate survey identified services on the estate needing further improvement, and policing was mentioned as an area of particular concern (see Figure 8).

Crime and policing were identified from the outset of the Foxwood project as a problem locally, with particular concern about drug-related crime among a few known families. The police response to problems in the area was described as 'sporadic', with some high-profile policing exercises seen as excessive in the circumstances, and not enough low-key 'police on the beat'.

Typical of many urban (and rural) areas elsewhere, policing was the focus of many complaints and anxieties among residents. As Figure 8 indicates, 29 per cent of respondents to the estate survey thought policing could be improved. Stakeholders saw community policing as offering a way forward, but the level of service for the estate was criticised and lack of resources was identified as a crucial constraint. Most members of the household panel thought there had been a decline in the police presence on the estate over the years, and that there was a need for more police on

**Figure 8 'Which services covered by the agreement need improving?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood Estate Survey.

the beat. One resident said:

*The police need to be visible on the estate a couple of times a week, to keep people on their toes.*

### Community dynamics on Foxwood

There was considerable debate from the start about the appropriate boundaries for the Foxwood project. Both stakeholders and residents saw the absence of a 'natural' community boundary as a potential barrier to bringing people together on the estate. The size and diversity of the estate made it possible to sustain a number of different and distinct communities, usually focused on small neighbourhoods in the area, and marked by involvement in different community groups. These groups included: the Community Centre management committee; Neighbourhood Watch, organised at a street level; the Foxwood Community Action Group; a play and toddler group; a drama group; a friendship club; and a youth drop-in centre.

Across the whole estate, 24 per cent of the estate survey respondents had said they were members of clubs or societies (Figures 9 and 10).

Residents found it difficult to identify with the Foxwood project area as a whole. One local authority tenant, for example, commented that for her 'Foxwood' was just a small part of the old council estate bounded by Bellhouse Way–Walker Drive–Bradley Drive. The same tenant said that since moving from Doherty Walk to Bellhouse Way she felt she was living on a street rather than an estate.

*Bellhouse Way feels 100 miles away from Doherty Walk ... it is a different atmosphere.*

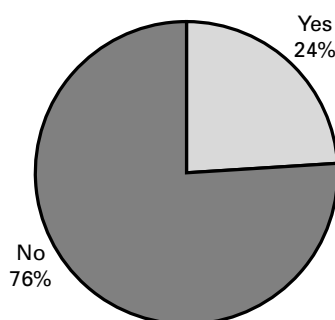
As stated earlier, the mixed tenure nature of the Foxwood estate made it an interesting area for the research team to study, and this also offered contrasts with the previous location for an estate agreement in York, at Bell Farm. Neighbourhood agreements had rarely been developed for mixed tenure estates and it was assumed that the development of agreements

across tenure boundaries would provide some distinct challenges.

The first round of stakeholder and household panel interviews indeed revealed perceptions of ‘deep-seated divisions’ according to tenure on the estate, with different tenure groups being acutely aware of their status, and with some evidence of resentment and antagonism. For example, owners living in streets around areas of council housing felt this proximity was adversely affecting their property prices. Some residents interviewed gave their address as Woodthorpe rather than Foxwood in order to avoid possible negative associations.

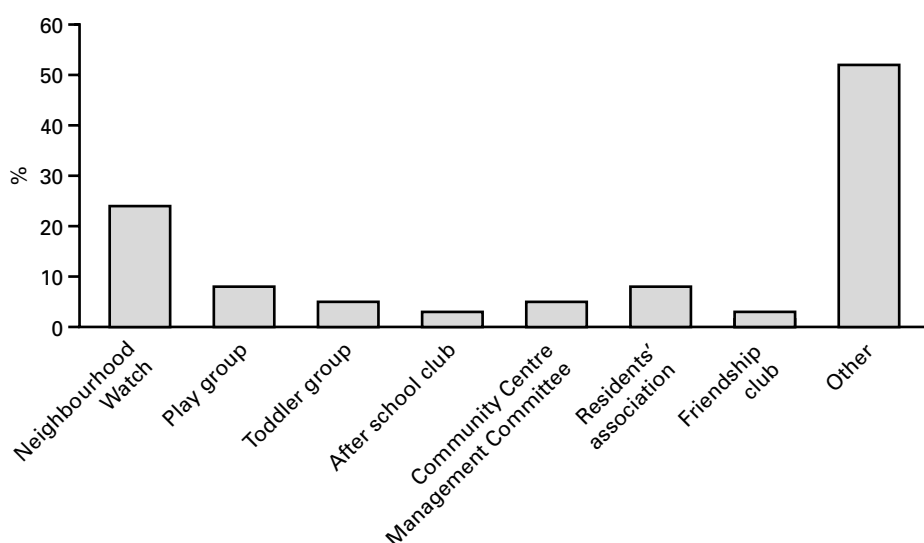
In follow-up interviews, the views of household panel members were split. Eight did not think there were divisions between owners and tenants. Tenants said they got on well with neighbours who had bought under ‘right to buy’, and RSL tenants had similar views

**Figure 9 ‘Are you a member of any local clubs or societies?’ (per cent of 149 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 10 ‘Which local clubs or societies are you a member of?’ (per cent of 35 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

towards neighbours buying a shared ownership home. Four others spoke of differences – including two owners who said ‘owner-occupied properties are more cared for’ and one local authority tenant who also thought owners took more pride in their homes. However, most said there was no difference between owners and tenants at a local street level. It was clear that residents identified more strongly with their street or small part of the estate than with their tenure per se.

However, residents in the Bradford and Northern and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust properties tended to see themselves as distinct groups, and Bradford and Northern tenants objected to being part of ‘Foxwood’ as a whole. An extreme example was a tenant who described taking a route out of the estate that avoided the local authority area, and she strongly objected to her home being referred to as part of Foxwood. The experience of management problems, especially in terms of neighbour nuisance, on the Bradford and Northern part of the estate seems to have affected the attitude of residents, and at one stage there were plans to re-establish the residents’ association in order to press for changes.

In contrast, the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust tenants appeared to be more outward looking. They had a high degree of satisfaction with their housing management, their individual properties and their estate; and seemed less threatened by the idea of being associated with Foxwood as a whole. One tenant commented that there used to be a ‘them and us’ split between Foxwood and Woodlands. ‘Now we all use the Community Centre, it’s a better community’.

Overall, perceived tenure divisions on the estate appeared to have decreased over time, and the broad remit of the neighbourhood agreement, going well beyond landlord–tenant issues, was seen to have contributed to this change.

Across the whole Foxwood area, respondents in the follow-up household panel interviews still had views about some parts being ‘bad’ or ‘good’, and these areas would tend to reflect tenure differences, although residents would not express their judgements in those terms. For example, areas of the predominantly local authority and Bradford and Northern housing stock had a reputation as ‘rough’, with some problems of crime and drugs. But, even people living in areas of the estate labelled as ‘rough’ felt that their street was not as bad as others were. All the owners interviewed in the household panel, for example, saw their areas as the ‘better’ or ‘quiet’ parts of the estate, sometimes as small enclaves within a larger problem area.

The project boundaries, however, seemed to form a rather artificial area, which did not mesh with the experience or expectations of residents. This therefore created difficulties in developing a sense of local commitment based on these boundaries. The rather obscure boundaries, and the large size of the project area overall, made it difficult for residents to take a view on the area covered by the agreement.

### Summary

Chapter 2 showed that many of the similar initiatives to the neighbourhood agreement have been introduced on ‘stressed’ estates elsewhere, often as part of a wider regeneration



programme. This was true of the forerunner to the Foxwood agreement in York, at Bell Farm. Foxwood, however, does not bear many of the hallmarks of these neighbourhoods. Problems with policing and the anti-social activities of young people, including alleged drug use, were the main causes of local concern – but this hardly differentiated Foxwood from hundreds of residential areas elsewhere. Views about the area were generally positive, and even those residents with negative perceptions tended to be satisfied with their own accommodation. Foxwood is no middle class idyll, and it has a fairly poor reputation across the city, but nor is it an area of severe social exclusion.

One of the ironic aspects of run-down neighbourhoods is that adversity often calls forth a more acute sense among residents of their identity as a community – often as a result of the area being singled out for special

regeneration measures, or as the focus of stigma and discrimination. Foxwood did not have this sense of itself as a self-contained community, set apart, detached from the surrounding district. Indeed, residents had difficulty in demarcating the boundaries of the Foxwood area, and the immediate environment of a few neighbouring streets was a more important reference point for their 'community'. The lack of a clear local identity was also reinforced by the physical layout of the estate, with discrete areas for different housing tenures.

The Foxwood neighbourhood agreement was therefore introduced in an area without a strong sense of identity, but with positive points in terms of its popularity among residents and the levels of local service provision. The following chapter outlines the process of developing the agreement in this neighbourhood context.

## 4 Developing the neighbourhood agreement

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### Introduction

The Foxwood project began life as a community safety and crime initiative. The neighbourhood agreement initially developed as a response from service providers to the problems they faced on the estate. The idea took root of formalising contact between residents and service providers similar to the approach initiated on the Bell Farm estate. While the Bell Farm project had always been housing-led, developing out of an Estate Action scheme, the Foxwood initiative had more corporate origins. The Citizens' Support Group in the City Council Chief Executive's Department took on leadership of the project, seeing the agreement as a means of engaging with residents, and improving service delivery and the quality of life on Foxwood. This was an appropriate response at the time because the issues of concern raised by residents crossed service boundaries and, in the longer term, leadership by a corporate department helped to add strength and independence to the project.

The involvement and empowerment of residents was seen as crucial to the project on Foxwood, as it had been on Bell Farm. The main drive for community involvement in the project involved the appointment of a Community Development Worker in 1996 and the appointment of the David Liggins Company, which had also worked on the Bell Farm project. The role of the David Liggins Company was to work with residents and service providers as a 'broker' to negotiate the neighbourhood agreement.

The Community Development Worker met with residents both in established groups and

more widely on the estate at the start of the project. Early work with existing groups identified residents' concerns and culminated in the benchmark survey of *Expressed Needs in the Foxwood Area*, issued in April 1997, and followed by a questionnaire on neighbourhood agreements. A series of focus group meetings was held and the first agreements were negotiated to a draft stage by the David Liggins Company, on behalf of residents. Drafts were then taken to fortnightly community work skills training sessions, used as a vehicle to look in depth at the agreements, enabling residents to have a more meaningful input into their development. Once residents had developed the skills, through experience of the early agreements and training, they subsequently took a role in direct negotiations with service providers.

