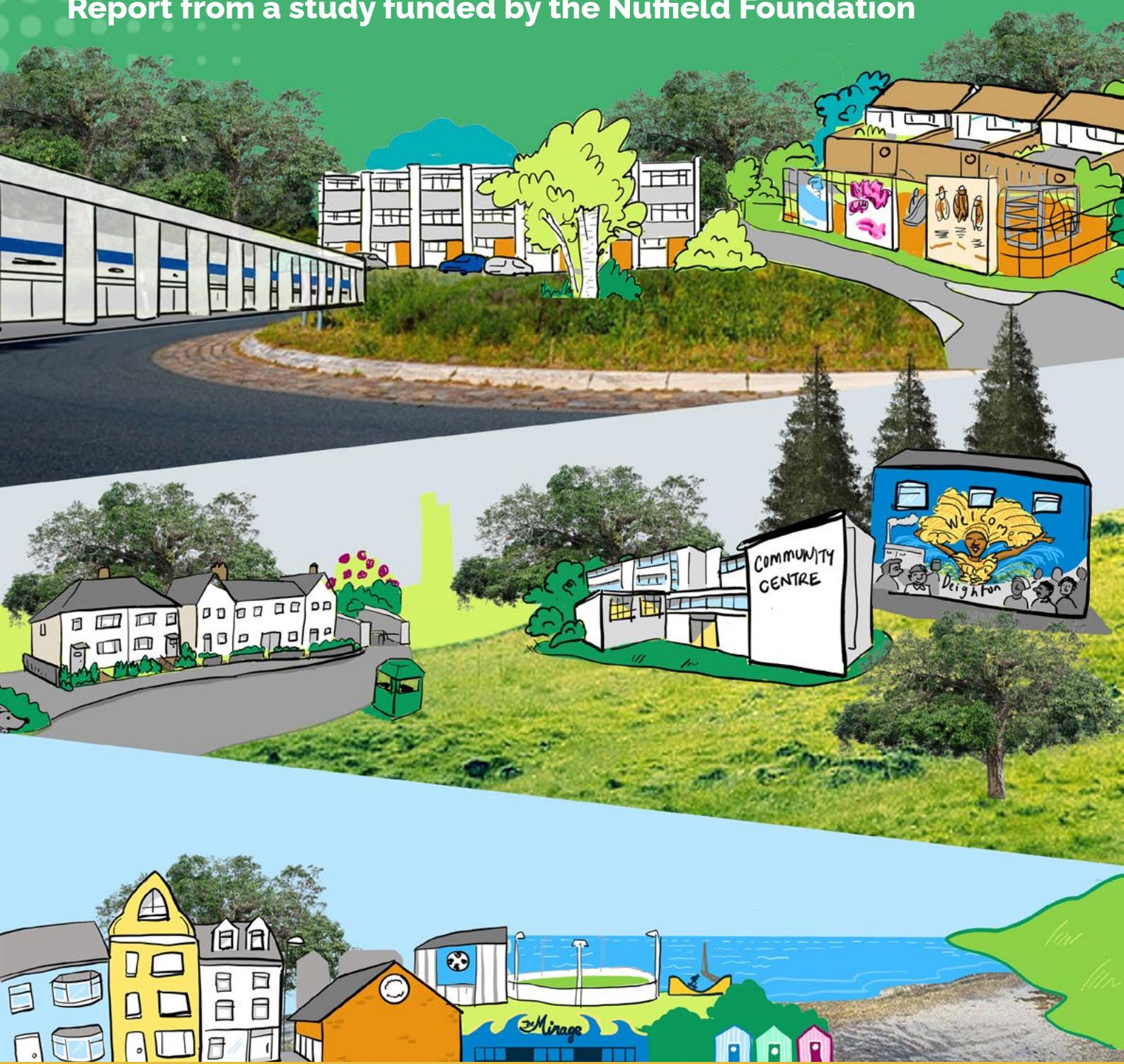


Young people as researchers and change-makers in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK

Report from a study funded by the Nuffield Foundation



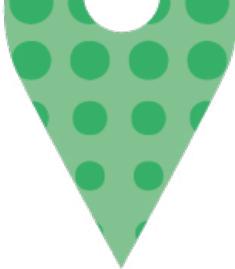
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Quick read

Research aims

Our research, conducted with young people in three economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England explores:

- The role of local neighbourhoods in young people's lives; what supports and what challenges them to flourish in contexts of economic disadvantage and marginality.
- How young people can be actively engaged in local action and decision-making and the methodologies and methods that support the generation and exchange of knowledge with young people.



Findings

A total of 257 young people aged 10-15 participated in the project. This included a core group of fifty-four young people who worked with us as co-researchers and change-makers, a role which involved their co-shaping of the project, its methods, outputs, community change projects and dissemination activities. Across the three study neighbourhoods, young people shared with us how they access public space; the activities they do outside school; the adults in their communities who support and advocate for them and their aspirations for their neighbourhoods. They also shared the challenges they experience in accessing safe public space, their experiences of anti-social behaviour and gang violence, and how youth clubs and services have been defunded and the negative impacts on their physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

Findings were curated with young people using audio-visual media (animation, film, zines) and shared with third sector, government and elected representatives at a series of local policy-dialogue events which included identifying and agreeing priorities for social change. Actions arising from these events include:



- The launch of a Young Leaders Award enabling young people to develop accredited community leadership skills.
- The active commitment of a local MP, informing Labour's commitment for a national network of Young Futures hubs.
- The acquisition of a Youth and Community Hut for use as a youth centre, enabling young people to organise and attend activities, where no provision had previously existed.
- The inclusion of young people's voices in a new Multi-Agency Safety Hub to improve safety in the area.
- The incorporation of young people's views in violence reduction plans to ensure their perspectives inform the approach.
- The championing of young people's voices by the local Mayor, ensuring their inclusion in the 2050 City Plan.

Recommendations



Young people have five key recommendations for local and national decision-makers:

1. Young people need to feel part of a community, for opportunities and a sense of belonging.

For this they need:

2. Safe, healthy outdoor and indoor spaces to meet and participate locally.
3. Well-maintained local green space.
4. To be involved in local and national decision making.
5. National and local decision makers to champion children and young people.

Our study, and these recommendations, highlight the importance of listening to and including young people's perspectives in local and national decision-making. It contributes new knowledge about what young people need to flourish and offers novel methods to support young people in generating knowledge, identifying priorities for change and engaging collaboratively with decision makers. However, further action is needed to ensure that young people's recommendations and voices are sustained at national and local level in accordance with their rights (UNCRC, 1989). This includes their rights to express their views and be listened to when people make decisions that affect them (Articles 12 and 13); an adequate standard of living (Article 27); develop to their full potential (Article 6), protection from violence (Article 19) and opportunities to relax and play (Article 31). Whilst responsibility for the rights of children lies primarily with the Government who have specific responsibilities and are legally obliged to protect and uphold their duties to children, all those delivering public services must ensure that the best interests of children are considered when making policies and designing services.

To meet these obligations, *in accordance with young people's views and suggestions from children's rights organisations*, our recommendations include:

- The appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children to champion the voices of children at the highest level
- The full incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law.
- Making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement for all new policy and legislation.



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Executive Summary

Executive summary

Introduction

Our research offers evidence from young people about the importance of local neighbourhoods in their lives, what supports and what challenges them to flourish and what needs to change to enable them to live meaningful lives. It offers new and practical insights about how young people can be included as co-researchers and change-makers in research and policymaking about their lives in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England. It sets out a methodology and methods for researching with young people, bringing their voices into dialogue with decision-makers to ensure that young people's experiences and perspectives are considered in national and regional policymaking.

"It's quite often we don't get listened to properly. If there was someone to listen properly and take notes, I think there'd be a lot more help for young people rather than it just being 'ah you're just a kid'"

(Young people's focus group, Woughton).

Rationale

The starting point for our project is the disconnect between public health scholarship to "build back fairer" (Marmot et al., 2020a), rising child poverty and disadvantage, and the continued absence of children and young people's voices in local and national policy making (Jones et al., 2020).

"I just want them (decision makers) to know that children are alive, that we exist"

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).



Our study took place in England during 2022-2025 during which time child poverty reached record levels, with over thirty percent (4.5 million) of UK children now living in poverty, an increase of 900,000 between 2010/11 and 2023/24 (DWP, 2025). At the time of writing, the Government is consulting on its Child Poverty Strategy but has rejected calls to date to remove the two-child benefit cap that would bring 300K children out of poverty and help 700K children to live in 'less deep poverty' (CPAG, 2024, 2025). It has also proposed controversial alterations to the welfare system and cuts to benefits (over £5 billion) (DWP, 2025) that will have far-reaching impacts on children and 'challenge the UK government's child poverty commitments' (CPAG, 2025).¹

¹ Since preparing our report the UK government announced that from April 2026 it will remove the two-child limit so that families can receive the child element of Universal Credit for all children regardless of family size (DWP, 2025) and has launched the Child Poverty Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2025). Government figures suggest that this will result in 450,000 fewer children in relative low income after housing costs in the final year of parliament (financial year ending (FYE) 2030) (DWP, 2025), a number that is expected to rise due to other measures including free school meals for all children in families on Universal Credit, help with energy bills, and the expansion of free childcare.

Within these national figures exist large regional differences in the prevalence and effects of poverty, with higher rates of child poverty in the North and Midlands and along the English coast (The Health Foundation, 2024). Poverty has a major impact on children's childhoods, opportunities and futures. It affects their health and wellbeing as children and is a predictor of their health, healthy life expectancy and income as adults (Marmot, 2020a, 2020b). Poorer children living in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods are at greater risk of exploitation by gangs, violence and knife crime, exposure to road accidents and pollution, live in overcrowded and insecure homes and have less access to green space (Barnes et al., 2022). The decline in local authority funding (Hayre and Pollock, 2022) has worsened poorer children's access to preventative services, reducing opportunities for them to participate in extracurricular and enrichment activities (Sutton Trust, 2023), exacerbating childhood inequality and disadvantage in the poorest neighbourhoods (Webb et al., 2022).



While child poverty and disadvantage are policy issues (CPAG, 2025) and although where children and young people live matters for their lives and opportunities, young people are routinely overlooked in policy and policymaking that impact their everyday lives and prospects (Jones et al., 2020). Failure to include young people in decision-making ignores their capabilities (Lomax et al., 2022), reinforces their marginality and perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage - the systemic disparities in the distribution of economic resources and political power between adults and young people. These disparities are experienced disproportionately by children and young people from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including those from poorer, minority ethnic and rural backgrounds who have less opportunity to participate or are easier to ignore (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2022).

Aims

Our research aimed to address this participation deficit for young people, developing methods of co-producing research and knowledge exchange with them, that both recognises their universal rights to be included in decision-making (UNCRC, 1989) and is responsive to the particularities of their experiences growing up in economically disadvantaged places. The central focus of the research was therefore to understand:



- The role of local neighbourhoods in young people's lives; what supports and what challenges them to flourish in contexts of economic disadvantage and marginality.
- How young people can be actively engaged in local action and decision-making and the methodologies and methods that support the generation and exchange of knowledge with young people.

Sample and case study sites



Figure 1
The three study sites



We were privileged to research with fifty-four young people as co-researchers and change-makers in three UK neighbourhoods:

- **Deighton & Brackenhall**, a neighbourhood within the former industrial town of Huddersfield in the North of England in Yorkshire and Humber;
- **Woughton**, a neighbourhood in a high-growth area in the affluent city of Milton Keynes in South East England;
- **Mablethorpe**, a spatially disconnected, small seaside town in the East Midlands.

These neighbourhoods have in common high levels of poverty and disadvantage (IMD, 2019), whilst also having distinctly different geographies and social histories, different patterns of employment, crime and differing access to green space, all factors that shape young people's lives and opportunities. Our aim, in selecting these case study neighbourhoods was to explore the influence of a wide range of place-based factors and their intersections that shape young people's experiences and opportunities in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK.

A total of 257 young people aged 10-15 participated in the project as co-researchers and research participants. This included the core group of fifty-four young people who worked with us as co-researchers and change-makers, a role which involved their co-shaping of the research questions and methods and as participants in local community dialogue events. A further six young people acted as advisors on our national advisory group, shaping the study's approach and methods.

Deighton and Brackenhall

Huddersfield
County of West Yorkshire



Mablethorpe

East Lindsey District
County of Lincolnshire



Woughton

Milton Keynes
County of Buckinghamshire



Figure 2

Fifty-four young co-researchers and change-makers
in three UK neighbourhoods

Methodology and methods

'... children's voices can be seen and heard when researchers are open to and create opportunities for children... through different media (text, talk, art) and take notice of children's sense-making through attentive forms of knowledge generation'

(Lomax and Smith, 2024).

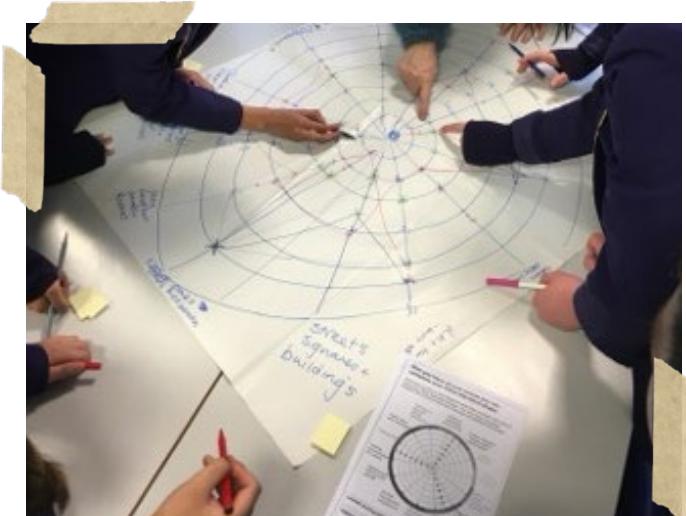


Figure 3
Young people using a place assessment tool to evaluate their local area, Woughton

Framed by the Capability Approach which recognises young people's capacities to positively influence their own lives and the lives of others around them (Sen, 1999), our methodological approach builds on previous Growing Up in Cities (GUIC) methods initiated by Kevin Lynch (1977) and developed during the second wave of GUIC studies in the 1990s (Chawla, 2002; Driskell 2002; Derr et al., 2018). Part of the third wave of studies exploring young people's experiences of their local environment and identifying methods that can be used across settings and cultures (GUIC, 2025) our study reflects more recent advances in Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Percy-Smith et al 2019), Children's Geographies (e.g. Horton and Kraftl, 2006) and Childhood and Youth Studies (e.g. Lomax and Smith, 2024; Day et al., 2022; Percy-Smith et al., 2003).



Figure 4
Researchers and co-researchers

Drawing on our attentive methodology (Lomax & Smith, 2024), we developed a rich portfolio of arts-based methods alongside interviews, focus groups and creative workshops, opening up spaces for young people to take an active role in the generation of knowledge and social action.

Study phases and activities

The project was conducted in four iterative phases of knowledge generation, synthesis and exchange with young people in each of the study neighbourhoods during October 2022 – June 2024. While these activities followed a broadly similar timeline, adjustments were made in accordance with each local neighbourhood context and young people's preferences.



Figure 5
The four phases of Participatory Action Research

Phase 1: Understanding young people's experiences of place



A total of 32 workshops across the three sites were conducted during phase one, with the core group of fifty-four co-researchers (fifteen young people in the workshops in Deighton & Brackenhall, eighteen in Mablethorpe and twenty-one in Woughton). This included the core researchers working with us in small groups over time to visually and creatively map their affective, sensory and lived experiences of place. Methods included map making, photo-methods, scrapbooking and journaling as well as collage, sculpting, paired interviews and focus groups.

Phase 2: Peer and adult perspectives

In each site the co-researchers worked collaboratively to develop and conduct peer-led workshops ($n=82$), peer-to-peer interviews ($n=4$) and a survey of 117 young people. They also conducted vox-pop interviews with adult residents and a survey of local stakeholders. Questions were developed by the young co-researchers using consensus methods to determine their collective priorities.



Phase 3: Community dialogues and youth-led change



Intergenerational community activities were organised to provide a space for young people to present their key findings and priorities for their neighbourhoods in dialogue with adult residents. These discussions – which took novel forms in each neighbourhood

(a postcard exchange in Mablethorpe, an in-person community event in Woughton and a series of workshops with a local artist and counsellors in Deighton & Brackenhall) informed change projects led by young people in each site. In Mablethorpe young people initiated a poster campaign to address their concerns about young people's vaping and the selling of vapes to young people in the area; in Woughton young people created a wellbeing and safety pack to support the wellbeing of other young people in the neighbourhood, and in Deighton & Brackenhall young people created a series of powerful artworks to be displayed as public art murals and contribute positive messages to the wider public about the area.

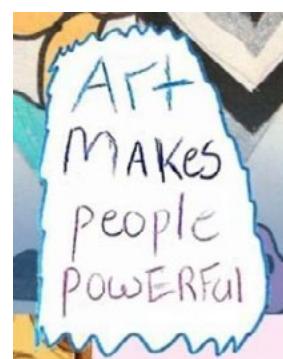
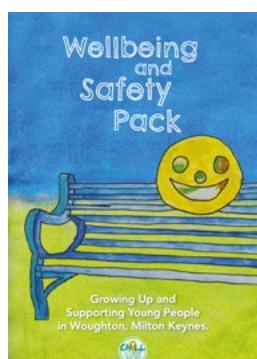
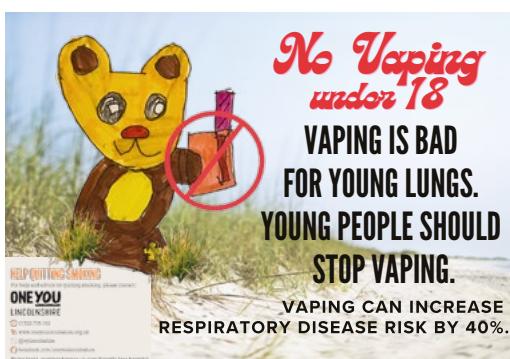


Figure 6
Young people's change projects

Phase 4: Dissemination and impact: Local stakeholder dialogues

In this final phase of the project, we worked with young people to facilitate their inclusion in local decision-making and generate positive change. Responding directly to the challenges they told us they were experiencing in having their ideas taken on board at local authority level, we facilitated a series of local policy dialogues in each of the study neighbourhoods where young people could meet with local stakeholders and decision makers to share and discuss their research findings and identify priorities for change. To support this, we drew on and developed Brown's World Café principles (Brown and Isaacs, 2005) together with our own attentive methodology as a means of facilitating young people's participation in these policy spaces.



Findings

Our findings make two specific contributions. The first provides evidence about how place matters for young people. Here we draw on what young people told us through their creative artwork, mapping and interviews about their experiences of growing up in the study sites which brings in to focus what young people value about where they live, their strong social connections, sense of belonging and the opportunities available locally for them. It also describes the challenges young people experience living in under-resourced neighbourhoods, what prevents them from accessing outdoor and public spaces and how this impacts their wellbeing and opportunities. It sets out their aspirations for their neighbourhoods and what needs to happen to enable them to flourish. The second contribution addresses the participation deficit, setting out a model and methodology for co-producing research and knowledge exchange with young people. Our approach, which draws on the theoretical framework of 'Capabilities' (Sen, 1999) and our own attentive ways of working with young people, advances a model of youth-led and informed research and policy engagement that is inclusive of young people including those 'easy to ignore'.

"It's all about the beach town!"
(Islae, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"It's got good bits. It has a bad reputation but bits of it are very community-strong and very helpful"
(Niamh, female, aged 15, Woughton).



"It is a bit of both, a good place and a bad place because a lot has happened here"
(Brandon, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

Place matters

The freedom to play, meet others and travel independently outside the home matters to the young people in our study. Access to local green space (woods, parks, beaches, informal green space); well-maintained outdoor space (streets and paved areas); welcoming indoor spaces (youth clubs and community centres); and the availability of trusted adults in these spaces provide vital opportunities for young people to socialise, travel independently to school and participate in activities, sports and arts, that are critical for their health and wellbeing. However, cuts to local authority budgets, poor maintenance, levels of violent and gang-related crime (in Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton) and seasonal tourism (Mablethorpe) impact young people's safety, limiting their use of public spaces and their independent spatial mobility in their neighbourhoods.

Young people in our study value their local neighbourhoods as important places to play and meet independently with other young people. This includes a range of places outside the home such as urban squares and spaces alongside streets, public footpaths and footways (TCPA, 2024); indoor spaces such as youth and community centres, sports venues, public swimming pools, shops and arcades; publicly owned outdoor spaces such as Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA), sports fields and parks; and natural spaces such as fields, woods, beach, sand dunes and peripheral urban green spaces, cycle routes, canals and waterways.

"We like go out on the beach and just play football... but then sometimes in the holidays when we want to do it the most, there are too many people parked-up and it's busy"

(Ben, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"There's a sense of belonging – looking out for each other"

(Young person, community event, Woughton).

"We have quite a lot of space to do different activities, for example like motorbikes, boxing, swimming..."

(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).



Figure 7
Photograph of the Multi Use Games Area in Woughton

Local, outdoor spaces encompassing woods (Deighton & Brackenhall) and sand dunes (Mablethorpe) are valued by young people as places that they can connect with others and engage in imaginative exploration (Rixon et al., 2019), for example, building dens and setting-up ramps and bike tracks. The opportunities these provide are particularly important for the young people in our study who, because of socio-economic factors including low income, parental working hours and geographical isolation (rural Mablethorpe), spend much of their free time in their neighbourhoods with little opportunity to travel outside their immediate area.



Figure 8
Young people's
drawings of
Mablethorpe
beach

However, young people in our study experienced a number of challenges that restrict and prevent them from accessing local public spaces. This includes feeling that their neighbourhoods are unsafe, ill-cared for and poorly maintained. This contrasts with how they experience 'wealthier' neighbourhoods.



Figure 9
Photographs of rubbish including a crate, a trolley, a bucket, and bottles in the green spaces in Mablethorpe

Across the three sites young people experience fear when using outdoor public space. In Mablethorpe this is associated with antisocial drinking and drug-taking by young adults and a night-time economy dominated by tourists. In both Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton, young people are fearful of gangs and gang-related violence while across all three neighbourhoods, young people are anxious about county lines and girls report being sexual harassed as they travel to and from school.

Access to outdoor, neighbourhood space is shaped by gender (both boys and girls are fearful but have different strategies to manage risk); family composition (having an older brother or sister or father to look out for you); friendship groups (having a group of friends who look out for you and whom you look out for) and temporal dimensions including seasonal changes (the onset of dusk in the late afternoon during the winter in the UK restricts where young people can go

and their safety as they travel home at the end of the school day). These combine in different ways to impact how young people use local space. Factors that support young people's use of public space include good quality design and the presence of trusted adults. For example, in Brackenhall (a small estate within the wider Deighton & Brackenhall ward) we observed the community centre as a thriving hub of activity with faith groups, sports, arts and holiday clubs busy with adults and young people inside and out. This hive of regular, sustained activity ensured the proximity of trusted adults (parents and community volunteers known to young people), creating a sense of security for young people playing nearby. Young people also have greater opportunities to move around and play freely in public spaces that are designed to ensure 'eyes on where children play' (Holt et al., 2015).

Figure 10
Family homes and community volunteers overlook the places where young people play on the sports field, basketball courts and playpark in Deighton & Brackenhall



"Sometimes the council listens here but if you live in a poor area they won't listen to you. If you have some money, probably it's a 50 / 50 chance they will listen. Then there are the rich people, then the council will listen to you"

(Brandon, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"I feel safe when there are others around just in case you need to run to them to help you"

(Lily, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"I like playing basketball in the basketball and football court. There is no gate there. We just walk in and we just play football, basketball and other sports. It's a communal thing. I play with my friends, sometimes with my family, and people here can just turn up"

(Emmanuel, male, aged 11, Deighton & Brackenhall).

While feeling safe is vital for young people to be able to access outdoor space, the presence of trusted adults in each site offered young people much more than safety. Across each of the study neighbourhoods young people spoke about how particular adults, for example some trusted teachers in their schools and those delivering youth services, sports and arts, make them feel welcomed and valued as well as included in the social and cultural life of the neighbourhood.



Figure 11
Front of community
council youth space,
Woughton

**"I really trust that teacher - really
trust them. I could tell them anything.
She's a mentor. Really nice"**
(Stacey, female, aged 14, Woughton).



A model of youth-informed participation and policy dialogue

Young people are eager to be included in local decision-making and have knowledge and expertise about their local areas that they are willing to share. However, there is a chasm, described by young people, in which decision makers at local authority level are routinely experienced as failing to listen to young people's concerns about where they live and what needs to happen. In all three research sites, this rift stands in sharp contrast to young people's positive experiences of local volunteers, church groups and youth and community workers who work directly with them, are attentive and supportive and listen to their concerns. This suggests that local authorities need more transparent ways to include young people in consultation and planning, including explaining why things have not happened or why budgets have been reallocated elsewhere.

The arts-based approach that we developed with young people offers a way to engage young people in research and decision-making. Underpinned by the Capability Approach and our attentive listening methodology which values and is attuned to their capacities and strengths, our model provides a framework for a participatory and rights-based approach (UNCRC, 1989) that aims to support young people, taking their views and feelings seriously and including them in outcomes and social change that affect their lives. Our methodological focus has been specifically on arts-based methods and how these can support young people to narratively and textually document and share their stories, including with decision-makers, in ways which make visible young people's shared experiences of place while retaining their anonymity. Arts-based methods mean that young people's perspectives can be seen and listened to and can offer ways of actively involving young people in policymaking to support richer understandings of their lives from their perspectives.

"I learnt to express my feelings freely and I will have my voice heard"
(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"(the policy dialogues event enabled) new opportunities for young people to be heard and help make changes"
(Young person, feedback at the local policy dialogue Woughton).