In contrast to many other estate agreements, which have often stemmed from the input of a strong existing local residents' group, a new group was formed specifically to work with the Foxwood project and develop the neighbourhood agreement – the Foxwood Community Action Group (FCAG).

In developing the second phase of agreements, a member of FCAG took the lead in negotiation, supported by the Community Development Worker or the David Liggins Company. FCAG was formally constituted and received community work skills training and ongoing support from the David Liggins Company, as well as from the local authority. It was the key group representing residents' interests throughout the process of developing and then adapting the agreement.

The production of individual service agreements revolved around a network of meetings and discussions. These involved representatives of the residents and service providers, with the David Liggins Company operating in a facilitative role. The meetings would work through ideas and formulate proposals, which could then be agreed or amended by the project Steering Group or, latterly, the Foxwood Partnership. This comprised a constant process of new ideas, reflection and review.

The Foxwood neighbourhood agreement was publicly launched in November 1998. The first set of agreements covered: community policing, street and environmental cleaning and refuse collection, jobs, training and enterprise support, council and housing association homes. In December 1999, the second set of agreements was introduced, covering services to young people and welfare benefits.

In April 1999, the Foxwood project Steering Group, chaired by a senior local authority officer, had its final meeting. The Foxwood Partnership, involving service providers, elected members and chaired by a resident, formally adopted the neighbourhood agreement and took responsibility for overseeing future monitoring and development.

### Services on Foxwood

The key areas of concern raised by residents in the *Expressed Needs in the Foxwood Area 1997* report had been youth, crime and policing, and, to a lesser extent, housing. These same issues were raised again during the household panel and stakeholder interviews. Nevertheless, most respondents to the 1999 estate survey had been

generally satisfied with the services covered by the neighbourhood agreement:

- 98 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with the refuse collection service
- 92 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with street cleaning
- 73 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with the service offered by the agency Future Prospects covering jobs, training and enterprise support
- 71 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with the housing service
- 55 per cent were very satisfied or satisfied with policing.

### Street and environmental cleaning

Of all the services covered by the neighbourhood agreement, levels of resident satisfaction were highest with street and environmental cleaning, and refuse collection. Similarly, nine members of the household panel thought the standard of Cleansing Services on the estate was good and five of these thought the service could not be improved.

An estate walkabout had been initiated as part of the Foxwood project and was thought to have had a considerable impact. One Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust tenant involved in the walkabout, for example, said standards had 'improved 100 per cent as a result of the walkabout' and that the Cleansing Department was 'very responsive'. The walkabout involved monthly inspections of the local authority and RSL estates by service providers and residents. The team included a Cleansing technician from the Client Services Department, the foreman

responsible for Cleansing from the Direct Labour Organisation, a representative from Leisure Services, the local authority Estate Worker and a housing management representative from the local authority. Residents from the local authority, Bradford and Northern Housing Association and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust properties also took part.

The Client Services Manager confirmed that changes had been made to the Cleansing contract in October 1997, partly in response to the concerns of Foxwood residents. New schedules and improved service standards had been applied on a city-wide basis. The Client Services Manager had also suggested that the area for the walkabout could be extended to include private areas of the Foxwood estate in future if there was an interest among residents.

### **Jobs, training and enterprise support**

The 1996 census estimates for the Foxwood ward showed that 6.6 per cent of the economically active population was unemployed, compared to 6 per cent for York as a whole. The proportion of Foxwood residents in standard occupations was also similar to that for York as a whole. The biggest proportion of unemployed people on Foxwood stated that their former industry had been construction (25 per cent in Foxwood compared to 13 per cent of unemployed people in York as a whole). In contrast, on Bell Farm, the 1991 census had revealed unemployment to be twice the city average and unemployment was not surprisingly the overriding concern for residents on the estate. In the Bell Farm estate survey, 62 per cent of respondents were found to be in unskilled, semi-skilled and manual

occupations. These figures contrast with the more economically diverse nature of the Foxwood area.

However, lack of local job opportunities was raised as an important issue in the household panel interviews on Foxwood. Future Prospects, a non-profit-making organisation operating in the York area, employed outreach workers on Foxwood throughout the project period. Services provided by Future Prospects included a 'drop-in' at the Foxwood Community Centre one day a week, where advice was given on training and employment, home visits and 'networking' for clients to establish their requirements and to help them find solutions to their employment and training needs. In addition to facilitating access to existing training opportunities throughout the city, Future Prospects also ran its own courses locally to help meet clients' needs.

Seven members of the second household panel had contact with Future Prospects, and had undertaken training on first aid, IT and pupil support. Other people had received advice either for themselves or their family. One man had been out of work for 15 years. Future Prospects helped with his training and then contacted him once he had started his new job, to make sure there were no problems.

On the whole, residents were very satisfied with the service provided, but saw some room for improvement. Ideas for improving training and job opportunities included more contact with the job centre, advice sessions for young people and affordable child care. Again, it is important to note that the level of the employment advice service provided on Foxwood was no different to that for any other area in York. However, the Future Prospects

worker reported regularly to the Foxwood Community Action Group and attended monitoring meetings.

### Housing

Housing conditions were less of an issue on Foxwood than they had been on Bell Farm. The Bell Farm project had been led by the Housing Department and driven by an Estate Action programme, and physical improvement of the housing stock and environment was very much at the centre of the project. On Foxwood, new investment in the social housing stock was not envisaged, and any environmental improvements were initiated by residents and covered by specific grants.

The problems of neighbour nuisance, other breaches of the tenancy agreement and voids attracting vandalism were raised in the household panel and stakeholder interviews. These concerns needed to be tackled through changing policy and practice, and developing joint working, rather than additional capital investment in the neighbourhood.

In the household panel interviews, tenants were aware of apparent differences in service standards between landlords and thought these should be brought up to an equally high level. Bradford and Northern Housing Association tenants, for example, had a less positive view of their landlord, and rents were considered high (up to £60 per week) and services poor. Tenants complained that the repair service was slow and that its quality was low; for example, they had to phone Manchester for emergency out-of-hours repairs. One tenant said it was difficult to get anything done because the landlord was always trying to save money. The biggest complaint concerned cases of neighbour

nuisance and harassment. One tenant with a vulnerable child complained that her family had been rehoused next door to a household that had previous complaints of harassment against it.

Bradford and Northern Housing Association tenants were, however, positive about the contribution of a recently appointed Estate Worker. They felt her presence on the estate had made an impact on the incidence of anti-social behaviour and that residents were now more likely to report problems than before. Tenants also valued the opportunity to meet with their landlord on the estate at quarterly meetings. It was claimed that this new approach stemmed from the feedback given at the monitoring meetings of the agreement.

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust tenants had a positive view of their landlord, had no complaints about the service and felt problems on their estate were addressed as they arose.

Local authority tenants were very positive about the housing service provided by their landlord. One tenant even described it as 'brilliant'. Positive aspects of the service included: getting appointments for repairs and a satisfaction survey on completion, helpful staff, positive attitudes to tenant participation and an accessible service. Similar attitudes towards the council's housing service had been noted four years earlier on the Bell Farm estate (Cole and Smith, 1996, p. 25).

Housing management surgeries were provided for all social housing tenants, although they were used more by RSL than council tenants, possibly because of the existence of a Housing Department sub-office in nearby Acomb. Residents noted some positive changes in the housing service over the life of

the Foxwood project. The neighbourhood agreement had undoubtedly contributed to more effective joint working between landlords in the area. A joint housing management group had been set up and landlords had worked together on housing issues of mutual concern. For example, tenants evicted from a local authority tenancy would now no longer be re-housed by a housing association in the area.

The work of the Tenancy Enforcement Team for the local authority was seen as particularly effective – as an inter-agency initiative involving housing officers, police officers and legal services officers, and as a means of tackling anti-social behaviour on the local authority part of the estate. Residents also made a significant contribution, with members of FCAG providing testimonies and supporting other residents through the process, enabling successful prosecutions to be made. This took considerable courage for those involved in the action.

The local authority also employed an estate handyperson, using joint funding initially for a 12-month period. FCAG had a role in reviewing the performance of the post-holder.

### **Welfare Benefits Advice Service**

The Welfare Benefits neighbourhood agreement was developed with City of York Council (Benefits Advice Team), Future Prospects and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (Welfare Benefits Advisors). Those involved in developing the agreement were new partners and did not appear to be as integrated into the process as those who had been involved from the beginning. There was a feeling that they were coming into the process with a cautious ‘wait and see’ attitude about their longer-term involvement. New initiatives as a result of the

agreement included a joint welfare rights surgery at the Foxwood Community Centre and a benefits information day. Service providers hoped the agreement would mean:

*More people will get more benefits they are entitled to sooner rather than later ... some people will be better off.*

However, there was some concern that the agreement had been developed without full consultation with benefits advisors. Officers also felt that involvement with the agreement might take control from them in terms of defining service priorities. This was a problem because of the resource implications and potential impact on other areas receiving the service.

For all the above services, an overall picture emerges of high levels of customer satisfaction before the agreement was even introduced, and of standards being maintained without any additional investment or special priority being given to Foxwood. Residents had an opportunity to raise concerns at the monitoring meeting and there was also evidence of greater collaboration between service providers, such as the different social landlords on the estate. Some of those involved felt there was a potential risk that Foxwood might receive preferential treatment as a result of the agreement, but this problem was not manifest at the time of the research.

However, there were also more intractable issues that came under the aegis of the agreement – notably services for young people, and crime and vandalism. These are considered below.