"Let the kids be a part of the opinions and let the people who live in the area help"
(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).



Through visual and creative arts, group discussion, reflection and policy dialogues, as a means of documenting and identifying priorities for change, young people in all three research sites took action in different ways, creating diverse spaces of participation and change in their neighbourhoods. In keeping with the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) and World Cafe principles (The World Café Community Foundation, 2025) our approach offers a way of doing community dialogue which centres young people's participation in these policy spaces in order to amplify and elevate their hopes and aspirations about where they live as a catalyst for action and change (Brown and Isaacs, 2005).



Figure 12
Artwork and text created by young people, Deighton & Brackenhall

Discussion and conclusion



Figure 13
 "Welcome" - Young person playing a rousing tune at the start of the local policy dialogue, Deighton & Brackenhall

Learning from this project challenges simplistic assumptions about young people's voice that exceeds formalised models of consultation. It offers an approach to youth participation, including utilising different media (audio, images, animation and texts) which can enable young people to give voice to a range of complex experiences of place and for adult stakeholders and decision-makers to engage directly with young people's perspectives through 'seeing' and 'hearing' (Rutanen et al., 2023).

This approach exemplifies the value of embedding children's rights (UNCRC, 1989) to express their views, access information and achieve their full potential (Articles 6, 12,13 and 17) through co-research and participatory action in the everyday lives of young people in their communities.

Actions arising from the policy dialogues include:



- The launch of a Young Leaders Award enabling young people to develop accredited community leadership skills.
- The active commitment of a local MP, informing Labour's commitment for a national network of Young Futures hubs.
- The acquisition of a Youth and Community Hut for use as a youth centre, enabling young people to organise and attend activities, where no provision had previously existed.
- The inclusion of young people's voices in a new Multi-Agency Safety Hub to improve safety in the area.
- The incorporation of young people's views in violence reduction plans to ensure their perspectives inform the approach.
- The championing of young people's voices by the local Mayor, ensuring their inclusion in the 2050 City Plan.

Recommendations



Young people have five key recommendations for local and national decision-makers:

1. **Young people need to feel part of a community, for opportunities and a sense of belonging.**

For this they need:

2. **Safe, healthy outdoor and indoor spaces to meet and participate locally.**
3. **Well-maintained local green space.**
4. **To be involved in local and national decision making.**
5. **National and local decision makers to champion children and young people.**

Our study, and these recommendations, highlight the importance of listening to and including young people's perspectives in local and national decision-making. It contributes new knowledge about what young people need to flourish and offers novel methods to support young people in generating knowledge, identifying priorities for change and engaging collaboratively with decision makers. However, further action is needed to ensure that young people's recommendations and voices are sustained at national and local level in accordance with their rights (UNCRC, 1989). This includes their rights to express their views and be listened to when people make decisions that involve them (Articles 12 and 13); an adequate standard of living (Article 27); develop to their full potential (Article 6), protection from violence (Article 19) and opportunities to relax and play (Article 31).

Summarised in figure 14 and discussed in depth in the main report, young people's recommendations are relevant to the new government's missions, in particular the focus on 'Safer Streets' and 'Break(ing) Down Barriers to Opportunity'. They also crosscut these missions and suggest a whole government approach is required to ensure young people's needs are considered in decision-making at all levels of government and across all departments.

Whilst responsibility for the rights of children lies primarily with the Government who have specific responsibilities and are legally obligated to protect and uphold children's rights, all councils – including districts – are also obliged and should fulfil their responsibilities and effectively meet their duties to children (UNICEF, 2021-2022). This demands co-ordinated government action to ensure that children's needs, that fall across all areas of government, are represented. Recommendations include the appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children to champion the rights of children, the full incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law and making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement for all new policy and legislation (Barnardo's, 2024; Longfield, 2024a; Save the Children, 2023).

Young people want:

1. To feel part of a community, for opportunities and a sense of belonging.



3. Well-maintained local green space.

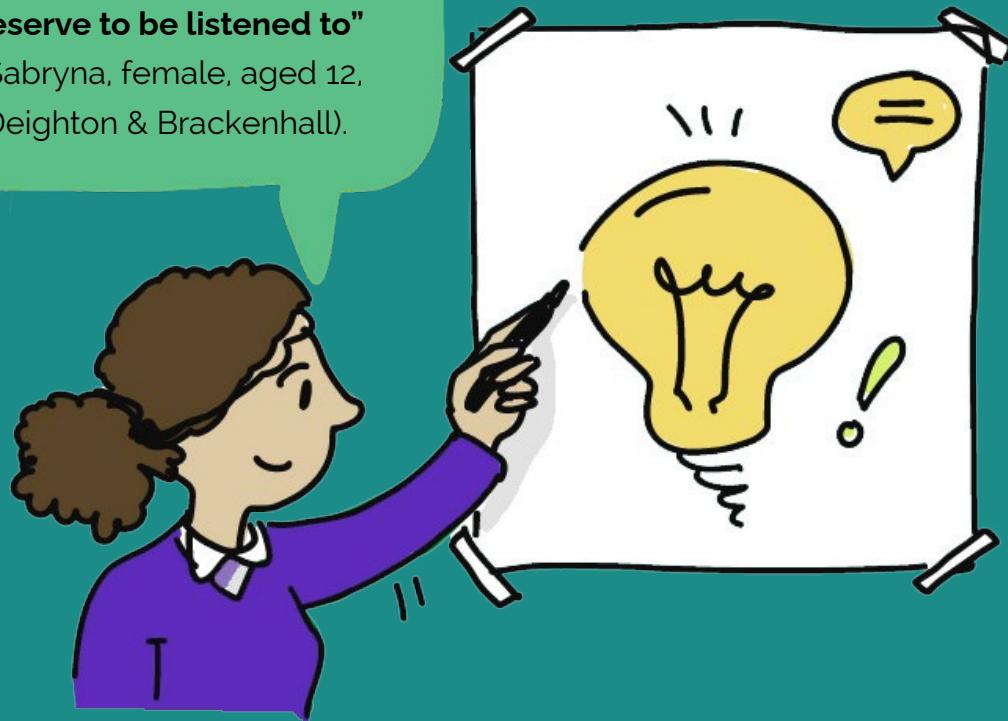


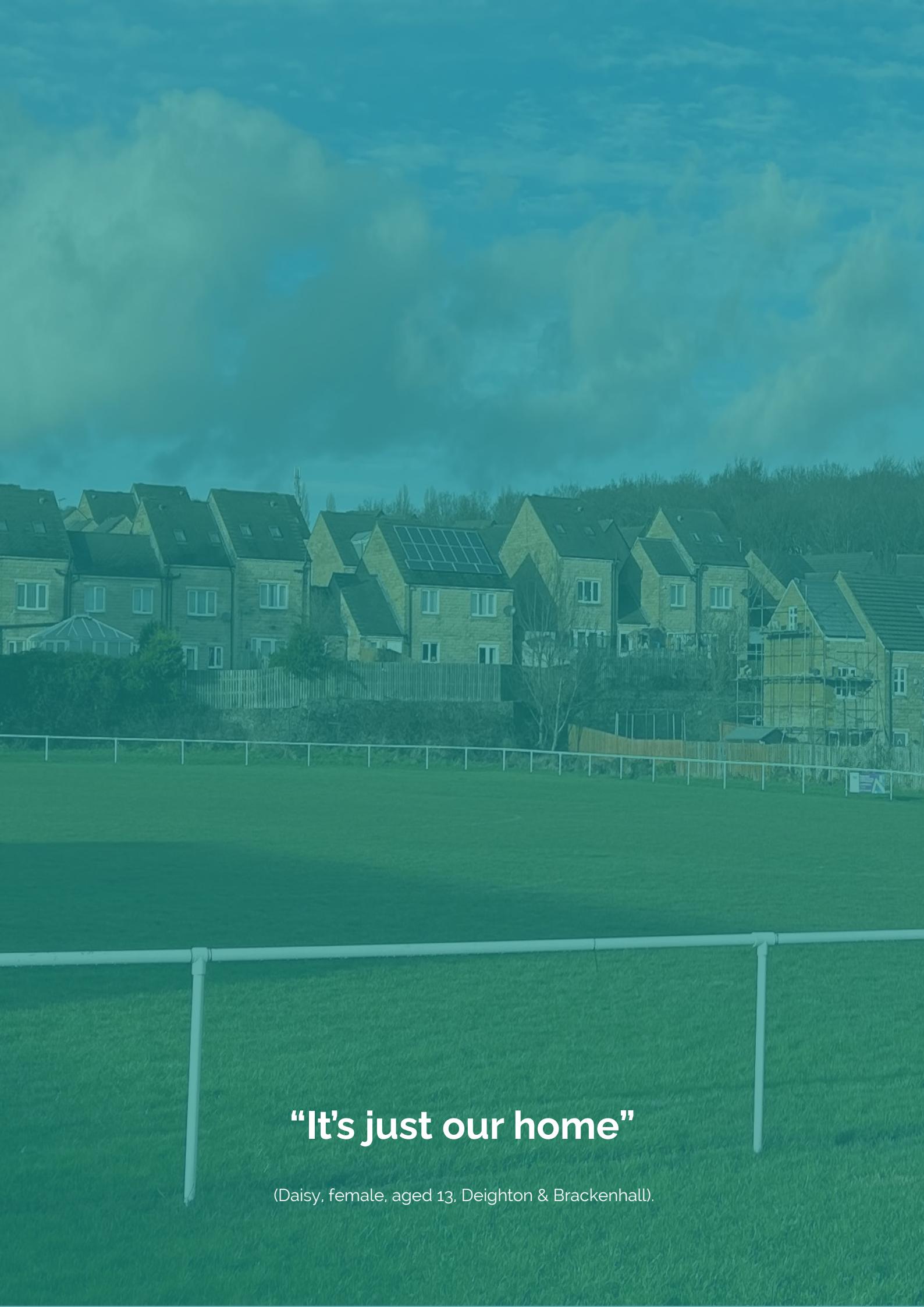
5. National and local decision makers to champion children and young people



Figure 14
Young people's five recommendations

"I want politicians and decision-makers to know that young people care about their area and community and deserve to be listened to"
(Sabryna, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).





“It's just our home”

(Daisy, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

1. Growing up in economically disadvantaged places

Introduction

- 1.1 The contemporary context of UK childhoods:
The spatial patterning of child poverty and disadvantage**
- 1.2 Why poverty matters**
- 1.3 Policy responses to child poverty and disadvantage**
- 1.4 The social dimensions of child poverty and disadvantage**
- 1.5 Children and young people's absence in policy and policymaking**

1. Growing up in economically disadvantaged places

Introduction

The global financial crisis of 2008 and ensuing era of austerity has pushed greater numbers of children and families into poverty (Goldblatt, 2024). The consequent widening of social and economic inequalities, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the erosion of public services (Barnes et al., 2022; Webb et al., 2022) consolidated the UK's position as home to some of the worst regional inequalities in the developed world (Etherington et al., 2022). Children and young people living in the most economically disadvantaged localities in the UK are exposed to more crime, live in worse housing and experience higher levels of food insecurity. They have on average, poorer educational attainment and poorer physical and mental health impacting their everyday lives, opportunities and outcomes (Barnes et al., 2022; Marmot et al., 2020a, 2020b; Neelon et al., 2017; Save the Children, 2023; Treadwell, 2023).

Yet, the way in which these regional inequalities are experienced by children and young people themselves, their perceptions of what challenges and what supports them to flourish now and their aspirations for the future, is not fully understood. This study responds to this gap in knowledge, researching with young people (aged 10 – 15) in three economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK to generate new insights from children and young people themselves to inform policy aspirations to 'build back fairer' (Marmot et al., 2020a) and reduce the disadvantages experienced by so many children and young people in the UK.

In researching with young people and supporting them as local change makers, our research offers unique insights into their lives and aspirations in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and how their needs and perspectives can be recognised and incorporated in local decision-making. The central focus of the research is therefore to understand:

- The role of local neighbourhoods in young people's lives; what supports and what challenges them to flourish in contexts of economic disadvantage and marginality.
- How young people can be actively engaged in local action and decision-making and the methodologies and methods that support the generation and exchange of knowledge with young people.



To answer these questions, the report is divided into five chapters.



Chapter One 'Growing up in economically disadvantaged places', explores the contemporary context of UK childhoods including the spatial patterning of child poverty and disadvantage, policy responses and children and young people's absence in policymaking.

Chapter Two 'Amplifying the voices of young people', sets out our response to these absences and how we researched with young people in accordance with their rights. It describes the socio-economic contexts of children and young people's lives in our three study neighbourhoods, their roles in the project and our ethical commitment to young people as insightful and skilled narrators of their experiences and how this can be enhanced through visual and creative arts-based methods to enable young people to document and identify their priorities for change.

Chapter Three 'Place matters: Young people's perspectives on their lives and futures', is focused on what young people told us, through their creative artwork, mapping and interviews. This includes what growing up in the study neighbourhoods feels like from their perspectives and why place matters to them; how they perceive and use local outdoor and indoor space; the significance of community and familial connections for them and their aspirations for their neighbourhoods.

Chapter Four 'Young people are change-makers in economically disadvantaged places', recognises and gives examples of young people's agency and potential for positive change, elaborating the positive differences they make in their communities and their active roles in local dialogues with decision-makers in each neighbourhood.

Chapter Five 'Recommendations from young people', concludes the report, setting out young people's recommendations to local and national decision-makers and how including young people in decisions locally can make neighbourhoods better for children, young people and communities.



1.1 The contemporary context of UK childhoods

Over thirty percent (4.5 million) of UK children live in poverty, an increase of 900,000 between 2010/11 and 2023/24 (DWP, 2025). This is expected to rise to 4.7 million by the end of this parliament (CPAG, 2025). Seven out of ten children living in poverty have at least one parent in paid work and 49% are from Black and Asian communities, compared to 24% of white children (CPAG, 2025). Since its introduction in 2017, the two-child limit has become the largest single driver of child poverty, currently affecting almost 1.7 million children (End Child Poverty Coalition, 2025). There are also large regional differences, with child poverty concentrated in the cities of the North and Midlands (Barnes et al., 2020). While children in the North are more likely to grow up in poverty than those in the South of England (Marmot, 2020b) there are also stark differences within regions in England. Children growing up in the coastal communities along England's 'salt fringe' (Bunting, 2023) experience higher levels of poverty, poorer educational outcomes and poorer health than those from neighbouring settlements only a few miles inland within the same region (CMO, 2021). It is also important to note that within the UK's cities and regions, there are large differences in poverty and children's opportunities. For example, in major cities in the UK, life expectancy and child poverty can be mapped along a single bus or tube map, with sharp declines in life expectancy and increases in child poverty between the richest and poorest neighbourhoods (Cheshire and O'Brien, 2012; Sheffield Fairness Commission, 2023).

1.2 Why poverty matters

'Child poverty is a stain on the collective conscience of the United Kingdom'

(Hayre and Pollock, 2022).

Poverty has a major impact on children's childhoods, opportunities and futures. It affects their health and wellbeing as children as well as being a significant predictor of their health, wealth and healthy life expectancy as adults (Marmot, 2020a, 2020b). Children and young people from the 20% most impoverished households are four times more likely to experience a serious mental health issue by the age of 11 compared with those living in the wealthiest 20% of households (Hayre and Pollock, 2022). Poorer children living in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods are at greater risk of exploitation by gangs, violence and knife crime, exposure to road accidents and pollution, and live in overcrowded and insecure homes (Barnes et al., 2022; Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2022; Marmot, 2020b; YEF, 2024). The spatial patterning of poverty, whereby children from the most economically disadvantaged areas are less likely to be 'school ready' and have lower levels of attainment than their more advantaged peers, impacts their employment and health outcomes as adults (CMO, 2021).

Children growing up in poverty experience heightened food insecurity, have worse nutrition and higher rates of childhood obesity (APPG, 2023; Barnes et al., 2022; Marmot, 2020a, 2020b).



The reduction in opportunities for the poorest children is exacerbated by the decline in local authority funding of children and young people's services. Hayre and Pollock (2022) report a decline in local authority budgets of 29% between 2010 - 11 and 2017 - 18, with the most deprived areas of the UK experiencing the greatest reductions and funding for youth services cut by 70 percent since 2010 (YMCA, 2020). These regional inequalities are also reflected in school budgets whereby pupils in London receive 9.7% more funding than those in the North (APPG, 2023) with similar disparities for schools in coastal areas. Research by Asthana and Gibson (2022) note how school funding allocations (2020-21) remain highest in London relative to coastal areas. They compared the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Kensington and Chelsea finding significantly higher per capita allocations (£6947, £6192 and £6163) compared to the coastal areas of Knowsley (£5383), Blackpool (£4839) and Portsmouth (£4770), noting that in these London boroughs the average GCSE performance of free school meal (FSM) pupils is higher than that of non-FSM pupils in the coastal authorities listed. Their work identifies a range of interlinked budgetary, socio-cultural and spatial factors impacting the educational achievement and health outcomes for disadvantaged children living in coastal communities. Overall, cuts to local authority and school budgets have worsened children's access to preventative services and reduced opportunities for poorer children to participate in school trips and enrichment activities (Quilter-Pinner et al., 2023; Sutton Trust, 2023), exacerbating childhood inequality and economic disadvantage in the poorest neighbourhoods (Webb et al., 2022).

1.3 Policy responses to child poverty and disadvantage

'Poverty scars the lives and life chances of our children. It is shameful that child poverty has increased by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now living in poverty in the UK and 800,000 children using foodbanks to eat. This is unacceptable'

(Secretaries of State for Work & Pensions and for Education, Foreword: Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy, 2024).

Our study was undertaken during the final two years of a Conservative government in the UK, at the tail-end of the 2019 COVID-crisis and a period of international political instability including the war in Ukraine, the genocide in Palestine (Save the Children International, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; United Nation, 2024), and the global economic crisis. This period saw huge rises in child poverty and widening socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by a hostile political economy (Hayre and Pollock, 2022). The austerity agenda of 2010 resulted in more than £30 billion in spending reductions to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services, leaving poorer children and families at extreme vulnerability to financial stress and pushing more children into poverty (APPG, 2023; CPAG, 2024; Horton, 2016; Schweiger, 2019).

Policy responses to the growing inequalities during this period included the Levelling up white paper (DLUHC, 2022) which set out the government's vision for an economically dynamic UK, where everyone, regardless of where they live, would have access to good jobs, pay and living standards; streets would be safer, and health and wellbeing would be protected. Yet, within this landmark policy, children and young people were barely mentioned, while the year-on-year reductions to social services and education budgets continued with dire consequences on the quality and availability of services for children (Local Government White Paper, 2024). Moreover, the emphasis in the Levelling up White paper on addressing regional disparities through increases in economic productivity, failed to address the wider issues of inequity and social justice whereby people are 'left behind and ill-equipped to catch up' (Bolton and Dessent, 2024). This narrow focus was exemplified in the mission to raise attainment at key stage two (the end of primary school in England).

The only mission to directly mention children was expressed not in terms of young people's lives and opportunities as children, but in terms of their economic contribution as future adults. Premised on narrow economic goals, it is emblematic of a legacy of failed regional and urban policy to address the wider determinants of poverty and disadvantage (Marmot et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2021). We have since seen a change in Government (July, 2024) with a Labour Government committed to reducing child poverty and regional differences in opportunities for children which includes the setting up of a national Child Poverty Taskforce (due to publish its strategy in Autumn 2025) to oversee the development of a cross-government Child Poverty Strategy which will "improve children's lives and life chances now and tackle the root causes of child poverty in the long term" (HM Government, 2024a, p1). Whilst the emphasis on young people's potential and productivity as the future workforce continues in this approach from Labour, it appears to be located within a wider programme of work for supporting young people's wellbeing and happiness outside school.

The child poverty strategy sits alongside the development of the new cross-government Young Futures Programme announced in the Labour Party Conference in October 2023 and formed an election manifesto pledge to "intervene earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime, creating a new Young Futures programme with a network of hubs reaching every community" (Labour Party, 2024, p.66). These hubs are intended to bring together more co-ordinated support for young people (such as youth workers, mental health support and careers advisors) to better address the challenges they face, including serious youth violence and exploitation, mental health and the impact of social media, and the longer-term impact the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the election, the Labour Government have made further commitments to improving services for young people in the form of a National Youth Strategy (announced by Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy on 12th November 2024) which it is claimed will complement the Young Futures Hubs, delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level, and returning decision-making power to local communities and the young people within them. It describes a process of co-production with young people, that will put them "back in charge of their own destiny, starting with better understanding of their lives and needs" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2024). The Strategy has been allocated £85 million of funding for enhancing youth facilities, and a further £100 million from dormant assets funding provided to improve youth outcomes

between 2024 and 2028. As part of this Strategy, a Local Youth Transformation pilot will "provide tools, guidance, peer challenge and funding to build back local authorities' lost capability in the youth space, sowing the seeds for a much-needed rejuvenation of local youth services" (ibid). Whilst it is too early to assess the impact of the (now published)² National Youth Strategy on the lives of young people, it is encouraging to see the shift in emphasis towards lived experience-informed policy and service delivery that is responsive to young people's ideas about what is needed in their local communities (National Youth Service, 2025).

1.4 The social dimensions of child poverty and disadvantage

'People with higher socioeconomic position in society have a greater array of life chances and more opportunities to lead a flourishing life'

(The Marmot Review, 2010).

Widening the focus beyond the economics of poverty to consider the social experience of disadvantage exposes large disparities in the social assets available to poorer communities. Economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods lack money, but they also have fewer social assets - community, cultural, educational, sport, leisure and green space - which combined with weaker transport and digital connectivity create a 'cycle of disadvantage' (APPG, 2023; Frontier Economics, 2021). However, not included in these measures are the intangible, 'felt' experiences and deep attachments that can exist and enrich poorer communities and childhoods (Bunting, 2023; Lomax, 2015; Marmot, 2010). Economically disadvantaged communities can be rich in social resources, they can be places where people want to live and enjoy living. Such attachments or 'community spirit', defined as the 'quality of relationships, sense of belonging, social cohesion and collective action' (Royal Society for Public Health, 2023) can protect against some of the harmful effects of poverty and other forms of social disadvantage (The Health Foundation, 2022). However, there are limits to what they can achieve even with strong local community action. As Bolton and Dessent (2024) argue:

'It's not that the residents of these neighbourhoods lack the skills, commitment or rich heritage to turn things around themselves.... The real deficit lies in the lack of support that these areas have access to.'

Local authorities containing disadvantaged neighbourhoods receive less core government funding per household than the average across England (OCSI, 2023). Residents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods report being routinely excluded from opportunities to participate in high-level decision-making about where they live and the quality of life locally (Poku-Amanfo et al., 2024).

² Since preparing our report, the UK government launched Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy, a ten-year government strategy to 'tackle the challenges for this generation of young people and ensure every young person can thrive' (Department for Culture, Media, 2025).

1.5 Children and young people's absence in policy and policymaking

'Children have been ignored and overlooked. They aren't at the forefront of any strategic policy within government. We should be outraged and devastated that tens of thousands of children don't have the support they need to be able to flourish in life'

(Anne Longfield, Centre for Young Lives, 2024a).

Local neighbourhoods are vital for children and young people's quality of life and life chances (Christensen and O'Brien, 2002; Marmot, 2010), with a sense of belonging and access to safe places to play and interact outdoors widely understood as markers of child-friendly neighbourhoods (Chawla, 2002a, Chawla, 2002b). Yet, although where children and young people live matters greatly for their lives and opportunities, they are routinely overlooked in policy and policymaking that impact their everyday lives and prospects (Morgan Jones et al., 2020; Rowland and Cook, 2020). Failure to include young people in decision-making ignores their capabilities (Lomax et al., 2022), reinforces their marginality and perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage - the systemic disparities in the distribution of economic resources and political power between adults and young people. These disparities are experienced disproportionately by children and young people from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including those from poorer, minority ethnic and rural backgrounds who have less opportunity to participate or are easier to ignore (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2022).

While there are examples of children and young people's voice in policymaking internationally (Cuevas-Parra and Stephano, 2020; European Youth Forum, 2020), the UK has been slow to embrace children's participation rights (UNCRC, 1989). The failure to consider children and young people's needs in decision-making was evident in the recent COVID pandemic during which children were neither consulted nor adequately represented (Lomax and Smith, 2024; Longfield, 2024a; Longfield, 2024b) leading to calls for greater representation of children and young people by a number of children's charities and organisations. Recommendations include the appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children, the full incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law and making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement for all new policy and legislation (Barnardo's, 2024; Longfield, 2024a; Save the Children, 2023).



A photograph of a coastal town street. On the left, there is a shop with a large blue sign that reads "FAMILY AMUSEMENTS" in white letters. The shop has a glass front and a display window showing various items. To the right of the shop is a long, two-story building with many arched windows and a balcony. The street is paved with asphalt and has a few people walking on it. The sky is clear and blue.

“I learnt to express my feelings freely and I will have my voice heard”

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe)

2. Amplifying the voices of children and young people: a participatory study

2.1 The study neighbourhoods

Deighton & Brackenhall, Huddersfield

Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire

Woughton, Milton Keynes

2.2 Young people as co-researchers and wider sample

2.3 Methodology and methods

2.3.1 Arts-based methods and young people's voice

2.4 The ethics and challenges of co-research in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods

2.4.1 Neighbourhood violence

2.4.2 Methodological adjustments and safeguarding

2.4.3 'Unschooling'

2.4.4 Ethics and informed consent

2.4.5 Anonymisation and young people's rights to be acknowledged as co-researchers

2.5 Project phases

Phase 1: Understanding young people's experiences of place

Phase 2: Peer and adult perspectives

Phase 3: Community dialogues and youth-led change

Phase 4: Dissemination and impact: Local stakeholder dialogues

2.6 Data and analysis

2. Amplifying the voices of children and young people: A participatory study

'Childhood should not be something that happens to children but something they have a say in and have control over'

(Lemm Sissay, Child of the North report, 2022).