### Areas of outstanding concern

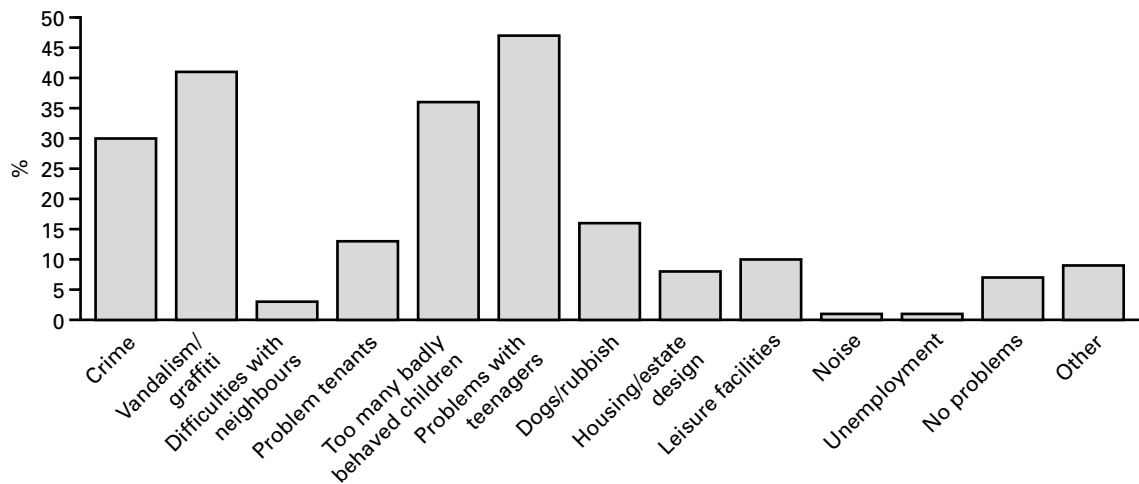
The estate survey identified as the main problems on Foxwood: 'teenagers' (47 per cent), vandalism and graffiti (41 per cent), badly behaved children (36 per cent) and crime (30 per cent) (Figure 11).

The *single* most important problem

identified in the estate survey was 'problems with teenagers' (Figure 12).

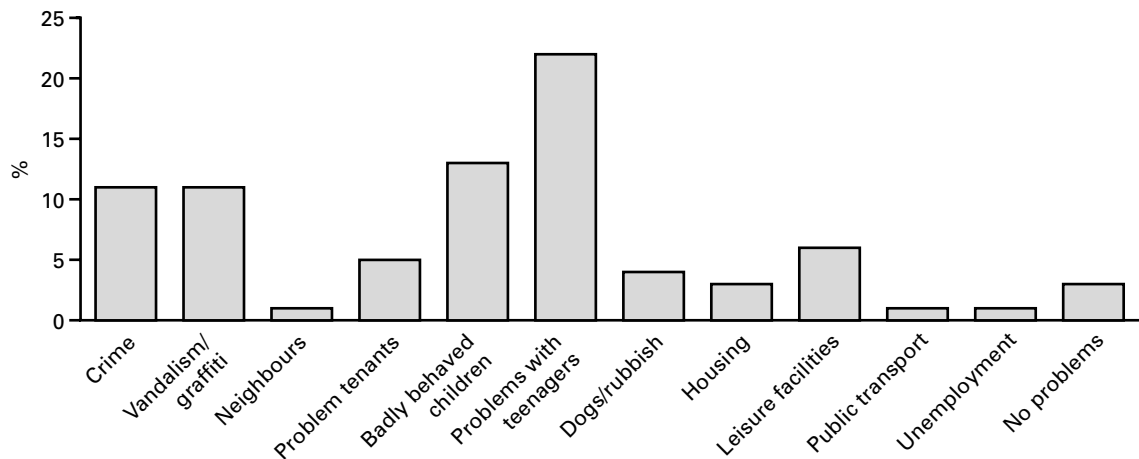
Both stakeholders and the household panel members were concerned about the lack of youth provision on the estate, although there was an acknowledged 'willingness to tackle the issues', both by the Leisure Services Department

**Figure 11 'What are the main problems on the estate?' (per cent of 141 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 12 'What is the most important problem on Foxwood?' (per cent of 141 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

and by young people themselves. Good progress had been made in developing the awareness of young people on the estate. Young people were involved in a feasibility study for the drop-in centre, there had been well-attended focus group discussions on the estate for young people and up to 40 young people had attended a public meeting about life on the estate.

Members of the Citizens' Support Group felt it was critical to make progress on youth provision and the work of the Detached Youth Work Project was seen as vital to the development of work with young people in the future. Service providers involved with services to young people had been working with the Foxwood Partnership since its inception and had become closely associated with its activities.

Stakeholders stressed the importance of the link between the Detached Youth Work Project and the Foxwood project. The Detached Youth Work team worked closely with young people on the streets and at the 'drop-in' at the Community Centre. Trips and events were organised, and young people were involved in planning and developing projects in the area, such as a youth shelter. The work of the Detached Youth Work Project over the years was seen as a significant factor contributing to the perceptions of falling crime and vandalism on the estate.

In December 1999, the neighbourhood agreement covering service for young people was launched. The development of the 'youth agreement' aimed to engage young people at a more formal level in the development and monitoring of services. Young people were involved through focus groups, project work and surveys, although some stakeholders remained concerned that the agreement had

been developed without comprehensive consultation, and that it might be difficult to involve young people fully in monitoring. In principle, though, monitoring of the youth agreement was seen as a way to break down the barriers to the wider involvement of young people on Foxwood.

A progression was envisaged, from occasional involvement in practical projects, to an interest in the development and monitoring of the youth agreement, and then on to more widespread participation in the full neighbourhood agreement. It is too early to tell whether this aim will be achieved. There is currently one person aged under 24 involved with FCAG and three teenagers regularly attend the working group to monitor the youth agreement. In addition, a group of six young people attend the working group on a less regular basis to raise concerns. These are not large numbers. However, given the difficulties inherent in involving young people in a formal process such as this, it is encouraging that a few people were beginning to recognise the role of the working group as a forum to discuss issues.

Crime-related issues were the second major source of local concern. In the 1999 estate survey, 34 per cent of respondents thought there had been no change in the level of crime on Foxwood in the previous 12 months, 22 per cent thought crime had increased and 16 per cent thought crime had fallen. However, 58 per cent of respondents thought there was no more crime on Foxwood than in other areas of York (Figure 13).

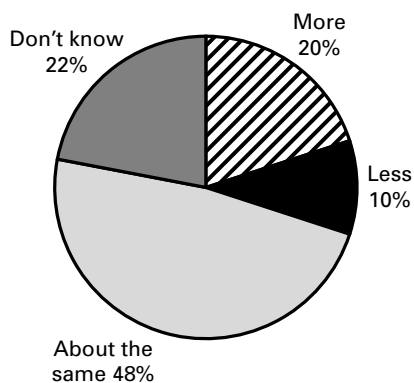
The estate survey found that 45 per cent of respondents thought there had been no change in the level of vandalism on the estate in the last 12 months, 33 per cent thought it had increased



and 13 per cent thought it had fallen. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents in the estate survey thought there was no more vandalism on Foxwood than in other parts of York (Figure 14).

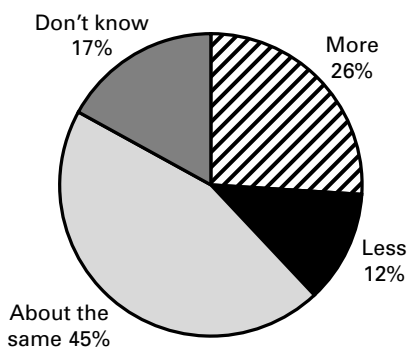
The community police officer for Foxwood regularly attended monitoring meetings for the agreement, making his own contribution to joint working locally. However, he did not feel that

**Figure 13 'Is the level of crime on Foxwood any different to the level of crime in the rest of York?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 14 'Is the level of vandalism on Foxwood different to the level of vandalism in the rest of York?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

the level of policing, or his own role, had changed significantly as a result of the agreement.

*I know the people that well, apart from providing the statistics it does not make that much difference to me.*

For whatever reason, and it would be hazardous to make any link with the agreement, figures on reported crime in the Foxwood area showed a fall in the level of crimes of violence (including domestic violence), nuisance and damage during the year up to March 2000.

The two phases of the household panel interviews showed little change in the perception of crime-related problems on Foxwood; the leading issues were drugs and the activities of young people. Some residents felt that drug-related crime was the root of the bad reputation on Foxwood. Most thought the problem was quite localised and, when they spoke about the areas affected, singled out individual streets at the centre of the local authority part of the estate.

The problem of young people hanging around the streets was sometimes related to drink and drugs, and some residents just saw the presence of large groups of young people as threatening in itself. For their part, young people were critical of the police and of the way adults on the estate responded to them; they wanted to be treated with more respect and for adults to engage in a dialogue about the problems on Foxwood. The agreement was helping to provide a forum to address this problem.

Vandalism on Foxwood was blamed on young people – from teenagers to children of 18 months on one part of the estate! There was a

mixture of explanations. Some criticised the police, who were seen to respond too slowly, or were not able to take action against vandals. Others said parents should take more responsibility for their children, and on the Bradford and Northern 'estate' one resident said people were afraid to confront children because of the abuse they received back. The young people interviewed wanted a place to 'hang about' where they could meet friends. This was not necessarily an organised youth club, but more an informal 'shelter'.

*... somewhere warm and dry to sit and socialise  
... somewhere to be where you don't feel people  
will criticise you.*

Following an extensive period of discussion and negotiation, a youth shelter was eventually provided on Foxwood early in 2000.

### Resident participation

Community involvement had been a central part of both the Foxwood and Bell Farm estate agreements. On Bell Farm, resident participation had been developed around the physical improvement of the stock, with the hope that the improvements would be sustained by ongoing community involvement in the estate agreement. On Foxwood, a similar approach was not an option and, instead, the focus of involvement became the agreement itself.

One concern for residents and stakeholders in Foxwood from the start was the fairly small number of community activists involved in the project, which prompted the feeling that, while the majority might support the work of the

project, few people wanted to take on any direct responsibility.

There were two potential barriers to extending resident involvement on Foxwood. The first was the absence of any programme of physical improvements to properties, which often acts as a magnet for collective action. The second was the mix of tenures on the estate, making it difficult to draw people together from different parts of the area, and the lack of distinct boundaries to Foxwood. There was, however, already a network for resident involvement through the Neighbourhood Watch schemes and three residents' associations, representing different parts of the estate. However, the estate survey had indicated that levels of active involvement were quite limited, which is not untypical, with less than 2 per cent of respondents saying they were members of a residents' association.

One stakeholder expressed the view of several others when she said:

*It seems to be the same people, they have got a big community spirit, they want to involve people, they want to drive things, but it seems to be the same people.*

The development of the neighbourhood agreement helped bring different elements of the community together. Different groups – FCAG, residents' associations, Neighbourhood Watch groups and the Community Centre Management Committee – had similar concerns, and the prospects of working together were helped by the fact that a key group of activists was represented on several different groups.

### The role of Foxwood Community Action Group

FCAG was established by the Community Development Worker to 'sustain and maintain the Foxwood Community Agreement' (Constitution Draft, 8 October 1998). The Group was open to all residents in the Foxwood project area. When research interviews were undertaken in 1999, FCAG had about 25 members, with a core of 12 regularly involved, of whom six were on the Community Works Skills Course. City Council, Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and Bradford and Northern tenants were represented on FCAG. In follow-up research early in 2000, about 20 residents were intermittently involved with FCAG, with a core group of about six. There had been some decline in involvement, although three new members had become involved since September 1999 following a recruitment campaign by the group.

Where estate agreements have been developed elsewhere, the existence of an established residents' group has usually been a key requirement for success. The Foxwood experience has vindicated a different approach. Stakeholders felt that creating a new body to develop the agreement enabled new people to get involved with the community, and that working outside established organisations helped to break down barriers between different interests on the estate.

Most stakeholders felt FCAG was a fairly broadly based group, and skills were shared between key people. In contrast, on Bell Farm, the *existing* residents' association, centred on two or three active individuals, had worked with service providers to develop the

agreement. While this had been supported by other Bell Farm residents, by the end of the project, concerns were expressed about the small number involved, problems within the group and its capacity to sustain the agreement in the longer term (Cole and Smith, 1996).

The Community Work Skills course had been important in facilitating the development of FCAG. The training was open to any resident in the Foxwood project area and was run once a fortnight at the Community Centre. The trainer said the aim of the course was to generate confidence and ownership of the Foxwood project. One stakeholder said the course had been established to create a 'level playing field' for those involved in the project, to enable residents to work effectively with service providers, to help them understand jargon and the way the local authority worked, and to learn how to handle projects. This stakeholder felt the outcome of the training had been 'increased confidence and self-esteem' for the individuals involved, in addition to a qualification to take into the job market.

Nine people started the course in January 1998 and a further seven joined shortly after. Of the 16 people who started the course, eight dropped out – two of the remaining eight were local authority officers, and the other six residents attempted levels 1, 2 and 3. Four residents gained level 2 passes. One resident subsequently gained employment as a Community Development Worker.

One stakeholder described the training as having made a 'significant' impact on the group:

*Without it, I don't think the project would have been successful, in that the initial group that*

*completed the course have gained confidence and skills ... it has opened their eyes to training and now they embrace that.*

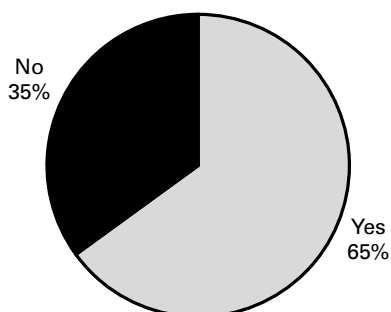
This view was echoed by a resident:

*For those who have completed it, it is the biggest factor in their development ... for those who are just starting the course it is the best thing they will ever do.*

Nine members of the second household panel, and 65 per cent of people interviewed in the estate survey, had heard of FCAG (see Figure 15). This included a higher proportion of local authority tenants than RSL tenants or owners, reflecting the origins of the group. Sixty-five per cent is a fairly high 'recognition rate', given the fact that FCAG was a new group developed to work on the Foxwood project. (Eighty-eight per cent of respondents in the Bell Farm estate survey had said that they knew about the residents' association, but the difference should be seen in the context of a well-established local group on Bell Farm, which had been actively involved throughout a long period of regeneration activity.)

There was general support for the work of

**Figure 15 'Have you heard of the Community Action Group?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



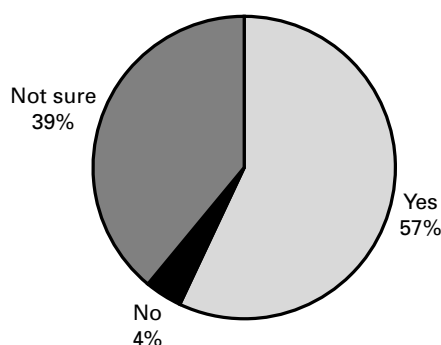
Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

FCAG on Foxwood. Eight of those interviewed in the Foxwood household panel, and 57 per cent of estate survey respondents who had heard of FCAG, supported their work (see Figure 16). Interestingly, owners were more positive than tenants about the work of the group. One owner-occupier was supportive of 'anyone who is trying to improve things' and another said 'things are changing, the group seems to be doing a good job'.

Stakeholders suggested that, despite the risk of overwork among group members, a strong sense of commitment and confidence had increased substantially over the previous three years. One Foxwood resident described the strength of the group as 'we all care about the same things'. She went on to say that, although the group was diverse and she did not get on with everyone, 'their opinions matter ... we can work together ... the neighbourhood agreement is a common ground'.

Another member of the group simply said 'We all muck in, no one is better than anyone else' and another noted that they 'worked as a team', interested and committed to improving the estate. Members felt they had benefited

**Figure 16 'Do you think the work of the Community Action Group is useful?' (per cent of 98 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

personally from their involvement in FCAG, with one saying she felt:

*... respected more ... people value my opinion more, that gives me a confidence boost.*

Residents were proud about what they had achieved both personally and for the estate through the development of the agreement. They had gained confidence to speak about the idea to other groups and to bid for additional resources for Foxwood.

Members of FCAG had a strong sense of ownership of the project; as one put it:

*It's our agreement ... the issues it covers affect our lives ... the agreement means we have it within our power to deal with problems ... decisions are our decisions now.*

These personal experiences were backed up by observations from the project team, and other stakeholders. This echoed the views of those Bell Farm residents who had also spoken about increased 'self esteem and the practical and personal benefits of working together during a period of change' (Cole and Smith 1996, p. 47).

The relationships between members of FCAG and service providers had developed over the project period, and one resident said how she felt service providers 'treat you as peers'. She went on to describe how FCAG worked with service providers:

*... not demanding things ... it is more that requests for co-operation are well received.*

Research observation at meetings and interviews with service providers tended to confirm these perceptions.

By early 2000, members of FCAG had settled

into their role monitoring the agreement, and working relationships with service providers were more established. One service provider stressed the ability of the group to ask 'pertinent questions', while another commented:

*They are not backwards in coming forwards when dealing with senior officers, if they are unhappy with something they say it, and they know how to say it in a way that is more likely to get a result.*

Another service representative reinforced this:

*Good rapport ... no 'after your blood' situations ... they don't have a go at us, they recognise they can get enough done by adopting a sensible attitude.*

The effort of committed volunteers working on FCAG was valued and confirmed residents' views of a strong group working well as a team. Service providers commented positively on the ability of FCAG to manage the agreement:

*They are certainly getting there, with the resources that have been invested in them, their worker and capacity building work.*

Another stakeholder described the group as: 'shining with confidence about what they have done'. At a broader level, one stakeholder described how the project had built up the:

*... capacity [of local people] to be involved in local government and to take control of their own lives. If people take a pride in their community and have power in terms of influencing the future that should have a knock-on effect in terms of the sustainability of the community.*

There was some disagreement about how

representative FCAG should, or could, be. FCAG officers were elected at the AGM, which is open to the public and advertised through the Community Centre, newsletter and local press. Attendance by members of the public was very low at the AGM in 2000, and the extent to which the group is representative of the wider community may be debatable, but one stakeholder commented that it was more important to consider:

*... are they good at the job, are they open and reactive to residents' concerns, can they report back to the estate, can they keep in touch?*

Stakeholders agreed that representation on FCAG should be developed, by seeking out new people, especially young people and owner-occupiers, with the skills and potential to work for the community. Overall, there was a positive feeling about the future of FCAG and its role in monitoring the agreement. Now that the Foxwood partnership was chaired by a resident, it was seen by stakeholders as the most effective way to tackle issues which cut across traditional service structures and departmental boundaries.

### Views about the neighbourhood agreement

The Foxwood neighbourhood agreement developed out of the model of the estate agreement initiated on Bell Farm, although it had been adapted to meet local requirements. The aims of the agreements, for example, were set out in different terms. On Bell Farm, the agreement had been intended to help residents to sustain the regeneration programme for the estate. On Foxwood, residents and service providers saw the agreement itself as the vehicle

to help improve services and the quality of life in the area.

A member of FCAG described it as:

*Getting the partners working together and working with residents. In the past if the Council said something, that was it, that was the law, now residents have a say.*

A stakeholder commented:

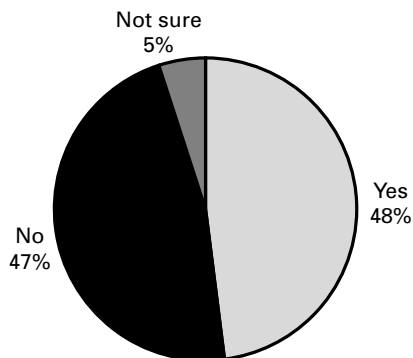
*Residents now have a recognised process whereby they speak to service managers regularly and have a way of monitoring service delivery; as a result of that the services covered by the agreement have been improved.*

In spite of intensive community development support during the project and the considerable efforts by FCAG to promote their work, respondents in both the household panel and estate survey suggested that knowledge of the agreement was not widespread. Ten members of the household panel, for example, said they had a copy of the agreement, but six of them said they had no idea what it was about. Estate survey respondents were evenly divided between those who knew about the agreement and those who did not (see Figure 17), with a slightly higher proportion of owners than tenants knowing about it. Given that the estate survey was undertaken in April 1999 and the neighbourhood agreement had only been launched in November 1998, a figure of 50 per cent of respondents knowing about the agreement could be seen as quite high. There was also an even split between those who said they had a copy of the agreement and those who did not (see Figure 18), although copies had been distributed to all homes in the project area. Local authority tenants were less likely to

say they had a copy of the agreement than owners or RSL tenants. Despite this lack of knowledge, 61 per cent of respondents in the estate survey nevertheless thought the agreement would lead to an improvement in service standards (see Figure 19).

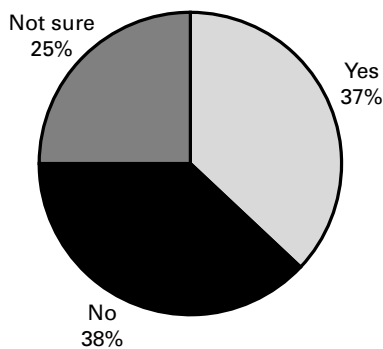
Both the stakeholders and 11 members of the household panel thought the agreement covered the areas of most concern to residents. Resident activists accepted that 'this is just the beginning' and that real improvements would only be achieved through monitoring the agreement.