Our research aimed to address the participation deficit that Sissay calls attention to, developing methods of co-producing research and knowledge exchange that both recognise young people's universal rights to be included in decision-making (UNCRC, 1989) and is responsive to the particularities of young people's experiences. Accordingly, this section of the report offers an overview of the socio-economic context of each of the three neighbourhoods in which we researched with young people, drawing on census (2021), Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019) and constituency data (Barton, 2024) to highlight the structural contexts that shape the everyday lives and opportunities of the participating young people in each neighbourhood. This is followed by an introduction to the young participants themselves and the different roles they played in the project as co-researchers and change-makers and how these roles were instrumental in the shaping of the research and knowledge exchange activities.

The final, largest portion of this section of the report elaborates the methodology and methods that we co-produced with young people to support them as researchers and change-makers in accordance with the aims of our project to amplify the voices of young people living in disadvantage contexts, recognising they have pressing interests and needs as children as well as their aspirations for their neighbourhoods. This includes our ethical commitment to young people as insightful and skilled narrators of their experiences, how this can be enhanced through visual and creative arts, group discussion and reflection as a means of documenting and identifying priorities for change.

2.1 The study neighbourhoods

The study was conducted in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in three regions in England: Deighton & Brackenhall, a neighbourhood within the former industrial town of Huddersfield in the North of England in Yorkshire and Humber; Woughton, a neighbourhood in a high-growth area in the affluent city of Milton Keynes in South East England; and Mablethorpe, a spatially disconnected, small seaside town in the East Midlands. As observed in figure 2.1.1, these neighbourhoods have in common high levels of poverty and disadvantage (IMD, 2019). Mablethorpe is among the 10% most deprived while Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton are each within the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England (IMD, 2019)³. While the three neighbourhoods are located in the lowest two deciles for income, employment, education and health, Woughton has considerably higher levels of deprivation as measured by levels of crime and access to housing and services while Deighton fares worst on income deprivation affecting children, and Mablethorpe has the lowest score for health.

However, this overall measure of disadvantage⁴ obscures variations between the case study sites in terms of their unique geographies and social histories, as well as other indicators of neighbourhood inequality.



³ The IMD for each of the study sites had been calculated by aggregating data at the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA). Aggregated data for Deighton and Brackenhall is comprised from LSOAs Kirklees 025A, 025C and 025D; for Mablethorpe it is from LSOAs East Lindsey 005A, 005B, 005C and 006C; and for Woughton it is from LSOAs Milton Keynes 018C, 018D, 018E, 021D, 023B and 023C. We then calculated the average IMD for each site following the guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Appendix A)- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d8b364ced915d03709e3cf2/1oD2019_Research_Report.pdf.

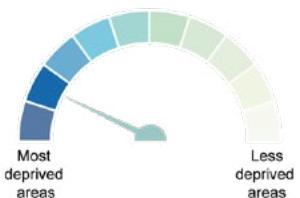
⁴ The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England based on seven different domains: • Income Deprivation • Employment Deprivation • Education, Skills and Training Deprivation • Health Deprivation and Disability • Crime • Barriers to Housing and Services • Living Environment Deprivation. <https://data.cdrc.ac.uk/dataset/index-multiple-deprivation-imd>.

Deighton and Brackenhall

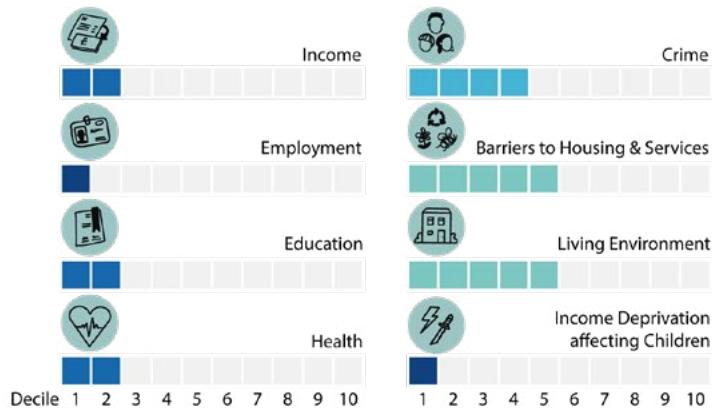
Huddersfield

County of West Yorkshire

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)



Domains of Deprivation

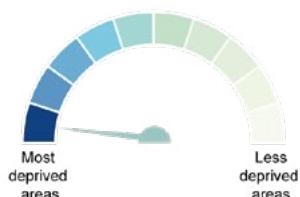


Mablethorpe

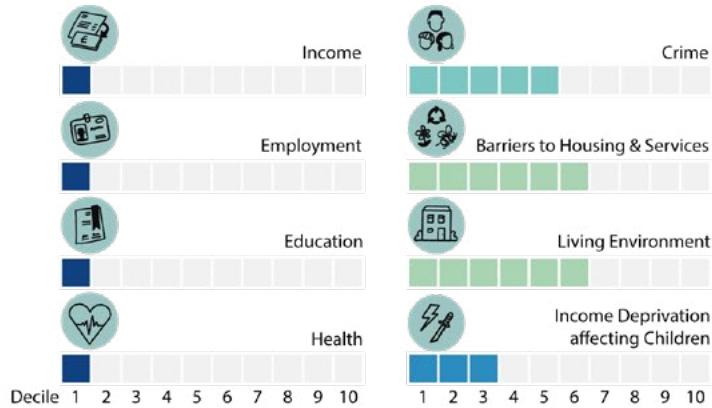
East Lindsey District

County of Lincolnshire

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)



Domains of Deprivation

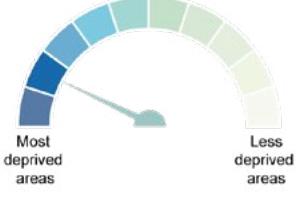


Woughton

Milton Keynes

County of Buckinghamshire

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)



Domains of Deprivation

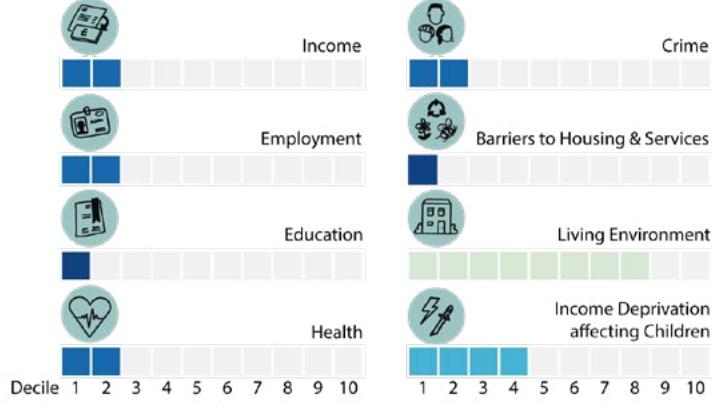


Figure 2.1.1
Levels of deprivation in the study neighbourhoods (IMD, 2019)

As illustrated below in Figures 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 there are differences on measures of crime, including violent and sexual crimes, car ownership, and the availability of public green space that impact children and young people's safety and spatial mobility - how they move around in and beyond their neighbourhoods. There are also variations in educational attainment, proximity to secondary and post-compulsory education, entitlement to free school meals and housing tenure – which impact young people's everyday lives and futures.

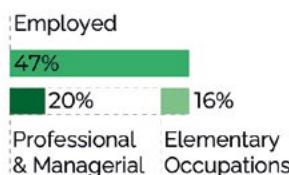
Our aim, in selecting these distinctive case study neighbourhoods was to enable the research to explore the complex and intersecting factors that shape young people's experiences and opportunities in these different neighbourhood contexts.

Deighton and Brackenhall

Huddersfield
County of West Yorkshire

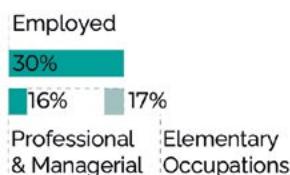
Employment

(England average: 33%)



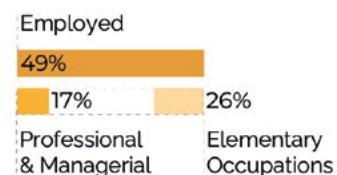
Mablethorpe

East Lindsey District
County of Lincolnshire



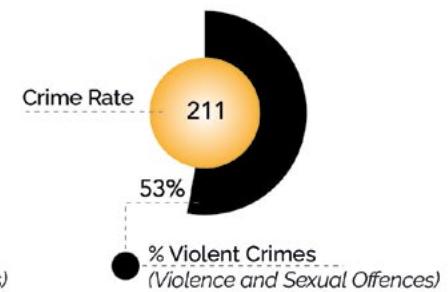
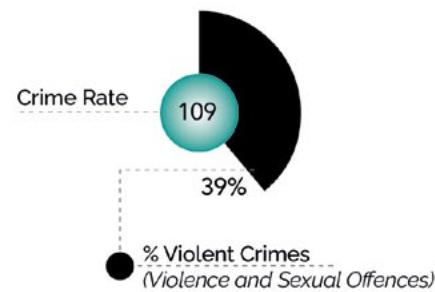
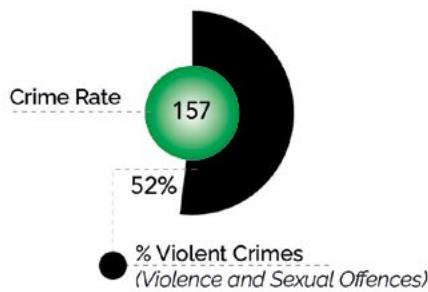
Woughton

Milton Keynes
County of Buckinghamshire



Crime Rate^I

(England average: Crime Rate=91 / % Violent Crimes=41%)



Educational Attainment^{II & III}

(England average: KS4=64% / KS2=72%)

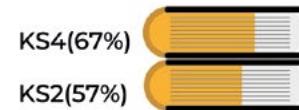
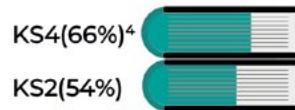
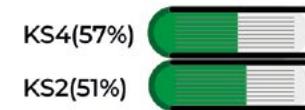


Figure 2.1.2
Comparison of key metrics by site (1 of 2)

I Crime rate refers to number of crimes per 1000 residents per year.

Figure also shows % of total recorded crimes categorised as violence against the person and sexual offences per site.

II % Children receiving free school meals (receiving or entitled to).

III For Mablethorpe, FSM considers only children attending Primary School. The area does not have a local Secondary School

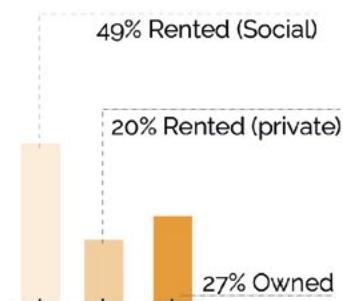
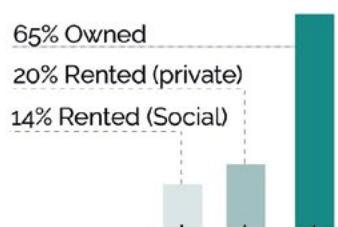
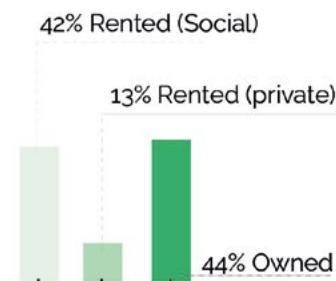
Deighton and Brackenhall
Huddersfield
County of West Yorkshire

Mablethorpe
East Lindsey District
County of Lincolnshire

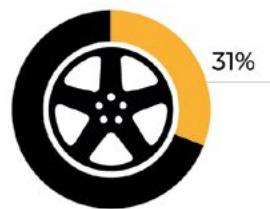
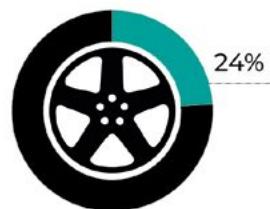
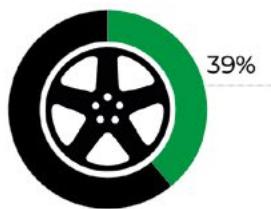
Woughton
Milton Keynes
County of Buckinghamshire

Housing Tenure

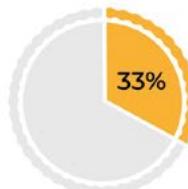
(England average: Owned=62% / Rented (private)=20% / Rented (social)=17%)



Households without a car
(England average: 25%)



Free School Meals (FSM) ^{IV & V}
(England average: 23%)



Access to Public Green Space ^{VI}
(England average: 385.46 m)

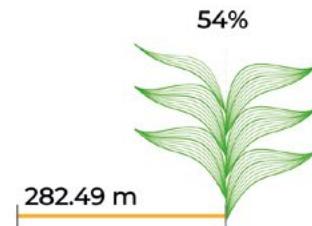
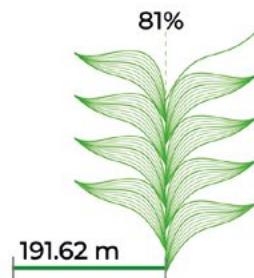


Figure 2.1.3
Comparison of key metrics by site (2 of 2)

IV KS2 - % of pupils meeting standards in all English reading, writing and maths 2022.

V KS4 - Proportion of pupils Achieving A*-C/ 9-4 in Maths and English GCSEs

VI Figures for access to Public Green Spaces showcase two measures.

- The number in meters represents the average distance to the nearest park, public garden or playing field
- The % refers to the built up area postcodes within 300 m of a park, public garden or playing field in each site.

Average distance to
nearest Park,Public Garden
or Playing Field

Leaves=No. of built
up areas within
300 m.
1 leave = 10% / 1 line = 1%



Deighton & Brackenhall, Huddersfield

Deighton & Brackenhall, in the Ashbrow Ward, Huddersfield, within the metropolitan borough of Kirklees, is amongst the most deprived 10% of English neighbourhoods on measures of income and child poverty, employment, education, crime and access to housing and services and amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods on measures of health (IMD, 2019). The violent crime (violence and sexual offenses) rate is 52% of crime incidences recorded (Economic Policy Centre, 2023). The population is majority white with 44% from an ethnic minority. Over half of adults are not in work (53%), 42% of households are social rented, and 39% do not own a car (Kirklees Observatory, 2020). Of children living in Deighton & Brackenhall, 44% are entitled to free school meals (Census, 2021) and educational attainment is lower than the national average with only 51% of children achieving the expected standard of English reading, writing, and maths at KS2, compared to 72% in England while at KS4 only 57% of children achieve A*-C/ 9-4 in Maths and English GCSEs compared to 64% in England (Barton, 2024). The area does better on a measure of living standards although is still within the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in England (IMD, 2019).

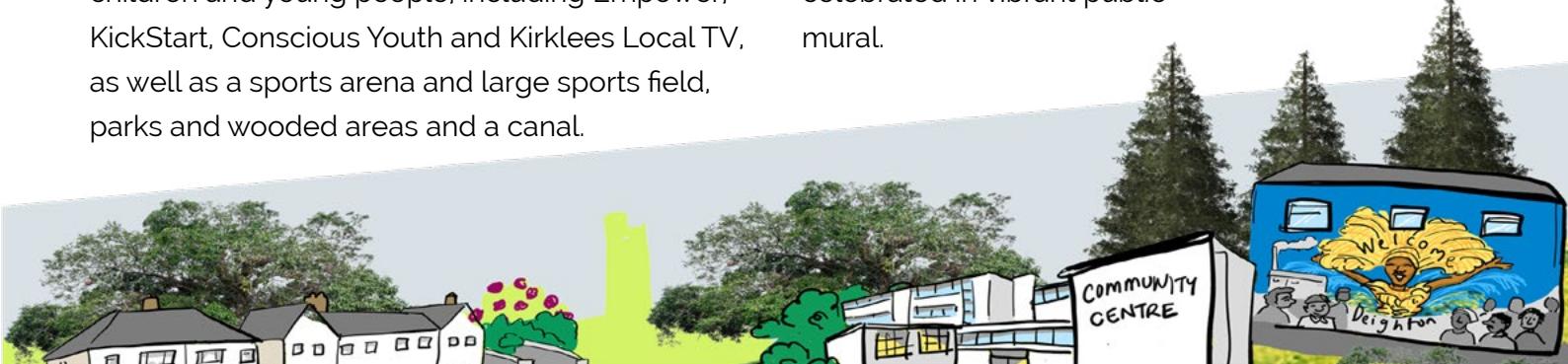
Situated on the northern edge of Huddersfield town, Deighton & Brackenhall has a range of private and rented properties, including social housing, industrial premises, warehousing and a large chemical works. There is a children's centre, primary schools and two large secondary schools. There are grass roots clubs and projects for children and young people, including Empower, KickStart, Conscious Youth and Kirklees Local TV, as well as a sports arena and large sports field, parks and wooded areas and a canal.

There is also a train station with a direct rail network to the town centre and the neighbouring cities of Leeds and Manchester.

The area, now known as Deighton & Brackenhall, was developed in the 20th century clearance of substandard housing with families relocated from London (Bayliss, 2001; Social Services, 1951) and Huddersfield town centre (BBC, 2014).

Newer homes were built to garden city principles during the late 1990s when regeneration included the demolition of a large area of housing and the work of the Deighton and Brackenhall Initiative (DBI) "a scheme to reinvest a portion of the profits from the redevelopment through a 'community dividend' that would pay for services and activities, including the local carnival, a community centre, youth, sports and arts activities" (Dobson, 2018). Residents were historically employed in Huddersfield textile and engineering industries and are now employed in a range of professional to elementary occupation (Census, 2021).

Access to green space is good, with 81% of homes having access to a park, public gardens or a playfield and the average distance of households being 191.62 metres to public green space (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Deighton & Brackenhall has a rich heritage and strong sense of community. The area is ethnically diverse, with 44% of the population from an ethnic minority (Census, 2021) and the neighbourhood has an annual carnival and this, and its heritage, are celebrated in vibrant public mural.



Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire

Mablethorpe is a seaside town in the rural coastal area of East Lindsey on the East coast of England. 98% of the population are white, with the mixed/multiple ethnic group category being the second largest at only 0.69% (ELDC, 2016). Amongst the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in the country on measures of education, life expectancy is lower than the England average (EPC, 2023). 24% of children in East Lindsey (the district within which Mablethorpe is located) live in poverty and 21% are obese by the age of 11 (ELHWP, 2017/18). Child admissions for mental health for under-17s is higher than the national average and as an ageing coastal community it has higher levels of adults with limiting long-term illness and disability. The violent crime rate is 39% (EPC, 2023).

Around a third of residents in Mablethorpe have no, or low, formal educational qualifications and economic inactivity is 42% (Census, 2021). 24% of people do not own a car and 56% of children living in Mablethorpe are entitled to free school meals⁵ (Census, 2021). Educational attainment is lower than the national average with 66% of children achieving the expected standard of English reading, writing, and maths at KS2 compared to 72% in England. The figures at KS4 are slightly above the national average with 66% of children achieving A*-C/ 9-4 in Maths and English GCSEs compared to 64% in England (Barton, 2024).

Only 31% of dwellings have access to a park, public gardens or a playfield with the average distance of households being 585.62 metres to public green space⁶ (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This is almost double World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) recommendations of 300 metres (a five-minute walk) for children to maximize the health benefits of green space. However, as a coastal location, it has long golden beaches and sand dunes. In 2021 Mablethorpe (alongside Skegness) secured a combined Town Deal funding of £48.4m as part of the Government's levelling up programme. Managed by the Connected Coast Board (CCB)⁷, part of these funds had been channelled into a new leisure centre (built throughout the project and opened to the public on July 2024), a research and community centre for health, wellbeing and care (set to be opened to the public in 2025), high street shopfronts and building repairs and a mobility facility offering a range of transport facilities and services (currently in the planning stage) (Connected Coast Annual Report, 2023-2024).

⁵ Only includes children attending primary school. The area does not have a local secondary school.

⁶ Mablethorpe is the only one of the three sites where not all postcodes are within 900m of a public green area. This does not account for the access to the beach, but it does reflect what young people said about the lack of green areas (see Chapter 3).

⁷ The CCB brings together key stakeholders in the area from private, public and voluntary sectors to provide leadership to oversee the development of transformational and sustainable projects to improve both Skegness and Mablethorpe (Source: <https://connectedcoast.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/AGM-Presentation-Mablethorpe.pptx.pdf>)



Woughton, Milton Keynes

Characterised by persistent economic disadvantage in the otherwise affluent post-urban, low-density city of Milton Keynes, Woughton is amongst the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country (IMD, 2019). Predominately the population is white, whilst a third of the area is ethnically diverse. The violent crime rate is 53% (EPC, 2023).

Although Milton Keynes has recently been named as one of the uppermost cities for high wages, innovation and housing growth, and workers in Milton Keynes on average earn above the national average (Centre for Cities, 2025), over half of adults in Woughton are not in work. 49% of households are social rented and 31% do not own a car. 33% of children living in Woughton are entitled to free school meals (Census, 2021) and educational attainment is lower than the national average with 57% of children achieving the expected standard of English reading, writing, and maths at KS2 (compared to 72% in England). The figures at KS4 are slightly above the national average with 67% of children achieve A*-C/ 9-4 in Maths and English GCSEs compared to 64% (Barton, 2024).

Milton Keynes is emblematic of post-war urban developments with a planned physical infrastructure designed to optimise safe movement and access to green space, a retail hub and cultural quarter. The creation of the city of Milton Keynes, designed and developed from an Act of Parliament in 1967, is one of the best-known 20th Century 'new towns' in the UK. Built to ease the housing shortages in London, its key elements include the garden city model to create a town designed for healthy living and industry, with permanent green space which surrounds the whole town and attention paid to landscaping and planting, with neighbourhoods connected by 'redways' (pedestrian and cycle ways which underpass major roads) to create ease of movement across the town. Within just a couple of decades of its conception Milton Keynes had "attracted over 80,000 jobs, oversaw the construction of 44,000 houses and planted 14 million trees and shrubs" (Living Archive, Milton Keynes). However, access to green space by its poorer residents is experienced as spatially segregated with limited access to city amenities. In Woughton, only 54% of dwellings have access to a park, public gardens or a playfield with the average distance of households being 282.49 metres to public green space (Office for National Statistics, 2020).



2.2 Young people as co-researchers and wider sample

A total of 257 young people aged 10-15⁸ participated in the project as co-researchers and research participants with a further six young people acting as advisors on our national advisory group, a role which enabled them to be instrumental in shaping the research and how we worked with young people as co-researchers. Suggestions, which we adopted, included that we work in small groups to create space for young people's contributions, involve young people in co-analysis and provide regular updates on the progress of the research (what we are finding out and how we are sharing findings with wider audiences) with the co-researchers.

Of the 257 young people who participated in the research, the sample was split as follows:

Young people as co-researchers

A core group of fifty-four young people worked with us as co-researchers and change-makers, a role which involved their active co-shaping of the research from the co-design of methods through to co-analysis, deciding on key messages and as active participants in community dialogue events. As illustrated in Figure 2.2.1, these thirty-nine girls, fourteen boys and one young person who identified as transgender were recruited through schools and youth projects in each of the case study sites. Of this sample, fifteen young people worked with us in Deighton & Brackenhall, eighteen in Mablethorpe and twenty-one in Woughton. These young people are from diverse backgrounds including with special education needs (n=11, 20%), from minority ethnic backgrounds (n=24, 41%) and in receipt of free school meals (n=11, 41%). Fifty-six percent (n=30) of the co-researchers lived in privately rented or social housing and seventy percent of the co-researchers had at least one parent who worked full or part time. The profile of co-researchers broadly reflects the demographic profile of each area in terms of ethnicity, housing tenure and entitlement to free school meals, with the exception that there were more girls than boys in the sample.

Young people as research participants

The study also involved a further sample of 203 young people living in each of the case study sites (Deighton & Brackenhall, n=118; Mablethorpe, n=25; Woughton, n=60)⁹, providing a robust sample size and ensuring diversity of representation in terms of gender, age and ethnicity.

These young people participated in peer-led focus groups, creative workshops, peer-designed surveys and one-to-one interviews with their peers, as well as in local community dialogue events. Their involvement was co-designed by the co-researchers and is discussed in section 2.5.

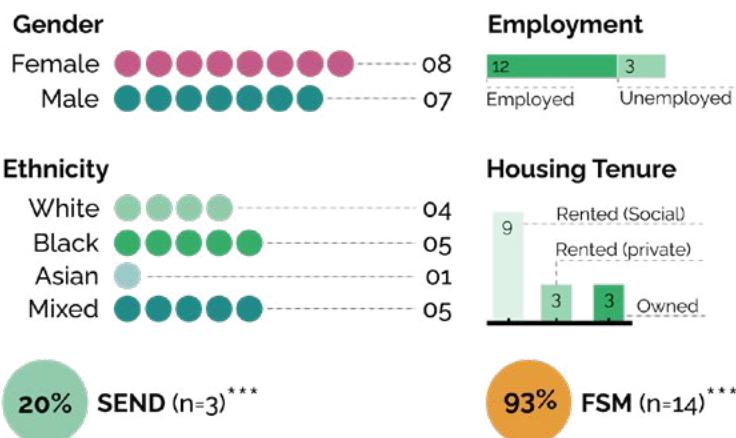
⁸ Reflects young people's ages at the start of the period of study. It includes two young people who were keen to participate whose age fell just outside the sample age-range (one young person was aged 9 nearly 10 and the other young person had just turned 16 years at the start of the study).

⁹ The variation in sample size across the three sites reflects the different methods chosen by the co-researchers in each site, with larger numbers taking part in the co-researcher designed survey in Deighton & Brackenhall compared to the peer-led qualitative workshops that took place in Mablethorpe and Woughton.

Deighton and Brackenhall

Huddersfield

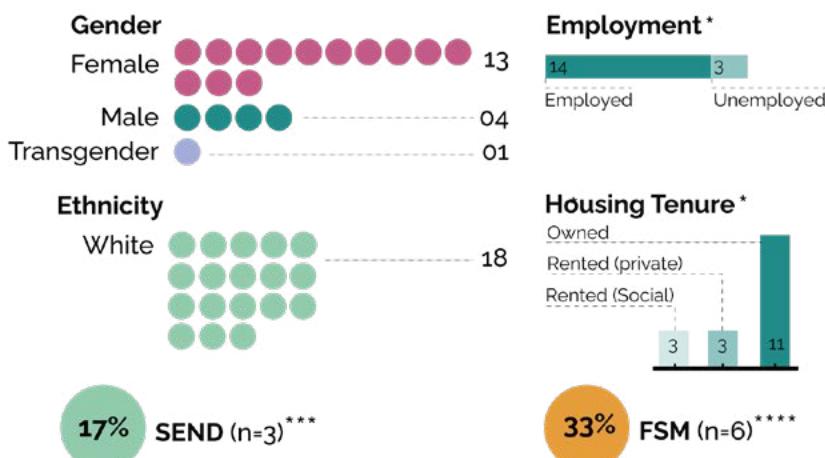
County of West Yorkshire



Mablethorpe

East Lindsey District

County of Lincolnshire



Woughton

Milton Keynes

County of Buckinghamshire

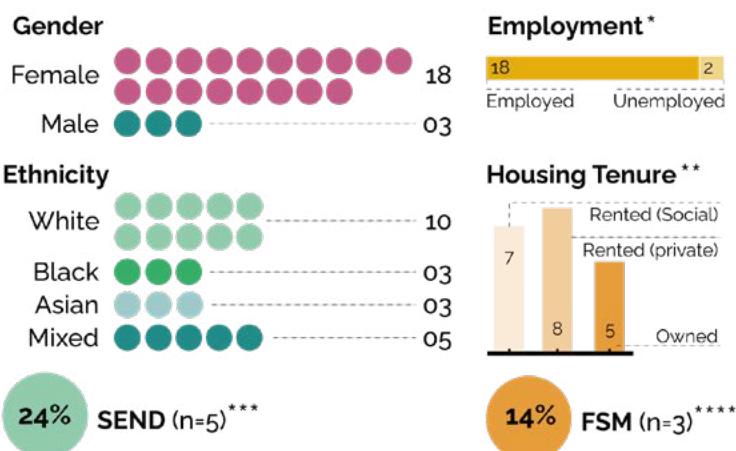


Figure 2.2.1

Project core group of fifty-four young co-researchers and change-makers

* In Mablethorpe, we had 1 non respondent to data regarding employment and housing tenure. Not included in the graph.
In Woughton, we had 1 non respondent to data regarding employment. Not included in the graph.

** In Woughton, 1 participant marked "other" as housing tenure. Not included in the graph.

*** SEND stands for special educational needs and disabilities.

**** FSM stands for free school meals.

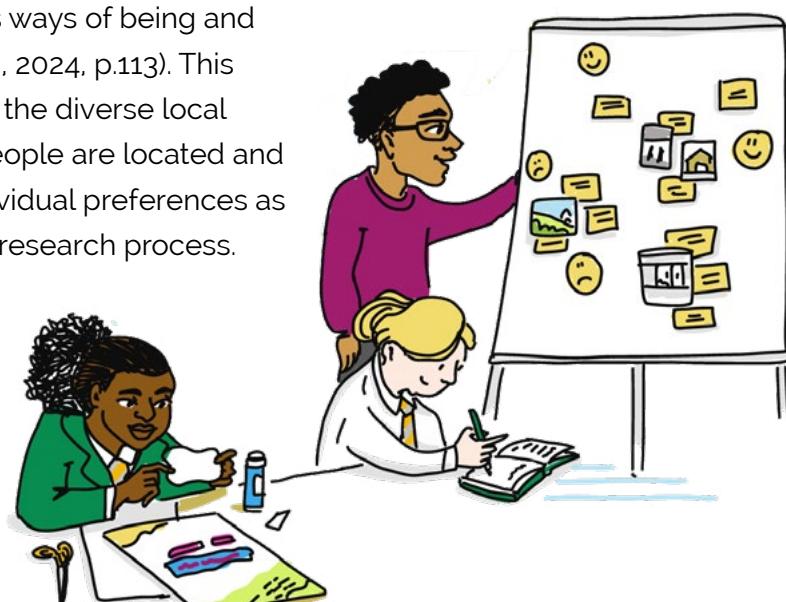
2.3 Methodology and methods

‘... children's voices can be seen and heard when researchers are open to and create opportunities for children... through different media (text, talk, art) and tak[ing] notice of children's sense-making through attentive forms of knowledge generation’

(Lomax and Smith, 2024).

Our methodological approach builds on previous Growing Up in Cities (GUIC) methods initiated by Kevin Lynch (1977) and developed during the second wave of GUIC studies in the 1990s (Chawla, 2002; Driskell 2002; Derr et al., 2018). Part of the third wave of studies exploring young people's experiences of their local environment and identifying methods that can be used across settings and cultures (GUIC, 2025) our study reflects more recent advances in Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Percy-Smith et al 2019), Children's Geographies (e.g. Horton and Kraftl, 2006) and Childhood and Youth Studies (e.g. Lomax, 2012; Day et al., 2022; Percy-Smith et al., 2003). Our approach to PAR is premised on the active involvement of children and young people in documenting and reflecting on their own lives and identifying actions and priorities for change (Percy-Smith et al., 2019; 2021). Framed by an attentive methodology (Lomax and Smith, 2024) our approach draws on a rich portfolio of arts-based methods alongside interviews, focus groups and creative workshops, opening up spaces for young people to take an active role in the generation of knowledge and social action.

Informed by early childhood research and pedagogy (Hackett et al., 2017) in which making art together with young people can facilitate their involvement and meaning making, we aimed to “dismantle conventional adult-child binaries”, attending carefully to young people's ways of being and knowing (Lomax and Smith, 2024, p.113). This meant being responsive to the diverse local contexts in which young people are located and being sensitive to their individual preferences as these emerged during the research process.



2.3.1 Arts-based methods and young people's voice

Music-making, drawing and crafting, talking, writing and image-making are some of the ways that young people in our research sought to make sense of their neighbourhoods and convey meanings to us, each other and wider audiences. To support these arts-based method, we offered a range of creative arts materials as well as providing opportunities for young people's participation through the expressive arts (including singing and music making). We provided an extensive range of high-quality art materials including art paper, fine art pencils, felt tips, collage materials, washi tape etc, that could be used to draw, colour, sculpt or collage. These were regularly updated in response to young people's preferences. For example, we brought masking tape and plasticine for some of the boys who were keen on modelling, as well as fine carbon sketching pencils for young people who expressed a desire to work with this medium. Emoji stickers were popular along with sparkly gem stickers.

We also assembled a bespoke art box for each young person including art materials according to their preferences and providing a choice of materials that they could self-select to add to their boxes and take home. The boxes themselves also provided a way for them to take care of their materials and store them safely.



Offering a choice of materials and the opportunity to introduce their own methods and ways of knowing generated novel and unforeseen insights from young people. For example, some young people brought in musical instruments and recorded their participation through other literacies such as music (piano, trumpet, guitar), poetry and song. Others enjoyed working with collage, plasticine and masking tape, using these to create three-dimensional models of pets, people and places that were important to them. Young people adapted and repurposed materials, combining pencil-sketches and ink-drawings with plasticine to create neighbourhood scenes in unexpected ways. In this, we were supported by the longitudinal, ethnographic design of our project. Working over an extended time period with young people at multiple touch points enabled us to get to know how they liked to work and what they liked to work with – from sitting quietly with a sketch pad, participating in a noisy group game or engaging in a one-to-one conversation over lunch with a member of the research team.



Art-Making

Place Assessment Interviews

Map Making

Walkabouts

Concentric Circle

Flipcharts and Post-it notes

Postcard Making

Interviewing Adults

Scrapbooking

2.4 The ethics and challenges of co-research in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Our approach, in which we made art, played games and listened carefully to what young people shared with us, was designed to be flexible and young person centred as part of disrupting conventional methods of engagement, imposed research design and 'truth finding' (Chesworth, 2018). However, in this we were challenged by the institutional spaces in which circumstances prescribed we must work with young people. In contrast to earlier children's geographies studies (e.g. Hart, 1978; Moore, 1986; Chawla, 2002) conducted with young people outdoors in their neighbourhoods, our study was undertaken predominantly with our core group of co-researchers in schools and youth activity settings. The requirement to research within these settings rather than to go outside and experience the neighbourhood alongside young people was due to safeguarding requirements that became apparent early in the research, discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Neighbourhood violence

One of the most pressing issues that impacted the project was the levels of violence in two of the neighbourhood sites. At the start of our fieldwork, in Deighton & Brackenhall the death by stabbing of a young person outside the secondary school sent shock waves through the community, necessitating great sensitivity in how we worked with and conducted field work with young people. Similarly, in the Woughton site, the death of a young girl from a dog attack gave rise to postponement and adjustments to some of the field work. Violent events were not isolated incidents in the study neighbourhoods. For example, revenge attacks and other serious crimes continued throughout 2022-3 with local data from the Kirklees Observatory indicating an acceleration in crime levels in Deighton. The data also reflects higher-than-average levels of crime, including incidences of violence and sexual crime, most particularly in Woughton and Deighton & Brackenhall (Census, 2021; IMD, 2019).

In Mablethorpe, the risks of gang affiliation and serious violence between community members was less immediate, but two of our young co-researchers were assaulted by other young people during the study period. More widely the community were well aware of the increasing threat of county lines networks on the East Coast, and the accompanying risk of criminal and sexual exploitation of children and young people. For this reason, outsiders, including tourists, were seen by adults as a potential risk to local children.

Violence and fear of violence continued to affect how we worked with young people who expressed strongly that our presence as outsiders working alongside them might arise suspicion. This also needs to be understood in the broader context of media interest and negative press coverage that accompanies serious crime and violent, gang related incidents and how this further stigmatises poorer areas (Jensen, 2014).

"It is more dangerous for people who don't live here. We live here and we know how to handle ourselves, how to walk away, where not to go"

(Bisah, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

For the young people we researched with, there was also the presence of the different pressures including press intrusion outside their school, police cordons on sites of crime, increased visibility of police and police patrols etc, and the insecurity that some of this generated which negatively impacted young people's access to their neighbourhood and their mental, physical and social wellbeing.

These events, and the young people's responses to them, as well as our own responses, led to valuable learning about the context in which children and young people are living as well as how to address the methodological challenges of researching in these contexts.

The methodological adjustments, as discussed in the following sections, reflect and are responsive to the neighbourhoods of these young people whose fear of violence and gangs means that they must carefully navigate the place they live, bringing into sharp focus the different ways they have developed to do this.

2.4.2 Methodological adjustments and safeguarding

Modifying our original research plan of doing street-based work (filmmaking and photography) outside in the neighbourhood with young people, we responded to the challenges of the areas and instead adapted methods to work in community centres and schools. Local schools and grassroots youth groups were invaluable partners in accommodating the research project and supporting young people's involvement. The need to research in these indoor spaces intensified our efforts to 'bring the outdoors inside', leading to some creative research innovation. We developed an approach which did not include going out together into the area but rather supported young people to narrate their experiences through words, images and text within their community and school spaces which was sensitive to their fears for their safety and emotional wellbeing. For example, we used photographs of key neighbourhood sites to prompt discussions from within the safety of the school and youth club rather than going outdoors.

We developed a range of methods to enable young people to reflect on their relationship with their local neighbourhood through art, narrative and images. These methods, whereby young people could draw, map and discuss where they meet, where they feel safe and where unsafe, and how they navigated their neighbourhoods at different times of the day, was powerfully evoked through these visual prompts.

Similarly, safeguarding concerns about children interviewing adults in the community generated some creative solutions with the co-researchers whereby young people were able to engage in asynchronous intergenerational conversations. This took the form of an anonymised intergenerational postcard

**"You try not to go down that alleyway ...
you try not to risk it"**

(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"When I walk to my mom's from my dad's the street is really empty and there is not a lot of light, it's really dark"

(Ruby, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

exchange with young people designing and writing postcards to adults in their community, sharing what they liked about living in Mablethorpe and what they thought could be changed in the town. The academic research team organised a drop-in arts and cafe session for adults and invited them to read young people's postcards and create their own postcards and write back to them, which they did. This asynchronous exchange prompted conversations between young people and adults in the community that might not have been achieved through a different method (such as interviews) and we found that the rich exchange between young people offered important insights into similar experiences and shared intergenerational concerns about the area (such as safety and litter) as well as intergenerational inequalities that exist in Mablethorpe, with young people asking adults – and adults responding favourably – if they might be included in the many activities available to adults. For example: Mablethorpe Art group, Model Boat Group, and Men's Shed. The postcards were then included as part of an open exhibition for the local decision-makers and community members as part of our Local Policy Dialogue (see Chapter 4, section 4.4).

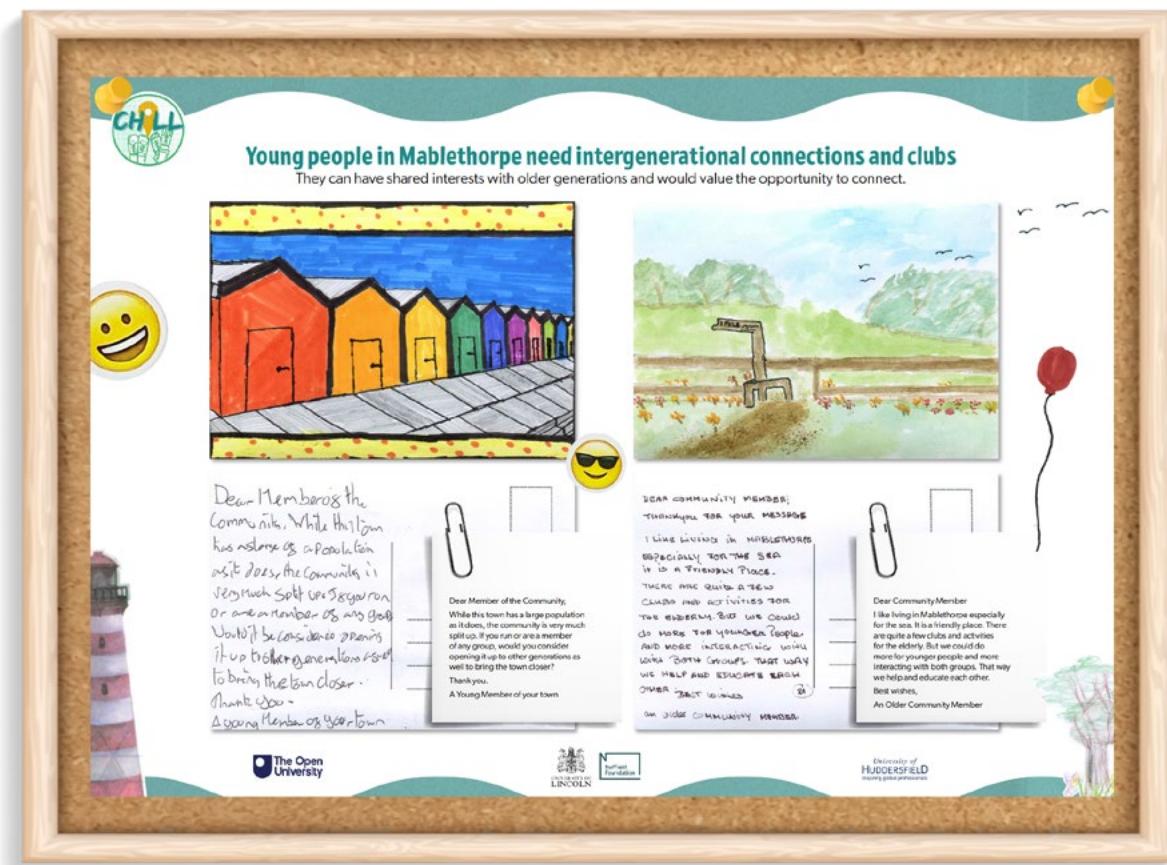


Figure 2.4.2.1
Example of the postcard exchange:
a young person's postcard on the left and the adult response on the right

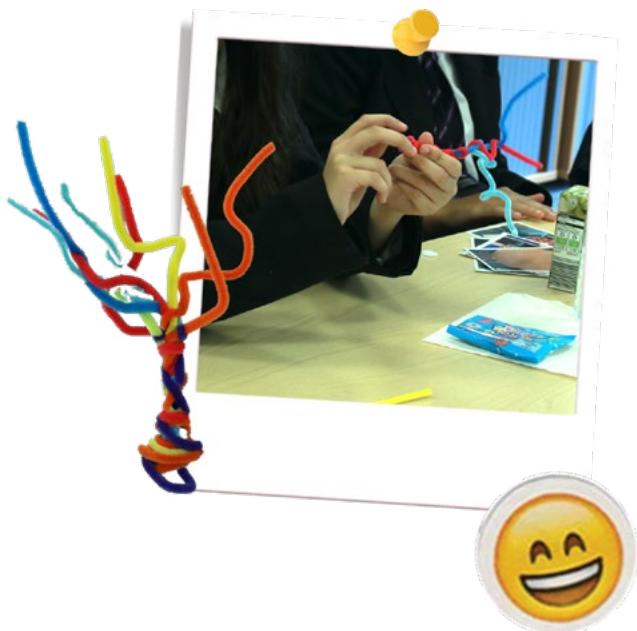
Not only is this an example of an innovative approach to supporting young people to generate knowledge with adults 'safely', it also illustrates the power of art to bring people together. The exchange of beautifully drawn postcards between adults and young people, with young people's carefully composed messages and adults' thoughtful replies, are a potent reminder to adults in the community that young people exist, have needs that are not currently being met, and how adults might address this through young people's social inclusion.

2.4.3 'Unschooling'



The requirements to research predominately within institutional spaces where adults 'rule' (Hillier and Aurini, 2018) creates some tensions, not least how to overcome the hierarchies that exist between adults and young people that are symbolically and materially present in the physical and 'felt' space. Reminders of these differences in adult-child status are present in the architecture and design of school buildings and in the explicit and tacit rules and norms that govern how young people are expected to behave in these spaces. This is not to suggest that the teachers and other adults who enabled us to work with young people were anything other than supportive and generous with their time and with the space, but that to engage young people as agentic research partners we needed to carefully 'unschool' these environments.

'Unschooling' meant disrupting norms that determine that adults dictate what happens in the space – from where young people may sit, how they should address adults, to the pace of activity. For example, where we could, we adjusted the desks and furniture to make space for movement and young people selected where they wanted to sit and could walk around freely. We used first and preferred names and requested that young people do the same. Framed by our attentive and playful approach (Lomax and Smith, 2024), we adjusted our pace to young people's own rhythms and ways of being in the space (Clark, 2023).

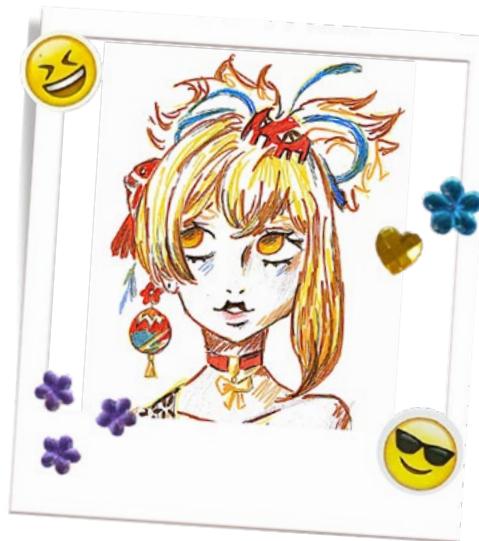


The art making itself also provided opportunities for this. We always included a wide range of art materials on the tables for young people – for example colourful pipe cleaners and colouring sheets that are marketed at adults as calming; these were great favourites of some of the young people who chose images of animals and nature scenes to colour at their leisure alongside or instead of other research activities, enabling them to slow things down and work at their own pace.

We also thought carefully about how to create a space that would facilitate and be responsive to young people's comfort and wellbeing. This included bringing in items from home to make

the environment feel more playful and inviting, setting the table carefully so that every young person had individual art materials, juice, fruits and other snacks, as well as making available communal art resources and refreshments that they could share and select in order to provide choice.

Playfulness and responding to play helped to communicate and facilitate inclusion and bring us into dialogue with each other across the range of ages. We bought some games and resources and suggested activities, inviting young people to suggest activities also. We deliberated and voted together to make decisions, building on consensus to make agreements. Incorporating play, we also paused regularly to play games, create and learn new games and to learn about and play the games that young people enjoy. However, we were only too aware of just how noisy we were and how disruptive of institutional norms, when, on occasion, young people were questioned, for example, as they left the research space and encountered school staff about why their faces were covered in sparkly jewels and stickers (!)



2.4.4 Ethics and informed consent



We approached consent as a continuous process through which young people were consulted at each stage of the research about how they would like to participate and how we may use the material generated with and about them .

Ethical approval was awarded by each of the participating universities. Framed by British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) (Graham et al., 2013) guidance, we followed explicit ethical processes to ensure young people's informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. This included the development of young-person centred project information and consent forms (**see appendices one and two**) to engage young people about their participation and the ethical implications of their involvement. Shared with young people and their carers at the start of the study, it provided the basis for ongoing discussion and ethical decision making with young people throughout the project. In this way, consent was approached as a continuous, 'tiered' process (Lomax, 2020; Wiles et al., 2008) ensuring young people understood the meaning of participation for them and agreeing with them the different ways that data could be used.

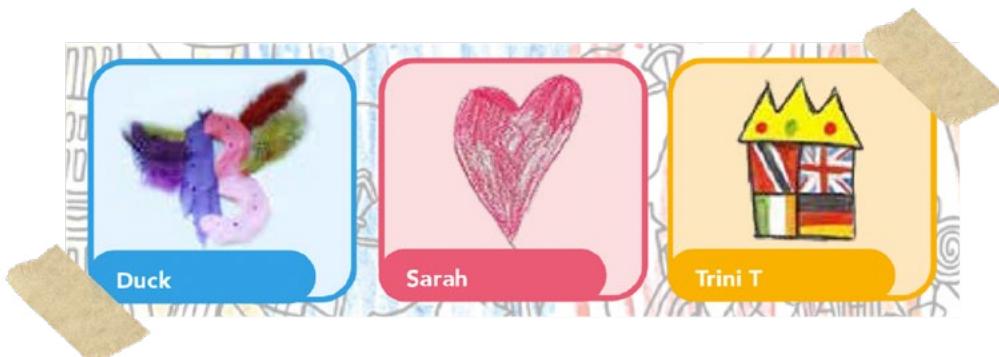
2.4.5 Anonymisation and young people's rights to be acknowledged as co-researchers

‘... how (can we) harmonise the apparent dissonance between the guarantee of anonymity we (researchers) are required to give to those children who engage in our research, and *children's desire to be seen, heard, identified, recognised and valued for what they contribute?*’

(Shier, 2022, our emphasis in italics).

As part of our ethical processes, young people chose a pseudonym through which their role as co-researchers and contributors to the creative and textual outputs (scrapbook, animated film, booklet and banners – see Chapter 3, section 3.8, and co-produced project reports) could be acknowledged. However, for this academic research team-led report and publications, the co-researchers' contributions (images, artwork and quotations) are acknowledged through an additional layer of anonymisation – a further set of pseudonyms selected by us to ensure young people are not identifiable. While there are arguments for using young people's given names (Shier, 2022), to protect young people from any harms that might emerge from their participation we settled on the use of pseudonyms on written and creative outputs, although young people were visible and recognisable in their roles as co-researchers and spokespersons in the local policy dialogues events (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

Dilemmas about young people's visibility and their rights to be named as co-contributors to research bring into sharp focus the need for the research community to find new ways to acknowledge children and young people's roles as knowledge producers with their rights to be protected from harm (UNCRC, 1989). In our research, we sought to reconcile young people's rights to protection with their rights to be acknowledged by engaging young people in discussion about the risks but ultimately taking responsibility for our decision to use different young person and adult determined pseudonyms as appropriate for different audiences.