**Figure 17 'Do you know about the neighbourhood agreement on Foxwood?' (per cent of 151 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 18 'Have you had a copy of the neighbourhood agreement?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



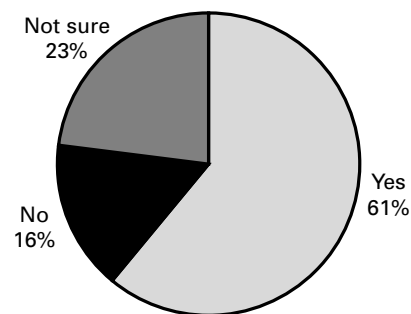
Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

One service provider expressed a similar view:

*In theory the problems have been addressed; it is too soon to say whether this is true in practice.*

Residents were more confident that the agreement 'has the potential to solve problems', while admitting that there was still a long way to go before the procedures for monitoring and refining the agreement could be described as durable. The longer-term prospects for the agreement are assessed in the following two chapters.

**Figure 19 'Will an agreement help raise service standards on the estate?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

## 5 The impact of the agreement

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### Effects on the image of Foxwood

Stakeholders were asked their views about changes in the reputation of Foxwood in the community and in York as a whole and the impact, if any, of the neighbourhood agreement on this image. Interviews showed a split between those stakeholders who thought the reputation of the estate had improved in recent years and those who did not. Some felt factors other than the neighbourhood agreement had improved the reputation, such as community policing and the introduction of a resident Estate Caretaker for the Bradford and Northern Housing Association properties. Others felt it was simply too soon to attribute any improvement to the agreement.

On balance, stakeholders thought that small-scale physical improvements to the estate, combined with a range of community events, had made an impact locally. The perceptions of people living outside the estate were considered more difficult to change than those of local residents. Some stakeholders said other areas looked 'jealously' at the attention given to Foxwood. Others said the estate still had a stigma for those living elsewhere in York.

Those stakeholders who felt the reputation of Foxwood had improved cited more positive press coverage, and one commented that Foxwood 'was no longer a difficult-to-let estate ... it is now an area of choice'. Several said that crime had reduced in recent years and that Foxwood had become a safer place to live. Although housing officers did not report any marked growth in demand for the estate, they felt that effective action to tackle anti-social behaviour was having an impact in stabilising the community.

The majority of stakeholders re-interviewed in 2000 felt the reputation of the estate had improved in the intervening period, both within the community and in York as a whole. Members of FCAG, for example, were described as 'ambassadors' for Foxwood, through their involvement in city-wide initiatives and through talking to other groups about the Foxwood project.

Specific initiatives started during the development of the agreement, such as the Cleansing walkabout, were thought to have had an impact on service standards. Several said the estate was now cleaner and the high profile nature of a walkabout had been an effective way of increasing community awareness of the agreement.

### Strengths and weaknesses

Both residents and stakeholders felt there were more advantages than disadvantages to the neighbourhood agreement. Some lessons from the Bell Farm project had been learned, so there were fewer concerns among service providers, for example, about providing information for the monitoring process at Foxwood. Other potential difficulties, however, remained, such as not being able to place sanctions on any service providers who fell short of agreed levels of service, because the agreement was not a formal contract. Although residents were themselves uncertain about their ability to enforce the agreement, service providers tended to view their accountability to residents at public meetings as an important sanction in itself. This became more significant as good personal relationships developed between residents and service providers, and as service



partnerships began to grow. The introduction of more formal sanctions might, in fact, have undermined these relationships, which in the longer term could be crucial in maintaining commitment to the project.

The drawbacks of the Foxwood agreement did not concern service standards or service provision, but the amount of work involved for residents in developing the individual agreements, and the workload for both service providers and residents in monitoring and sustaining their involvement. Although one service provider said: 'if we don't meet the agreement we are up against the wall', some seemed to take their commitments under the agreement more seriously than others.

Some service providers felt less involved in the project when interviewed in 2000 than they had been 12 months earlier, and consequently felt that they were getting less from it in terms of opportunities for joint working and closer contact with the community. A few were also concerned that the agreement would be seen as 'just another piece of paper, unless it offers something new' in terms of service provision, but that extending service levels put pressure on resources and could mean cutbacks in services in other areas. As one said:

*Sustaining our performance in the Foxwood area has inevitably had an impact on staff resources in other areas, potentially to the detriment of customers in other parts of Acomb.*

It was suggested in several cases that total budgets were very limited, and sustaining a high level of commitment to Foxwood might deflect staff and financial resources from other areas with equally pressing needs but perhaps without the capacity to make the same demands

on the service.

For residents involved in FCAG, the development of individual agreements had made constant demands on their time and energy. A more streamlined approach might have simplified and speeded up the process, but would inevitably have lost something in terms of ownership of the problems and solutions by residents. This sense of ownership was also needed to maximise adaptability to local circumstances. Local flexibility had been a hallmark of the approach to neighbourhood agreements in York, distinguishing it from other models, where standard specifications had been used for each estate.

A pitfall for neighbourhood agreements in other local authorities, also raised by several stakeholders on Foxwood, has been the problem of raising expectations to an unrealistic level. One resident thought that those not involved in the day-to-day monitoring and negotiation of the neighbourhood agreement did not appreciate the time it took. For example, young people on the estate had been critical of the slow progress on development of a youth drop-in centre. High expectations needed to be managed as part of the process of negotiating and monitoring the agreements. Residents said they now had a better appreciation of constraints on service provision and felt that over the longer term more residents would gain better understanding and have more 'realistic' expectations.

The uneven impact of the agreement around the estate was noted, with one stakeholder describing how it:

*... tends to be focused on the social housing side and has not engaged the more affluent residents.*

Several other stakeholders had noted the risk of an 'affluent-poor' division on the estate, which the agreement might inadvertently perpetuate, unless it could widen its appeal to home-owners. This view was not, however, borne out by the results of the household panel and estate survey, which showed stronger support for the work of FCAG and the neighbourhood agreement among owners than tenants.

Set alongside these concerns, both residents and stakeholders felt that overall the neighbourhood agreement would bring significant benefits to the Foxwood area. One stakeholder, for example, specified its role as:

*Bringing together key players ... where residents can raise their concerns ... there is some accountability, and because it is set in a document it is more concrete and taken more seriously.*

This theme is considered in more detail below.

### The role of partners to the agreement

One of the residents thought that 'it keeps both sides on their toes, everyone knows what to expect'. Residents felt they benefited from more influence and control over services, leading to services more relevant to their needs and to higher standards. For example, the agreement with the police had defined response times, immediately improving the relationship with residents. There was also increased access to service providers, such as the direct contact with the contractor in the Cleansing walkabout. Overall, residents felt they now knew more about the services available to the community.

Work with Future Prospects, for example, had given residents access to a whole network of employment and training opportunities that they were not previously aware of.

Providers also expected increased and more appropriate use of their services, as residents become more aware of the range of services available to them. The police, for example, might judge this in terms of the number of residents who did not normally come forward to report crime now gaining the confidence to do so. For Future Prospects, being a part of the agreement had been critical in establishing its role on the estate.

Despite the concerns about maintaining equity between different neighbourhoods in York, other stakeholders took a more positive approach. Service providers felt they might meet higher service standards, achieved through joint working between service providers seeking best practice, while joint funding could help hold projects together when budget cuts were threatened. Housing officers from all sectors, for example, had been working together on common issues, such as caretaking, drugs and nuisance policy, and allocations. As a spin-off, it was anticipated that the agreement would help break down tenure barriers on the estate. For example, closer working between social landlords could strengthen contact between local authority and housing association tenants, helping to develop a more cohesive community. Welfare benefits advisors working on the estate were planning to hold a weekly joint advice surgery. The three partners to the agreement would share responsibility for the surgery, and this approach would increase access at an estate level and enhance the standard of service.

### Inter-agency working

Stakeholders saw inter-agency working as a major achievement of the Foxwood project. Individual service providers described how relationships had developed and how co-operation was taking place on issues cutting across service areas. One stakeholder described how relationships had changed:

*We all know each other, there is none of 'that's mine', it's 'how can we overlap?', 'where can we help?'.*

Corporate leadership of the Foxwood project by officers working outside service departments had helped to create credibility among residents and agencies outside the local authority. This has enabled strong inter-agency working, helping to bring together different local authority departments and external bodies over issues of common concern to residents.

The wider application of inter-agency working remains a challenge. One stakeholder, for example, observed that the success of inter-agency working on Foxwood was a credit to the individuals involved rather than the organisational structures that supported them. New partners to the agreement commented on the benefits of meeting other service providers operating in the area. One service provider new to the Foxwood area, for example, commented:

*It has been brilliant for me being new to post, it has got me straight in, it has given me a quick in-depth to what everyone does.*

Once the individual agreements had been established, the consequent reduction in inter-agency contacts over time became a potential source of weakness. Some service providers

found the monthly monitoring meetings were now the only opportunity they had to make formal and informal links with other agencies working on the estate. The loss of this contact could be detrimental to the further development of joint service provision.

### Raising service standards

The main aim of the neighbourhood agreement was to raise service standards. Stakeholders felt that the agreement had opened services up to the public, but they were unsure to what extent it had raised standards. In some cases, the level of service to Foxwood had stayed the same. Other agencies had introduced new initiatives, such as the Cleansing walkabout and the estate handyperson.

Stakeholders were more confident, however, that the agreement would make their services more responsive, enable them to target resources more effectively and make service providers more accountable. The agreement was seen as a flexible tool, 'to be reviewed and evaluated', able to adapt to the changing needs and priorities of residents. It would be necessary to look at the agreement again in two years' time to assess the impact in practice. The level of monitoring required for individual services should be reviewed, to provide more flexibility. Other service providers were unhappy with the focus of monitoring information, feeling that it either did not reflect the variety of work carried out on the estate, or that there was insufficient information to enable FCAG to make judgements on service levels, or to initiate change.

It was recognised that FCAG depended on service providers to guide them through the

services and provided them with the information needed to make decisions and judgements about local services. Questions arose about the extent to which service providers were being proactive and helping FCAG to change levels of service and raise standards. Some suspected that service providers might be simply playing lip service to the process, providing the information requested without prompting the group to explore the issues in more detail. The Community Development Worker had to encourage the group to push out the boundaries of what service providers were offering in terms of information and to work with their relationship with FCAG.