2.5 Project phases



Figure 2.5.1
The four phases of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The project was conducted in four iterative phases of knowledge generation, synthesis and exchange with young people in each of the study neighbourhoods during October 2022 – June 2024. While these activities followed a broadly similar timeline, adjustments were made in accordance with each local neighbourhood context and young people's preferences

Phase 1: Understanding young people's experiences of place

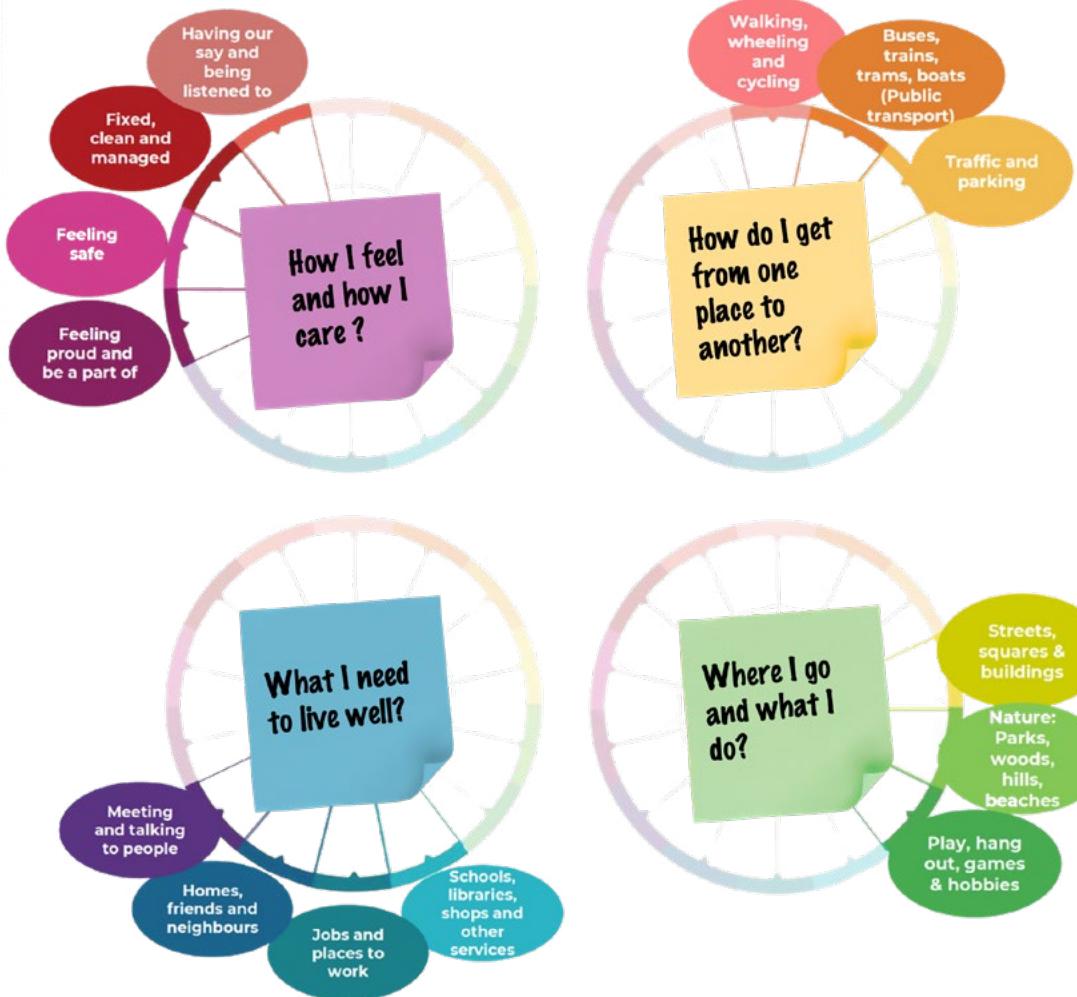
October 2022 – March 2023

A total of 32 workshops were conducted across all three study neighbourhoods during phase one with the core group of fifty-four co-researchers. Young people worked in small groups to visually and creatively map their affective, sensory experiences of place, reflecting on its meaning for them. Conducted over a series of touchpoints and adapted according to the neighbourhood contexts, methods included map making (see section 3.1 – 3.4 for different examples of mapping), photo-methods, scrapbooking and journaling as well as collage, sculpting, paired interviews and focus groups. This phase also included an adaption of The Place Standard Tool for Children and Young People (2024) and, in Mablethorpe, a neighbourhood tour led by young people which adapted some of the methods from Growing Up In Cities (Chawla, 2002; Lynch, 1977; Driskell 2002; Derr et al., 2018) for example asking young people to note down in real time during the walk: i. what do you see, ii. what do you smell, and iii. what do you hear.



The Place Standard Tool

Young people discussed the things that matter to them and rated their neighbourhoods on fourteen standardised dimensions according to how well their neighbourhoods support their wellbeing, safety, spatial mobility and social and cultural opportunities. This tool helped the young people in our study to talk about: i. what they do in their areas and ii. what they need to live well as well as iii. what changes in the neighbourhood would make things better for them.

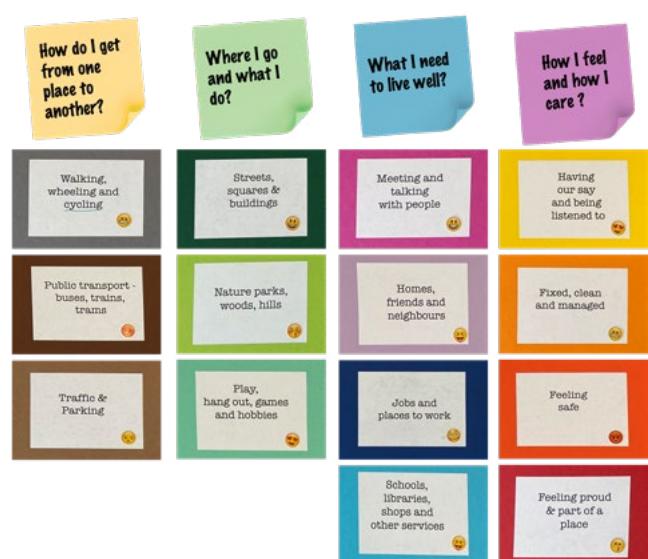


'What we did'

To make the Place Standard Tool accessible and encourage discussion we:

- created a set of 14 cards of each of the dimensions for each young person to rate their experiences using emoji stickers.
- worked with young people in pairs (each with their own set of cards) and a member of the research team.

Young people also adapted the methods, and we encouraged them to do so. For example, on the Deighton & Brackenhall and Mablethorpe sites, young people also selected emojis that best represented their feelings and created their own personalised ranking card based on those emojis.



Phase 2: Peer and adult perspectives



March 2023 – August 2023

In each site the co-researchers worked collaboratively to develop and conduct 4 peer-led workshops (n=82), 4 peer-to-peer interviews (n=4) and a survey of 117 young people (n=117).

Preparing questions for their peers, young people selected and drafted questions they wanted to ask, prioritising and ranking the questions through discussion in small groups. In Deighton & Brackenhall, they played a game to find agreement between them by sorting questions into two piles - i. questions that they felt were a priority to ask and ii. discarding questions that they rejected. The rules of priority and discarding were entirely their own and included discarding questions they felt were irrelevant to the area that they lived or were boring to young people, as well as re-writing questions for their peers.



Figure 2.5.2
One pile are questions that young people felt were a priority ('yes') to ask their peers and the other pile are questions that were discarded ('no'), Deighton & Brackenhall

In Mablethorpe, the young people decided on leading an art-based activity so that everyone could contribute. They focussed on two questions to lead the drawing activity: i. What do we have (and like) in Mablethorpe? ii. What do we need in Mablethorpe? They used collective drawings to spark discussion with their peers and open the floor to their peers to share their drawings and their thoughts about Mablethorpe.



Figure 2.5.3
Collective drawing made by young people as part of the youth-led workshop with their peers – “Things we need in Mablethorpe”

In the final stage of agreement, young people worked altogether using a consensus circle to identify the top 3-5 questions that they felt were a priority for their area and spent time deciding on the final language of the questions. Their questions formed the basis of the survey that went to their peers (Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton) and the one-to-one interviews and youth-led workshops (Woughton and Mablethorpe).



Figure 2.5.4
Consensus circle group decision-making to select priority questions for peers, Deighton & Brackenhall

In addition, adult-led focus groups were undertaken with a total of 35 parents and grandparents, youth-led vox-pop interviews with 33 adult residents and a survey of 47 others, and adult interviews with 27 local stakeholders undertaken by the young co-researchers. Young people were again supported in reflecting on and discussing issues that emerged and priorities for change identified. In Mablethorpe, we used a consensus circle, moving questions forward and leaving behind other questions to support young people to reach agreement as a group and identify questions that they felt they wanted to ask adults in a survey about their neighbourhood.

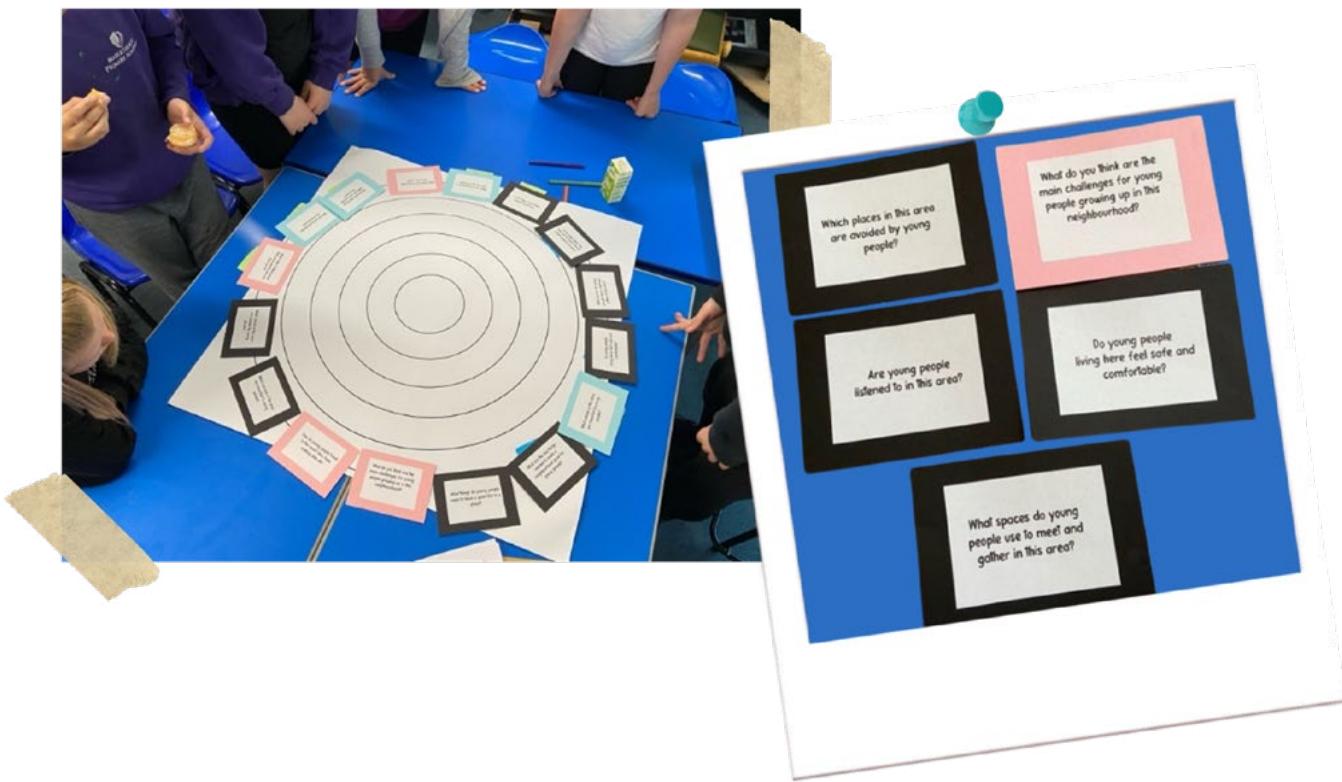


Figure 2.5.5
Consensus circle group decision-making and the selected five priority questions for the survey that went from young people to adults in Mablethorpe

In Woughton, where face-to-face interviews took place with adults, we held two training workshops focused on developing young people's interviewing skills. This included some roleplay and games and some young people interviewed their parents – again coming together to create questions about where they live, what is good / not good about the neighbourhood and practicing their interviewing skills in a session prior to the interviews.

In Deighton & Brackenhall, to support the young people to prepare for the Vox-pop interviews they would conduct with adults, we asked them to think about a time when they had been interviewed (including as part of CHiLL) and we asked them a series of questions to help reflect on their experience:

- What worked?
- What was good?
- What was not so good?
- What would you do different?
- How did you feel when we interviewed you?

They were also given post-it notes to write their thoughts down regarding these questions.

We worked with the young people using their answers to discuss how we would shape the experience of the adults being interviewed. Together we agreed that the aim was to support the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease to share their views, so we worked to design the questions and also practice what the young people would like to say about the project as an introduction for the adults. To support the young people, we prepared as a small stack of cards that included a brief text as an explanation of the project. We also introduced them to the term, 'Vox-Pop' and showed them a few Vox Pop interviews as examples, discussing the style of the interview which appealed to them due to the short time and the very immediate and highly effective way to test public opinion and feelings.

Although most of the young people were familiar with iPads, we also delivered a mini-training session and created time for a practice run with the video app and the voice recording app. We included a detailed discussion about consent and the forms that recorded consent. However, young people were keen for the academic researchers to take responsibility for securing consent from the adults which we did. Roles were divided up according to preference, with some young people keen to interview whilst others wanted to stay behind the camera (an iPad, which we supplied). Each young person paired themselves with another young person who they wanted to work with to support each other during the interview, alongside a member of the academic research team. We had briefed some of the adults who were already in the community spaces where the interviews were to be conducted and identified some 'trusted' community members who were willing and supportive of young people interviewing them to ensure this was a positive experience for young people canvassing the opinion of adults in their area.



Figure 2.5.6

Post-it notes with ideas from young people to prepare for interviewing adults in their area, Deighton & Brackenhall



Part of phase 2 included analysis with young people who had already created a large quantity of visual, textual and other data. This was analysed thematically with the young people themselves and we worked in small groups enabling young people to explore common themes. The analysis was then used to identify key messages and inform visual and creative outputs that could be shared with wider audiences in the community (residents, community and youth activists). On each site different forms of creative outputs were created with the young people, who took part in editing, selecting artwork and quotes, generating more images to support their key messages, and deciding on the order of the pages, acknowledgements, and their own pseudonym.

Phase 3: Community dialogues and youth-led change



September 2023 – March 2024

In phase 3, intergenerational community events were organised to provide a space for young people to present and discuss key findings and priorities in dialogue with adult residents, hear their experiences and perspectives and decide on priorities for community action projects. For example, in Woughton we held community roundtable events where young people (in pairs or threes) hosted and ran activities to find out about adults' experiences of growing up locally and talk about and share concerns about the neighbourhood, in particular the issue of safety which was a common topic. These discussions fed into the change project and young people were then supported in taking forward community change projects.

In Mablethorpe, young people, in pairs, interviewed teachers in their school. They also designed a survey that was distributed to adults with the support of the school to share their views on what they felt were the challenges young people face whilst growing up in the area and what they thought it was like to grow up in Mablethorpe today. These adult responses (Figure 2.5.7 on pink cards) were then compared by the young people with their own views (Figure 2.5.7 on purple cards, from the Place Standard Tool activity) and co-analysed with the young people who organised them on a wall by themes. The themes that emerged for the analysis were incorporated in a booklet that we went on to create with the young people called "10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their Town" (see section 3.7).



Figure 2.5.7
The pink cards completed by adults were then compared by the young people with their own views which are on purple cards

Young people in each area worked with us to develop a community change project to address a priority they had identified for their neighbourhood. Change projects were based on the key findings from the research and were led by young people. As part of this process some young people involved local community workers and services to support them. Please see section 4.2 for more information about the young people's community change projects.



Phase 4: Dissemination and impact: Local stakeholder dialogues



April 2024 - June 2024

In each study location, strong partnerships were developed with local stakeholders who were engaged with throughout the research and kept informed about the project through a series of meetings with the academic research team in person and online. In this final phase, the research team worked together with young people to share learning from the project and communicate the outcomes of young people's change projects in dialogue with these local stakeholders and further stakeholders in the area. In keeping with a participatory ethos, the process in each study location varied according to local contexts and young people's preferences and decisions. For example, in Mablethorpe the YMCA played a key role in the social action project in phase three, in Deighton & Brackenhall young people have been consulted and were leading on a local council environmental project, and in Woughton the role of the local youth service was pivotal in the design and implementation of local change initiatives. See section 4.4 for more information about the local stakeholder events including the recommendations and pledges (in Mablethorpe, adults made verbal and written pledges to young people as part of the activities).

2.6 Data and analysis



The study generated a large quantity of visual, textual and narrative data encompassing transcripts, maps, drawings, photographs, video, and soundscapes. This was analysed thematically including with the young people themselves (Mannion et al., 2024). Here we worked in small groups, enabling young people to explore common themes and make sense of their collective findings. The young people's ideas, together with the raw data itself, was then shared and discussed over a series of academic researcher team meetings to identify, explore and understand commonalities and differences in young people's experiences across the three neighbourhoods.



**“There’s a sense of
belonging - looking out
for each other”**

(Young person, community event, Woughton).

3. Place matters: Young people's perspectives on their lives and futures

3.1 Introduction

3.2 How neighbourhoods support young people's physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

3.2.1 Parks and natural green spaces

3.2.2 The built environment

3.3 Feeling unsafe

3.4 Care and maintenance

3.5 Social interaction

3.6 Child friendly neighbourhoods

3.7 People make places

3.8 Young people's aspirations for their neighbourhoods

Place matters: 3. Young people's perspectives on their lives and futures

"We like go out on the beach and just play football... but then sometimes in the holidays when we want to do it the most, there are too many people parked-up and it's busy"

(Ben, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"There's a sense of belonging – looking out for each other"

(Young person, community event, Woughton).

"We have quite a lot of space to do different activities, for example like motorbikes, boxing, swimming..."

(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It's all about the beach town!"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"There's stigma – it's our postcode"

(Young person, community event, Woughton).

"It is a bit of both, a good place and a bad place because a lot has happened here"

(Brandon, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

3.1 Introduction

Article 15 (freedom of association)

Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations.

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture)

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Article 24 (health and health services)

Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy.

Article 26 (social security)

Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.

Article 27 (adequate standard of living)

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989.



The freedom to play, meet others and travel independently outside the home matters to the young people in our study. Access to safe local green space (woods, parks, beaches, informal green space); the built environment (bus stops, streets and paved areas outside shops), indoor spaces (arcades, youth clubs and community centres) and the availability of trusted adults (including youth and community volunteers) provides vital opportunities for young people to

flourish, socialise, travel independently to school and participate in youth activities, sports and arts that are critical for their health, wellbeing and development.

However, cuts to local authority budgets, poor maintenance and levels of violent and gang-related crime (in Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton) and seasonal tourism (Mablethorpe) impact young people's safety, limiting their use of

public spaces and how they move independently around their neighbourhoods. As indicated in Chapter 2, in Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton, there was also media interest and negative press coverage that accompanied incidents of serious crime and perpetuated deficit narratives that were keenly felt by young people who carried "the heavy weight of negative labelling and social stigma" (MacDonald, 2022). In Mablethorpe,

negative depictions of their neighbourhood in the media also impacted young people, with the area being named one of the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in Lincolnshire and ranked the 2nd worst seaside town in the UK in 2024 whilst only the year before the beach was ranked the best in England! Young people were also aware that the town has also been in the news due to their lack of a GP or Dental services.



Figure 3.1.1
Young people's comments regarding the need of health services in Mablethorpe

This chapter draws together the evidence generated by and with young people themselves as co-researchers, about how places and environments support their lives and futures and what challenges this. Across the three study neighbourhoods the co-researchers mapped where they go in their neighbourhoods, with whom, and how this supports their physical, social and emotional wellbeing. They also shared with us the clubs and activities they do outside school and the adults in the community who are important to them, their aspirations and hopes for their neighbourhoods.

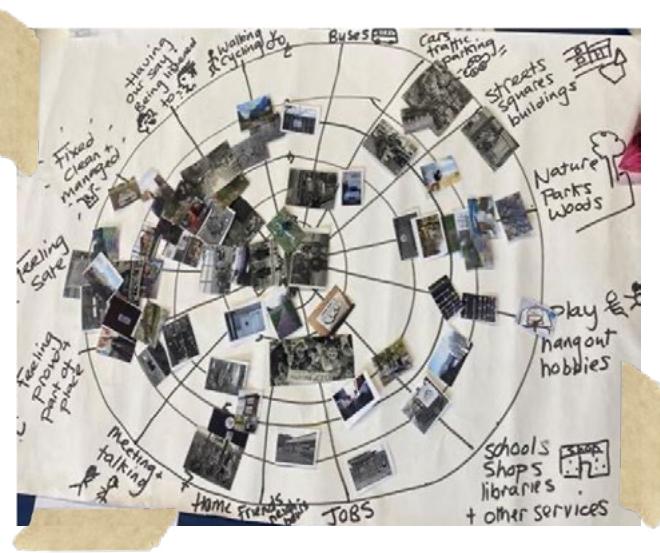


Figure 3.1.2
Young people using a place assessment tool to evaluate their local area, Woughton

3.2 How neighbourhoods support young people's physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing

Young people in our study value their local neighbourhood spaces as important places to meet, play and connect with others. This includes a range of places outside the home (see box 1) all of which can provide vital opportunities for young people to play and meet independently with other young people.

Box 1

Indoor spaces: Youth and community centres, sports venues, public swimming pools, shops and arcades.

Publicly owned and managed outdoor community spaces: Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA), sports fields and parks including those designed and equipped for children and young people and green parks of all sizes.

Informal public space: Urban squares and streets, fields, woods, beach, sand dunes and peripheral urban and green spaces, cycle routes and walkways, canals and waterways.

Local, outdoor spaces encompassing parks and woods and urban spaces alongside roads, public footpaths and footways (Town and Country Planning Association, 2024) are valued by young people as places that they can connect with others and engage in imaginative exploration (Rixon et al, 2019), for example, building dens and setting-up ramps and bike tracks. The opportunities these provide are particularly important for the young people in our study neighbourhoods whom, because of socio-economic factors including low income, parental working hours and geographical isolation (rural coastal Mablethorpe), spend much of their free time in their 'home' neighbourhoods, with little opportunity to travel outside their immediate area.



Figure 3.2.1
Photograph of the Multi Use Games Area in Woughton



Figure 3.2.2
Young person's collage of the woods in Deighton & Brackenhall

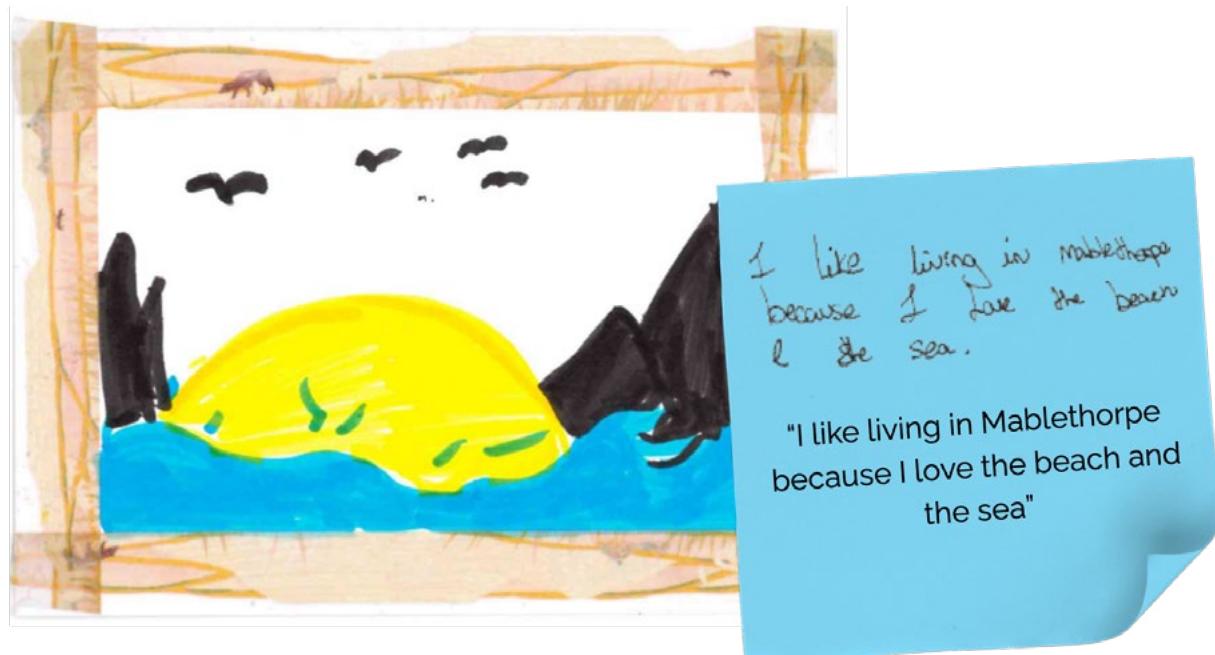


Figure 3.2.3
Young person's drawing and writing about the beach and the sea in Mablethorpe

Within each neighbourhood young people tend to travel within a short range – i.e. within walking distance of a few minutes from where they live. As illustrated in Figure 3.2.4, 3.2.5 and 3.2.6, these 'locales' (MacDonald, 1991) of young people's neighbourhoods are often limited to a main street or a small number of connected roads, part of a housing estate that form segments of the broader neighbourhood. Young people in our study described their experiences of their locales at a micro-level, plotting them for the research team through carefully annotated maps of where they go, boundaries that do not appear on an ordnance map of the area or a local authority area.

These opportunities to 'map the neighbourhood' focussed on the visible aspects of place as well as providing a space for young people to reflect on the intangible, affective aspects of neighbourhood and wider forms of connectivity that intersect with children's relationships with place.