Stakeholders suggested that a standard formula for monitoring might no longer be appropriate. One suggested that monthly monitoring should be reserved for services that FCAG was particularly concerned about and those that were performing well should not need such intensive monitoring, reporting every quarter instead.

The impact of the neighbourhood agreement on service standards in areas of private housing was relatively marginal. Most stakeholders thought private residents had been relatively untouched by it and it was assumed that they had less interest in the issues covered by the agreement. When they did have problems, they tended to be better at 'accessing services' and therefore did not need an agreement. These views were not, however, borne out by the household panel and estate survey interviews, which found stronger support for FCAG and greater awareness of the agreement among owners than tenants. Although they have little

involvement in the agreement, owner-occupiers still perceived some indirect benefit to be derived from it. This may be either as a result of improvements to services or improvements to the area as a whole, and perhaps areas of social housing in particular, which they may currently see as having a negative impact on their property values.

In interview, service providers claimed that they had started to gain more feedback from residents, enabling them to target services and use resources more effectively. They felt that the process of talking through service plans with residents was beneficial, as it was:

*Formalising what is provided on the estate ... making provision and standards visible and accountable.*

Another said:

*What I want is if people see a problem for them to come and tell me about it. I can't put right what I don't know ... this [the agreement] is going to give me the feedback I want.*

As a result, it became increasingly important not to take a 'blanket approach' to service delivery, but to look instead at the specific needs of the estate, making provision more responsive to residents' concerns and priorities. While only an interim verdict can be offered at this stage, the view of participants themselves revealed how the process of providing services locally had begun to shift towards a more consultative and inter-agency approach as a result of the new framework.

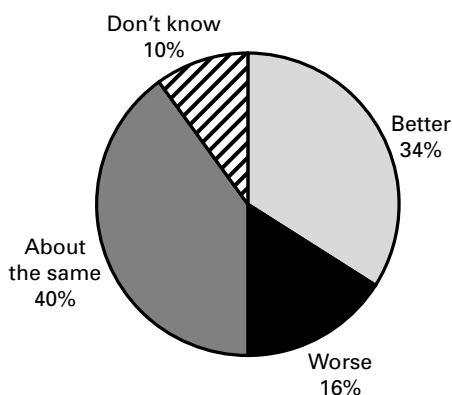
## 6 The future of the agreement

### The future of Foxwood

A third of residents interviewed in the estate survey said that they thought Foxwood would be a better place to live in five years' time (Figure 20). They felt the signs were positive, things were starting to change, people were pulling together and working to improve the estate. Such changes would work through gradually. Foxwood was never considered as 'bad' as Bell Farm had been, and residents did not think there would therefore be such a dramatic improvement as a result of the project.

Members of the household panel were asked what single improvement would most improve the quality of life on the estate. Attitudes varied by tenure. Bradford and Northern tenants wanted their landlord to 'listen to their tenants and take some action'. Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust tenants were generally positive about the future and confident that things would improve. Local authority tenants were also positive and hopeful, identifying improved policing, improved behaviour of young people

**Figure 20 'In five years' time will Foxwood be a better place to live, worse or about the same?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

on the estate and getting rid of problem families as key factors to improve the area. Owners were more qualified in their comments, saying improvement 'depended on' jobs for young people, maintenance of improved areas and not building too many new houses on green space.

Positive attitudes related more to changes at street level than for the project area as a whole, confirming earlier observations. There were still some difficult areas, and problems with anti-social behaviour and crime, but most people felt quite removed from them. As one put it:

*People are starting to get on together better now, hopefully things will improve, they cannot get any worse for us. People will pull together.*

### The sustainability of FCAG

When interviewed in 1999, stakeholders had viewed the sustainability of the group as a 'hurdle', but continued to express confidence in it, and this was recognised by the group members themselves:

*Support from Citizens' Support is brilliant ... they always had faith in us and they still have.*

A year later stakeholders felt that the future of the group was more viable:

*As long as they want to operate I think it is sustainable ... subject to funding ... they want their own community worker, they are busy and recognise their needs.*

Stakeholders saw Foxwood as a community with 'a sense of direction and purpose', compared to other communities where the 'agenda is a void'. The neighbourhood agreement, it was suggested, gave Foxwood residents 'something positive to strive for'.

The overriding issue to emerge from interviews, both from active residents and service providers, was the heavy workload involved in managing and monitoring the neighbourhood agreement. One member of the group commented, in relation to the demands on their time, that 'they all want a bit of us'. More volunteers were needed to share the work. The group has started to focus on its own development and training needs while also trying to sustain the agreements that have already been signed. It recognised that it did not have the capacity yet to develop more agreements and its ambitions would be curtailed unless more volunteers joined the group.

This position was, nevertheless, a significant step forward for the group compared to the situation 12 months earlier. At that time, members were unable to contemplate continuing the work at all without the ongoing support of a Community Development Worker. The group still valued this input, and aimed to keep their own worker in the future, but felt 'enormously more capable' and confident than a year earlier about their ability to manage alone. Stakeholders recognised that continuing future funding for the group would be an issue. Many of the problems faced by FCAG are the same as those faced by any voluntary organisation, and stakeholders recognised the need to create a support system for the group as part of the exit strategy for the project.

The 'bottom-up' approach taken by the Community Development Worker for developing FCAG had encouraged a wide range of residents to get involved and strengthened the potential sustainability of the group. This approach to participation taken on both Bell

Farm and Foxwood reflected the approach of the local authority to community involvement throughout the city. Stakeholders were also hopeful that the community work skills training would continue to be a useful tool, helping to sustain the group and support new people getting involved.

Opinions differed on the need for long-term support for FCAG. One resident interviewed in 1999 felt the estate would always need a paid worker:

*Residents move in and out, you need paid staff to offer continuity and a broader view.*

Residents felt strongly that the support from the local authority and David Liggins Company in developing the agreement had been more than they expected. But they also claimed that the group would have felt 'set up and used' if community development support had been withdrawn in April 1999. The group was concerned that the City Council would have provided the support to 'inspire' the group only to 'pull the rug out' when the agreement was launched.

In 1999, residents had expressed three main concerns about the sustainability of FCAG. First, they felt it had a long way to go before it could 'stand on its own two feet'. Second, they felt the group had 'no authority' without support. Although residents recognised that the agreement itself gave them some authority, ultimately they thought it would only be enforced with the co-operation of service providers. Third, residents thought the group would 'lose focus' if community development support was withdrawn and it would be difficult to keep the interest of the wider community.

By 2000, residents continued to feel the need for support, but no longer felt unable to manage alone. Instead, they saw support as a means to enable them to achieve their aims, as 'volunteers don't have the time to do all that residents expect'. They felt that a worker could provide 'support, skills, drive and experience', as well as helping to maintain links with service providers.

Stakeholders put forward a range of options about how continuing support could be provided, including a financial contribution from all stakeholders, external grant funding, and reallocating existing staff time and resources already dedicated to the estate. Further support might have been provided by more directly linking the neighbourhood agreement into overall local authority structures and processes. It raised the question, however, of whether FCAG was going to function as an independent residents' association under another guise, or seek a higher profile and be incorporated into the mainstream of council business. If FCAG was 'left on the fringes', the emphasis given to its work might be undermined by competing priorities:

*We need to build up the residents' ability to take over the running of initiatives; that will require the continued involvement of a chaser and convenor of monitoring meetings. This could be incorporated into the Council's mainstream neighbourhood consultation programme. If it remains outside the mainstream work, then it will struggle to survive.*

Other stakeholders mentioned the wider development of ward committees, which would require the routine production of statistics at a local level. However, FCAG was, and still is,

very reluctant to be tied more closely to formal local authority structures. Members considered it more likely that they would seek greater independence from the council, rather than less, as their work unfolded.

FCAG was judged to have become more confident in its role and ability to manage the agreement over time. The Community Development Worker had completed a training needs analysis with the group, and plans had been made to access formal training and share skills already existing in the group. All members of FCAG were willing to acquire the key committee skills of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, and the group rotated responsibility at their weekly meetings, to ensure that it did not become too dependent on members specialising in particular roles.

In 1999, two members of FCAG gained BASSAC Millennium Awards of £2,000 each to further their personal development. Both members completed a national course in facilitation skills for community consultants in April 2000. Other courses have included fundraising, public speaking, chairing meetings, partnership working, project management and supervision skills.

The group also worked to gain management skills and experience. A member of FCAG and the Citizens' Support Group currently jointly manage the Community Development Worker. The FCAG member is being trained in supervision skills and is shadowing supervision sessions. All those involved in this arrangement were positive about it in interview. Other members of the group recognised their need for further training and were open to new opportunities. This approach is likely to make a significant contribution to the future

sustainability of the group.

Over the study period, it was suggested that as a minimum FCAG would need to develop a package of practical support and funding measures to enable residents to carry out their work in the future. Such a package might include:

- budgetary provision for the group, including provision of support for office accommodation, administration, insurance, training and conferences, newsletter and publicity
- a training strategy, to enable the group to function with confidence in the future and to meet the needs of new members joining the group
- a strategy to enable the group to interact with the wider community, including plans to encourage more people to get involved with the group at a formal level and means of developing feedback and interaction with all Foxwood residents on issues raised by the agreement
- a strategy for the continuing development of the relationships between service providers and FCAG
- at least short-term continuing community development support, tied in to an exit strategy agreed with the group
- a strategy negotiated with the group, laying down the long-term support to be provided by the local authority, and the roles and responsibilities of support workers compared to the roles and responsibilities of residents.

Considerable progress was acknowledged in several of these key areas. The group has submitted a £75,000 bid for lottery funding for a Community Development Worker, running costs and training, and the training needs analysis and continuation of the community works skills training was under way.

### Promoting broader involvement

Stakeholders involved in supporting FCAG were very aware of the need to develop a strategy to involve more people in the work of the group. Members of FCAG were also concerned about the low level of involvement but, at the time of interviews in 2000, they had few practical ideas on how to attract more people. They stressed that residents could get involved with FCAG at whatever level they felt most comfortable: attending meetings, reading the newsletter, reporting problems and so on. They were desperate for more active involvement from volunteers to share the workload. However, the involvement of new members into any group that is embroiled in keeping current activities going can be problematic and time consuming in itself.