Figure 3.2.4

Young person mapping their neighbourhood, showing the places that are important to them
(Rose, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe)

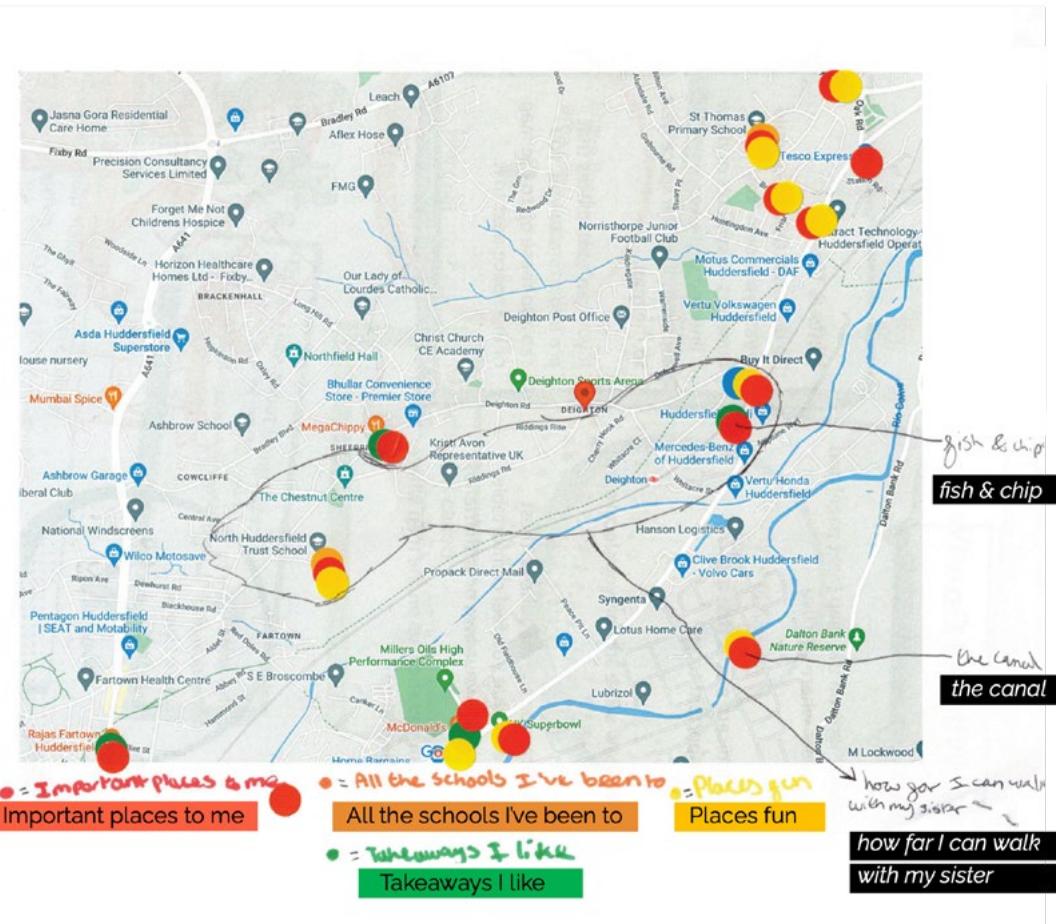


Figure 3.2.5
Young person mapping their neighbourhood and the places they go (Carla, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall)

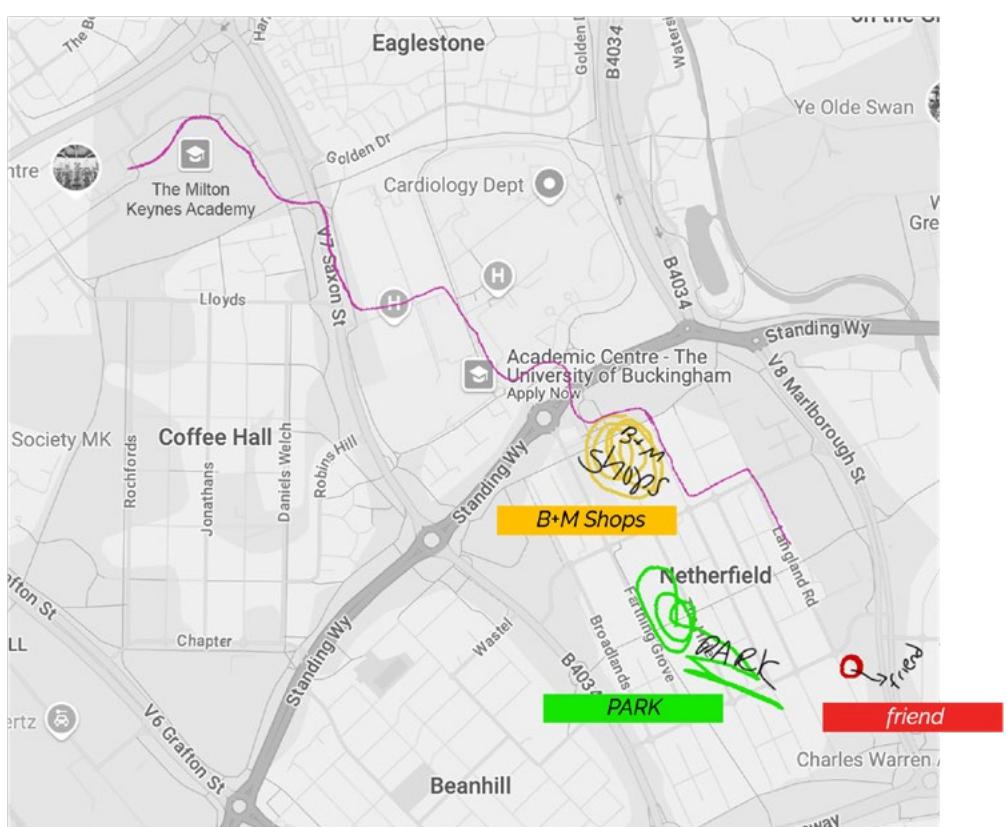


Figure 3.2.6
Young person mapping their neighbourhood and the places they go in Woughton

3.2.1 Parks and natural green spaces

'Though it was only a little park, it held within its borders of old tall trees, notched with our names and shabby from our climbing, as many secret places, caverns and forests, prairies and deserts, as a country somewhere at the end of the sea. And though we would explore it one day, armed and desperate, from end to end,, yet still the next day it remained as unexplored as the Poles – a country just born and always changing'

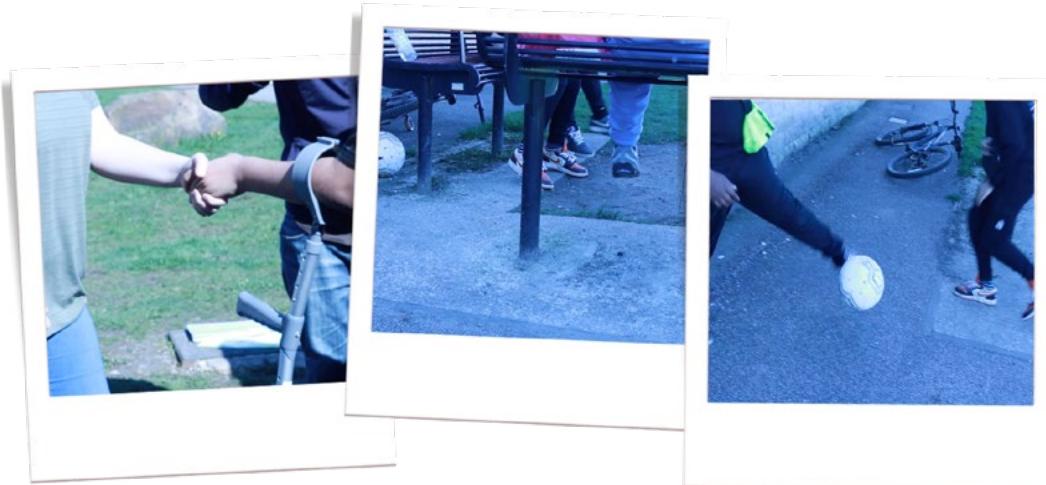
(Dylan Thomas, 'Reminiscences of Childhood').

"I just like nature because it's fun and it's like a lot of interesting stuff, right? You can build whatever you want like - bike tracks and dens"

(Tim, male, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

Woods, parks and natural green spaces are local places that many of our co-researchers enjoy hanging out with friends and exploring the nearby natural world (Chawla, 2020). In Woughton and Deighton & Brackenhall, local woods and parks are enjoyed as places to ride bikes, hang out, flourish and have fun.

Figure 3.2.1.1
Young people meeting their friends on the playing field to hang out, play football and ride bikes together in Deighton & Brackenhall



In Woughton, there are numerous green spaces including pocket parks and green areas. Within these, there are lots of organised activities provided by the youth team and community council. These include dance and arts events, community picnics and barbeques and 'fun clean ups'. These events are free, food is provided, and they are generally well attended by young people.

In Mablethorpe, a coastal location with long golden beaches, the green spaces behind the sand dunes are important places for young people to meet friends and play. These natural, green spaces offer opportunities for intrigue, discovery and imaginative play where young people can build dens from found objects - a secret, hidden place where young people can spend time with other young people (Oldenburg 1989).

"Mablethorpe has soft sandy shores"

(Bethany, female, aged 12, Mablethorpe).

"I like Mablethorpe because it has sea air"

(Owen, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"Mablethorpe is a fantastic place to live in. It just feels good to be here"

(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

"This is our den... and then this is our little area where we are going to put a tent. And then this is the tree where we all tried to carve out our names. And then right here is a little dike area, there are two trollies"

(Young person showing the academic research team the den in Mablethorpe).



Figure 3.2.1.2
Young people's drawings of Mablethorpe beach, which is an important place for them to meet friends and play

While nationally children and young people are spending less time outdoors with a marked decline in independent spatial mobility and a reduction in time spent in unsupervised active play (Centre for Young Lives, 2004; O'Brien et al, 2000), within our study there was clear appetite for outdoor play which young people experience as important for their independence, sense of identity and for their physical health and mental well-being (Chaudhury, et al, 2016; Chawla, 2015).

“... even when I’m not playing, I would just go and get fresh air. It’s just one of the best things outside”

(Brandon, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).



Figure 3.2.1.3
Young person's collage of being outside in Deighton & Brackenhall

Young people value their time outdoors in green space both for its intrinsic worth - its beauty and value as a space for nature - and the physical and social activities it affords. In Deighton & Brackenhall, the opportunity to be simply outside, away from indoor spaces (home, school) in natural green space provides an opportunity to flourish and a refuge for young people. The fields, canals, reservoirs, parks and woodland offer spaces to be physically active (scootering and cycling, fishing and swimming) as well as quiet places to be in, observe and draw nature.

“I like to draw in the woods”

(Sophia, female, aged 14, Deighton & Brackenhall).



Figure 3.2.1.4

'I like to draw in the woods'

3.2.2 The built environment

The built environment, including bus stops, pavements and areas outside shops, also provide opportunities for young people to meet and play, offering a 'third space' (Soja, 1996) between their home and school to socialise with peers. This is illustrated by the experiences of the older group of co-researchers (aged 11-16) from Mablethorpe who told us how the daily wait at the bus shelter to get to their secondary school provides an opportunity to engage with friends and socialise as young people. They describe how they appropriate this space at this time of the day, setting up noisy, physical games while they are waiting for the school bus each morning.

"The bus stop is the one place where (there are) no parents, so all the kids go there, (there are) kids on their speakers and playing football in the car park, stuff like that in the morning"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).



Figure 3.2.2.1
The bus stop and the car park in Mablethorpe where young people meet and play and socialise with peers.

The particular significance of this space and its affordances for young people's physical activity and social wellbeing becomes clear in context of the absence of a secondary school in Mablethorpe. Having no secondary school in the town means that young people, from the ages of 11, must make a daily 90-minute round trip, impacting the amount of available free time they have for independent free play, particularly during the winter months. Being tied to a school bus schedule also means young people cannot stay for extracurricular activities which limits the opportunities available to them after school. Seen in this wider context, the social significance of the bus stop, its role in forging and maintaining friendships with peers, in the daily social life of young people becomes clear.

In Mablethorpe, indoor spaces such as arcades and shops are also places that young people experience as fun and where they mostly feel warm, safe and welcome (also see section 3.5 where young people report that their presence in the arcade is seen as problematic by some adults).

"The main places are usually where we hangout are the Mirage, the skateparks or the funfair. Again, depending on the season because usually the funfair closes and doesn't open until summer"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"You know next to factory shop? Upstairs we do a youth group. We do one on a Thursday night but that is for 15 years and older.... there used to be a youth group (for under 15s) at the salvation army"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"It is good because we go out all about town and there is loads of places that we can go... Sometimes we go out all day and we go to the shops or Greggs"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

Across all the sites in our study, young people identified indoor places in their neighbourhood that they use regularly – especially during the dark winter months - or occasionally for special events, that evoke positive emotions. These include trips to the cinema with family (not all families can afford the cinema) or community venues where their friends joined them for their birthday party and places where they have visited as treats.

"I was there for the bonfire night watching the fireworks. And last Christmas my sister's friend did this thing for Christmas there and I was invited"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"...Near my house lots of memories, I had a birthday party there one time"

(Brandon, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

These 'spatialities of feeling' (Thrift 2004, 2008) that young people evoke through their descriptions of the sights, sounds and smells of their home neighbourhoods offer insights into their emotional attachment to where they live – connections that are embodied, affective and sensory (Farrugia, 2015). In Mablethorpe, young people's artwork, soundscapes and video conjured the sounds of the sea, the fair ground music and the smell of chips on the seafront and the felt experiences these arouse - the memories and associations of time spent on the beach and in the amusement arcade with their families and friends.

"I like living in Mablethorpe because I love the beach and the sea"

(Eden, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"I like living in Mablethorpe because of the beach and arcades including the food in them"

(Owen, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"... I like living in Mablethorpe because I love going to the beach despite the weather. As I live by the beach, I enjoy the fresh smell of food"

(Rose, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).



Figure 3.2.2.2

Photograph of the amusement arcade where young people have positive memories of good experiences, Mablethorpe.

Across all the study neighbourhoods young people describe how green and built spaces offer them the freedom to travel independently, meet friends and play (Chawla, 2020; Lynch, 1977). Young people's enjoyment of these places offers important insights into what, matters to them, helps them flourish and what they consider is a good childhood (Centre for Young Lives, 2024). However, not all the young people in our study had access to good quality public and green space. Across all the sites young people described three main issues that curtail how, when and if they use public spaces at all. Factors that prevent young people from accessing public spaces, including those that are in walking distance of their homes and routes to and from school include:

- Feeling unsafe
- A lack of care and maintenance
- Social interaction

These are explored in the following sections.

3.3 Feeling unsafe

The biggest concerns for young people and parents in our study are worries about safety. For some parents, in line with the wider, well documented trend in parental anxiety about children and young people's independent spatial mobility (Jones, 2000; Rixon et al, 2019; Witten et al. 2013), their concerns are so great they restrict all outdoor play and/or impose curfews and conditions on young people's outdoor play. This is particularly the case for girls. Across all the study neighbourhoods, parents are more likely to restrict girls' independent spatial mobility.

"There are places that you don't really go and there are places that you go to feel safe ..."

(Daisy, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It depends on who you are because if you are a popular kid, you will walk around feeling like you own the streets but if you are someone that feels threatened by these kids then you won't feel safe"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"... places are usually unsafe because of the people. It's the people who make it unsafe. A place can never be unsafe unless the people made it like that"

(Brook, female, aged 14, Woughton).

"I always go out with someone... I'm not allowed to go out without my brothers or my dad. Or even if my older sister is the only one around, it's just I have to have someone"

(Sabryna, female, aged 12,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

Girls are less likely to access outdoor spaces for leisure and do not, in general, travel independently. For many girls in the study, they report that their parent/s or carer/s will not allow them to play unsupervised in woods and parks. For example, in Deighton & Brackenhall, girls explained how, due to fear of gang related violence (see section 2.4.1), they do not go out without an older male family member, while boys articulated how they go out in groups in order to stay safe.

As became clear from the discussions with young people, access to outdoor, neighbourhood space is shaped by factors including gender (both boys and girls are fearful but have different strategies to manage risk); family composition (having an older brother or sister or father to look out for you); friendship groups (having a group of friends who look out for you and whom you look out for) and

temporal dimensions including seasonal changes (the onset of dusk in the late afternoon during the winter in the UK restricts where young people can go and their safety as they travel home at the end of the school day) combine in different ways to impact how young people use local space.

Across the three sites, young people experience fear and violence when using outdoor neighbourhood spaces because of gangs, county lines and sexual harassment (see section 2.4.1). In Woughton and Deighton & Brackenhall, incidences of knife and machete attacks, some of which have resulted in fatalities, have a huge impact on young people's safety and how they then use public space.

"We live in the shadow of the gangs"

(Daisy, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"... a lot of stabbings happen near where I live... there's always a risk"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It changes a lot. One day you could be ready to go, and then one day you can get beaten up outside your house. I was playing football at the bus stop and he just started kicking him (his friend), and grabbing him"

(Ben, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"... (I am) more cautious in areas where you know there have been murders. There was a stabbing at the college, and (now) I go around the front"

(Leah, female, aged 13, Woughton).

Boys feel unsafe in the area and they recognise the very real risks of recruitment to, and/or violence from gang members. In Deighton & Brackenhall, they also told us that they have rehearsed strategies for coping in the event of serious violent crime based on knowledge of attacks on other young people in the area.

"If we are in danger and we're chased by someone with a knife, we will make sure we look after each other"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

Girls had other fears and some of them talked about fear of rape and/or exploitation such as being used by boys in gangs to hide knives and money. As these examples suggests, girls feel unsafe and are less likely to access public spaces (Make Space for Girls, 2023), despite telling us that they recognised, for example, green spaces as places of fun and wellbeing.

Some girls told us that they only go out in public spaces on occasion with an older sibling or an adult (for example to ride bikes with dads) due to the risk of violent crime and others do not access these spaces at all, especially after dark.

"Her boyfriend is in a gang and she got beat up because her boyfriend left the gun and loads of money"

(Sabryna, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"No, we don't go out at night"

(Daisy, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

In Woughton, young people were also scared of dangerous and status dogs that had been used in crime and as weapons for intimidation in their neighbourhood.

Both girls' and boys' experiences of violence and as witnesses to how serious, violent and illegal drug-related crime affects other young people (including their friends, siblings and extended family) means that they have learned, and teach each other, how to navigate unsafe places as best they can. They try to keep themselves, their siblings and their friends safe. For example, girls in Woughton mostly found it safer to spend time with other girls as a strategy to look after themselves.

While young people in Deighton & Brackenhall mostly walk to school in friendship groups or with their sibling, they rarely plan to go out on their own but sometimes they have no choice and have to navigate risk in order to attend out of school clubs, meet friends or collect younger siblings from primary school. They told us how they manage this, being careful about the time of day including trying not to go out after dusk when there feels like an "invisible curfew" (Brandon, male, aged 12) and "taking the long way around" (Sophia, female, aged 13), travelling further to get to places to avoid alleyways, ginnels and some streets.

"A little girl got killed locally by a dog. (It) makes me feel unsafe."

Really I don't feel safe going around (the area) as often... I have like dodgy feelings that something is gonna happen"

(Maisie, female, aged 12, Woughton).

"Girls normally feel more comfortable around girls. They can express themselves well and then the girls don't have that constant pressure of trying to like impress everyone. Because if you become close with people, you're just yourself around them"

(Chloe, female, aged 14, Woughton).

The incidence of serious violence has a major impact on when, where and how young people use their local neighbourhoods. In some cases, young people are too frightened to go out at all or are prevented by their parents.

Where they are allowed, young people utilise strategies to navigate these dangers, for example by avoiding known trouble spots, woods and walkways after dark or by using routes that elude known sites of danger. Most girls avoid these areas altogether, impacting their independent spatial mobility, access to green space and their social inclusion - opportunities to be active and visibly part of their communities and their participation in social activities and physical play.

'I'm mostly indoors because one kid on my estate beat him up so we had to file a police report. My estate isn't the best, so we normally just stay in my house... I can't walk home alone either because creepy men want to stare at me or try and kidnap me because that happened on my way home"

(Chloe, female, aged 14, Woughton).

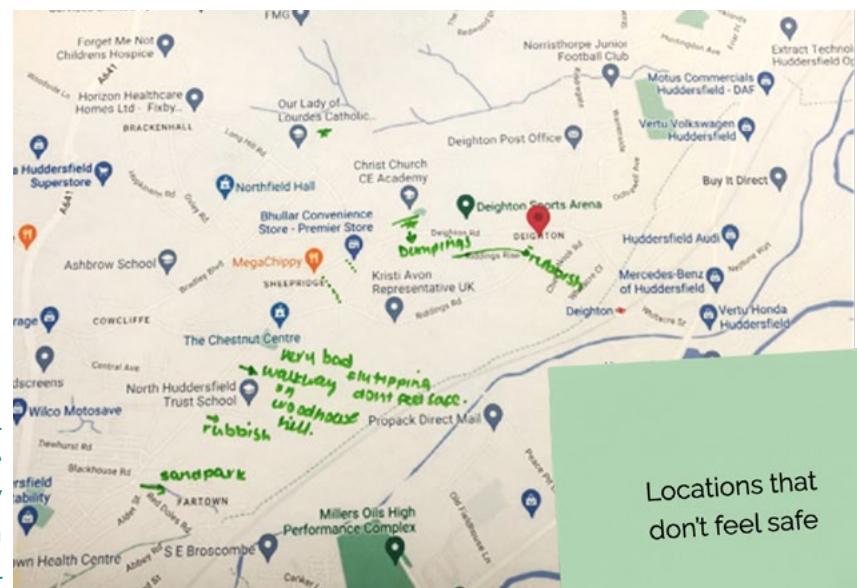


Figure 3.3.1
Locations that young people marked on a map¹⁰ where they don't feel safe in Deighton & Brackenhall

"It's not really safe around town because loads of people come and you don't know who they are. They could carry pocketknives around with them and around the beach there is a lot of people there"

(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).



Figure 3.3.2
Young person's collage about the lack of safety in Mablethorpe

¹⁰ On the Deighton & Brackenhall map, both the school (NHTS) and The Chestnut Centre were 'safe' places for young people, but it was necessary for them to navigate 'unsafe' parts of their neighbourhood to get to the school or The Chestnut Centre.

Fear of violence is intensified by local design features. For example, the design of Milton Keynes, where neighbourhoods are connected by 'redways' (pedestrian and cycle ways which underpass major through roads) creates dark 'no go' areas which many young people won't use due to fear that they might be attacked. Similarly, in Deighton & Brackenhall, young people choose to go "the long way round" rather than use ginnels and alleyways that are a feature of the inter-war urban design.

"The streets are dangerous and sketchy'. Especially down by the sports centre, it gets really dark down there"

(Kai, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"I see quite a lot of tall, hooded figures, so I'm just like 'do I want to risk my life with hooded figures just to have a nice walk to school? – No'. I just have to take the long way round which is annoying because I really like the woods"

(Sabryna, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"Sometimes you get lost... because if someone is following you, you try to go a way you don't know to try and get away, then you get lost, then you try and circle around but the person's behind you, so you have to pretend and I always pretend to call someone"

(Leah, female, aged 13, Woughton).

"I know where they hang out as well so I sort of have to avoid those places which means I avoid going to certain places. I'll take a slightly longer route to work or take back roads to places, because I know where they will be, so I take longer routes to avoid them"

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

In Mablethorpe, age appeared to be a factor in how young people accessed outdoor space. As explored in section 3.2.1, green spaces are particularly important for younger (primary aged) children who showed us how they enjoy adventuring in wild green spaces beyond the dunes¹¹. However, these spaces are much less relevant in the daily lives of secondary age young people who, despite fewer parental restrictions on where they go, have a smaller range of independent movement across the town and surrounding neighbourhood.

This older group of young people explained how they spend more time in urban environments – meeting friends in the streets, shops, and arcades of central Mablethorpe where they feel safer and can navigate what they feel are risks from other groups of young people in the neighbourhood.

Fear of violence limits young people's spatial mobility and their independence. For some young people this meant that they can only go out if accompanied walking to and home from school, with friends or being routinely taken to school and activities in the car. However, not all families can afford a car.

"For lower income families that cannot afford a car this is a huge inequality, especially as the public transport is not very good"

(Young Person's Focus Group, Mablethorpe).

Other young people don't want to spend time outdoors even as they become older teens, preferring to spend their free time indoors to avoid potential risks of crime outdoors.

Despite a strong sense of attachment to where they live, anti-social and at times dangerous behaviours of other people was a significant concern for the young people in our study.

"Sometimes when you're outside you can get stressful, I feel I don't allow myself to get stressed at home"

(Nico, male, aged 15, Woughton).

"There are some good places around Mablethorpe. There are good shops and there is a library. But there are people who ruin it for everyone else which means you can't access those places because of those people"

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

¹¹ In Mablethorpe 1 young co-researcher (aged 11), shared that wild green spaces were frightening due to them being isolated, dirty and not well lit, hence did not enjoy them

Figure 3.3.3 Young people's collated maps marked with the places they go in Mablethorpe



Collated maps of where young people in Mablethorpe go - primary school age (ages 10 – 11)



Collated maps of where young people in Mablethorpe go – secondary school age (ages 13-16)

Note the difference in spatial range between the two age groups. Young people attending secondary school have a smaller spatial range than primary school children. As discussed in section 3.2.2, this is in part attributable to the amount of time secondary school-aged young people have available to hang out outside, particularly in the winter months due to the amount of time spent commuting to school, it being dark when they get back and their fears of being outside after dusk.



The concerns that young people have about their safety being outside range from the threat they feel from the presence of young adults drinking and smoking weed in the parks and walkways (Mablethorpe), fear of tourists (Mablethorpe) and fear of gangs and violent attacks (Woughton and Deighton & Brackenhall) on the streets where young people live and attend school. Adults behaving inappropriately in public areas that were designed for children and young people also made young people feel unsafe and afraid to use these amenities.

"You see a lot of people just doing weed in their local shop or out in the streets without a care in the world"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"Sometimes adults are around the basketball court and they are drunk and leave their rubbish (empty bottles) and that is not nice"

(Hannah, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"So that's why I don't go to shops... I never felt comfortable going out because men, they're creepy. I don't like my mum going to shops on her own"

(Leah, female, aged 13, Woughton).

These experiences illustrate the ambivalence that young people have about where they live. In Mablethorpe, young people had a contradictory view of the town on the one hand feeling a strong sense of belonging to a 'cool beach town' but at the same time seeing it as a place of substance misuse (illegal drug taking) and anti-social behaviour, reliant on tourists whom they felt did not respect the area or young people and their families (discussed in section 3.5).

3.4 Care and maintenance

How a place looks and what other people think of it can affect how young people themselves feel about their neighbourhood (Public Health Scotland, 2022). Young people in our study have pride in where they live, but they do not feel their neighbourhoods are properly kept clean or well managed. Across all three sites young people highlighted persistent littering (broken bottles, food and drinks packaging) and the dumping of white goods and household items in public parks and alleyways.

The young people mapped and shared photographs of the places – streets, bus stops, parks and green spaces that are continually littered with discarded white goods and domestic waste, making these areas “*unsafe, dangerous and uncared for*”.

“There are football courts, but they are not very good because they are not well surfaced... and also important are the nets because if you don’t have nets the ball can go anywhere into the carpark. The football courts did have nets, but they have been ripped off or stolen”

(Michael, male, aged 15, Deighton & Brackenhall).

“There are things that are broken and not fixed, litter and broken glass and derelict spaces that have just been left without attention”

(Young people’s focus group, Woughton).

“I just feel the streets aren’t taken very good care of by the council, there are potholes everywhere. Outside of co-op there is some huge ones that are just terrible and the streets aren’t taken care of. A lot of overgrown spaces as well. Rubbish”

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

“... places can easily get broken into”

(Owen, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

“You see a lot of broken glass in Mablethorpe.... everywhere and anywhere”

(Miles, male, aged 16, Mablethorpe).

Young people recounted persistent fly-tipping, discarded needles and illegal drug-taking paraphernalia along walkways and ginnels which, although designed as pedestrian through ways and traffic free short cuts to school, local parks and friends' houses, had become no go areas for them.

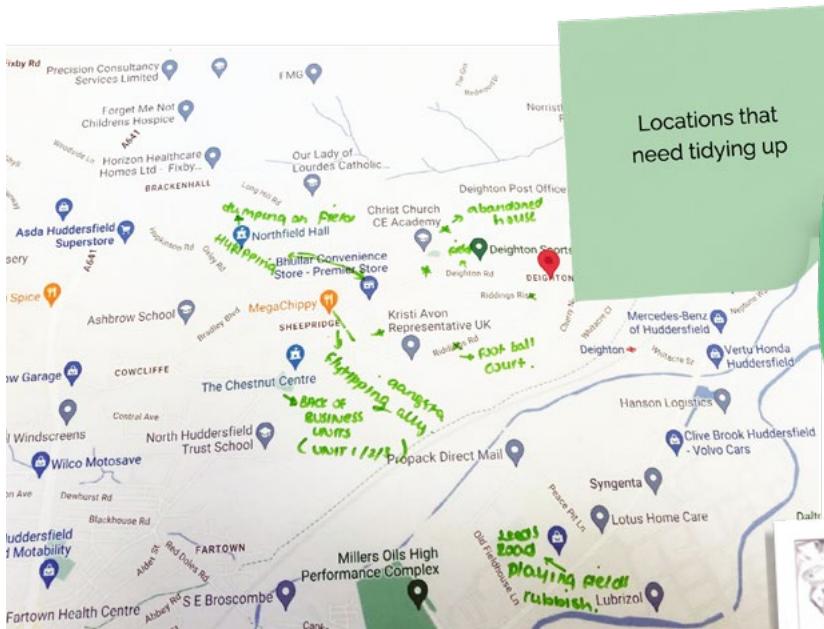
"A lot of the times there will be rubbish in the streets and damage to buildings that is noticeable as well. It is not like it is small bits"

(Declan, male, aged 13,
Mablethorpe).

Figure 3.4.1
Photographs of
rubbish including
a crate, a trolley, a
bucket, and bottles in
the green spaces in
Mablethorpe



In Deighton & Brackenhall, this general state of disrepair was exacerbated by the boarded-up shops and business premises along the main shopping parade which young people described as rat-infested, dangerous and stigmatising.



“... fly tipping, setting fires, dumped litter, white goods, fridges, prams, mattresses, nappies are disgusting... it doesn't feel safe, it's all very scary”

(Young people's focus group, Deighton & Brackenhall).

Figure 3.4.2
Places marked on a map of the neighbourhood that
young people think need tidying up in Deighton &
Brackenhall

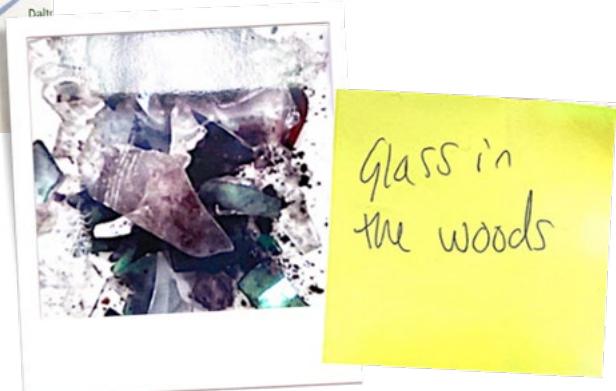


Figure 3.4.3
Photograph of glass in the woods
(Tim, male, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall)

Caring deeply about their neighbourhood, many young people are actively involved in litter picks in their parks and take part in beach cleans in attempts to improve the natural spaces and built environment. However, even areas that should be maintained by the local authorities are often poorly managed and do not appear to be properly maintained. For example, young people in all three sites described playgrounds that were in a poor state of repair and or blocked off altogether so they could not use them.

"I stopped going to the park quite a while ago because it has been blocked off. That is where I used to go. It was all overgrown the last time I went"

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"... our park is damaged. It has no swings, nothing"

(Hannah, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"There are hardly any playgrounds, but there are some that have good slides. But some are rusted"

(Owen, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).



"The skatepark equipment has been broken for a while and needs to be fixed"

(Danielle, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

Figure 3.4.4

Photograph showing the broken equipment in the playground in Mablethorpe which young people can no longer use

The legacy of austerity and more recent local authority budget cuts are such that play equipment is not always maintained or replaced while local services and amenities are closed because of the costs of running them. Mablethorpe was the exception as one of the playgrounds was demolished and redeveloped during the period of our study. However, this was to serve the larger purpose of developing the sports centre to become the new Leisure and Learning Centre with a swimming pool extension. The young people were not informed or consulted about this, and they therefore viewed the playground demolition as a permanent loss. In effect this is what it turned out to be, as the replacement play equipment that was installed was only suitable for young children and therefore not our young co-researchers' age group.

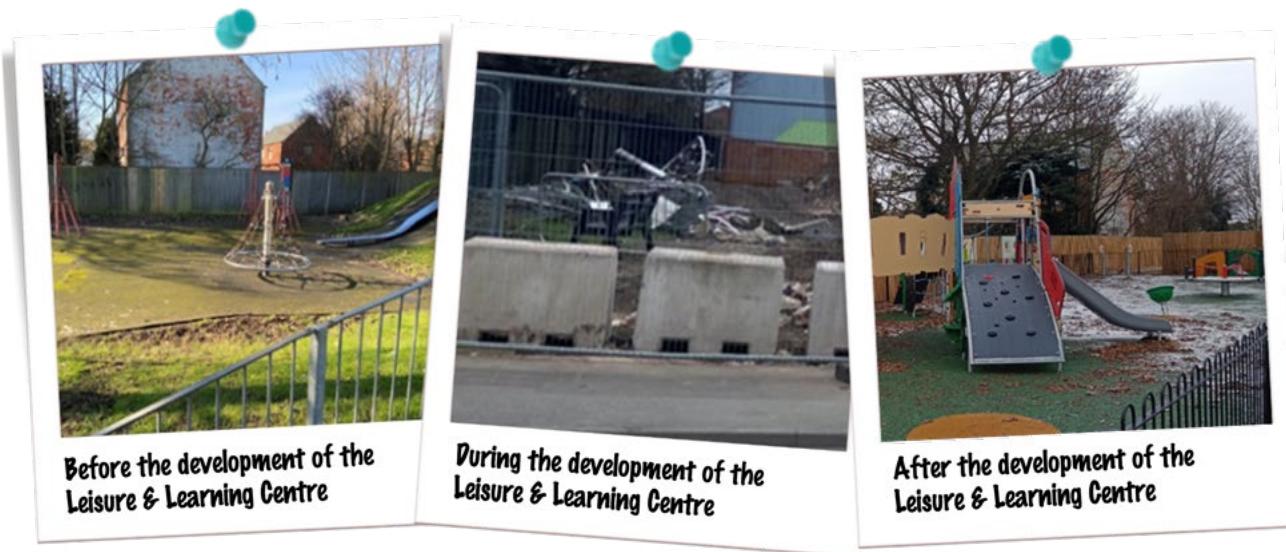


Figure 3.4.5
Before, during and after - changes to the playground at the redeveloped Leisure and Learning Centre during the course of our study

Young people in each of the study sites felt that their neighbourhoods are less well-resourced compared to better off neighbourhoods, citing the closure of important local amenities and youth and leisure centres due to cuts in local government budgets. In Mablethorpe, for example, the closure of the floodlit AstroTurf and the removal of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) means that, at the time of the research, there was nowhere with lighting for young people to meet outside after dark and the Friday Night Sports project which only ran in the winter was no longer able to offer football in the outside space. Similarly in Deighton & Brackenhall, a leisure facility that young people told us they used for football, dance, sports and other physical activities was closed, reopening on a vastly reduced timetable during the fieldwork for this project.

Parents were also worried about the closure of services and projects for young people.

"There's not enough funding for what young people want to do... everything taken away, youth clubs, places for young people to go and chill. There's more in the town centre. Why has everything been taken away, all the youth clubs all over, everything"

(Parent's focus group,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"There is nothing for young people to do. There's nothing for them to look forward to"
(Parents focus group, Woughton).

"There is a lack of places to go and lack of resources for young people"

(Parents survey, Mablethorpe).

These findings illustrate the impact of cuts in local authority budgets which have devastated public services including youth provision, street lighting and maintenance. The impact of these measures is keenly felt by young people who depend on these services for their physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing, exacerbating childhood inequality and disadvantage in the poorest neighbourhoods (Webb et al., 2022).

3.5 Social interaction

"I like the woods ... I just like going ... on my BMX ... but the council have just taken (our ramps) away"

(Logan, male, aged 12,,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"We don't have a park anymore. It got knocked down to put a swimming pool there"

(Ruby, female, aged 11,
Mablethorpe).

Other factors that impact young people's access to local outdoor space include the different ways that adult decision-makers and young people perceive and value space. While, as section 3.7 explores, at the hyperlocal level, residents – including parents, third sector and community activists - are generally supportive and actively encouraging of young people's presence in outdoor spaces, this does not always extend to adult decision-makers at the local authority level¹².

In Deighton & Brackenhall, young people explained how the council regularly remove bike ramps of importance to them in local woodland. In the coastal neighbourhood of Mablethorpe, an area economically reliant on tourism, young people report feeling squeezed out of the main public spaces by tourists during the summer season (see section 2.5). Younger children in Mablethorpe also report feeling unsafe around tourists whom they perceive as 'dangerous'.

"I do not really feel safe around town because loads of people come, and you don't know who they are. They could carry pocketknives around with them, around the beach there is a lot of people"

(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

¹² Across all three sites, the academic research team also met a small number of adults in the local authority who were the exception, particularly where their role included engaging and consulting with young people as part of 'voice' and 'influence' teams. These adults tried to champion young people's rights to have a voice in local decision-making. However, their work was not always enabled at this level and their efforts to develop and embed more sustained mechanisms for young people's 'voice' across all departments in the local authority faced numerous obstacles (see 4.3.3).

Moreover, the town's seasonal economy affects what amenities are available during the off-season. Young people explained how, in the winter, when the tourists have left, the town's leisure facilities shut down and there is very little left open for them to do. As discussed in section 3.2.2, young people tend to like to congregate at the arcade which is open all year, is warm, well-lit, safe and has a toilet they can use (there is a 40 pence charge for tourists, residents and children alike to use all public toilets in Mablethorpe).

Figure 3.5.1
Artwork from young person about the arcade in Mablethorpe, an indoor space where young people like to meet and spend time with their friends



However, young people report that their presence in the arcade is seen as problematic by some adults. The attitudes of adults and adult-centric institutions 'who forget we (young people) exist' (Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe) determine how spaces are managed in ways that can conflict with young people's needs and rights (UNCRC, 1989). This includes their rights to meet with other young people (Article 15); exercise their physical and social needs (Article 27) and their rights to relax and play (Article 31) – factors which are critical for their physical health and social and emotional development. However, while these are examples of how young people's needs are de-prioritised at the local authority level, young people shared with us many examples of how adults in their area actively encourage and advocate their inclusion in the public life of the neighbourhood.

"When someone needs help in Mablethorpe, people help them"
(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

"It's got good bits. It has a bad reputation but bits of it are very community-strong and very helpful"
(Niamh, female, aged 15, Woughton).

This is considered in the following section which explores how well-designed, 'child friendly' public spaces can positively contribute to young people's independent spatial mobility and the important roles of adults in these spaces who champion young people's rights to exercise their physical and social needs, to relax and play and to have a voice in local decision-making.

3.6 Child friendly neighbourhoods

A critical factor for the success of neighbourhood space for young people's 'doorstep' play – play that takes on the street or in parks close to young people's homes (Town and Country Planning Association, 2024), is the presence of trusted adults nearby. Throughout the period of our study, we observed examples of how this was supported at a hyperlocal level. For example, in Brackenhall (a small estate within the wider Deighton & Brackenhall ward) we observed the community centre as a thriving hub of activity with faith groups, sports, arts and holiday clubs busy with adults and young people inside and out. This hive of regular, sustained activity ensured the proximity of trusted adults (parents and community volunteers known to young people), creating a sense of security for young people playing nearby. For parents too, the presence of these 'trusted eyes' mitigated anxiety about the perceived risks posed to children by unsupervised outdoor play. As has been widely noted (also see section 3.3), parental fears about a decline in community cohesion has fuelled perceptions of outdoor play as risky play with parents increasingly forbidding children to play out unsupervised (Rixon et al, 2019).

"Parents will not allow young people to go out, it is not safe... ... people want to protect their children because they may get involved in drugs and county lines. Dealers have these kids and they show them all this money and it's a problem with the cost of living crisis where people can't afford things"

(Parent's focus group, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"Young people don't go out because they're scared"

(Parents focus group, Woughton).

"I feel safe when there are others around just in case you need to run to them to help you"

(Lily, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

Young people have greater opportunities to move around and play freely in public spaces that are designed to ensure 'eyes on where children play' (Holt et al., 2015). For example, in Brackenhall children and young people were observed to play out – scootering independently to and from the MUGA (Multi-use games area), playing fields and park - in an area of the neighbourhood that had been designed so that family homes adjoin and overlook these amenities – sports fields and the community centre (see figure 3.6.1). Here, young people's independent play was facilitated by the inclusion of traffic calming measures. Designed to slow traffic, these enabled children and young people to travel independently, crossing safety from their homes to meet friends and use these amenities.

'Palpable... is the sense of unrestricted, unsupervised play among peers—an unconstrained youthful sociality which is not possible within tightly controlled school spaces, or adult-dominated neighbourhood localities. Cages [multi-use games areas] ... facilitate a form of play which is increasingly rare, given sharp declines in unsupervised outside play in Britain'

(Billingham et al., 2024).

The design and maintenance of these facilities is a further important factor in young people's use of and enjoyment of parks and public spaces. As was reported in section 3.4, poorly designed and broken equipment has a negative impact on young people both because they may not use it when nets are missing and swings are broken but also because it signifies how they are perceived, as young people living in 'poorer' neighbourhoods, with their needs deprioritised. Conversely, young people talk positively about good design – well maintained Multi Use Games Areas and parks that support their physical and social play.

"I like playing basketball in the basketball and football court. There is no gate there. We just walk in and we just play football, basketball and other sports. It's a communal thing. I play with my friends, sometimes with my family, and people here can just turn up"

(Emmanuel, male, aged 11,
Deighton & Brackenhall).



Figure 3.6.1
Family homes overlook the community sports field, basketball courts and playpark in Deighton & Brackenhall

Other features that positively enable young people's access to outdoor neighbourhood space include the design of pedestrian footways away from traffic – i.e. with green verges and trees separating people from moving vehicles. In Woughton, this includes a network of green corridors and connected park systems developed in the 1970s. Similarly in Deighton & Brackenhall, green corridors were introduced as part of the redesign of the area during the late 1990s and early 2000s to replace pavements that abut roads, necessitating young people to walk in close proximity to traffic. The latter remain a feature in older parts of the ward where we observed young people travelling to and from school, required, by the urban design to walk in close proximity to traffic and environmental pollutants (Marmot, 2010).



As illustrated in Figure 3.6.2 the design of this well-used walkway, with a green verge and trees, is an effective means of keeping pedestrians, including young people, away from moving vehicles as well as integrating nature into the heart of the built environment where it supports wellbeing and absorbs environmental toxins (McDonald et al, 2007). Moreover, given young people's concerns about 'no go areas' (the ginnels and pedestrian underpasses described in section 3.3 and 3.4) the design and landscaping ensure clear sightlines enabling young people to observe who is present and manage their safety.

Figure 3.6.2

Roadways and footpaths are kept separate with green space in some parts of Deighton & Brackenhall

In contrast to Deighton & Brackenhall and Woughton, the design of pedestrian footways in Mablethorpe were of concern to young people. The paths are small and narrow making it difficult for them to navigate their neighbourhood safely and necessitating them to walk next to the busy roads.

"The path is quite small and sometimes when you are walking with younger siblings or people like that, you have to try and keep them off the road and keep them on the pavement"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

Young people's negative experience of the paths and streets was made much worse in the summer in Mablethorpe, which is marked by the seasonality of the town and the influx of tourists.

"(in the summer) the streets are usually just filled (with people) and you can't normally get around"
(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

"In summer there is obviously a lot of tourists, and the path is really narrow as you get towards the beach and obviously there is going to be more people closer to the beach... There isn't really any space on the pavement for things like wheelchairs or bikes, or like scooters, it is all just people walking in summer. If it is winter then it is just people riding around on bikes and that"
(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

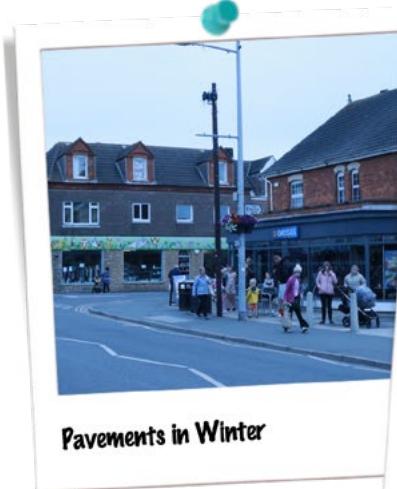


Figure 3.6.3
The differences in the pavements in the summer and in the winter due to the influx of tourists in Mablethorpe

3.7 People make places

'It is necessary to look both at harms to children's actual well-being and to harms to their well-becoming (their future well-being). This dual perspective on well-being and well-becoming is of particular interest in the case of children since what happens during childhood has such a crucial influence on the future well-being as an adult'

(Schweiger, 2019).

The previous section explored how good quality public space contributes to young people feeling safer in their neighbourhoods and how this positively contributes to their physical and social wellbeing. Young people report feeling secure in local areas where there are trusted adults nearby. However, while feeling safe is vital for young people to be able to access outdoor space, the presence of trusted adults in each site offered young people much more than this. Across each of the study neighbourhoods young people spoke about how particular adults, for example some trusted teachers in their schools and those delivering youth services, sports and arts, make them feel welcomed and included and that they could flourish.



"I really trust that teacher - really trust them. I could tell them anything. She's a mentor. Really nice"

(Stacey, female, aged 14, Woughton).

"I am proud to be part of the community, because it is just nice round here."

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

In Deighton & Brackenhall, trusted adults run weekly youth-focused activities (including arts, bike clubs, boxing, dance and football) and include young people in community celebrations. A community interest company, Empower, is extremely popular with young people and provides sports coaching, arts and fitness training for young people. Community leaders, trusted and familiar adults, offer young people safe spaces to meet and are vital for their social wellbeing and physical health.

"Empower [club providing health and wellbeing activities for young people] literally helped quite a few kids in the community to become more social and more active"

(Sophia, female, aged 14,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"Young people can do dance and sport and there are lots of groups to join"

(Khamari, male, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"My mum organised the mural. It took her like a few years to organise. They revealed it at the carnival when everyone was going by and everyone started cheering. It was really nice"

(Bisah, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

Young people also told us how voluntary and community groups in their neighbourhoods run community larders and distribute food and clothing (school uniform, shoes, coats), toiletries and other necessities to address the material disadvantage they experienced and their families. For example, in Deighton & Brackenhall, the Chestnut Centre is a cherished and unique resource for the local community, supporting individuals, community groups and businesses through providing a whole range of services, including the local library and information centre, a children's centre with a nursery and running a community pantry. Young people identified how these local initiatives and the adults who lead them are a vital part of their communities, replacing services that have been cut due to austerity and supporting their capacities to live a life they value that includes the arts, sports and opportunities for social connections with others.

Despite huge reductions in local authority budgets and devastating impacts on youth and neighbourhood services (Hayre and Pollock, 2022; YMCA, 2020) we found many examples where parents and community activists, faith groups, third sector and local authority actors are actively committed to supporting, celebrating and encouraging young people's access to local public space and amenities. Across all three neighbourhoods we noted the provision of safe, welcoming indoor and outdoor spaces for young people to meet and connect with other young people and the inclusion of young people in local community arts and cultural initiatives. Young people told us how much they value these opportunities to meet and connect with other young people in their community.

"The Chestnut Centre has the baby boutique for all baby clothes. They have the uniform exchange. They have computers, a library and a nursery and a community pantry and everything – it's really good"

(Bisah, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It's ok here – they look out for me and I can play about"

(Harvey, male, aged 13, Woughton).

"Quite often people don't want to be in these gangs. They stay because there's someone holding them there. If you have someone to talk to about that it eases the pressure. Takes a weight off your shoulders"

(Niamh, male, aged 13, Woughton).

"I like to be connected with people in my community, especially my friends"

(Bisah, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It's a great communal place. It's a nice place to be in. With a bunch of nice people as well"

(Emmanuel, male, aged 11,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"The people (in my community) help me feel safe"

(Khamari, male, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

We observed a range of provision in each neighbourhood, including weekly activities, projects and cultural and sporting activities for young people. For example, in Woughton this included a weekly programme of activities (sports, music, art, craft, games and unstructured recreation) for younger and older teens and young parents. Woughton Community Council offer weekly youth groups including standard youth club sessions and bespoke groups for young people (LGBTQ and SEND) which provide safe spaces for the young people to flourish who may not have other spaces to go to. Health and wellbeing are a feature of all the youth clubs and events with advice and support from adults. Every group includes food for the children and young people and access to other free resources such as sanitary products. Woughton Community Council put on regular community events such as pumpkin carving and baking, family picnics and play day events.



Figure 3.7.1
Front of community council youth space, Woughton



Figure 3.7.2
Notice board with Woughton community council events

In Mablethorpe, a community volunteer organises a weekly youth group for young and older teenagers. They meet in a space available on top of a charity shop.

“The youth club is mainly just seeing friends and doing stuff”

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

“The only places I tend to go are over to the youth group”

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).



The Upper Room, venue for one of the youth groups on top of a charity shop



The Upper Room. By the end of the project, they updated the sign on the door



Beach Hut where the youth group taking part in the project were meeting by the end of the project.

There is also Senior Youth Worker from Lincolnshire County Council who runs two weekly programs: a youth group and a sports project. The youth group offers an array of activities for young people such as arts, crafts, games, mindfulness activities and other. The sports project (running yearly from October to April as many young people get work in the tourist sector) offers the opportunity for young people to engage in sports and physical activity. However, it is an open and welcoming space and those young people who are not keen on taking part in sports are offered a variety of arts, crafts, and games activities. Sadly, toward the end of the research period, the Sports Hall was scheduled for demolition to make way for a new leisure and learning centre. As a result, the youth club lost access to their venue and the floodlit outdoor space alongside this. As a temporary solution, the youth club began meeting at a beach hut, which was only available because the summer season had not yet started. These examples illustrate the ongoing struggle between trusted adults and their commitment and willingness to support young people and the precarity of resources and space that they are constantly having to contend with. With the leisure centre now opened, they have secured a space in it for the season, albeit with more limited space and facilities for the sports they had previously offered.

Figure 3.7.3
Photographs of the youth group meeting spaces as they changed over the timeline of the study, Mablethorpe

Youth led activities provide opportunities to spend time with other young people and with adults who are invested in them and in their communities. The actions and activities of these local trusted adults in these neighbourhoods can be conceptualised as 'vulnerability diminishers' (Schweiger, 2019) i.e. one of a number of tools that can be mobilised to protect young people from the effects of economic and place-based disadvantage (including high crime rates and anti-social behaviour). In the context of austerity and the retrenchment of services (Horton, 2016, Webb et al., 2022) these adults and the activities and spaces provide vital material and social resources and opportunities. Young people articulated how this contributes to their own sense of wellbeing and well-becoming (future wellbeing) (Schweiger, 2019). Living in places where people mobilise to care for others in the local community was experienced positively by young people and enhanced young people's feelings of being able to flourish and their sense of belonging to their local area (Bird, 2024).