Barriers to greater involvement were difficult to identify, because both residents and stakeholders felt FCAG was generally open to new people and aware of the need to recruit new members. It was considered difficult for new people to feel part of the group, because it was now well established and the skills gap might be too wide. Others felt that FCAG focused too much on the local authority part of the estate, or was too closely associated with the Community Centre Management Committee. Residents said they did not want to 'take the



risk of getting involved with the Council', or be seen as 'do gooders'. One resident suggested 'it normally takes a disaster to pull a community together'.

Without wider involvement, a 'community clique' might develop, with a few residents dominating the agenda of the group. Residents from private housing, for example, were under-represented, and only one resident under 24 years old was on FCAG. Work on the development and training of the group had helped address these concerns, but active residents recognised the need to increase participation in the process further and build up membership of FCAG.

Projects such as the 'Designing out crime – snickets campaign' were seen as an important practical expression of FCAG's work. One member said:

*... once they see one snicket closed they will acknowledge we are doing things, and get involved.*

The Community Development Worker also felt that:

*... the snickets campaign was seen as an ideal way of drawing in new people ... they see that something concrete is happening ... seeing that issues are being addressed.*

In interviews, stakeholders had few ideas about how to get more people involved, although the Community Development Worker stressed that:

*... initiatives need to be recognised as a spin-off from the neighbourhood agreement, not as something separate.*

The potential for developing the involvement of young people through the youth agreement was recognised, and service provider partners to the agreement also felt they had a role and responsibility for promoting the work of FCAG and the neighbourhood agreement. Several stakeholders commented on efforts made to promote the agreement in the course of their work, but some felt less in tune with the work of the group than they had been in the early stages. If this continues, their ability to promote the agreement will be weakened.

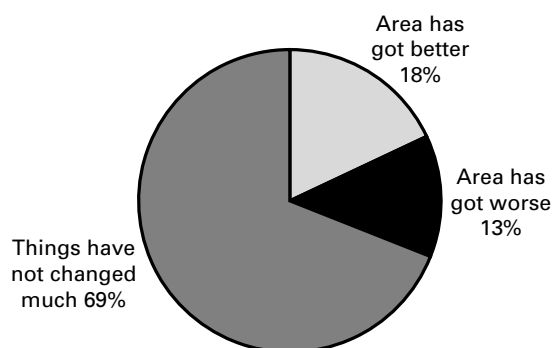
More widely, 65 per cent of respondents to the estate survey had heard of FCAG, but only six had ever attended a meeting, and only 19 respondents expressed any interest in working with FCAG. Respondents in the household panel and estate survey nevertheless felt a sense of commitment to the area, offering some prospect for future community involvement in the topics covered by the agreement. As on Bell Farm, most stakeholders and residents felt that few were interested in any ongoing involvement. This was evident at both neighbourhood agreement launches and in the poor attendance at the FCAG AGM in April 2000.

The interviews with residents active on the estate suggested that they had high expectations of community involvement, whereas in practice such participation is rarely likely to appeal to many residents. Stakeholders seemed fairly realistic about the prospects of increasing involvement. FCAG members felt they were not able to achieve all they wanted for the estate, unless they managed to gain wider support.

### Sustainability of the neighbourhood agreement

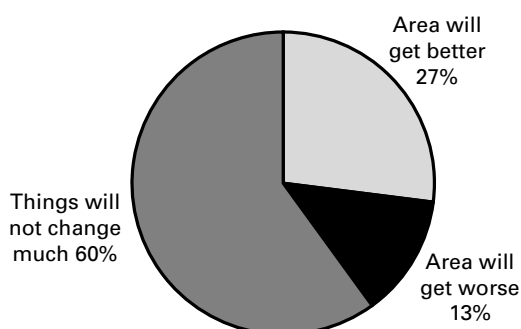
Although most respondents in the estate survey thought the neighbourhood agreement had the potential to improve Foxwood, many thought things had not actually changed much over the previous 12 months and were not expected to change over the next two years (see Figures 21 and 22). The extent to which one would expect a high degree of awareness of the impact of the agreement is debatable. The majority of

**Figure 21 'How has the area changed in the last year?' (per cent of 152 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

**Figure 22 'How do you think the area will change over the next couple of years?' (per cent of 146 cases)**



Source: 1999 Foxwood estate survey.

residents in the Foxwood area appeared broadly satisfied with the services received and could not be expected to be aware of any changes unless they were very dramatic and affected them directly. The current level of satisfaction should therefore be used as a benchmark to measure changes in residents' perceptions over the years, as the agreement becomes more established.

Respondents to the estate survey were slightly more optimistic about the future (27 per cent thought the area would get better) than about the past (only 18 per cent thought the area had improved in the last 12 months). Local authority tenants were more positive than owners or RSL tenants: 24 per cent of local authority tenants said the area had got better in the past year. RSL tenants were more optimistic about the future than local authority tenants or owners. Forty-three per cent of RSL tenants thought the area would get better in the next two years, possibly reflecting the more positive views about local management support.

When the neighbourhood agreement was launched (November 1998), stakeholders had expressed mixed views about its sustainability. They were optimistic about the commitment of residents involved in FCAG, and service providers who had been directly involved with developing the agreement also felt positive about their own role and the potential for extending the scope of the agreement. Other service providers (such as health promotion and family centres) were approaching the project and asking to be involved.

However, residents' concerns about the sustainability of FCAG and their capacity to take the agreement forward were mirrored by the anxieties of service providers about how

they would themselves sustain their commitment to the process, especially if the model were more widely applied throughout the city. While service providers were willing and able to get involved in a one-off project, some felt it would be difficult under current structures to continue the commitment in the longer term, or to replicate it elsewhere, without more fundamental political, structural and cultural changes.

While service providers saw the need to ‘keep it alive and at the forefront of the agenda’, several were finding it difficult to manage regular attendance at monitoring meetings alongside other commitments. They assumed that FCAG would contact them if they had any concerns. One stakeholder also commented on the difficulty of:

*Getting the commitment given by senior managers down to grass roots staff.*

The future success of the neighbourhood agreement on Foxwood depended, according to the Community Development Worker, on the fact that:

*The key is that it is driven by residents and that it is respected by service providers.*

The ‘exit strategy’ for the project provides an opportunity to explore how the lessons of the Foxwood project can be applied more widely to area regeneration initiatives in York and elsewhere. Looking piecemeal at agreements for individual estates leaves them vulnerable to changes in priority. It might be difficult to sustain a single agreement because it would always be seen as a special case, needing to argue for ongoing support against other priorities.

Sustaining the agreement in the long term could always be weakened by changes in the workloads and priorities of service providers, or in political commitment in the local authority.

The neighbourhood agreement was seen by stakeholders as a useful tool that could be applied to other areas of the city. In order to achieve this, however, it was suggested that the local authority would need to take a more strategic view of regeneration activity and long-term community support for residents. It was generally agreed that the agreement could be applied to areas where residents were interested and which were also a priority for service providers. Local strategies for priority areas could be linked to data mapping and sharing of key information between agencies. Crime, deprivation, poor health and housing need could be mapped together to help target regeneration. As one stakeholder put it:

*Neighbourhood agreements will have a part to play in bringing about sustainable improvement in the quality of life in the areas that are targeted, because key is resident involvement.*

It is, however, difficult to assess the current prospects of applying the neighbourhood agreement model more widely in York. One stakeholder said the council was ‘not thinking in terms of urban regeneration capacity-building’ and there was ‘no strong direction for co-ordinated interdepartmental work’.

Concerns were expressed about the impact of the ad hoc development of neighbourhood agreements in the city on staff workloads and the resources of services. The success of the Bell Farm and Foxwood projects raised more strategic questions about neighbourhood-centred resource allocation and service delivery

across the city. These issues are explored further in the next chapter.

### Empowerment

As a tool to empower local residents and increase participation in local government and local democracy, the neighbourhood agreement was seen as potentially very useful. Those residents involved in FCAG seem to have been empowered as a result of the strong community work focus and training provided by the project. The community development approach was widely supported by stakeholders. As one said, putting the agreement on paper was easy, but 'enabling people to drive it forward is the problem'.

Stakeholders felt that community development was the key, with residents themselves defining problems and solutions. They recognised that, if the neighbourhood agreement model were to be applied more widely, the local authority would be unlikely to support the same level of community development dedicated to Foxwood. One stakeholder suggested that, although it would be difficult to sustain many more agreements under the current structure, these structures for support could be changed. This in turn would depend on the political priority given to the neighbourhood agreement process and the links given to a city-wide regeneration and neighbourhood strategy. However, one respondent sounded a cautious note about the viability of this approach:

*It is difficult to change the culture of an organisation on the basis of two neighbourhood agreements.*

### The future investment of resources

Stakeholders were positive about what had been achieved and clearly saw the agreement as focused on 'issues' rather than cash investment. The aims and benefits of the agreement were seen in terms of improving service standards, and 'to make Foxwood a better place to live' in the broadest sense of developing a community and a future.

One resident said she wanted to be able to say she was:

*Proud to say we lived on Foxwood. We lived there when it was a dump, we changed it, and now it is a respected area.*

Stakeholders clearly hoped that the project would enable them to attract resources to the estate, but the need for more resources has not been a motivating factor for the project and it had not deterred those residents who had got involved with FCAG.

Perhaps as significant as the modest improvements already made was the belief amongst stakeholders that the neighbourhood agreement had the potential to generate more positive improvements in the future. For example, one stakeholder said there would be an ability to attract considerable outside interest in the area, because of the experience gained about tenant involvement and joint working. An attitude had developed among residents of 'we can do things', rather than 'it's not worth it'. The positive attitude of residents had enabled them to bid successfully for resources already and would enable them to attract more investment to the estate in the future. The wider ramifications of the Foxwood project are considered more fully in the next chapter.

# 7 Conclusion

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## The next steps for Foxwood

As stated at the outset, the economically diverse nature of the Foxwood estate, the relatively high levels of satisfaction with local services and the mix of housing tenures all render the area distinctive from neighbourhoods which are usually the focus of special schemes for renewal. In this setting, the neighbourhood agreement has proved its flexibility as a framework that has spawned innovation and change. The co-ordinated involvement of welfare benefits advisors, the 'on-the-spot' presence from one of the housing associations, the move on tenancy enforcement, the development of the Community Action Group, the production of a separate agreement for young people: all these initiatives have helped to keep local services attuned to residents' concerns through the framework of establishing, monitoring and reviewing service provision in the neighbourhood. The direct benefits may have been felt more in areas of social housing on the estate, but private owners stand to gain as well, if a more positive image of Foxwood starts to work through to property values.

The future of the Foxwood neighbourhood agreement depends on the ongoing commitment of residents involved in the Community Action Group, and service providers and partners to the agreement. It is clear that FCAG has developed a strong capacity to manage the agreement as it stands and that service providers are on the whole committed to the process.

The Foxwood agreement is now entering a phase of consolidation, following the more intensive developments of the last two years. At this stage, it would be straightforward for those

involved to settle down to a process of monitoring and service review along the lines laid out in the agreement. However, it is important to see the agreement as a live and working document, and FCAG and service providers will need constantly to review and question the framework. Those involved should not be afraid to change, challenge, rewrite and relaunch the agreement to meet new needs in the area, or address existing needs in a more appropriate way.

To manage this process, residents will need to be aware that different parts of the agreement will take on importance at different times. It is clearly a daunting task to take on responsibility for monitoring a wide range of services across the whole Foxwood area. Members of FCAG will need to draw on the experience and support of service providers, the support of their Community Worker and Citizens' Support Group, and the interest and concerns of the wider community. FCAG is a focus for the agreement and has ultimate responsibility for it, but the 'partnership' element of the framework, involving all the stakeholders, will have to be developed further to spread the sense of ownership.

Service providers identified many advantages about working in partnership with residents within the neighbourhood agreement on Foxwood. Their future commitment, however, should not be taken for granted, and the benefits of joint working and interaction with the community need to be built on.

Those responsible for service provision on Foxwood have a role in promoting the agreement across the community. Plans for increasing and broadening resident participation, especially in areas of private

housing, would have positive spin-offs for both service providers and FCAG. Although members of FCAG have gained knowledge and experience of services in the past two years, more training or support for the group is likely to be needed in the future. The group can now effectively monitor the agreement, but it could be asking more of the service providers in the future. At present, FCAG members are inclined to accept statements about service levels, constraints and resource availability without much challenge. As members gain in confidence, they will be better placed to ask pertinent questions about possible *changes* to accepted practice, rather than ensuring the maintenance of a 'steady state' regime for local service provision in meeting agreed targets.

The neighbourhood agreement covers the whole of the Foxwood area. The formal involvement of a large number of residents in the process would be an unrealistic expectation. Nevertheless, sporadic interest in local issues and informal links with FCAG members could be developed more, especially among private residents, even if this does not lead to more formal engagement. The involvement of the wider community in events for information (such as a fire safety campaign) and fun (such as the Foxwood Festival) has been successful, and this might be extended.

The community on Foxwood is focused on smaller sub-areas and on specific issues. This has been reflected in some of the project work undertaken by FCAG, for example the snickets campaign and the youth shelter. There is a case for taking a more strategic approach in order to develop resident involvement along these lines, assessing who might have an interest in being involved in different issues. A project concerned

with crime prevention, for example, could be an opportunity to bring together Neighbourhood Watch groups; while a project concerned with school provision might be an opportunity to bring together youth workers, play workers, parents and young people. FCAG members would be acting more in the role of catalysts in this process, rather than as those who had to do all the work – as has been the case in the past. This objective, though, is still some way off.

### Estate agreements in York

As noted earlier, this evaluation has been set against the experience of the Bell Farm project, which launched the estate agreement idea in York. Direct comparisons are difficult given the differences in the nature of the neighbourhoods and the circumstances in which their agreements were formulated. However, some similar issues and concerns were raised, and the experience on Foxwood took further some of the findings of the Bell Farm study (Cole and Smith, 1996).

- The development of a neighbourhood agreement is not dependent on investment in the physical infrastructure of the estate.
- The neighbourhood agreement model is amenable to customisation to different estate contexts.
- The neighbourhood agreement model can enshrine the multi-service approach into a more durable formal mechanism.
- The neighbourhood agreement offers flexibility in terms of the changing scope and scale of inter-service involvement.

- The neighbourhood agreement is well adapted in principle to the extension of the 'service by contract' idea at a local level. This makes residents more conversant with contract scrutiny, appraisal and audit as means of influence.

However, the 'potential perils' outlined in the review of Bell Farm can also be identified on Foxwood – residents losing interest, the risks of being swamped in heaps of paper and lots of procedures, the difficulty in identifying a tangible pay-off for getting involved and so on. This is a common problem for many forms of resident involvement in management. On Foxwood, FCAG has attempted to address this through the ongoing support of the Community Development Worker and training for members.

The Bell Farm project highlighted a familiar division between those active residents, who had learned the language of 'influence through contract', and the rest of the population, who had not. Residents and stakeholders on Foxwood were also concerned about the low level of active involvement in the neighbourhood agreement. There were plans to extend involvement, but equally a recognition that active committee involvement was only ever likely to be attractive to a minority. Other methods were needed to increase knowledge of the initiative in the community and to keep in touch with the concerns of the 'silent majority'.

A further difficulty on Bell Farm was how to translate some aspects of service delivery into standards, targets and outcomes. This appears to have been less of a problem on Foxwood and perhaps service providers had gained in experience while residents had also developed their skills. There were still concerns that

monitoring was not robust enough and that questions asked of service partners could not give the necessary information to enable FCAG to press for significant changes to service provision on the estate.

The lack of sanctions and leverage over changes in standards and breaches of the agreement was a problem on Bell Farm, and remained an unresolved issue for residents on Foxwood. However, maintaining the commitment of service providers and the relationship between service providers and residents on Foxwood may prove more important than the introduction of any sanctions per se. The development of a neighbourhood approach to service monitoring within the local authority as a whole would add strength to sustaining the agreement on Foxwood. The future development of links between agreements and best value service reviews also opens up interesting avenues, which might strengthen the overall process.

Within the local authority, the neighbourhood agreements on Foxwood and Bell Farm will remain vulnerable while they are seen as 'mere' pilots. The City Council will need to consider how it supports the desire of residents to have more control over local services, while enabling them to maintain their independence. The wider applicability of the model across the city remains an important question for the local authority, particularly with the onset of tenant participation compacts, growing interest in neighbourhood management and inter-service liaison, and continuing support for resident consultation on an individual and collective basis. The neighbourhood agreement may provide a valuable launch pad for this new relationship

between service providers and residents.

On Bell Farm, service providers suggested that the 'special treatment' accorded to the neighbourhood could not be sustained, or transferred to other areas, as resources were not available. The Bell Farm project had been dependent on special Estate Action funds and support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The message on Foxwood was more equivocal. While some service providers said that the priority given to the area could not be replicated elsewhere, others suggested that they had not made 'special provision', and that the changes were more about style and approach than additional resources. The most important new factor was the need for the residents to receive assistance to play a full part in monitoring and developing the agreement.

The Bell Farm project, for example, highlighted the need for continuing community development support, to ensure that the initial dialogue between residents and service providers did not become 'one-way traffic' (Cole and Smith, 1996, p. 86). This remains a key concern for residents on Foxwood, which is less about their ability to manage the agreement as it stands, than the need for ongoing support to help them develop and extend it in the future.

While the development of neighbourhood agreements places the onus on service providers alongside tenants to maintain, and where possible improve, standards, continuous resident input is required to keep this system fresh and alert to change. Neighbourhood agreements can offer a valuable conduit to ensure broad-based resident involvement which cuts across rather artificial service boundaries, and they can be readily adapted to meet changing needs and issues – but they are

difficult to maintain on a free-standing basis, without modest but continuous levels of additional community support to keep the process on track. It remains to be seen how far the experience gained at Bell Farm and Foxwood will be translated into a city-wide strategy – but the positive outcomes for the two contrasting areas show what is possible, if basic ideas are adapted to meet local needs and concerns.

### Wider national ramifications

Chapter 1 outlined how the core principles behind estate agreements and similar initiatives have a resonance for national policies towards neighbourhood renewal, service accountability, joined-up governance and community involvement. The Foxwood project shows that any anticipated gains from such projects need not be confined to very deprived neighbourhoods, where most local authorities may decide to concentrate their attention. Foxwood is an area with a fairly poor local reputation, with occasional outbreaks of crime and vandalism, and with small sub-areas that some local residents choose to avoid, but it is not a hotbed of economic and social disadvantage. The disparate nature of the local community, the housing and tenure mix, and the lack of a clear 'Foxwood identity' were potential barriers to the development of a sense of a discrete community, but the agreement has managed to forge these different components together into a relatively cohesive framework.

There is a danger that an undue focus on 'socially excluded' neighbourhoods in the most deprived local authority districts may unintentionally inhibit the transferability of



policy and practice to other areas. The Foxwood project shows that some changes in the relationship between residents and service providers are feasible without associated large-scale investment or grand strategies – the key is to ensure this unfolds as an open-ended process, rather than as a preordained model which can be transplanted to quite different settings. But the improvements on Foxwood noted in this report were achieved without massive new resources, underlining the transferability of the estate agreement idea to a range of different neighbourhoods.

The issues emerging from this evaluation of the Foxwood scheme, however, also strike a note of caution for those local authorities limbering up to introduce neighbourhood management, local service partnerships and community plans. The painstaking process of drafting, revising and monitoring each of the individual service agreements has taken up considerable time and energy for providers and residents alike. The benefits of inter-service working have been recognised gradually, as the framework has evolved. The opening up of service levels to community scrutiny has created some discomfort and emphasised the need for learning by all partners to the process.

Fundamentally, the need to highlight the virtue of flexibility behind the neighbourhood agreement, as an approach rather than as a document, has presented a challenge to all those

involved. The move from producer-driven, functional, professionally structured service ‘delivery’ to open, consultative and responsive partnership networks will not take place without some frustration, retrenchment and setbacks. But there are now a growing number of examples of local schemes beyond the ‘heavyweight’ regeneration programmes that can offer a lead to those just embarking on this process. Foxwood clearly falls into this category.

There is a risk that the welter of recent policy documents from the government on modernisation, social exclusion and joint working will receive a proportionate response in terms of multiple reams of local documentation, as best value plans are written, community plans issued, tenant compacts publicised and neighbourhood profiles produced. The Foxwood project reminds us that the relationships that are built around the production of such texts are more telling than the documents themselves.

Foxwood is a community that differs from the ‘sink’ estates that often dominate the agenda about neighbourhood renewal and change. This research has shown that the positive attitudes and perceptions of residents and service providers involved in the Foxwood neighbourhood agreement offer a testimony to its potential value in reshaping local service provision elsewhere.

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