Figure 3.7.5
Young person's artwork,
Woughton



Figure 3.7.4
Young person's artwork,
Deighton & Brackenhall

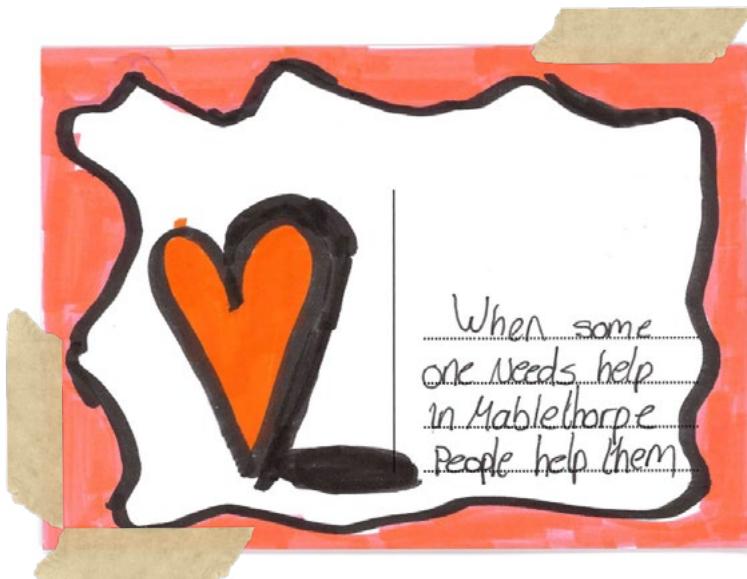


Figure 3.7.6
Young person's artwork,
Mablethorpe



3.8 Young people's aspirations for their neighbourhoods

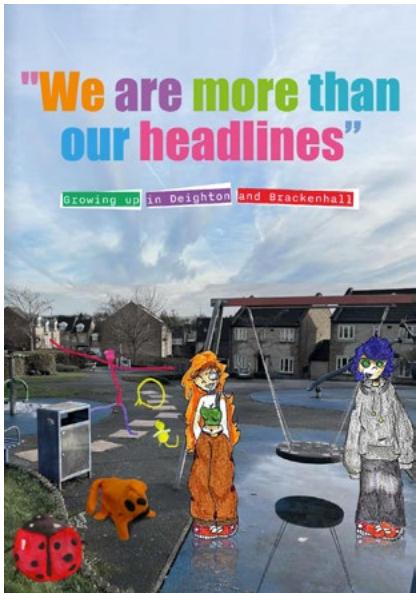
'Instead of viewing children as separate entities that become capable of social involvement, we may consider children as being inherently engaged in the social world even from before birth, advancing throughout development in their skill in independently carrying out and organising activities of their culture'

(Rogoff, 1990, our emphasis in italics).

A critical aspect of the local action – 'people make places' described in section 3.7, is the ways in which it values the power of local communities and young people's capabilities as social actors who are invested in their local areas (Biggeri, 2020). Rather than seeing young people as 'separate entities' (Rogoff, 1990), young people are valued for their capacity to positively influence their own lives and the lives of others around them (Sen, 1999). This is counter to deficit narratives about place and the young people who live there and the idea that socio-economically disadvantaged places lack social capital.

As the following section considers, young people have clear ideas about what they and their communities need to live well and flourish and how their neighbourhoods could be improved in ways which support their, and their families and peers, wellbeing and well-becoming. In keeping with the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) which recognises young people's moral agency and capacity to aspire, and drawing on their co-analysis and discussion of the key findings about where they live and the changes they would like to see, we worked with young people to co-produce creative outputs which brought together their research and priorities for change in their neighbourhoods.

Young people's creative outputs were themed around the strengths of their neighbourhood and the changes young people wanted to see. Their choices of medium (scrap book, animation, booklets and banners) and careful curating of the images and text they had generated about their neighbourhoods, illustrates their capabilities to positively contribute to knowledge about their neighbourhoods and to communicate key messages to local stakeholders in local policy dialogues in each study site (discussed in section 4.4).



In Deighton & Brackenhall, the online Scrapbook "We are more than our headlines" captured young people's experiences of growing up in the area through art, music and words. Five thematic areas: 'what home means to us'; safety in the area'; 'cleaning up the place'; 'green spaces' and 'our community', visually and textually convey to decision-makers (e.g. including local government officers and councillors, and other stakeholders with the power to shape local resource allocation, service delivery and regeneration efforts) how places feel and are experienced by young people. This includes how they are supportive of young people's wellbeing and how their opportunities are challenged by a lack of maintenance and care.

In Woughton, a series of banners were created with young people as a travelling exhibition to showcase the research project and disseminate the 'Wellbeing and Safety pack' (see section 4.2). Discussed in Chapter 4, the purpose of the pack was to provide support and advice concerning mental health and wellbeing, health and healthy relationships, safety, bullying, gangs, future and local information for young people about where to get help. The pack was produced in an online and printed format and distributed widely across the area.



In Mablethorpe, an animated film and a booklet "10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town" was created using young people's art and words to highlight how they feel about and what they need from to make life better for them in their town. The use of young people's art and words in the booklet carefully evidences what's needed while the animation, which includes the voices of young people, palpably conveys the felt attachments and experiences.



“... we all go out and we go litter collecting... we have done it on the beach a couple of times”

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

4. Young people are change-makers in economically disadvantaged places

4.1 Introduction: Young people are change-makers

4.2 Community change projects

Mablethorpe – No Vaping under

Woughton - Wellbeing and Safety pack

Deighton & Brackenhall – Public Art Murals

4.3 Young people as decision-makers

4.3.1 The gap between young people and decision makers

4.3.2 Young people are not being listened to

4.3.3 Young people's concerns are not being acted upon

4.4 Local policy dialogues and priorities for change

4.5. Local recommendations - sharing collective discoveries ('the harvest) (World Café principle)

Mablethorpe, Local Policy Dialogue key local recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

Woughton Local Policy Dialogue key local recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

Deighton & Brackenhall Local Policy Dialogue key local recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

4. Young people are change-makers in economically disadvantaged places

"I did a cake sale in the summer. I started selling painted rocks. I had this money jar and loads of people kept coming to give me money, like £20 for a (painted) rock. Then my mum started making cakes for me to sell. And then the town choir got involved and they came to my house. I raised £600-£700 for the NHS"

(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

"I'm working with the Youth Panel. I'm enjoying it because I get my voice heard by people who are willing to help the community"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"I did work experience in a nursery. It was amazing. Got the best feedback that I was willing to do anything, helpful, always doing something if children needed it"

(Niamh, female, aged 15, Woughton).

Article 6 (life, survival and development)

Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times.

Article 13 (freedom of expression)

Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

Article 17 (access to information from the media)

Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989.



4.1 Introduction: Young people are change-makers

'A major contribution of the capability approach is that it provides a framework in which children are considered not just as subjects of interventions, but also as active citizens whose priorities, values and aspirations are worthy of recognition.'

(Biggeli, 2020)

The previous chapter (sections 3.6 & 3.7) considered how young people value their relationships with trusted adults in their neighbourhoods and how this enhances their sense of belonging to their local area (Bird et al. 2013). We noted how young people valued those adults (parents, youth and community volunteers known to young people), who spend time with them, listen to them and recognise their capabilities as young people to positively influence their own lives and the lives of those around them (Sen, 1999). This is counter to deficit narratives about young people in economically disadvantaged places who are frequently presented as lacking and in need of 'fixing' (Rogoff, 1990).

Rather, our approach, in keeping with the Capability Approach, is focused on how we can support – and share - the process by which young people, academic researchers and local decision-makers can come together to remove the 'un-freedoms' (Sen, 1999) that limit young people's opportunities, agency and rights to express their views, access information and achieve their full potential (Articles 6, 12,13 and 17). These are essential to ensure young people's development and wellbeing within the complexity of each young person's individual life circumstances so they can flourish.

As part of this process, we are committed to recognising through our actions in researching with young people and in how we represent them in our reporting, young people's extant roles as active citizens in their communities and their capabilities 'to exercise reasoning about what they value and to express their point of view and priorities' (Biggeri, 2020). It is important to emphasise these individual and collective capabilities are already present in the young people we researched with. We did not instil this on economically disadvantaged communities, but rather, listened and paid attention to what was happening locally and worked with young people flexibly and in ways of their choosing to deliver local actions they wanted to see.



Accordingly, we aim in the chapter to acknowledge and explore:

- The ways that young people are already active in their communities through their participation in youth panels (Deighton & Brackenhall and Mablethorpe) and community events (the annual carnival in Deighton & Brackenhall), mural painting (Woughton), and litter picks in their parks, play areas and the beach (Deighton & Brackenhall, Woughton and Mablethorpe).
- The contributions that young people made as co-researchers during the project, including designing and delivering their own community change projects to bring positive change in their neighbourhoods.

The chapter is organised into the following sections that draw together evidence to illustrate the positive contributions towards change that young people made as co-researchers in each of their neighbourhoods. This includes:

- In section 4.2. 'Community change projects', how young people were involved in designing and delivering their own community change projects and how these have been disseminated widely in each of the study areas.
- In section 4.3 'Young people as decision makers', we explore the extant activity of young people in their communities, seeking to bring about improvements in their areas through engaging with local decision-makers on "issues that concern their individual and collective life conditions" Chawla (2001, p.9) to try to ensure that their neighbourhoods support the wellbeing and futures of the children and young people who live there.

"I like when people listen to me and I get to explain stuff and I have the option to speak. We are trying to speak to the news reporters to encourage people to come out from their houses and help the community"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"(Being involved with CHiLL), it's allowed younger people to have their voices heard"

(Niamh, female, aged 15, Woughton).

"... we all go out and we go litter collecting... we have done it on the beach a couple of times"

(Isla, female, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

Throughout, the chapter demonstrates young people's willingness to work with local influencers and be included in local decision-making and what they bring in terms of their knowledge and expertise about their local areas, what supports and what challenges them and their communities to flourish. However, the chapter also illustrates 'The gap between young people and decision makers' (section 4.3.1) and how 'Young people's concerns are not being acted upon (section 4.3.2), drawing together evidence from young people about how they do not always see positive impacts of their participation, including how their views and ideas do not appear to filter through to planning decisions or are overlooked by decision-makers. Rather, our research suggests that whilst local community workers are supportive and advocate for young people in local decision-making, this is not always connected to and enabled at the local authority level and there are a lack of effective mechanisms to include young people in decision-making at this higher - District, Metropolitan and Unitary authority - level.

Section 4.4 'Local dialogues and priorities for change', which responds directly to the challenges that young people told us they were experiencing in having their ideas taken on board at local authority level. Here we explore how we worked with young people and local stakeholders to facilitate a series of local policy dialogues where young people could meet with decision makers to share and discuss their research findings and identify priorities for change. To support this, we draw and expand upon Brown's World Café principles (Brown and Isaacs, 2005) to frame our approach, together with our own attentive methodology (Lomax and Smith, 2024) as a means of facilitating young people's participation in these policy spaces.

As part of these events with community stakeholders and local authority decision-makers, young people set out their recommendations, drawing on their localised knowledge of their areas as a basis for local planning and action. Planned with young people, the local dialogues events provided a platform for young people to amplify and elevate their aspirations to local decision makers about where they live and their futures as a catalyst for change. Their recommendations are set out in the final section of the chapter, 4.5 'Local policy dialogues and priorities for change'.

4.2 Community change projects

Recognising and valuing young people's (different) capacities is a key tenet of the Capability Approach (CA). A theory and a methodology, CA supports adults to think differently about, and to be more responsive to, young people's capacities (the range of talents, skills and personal characteristics) and to ensure they are valued and supported (Biggeri, Ballet and Bhukuth, 2011). As part of the changemaking process, young people in each area worked with us to develop community change projects to address priorities they had identified for their neighbourhoods. Based on their co-analysis and discussion of the key findings alongside their many different "funds of knowledge" (Moje et al., 2004, p.38) about where they live, the projects were led by young people, reflecting their ongoing commitment to their communities.

As part of this process some young people involved and drew on support from local community workers and services, contributing to the identification of community assets and building on community, including intergenerational capital. In Mablethorpe young people initiated a poster campaign to address their concerns about young people's vaping and the selling of vapes to young people in the area; in Woughton young people created a wellbeing and safety pack to support the wellbeing of other young people in the area, and in Deighton & Brackenhall young people created a series of powerful artworks to be displayed as public art murals and contribute positive messages to the wider public about the area.

The change projects, presented in this section, are illustrative of how young people already participate in their communities to create tangible possibilities for positive change by shaping the places they live. They also demonstrate how skilled young people are at identifying issues in their area, working with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders and creating, communicating and disseminating their ideas in such varied and creative forms – poster, banners, wellbeing pack and public art murals. In so doing, they call in to question assumptions about weak social capital in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the prevalent view of young people 'as recipients of positive social capital rather than as shared producers' (Malone, 2012). Rather, the change projects illustrate how young people can imagine, plan, take action and collaborate with their peers and stakeholders in their neighbourhoods to create positive change and community flourishing.

Recognising young people as 'dreamers, designers and agents of change' (Malone, 2013) requires us to understand and respect that young people engage in ways that don't always fit a 'formal' method of civic engagement such as meetings with agendas set by decision makers. Rather, as we illustrate, their participation is contingent upon adults "start(ing) from the basic assumption that (young people) are of the social world and in a number of complex and not always readily visible ways, socially competent" (Wyness, 2006). This can be seen in the young people's involvement in the change projects. As the following examples illustrate, young people formulated their ideas for change, drawing on their funds of knowledge, derived from their cultural and societal contexts as young people. In this they were supported by the academic research team, who, drawing on our attentive methodology, created a flexible and inclusive space in which young people were able to articulate their aspirations and plan, communicate and deliver their projects.

Mablethorpe – No Vaping under 18

In Mablethorpe young people expressed their concern about the number of young people who were vaping and the shops that were selling vapes to them.

Young people in Mablethorpe worked with the academic research team and community stakeholders to design and develop a social action project to raise awareness of the risk of underage vaping. In this they were supported by a youth worker from YMCA Lincolnshire and a Lincolnshire County

Council (LCC) senior youth worker. Within this process, the young people determined that they needed to understand more about the risks of vaping and the law about selling vapes. To enable this, the academic research team facilitated video calls with LCC's Young Persons Tobacco Control Specialist, who works closely with Trading Standards and NHS Lincolnshire's Children and Young People Programme Manager.

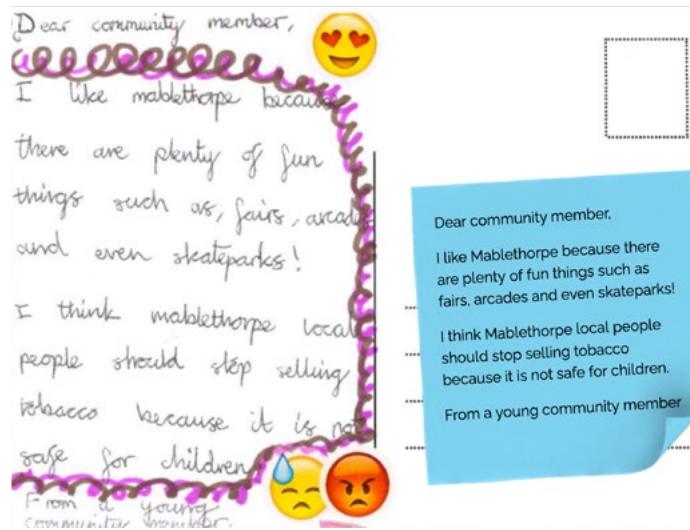


Figure 4.2.1

Postcard from a young person concerned about vaping in Mablethorpe.
(Maya, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe)

What needs to happen?

- Raise awareness:
 - With younger children to prevent
 - With smaller shops
 - Street vendors - locations around the town
 - of health issues
 - of the law
 - With parents
 - health
 - what they look like
 - packaging

i) What is the problem?

- Illegal sale of nicotine products to under age young people.
- Young people don't realise the effect of vaping on the body + impact in later life.
- Young people around 13 can buy vapes on the high street. We have seen 10 and 11 year olds Vaping.
- The shops are responsible for selling that to children.
- Parents are part of the problem - giving the vapes to children.
- Smaller shops are worse.
- We don't know enough about what's in them - even without nicotine in them they have other substances?
- Packaging - bright colours
- Pricing - half price.

Figure 4.2.2
Collated notes
from young people
identifying the
problem of underage
vaping

Young people went on to develop a series of posters which these key professionals also provided feedback on, supporting the young people to ensure their information was accurate and including signposting to support young people to help them to stop vaping.

These posters were displayed in key locations where other young people might see them, including local Lincolnshire County Council venues and YMCA Lincolnshire's main youth centre 'The Showroom'. There are plans for them to be used to support education with young people across a variety of services, including NHS community connector work on asthma prevention, YMCA anti-vaping school assemblies, and a new Lincolnshire County Council smoking and vaping awareness course for young people. Information about this community change project, including the posters, also feature on the Lincolnshire NHS Integrated Care Board Young People and Vaping webpage.



Figure 4.2.3
Community change project – 'No vaping under 18' posters designed and distributed by young people, Mablethorpe

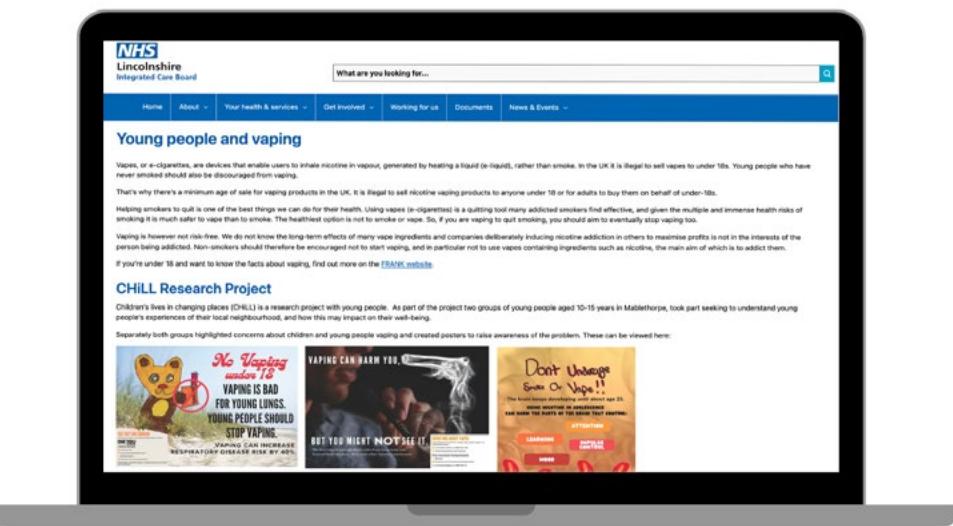


Figure 4.2.4
Young people's community change project posters on the Lincolnshire NHS Integrated Care Board Young People and Vaping webpage

Woughton - Wellbeing and Safety pack

In Woughton, young people developed a Wellbeing and Safety pack to support young people in the local area. The impetus for the project arose through a series of intergenerational workshops in which young people communicated their priorities for change to adult residents and professionals from youth services and neighbourhood regeneration teams. A priority for young people was to help other young people with challenges around personal safety, mental health and social isolation. Accordingly, the pack was designed to provide information and advice on mental health and wellbeing, health and healthy relationships, safety, bullying, gangs and where to get help. The pack was produced in an online and printed format and distributed widely.

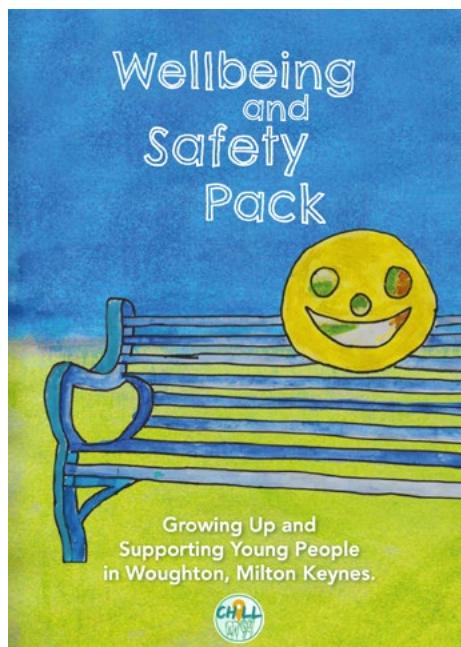


Figure 4.2.5
Community change project – 'Wellbeing and Safety Pack' designed and distributed by young people, Woughton

"We made our community better and safer"

(Young people's focus group, Woughton).

"It makes me feel really, really proud. Really proud"

(Young people's focus group, Woughton).

Young people also designed posters and banners to support the distribution of the pack in local schools and community spaces (hubs). The online version and flipbook, which could be accessed by a QR code, was sent to Milton Keynes City Council and local NHS health services for young people, MK Mind, MK YMCA and local neighbourhood (policing) teams, in order to reach a wider audience of young people. In recognition of the value of the Wellbeing and Safety Pack, Woughton Community Council now hosts the Packs on their website and the Violence Reduction team in Woughton use the Packs as part of their ongoing presentations in schools and events with children and young people. Some of the young people continue to work with the academic team in partnership with Milton Keynes City Council to create further material that can be used in conjunction with the packs.

Deighton & Brackenhall – Public Art Murals

Inspired by a landmark mural that celebrates the contribution of the Windrush generation and their descendants to the UK, young people in Deighton & Brackenhall worked with a local artist to create powerful artworks to be included in a series of public art murals in the neighbourhood. They worked with local artist Rio Duma to create images about the cultural identity of the area which portray their own attachments to the neighbourhood. Reflecting on their involvement, young people told us that they felt that the joy and positivity engendered by the murals would also serve to counter the stigma that negative media has perpetuated about the area, make their perspectives more visible to the wider public and promoting social inclusion (Zebracki and De Bekker, 2018).

"There should be a space for street art for young people to express themselves. A space for expressive art"

(Logan, male, aged 12,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"I feel like (the mural) It's colourful and creative (and) ... a nice welcome to Deighton. I walk past it every day and I just like looking at it."
(Chantelle, female, aged 12,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

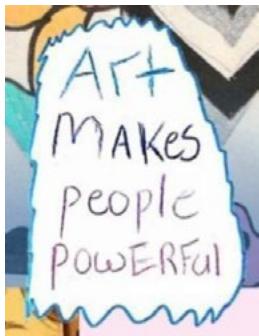


Figure 4.2.6
Artwork and text for the public art murals created by young people, Deighton & Brackenhall

Planning where the murals would be displayed, the young people worked with Rio and the academic research team, Rio taking forward the perspectives of the young people to local councillors and senior staff at the local community centre. As part of this process, young people made important decisions about the location of the murals, which actively contributed to the visual and felt experience of their neighbourhood. This included locating murals in areas that they felt had been abandoned, including an area in front of a row of derelict shops and along an unsightly wall that bordered a local park. Through sighting art within the open, public space of the neighbourhood rather than within an art gallery or community building, the young people aspired to make art accessible, create a lasting and positive contribution to the aesthetic of their neighbourhood.

4.3 Young people as decision-makers

Being involved in local decision-making, meeting with decision-makers and having their perspectives listened to and acted on matters to the young people in our study.

"I feel if the teenagers were listened to then they wouldn't turn to crime. If they felt like they had a voice more then I feel that it would be better"

(Bisah, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"It's good to talk freely like this about things that matter and share opinions and have your perspective understood"

(Young people's focus group, Woughton).

"I learnt to express my feelings freely and I will have my voice heard"

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

Young people are willing to be included in local decision-making where they have knowledge and expertise about their local areas. However, there is a chasm, described by young people, in which decision makers at local authority level are routinely experienced as failing to listen to young people's concerns about where they live and what needs to happen (see section 4.3.1 for more information about the gap between young people and decision makers). In all three research sites, this rift stands in sharp contrast to young people's positive experiences of local volunteers, parents, church groups and youth and community workers who work directly with them, listening to their concerns. As described in section 3.7, young people describe these adults as attentive, supportive and on the 'same side', caring about them and the local area.



"People around that are very, very nice. If you need any help, you can knock on someone's door, and they'll literally give you the answer to that question. People often will say the doors open if you want to."

(Maisie, female, aged 12, Woughton).

"On some days I go to this community meeting (Youth Panel). I get to speak and I'm enjoying it because I get my voice heard by people who are willing to help the community"

(Logan, male, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

"... my mum and my parents, my friends, my teachers listen to me. My teachers. Yes, people like that listen to me. At the sports centre, I get listened to. My dad used to work there. (When I give my views) They try and figure a way to get something to happen"

(Ben, male, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

As a result of the support that these groups offer and how well received these are by young people, these local projects and people are well positioned to improve local environments with and for young people. Externally funded projects that young people attend, that are youth focussed and inclusive, similarly can play a significant role if properly funded and integrated into local neighbourhoods.

4.3.1 The gap between young people and decision makers

Across all the sites, young people described how decision makers routinely fail to listen and act upon their concerns. Whilst local community workers who help facilitate and sustain projects for young people are supportive, and we heard examples of how they advocate for young people's voice in local decision-making, this is not always connected to and enabled at a local authority level. For example, in neighbourhood design and planning decisions, young people in Mablethorpe see much of the outdoor space as designed for adults or for business and there is little outdoor space they identify as 'for them'.

"They (decision makers) think about people to be benefitted from projects like adults, business owners, shops. They do not consider children"

(Maisie, female, aged 10, Mablethorpe).

"Outdoor spaces for young people have not changed. They (decision makers) stick with the past, they don't listen to what young people are interested in now"

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"When you try to say something, they (decision makers) never ask. If they want something they just build it"

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

INCLUDE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DESIGN PROCESS!



"It is really difficult to try and find a decent field because it has all been built on... At some point they are going to build on Sherwood (the local park). It is definitely going to happen"

(Rose, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

The marginalisation of children and young people's interests in neighbourhood planning is also reflected in the urban design in Woughton (as discussed in Chapter 3).

**"There's not really much for the youth... It's more of an adult thing.
It's not really a child's place"**
(Tyson, male, aged 15, Woughton).

**"I'm not allowed to use redway
because it is unsafe"**

(Young people's workshop, Woughton).

**"... it's not safe to cross the roads and
dual carriageways"**

(Young people's focus group , Woughton).

As described in section 3.3., the design of Milton Keynes, where neighbourhoods are connected by 'redways', pedestrian and cycle ways which pass through parks and housing estates and underpass the main arterial roads that border the city's neighbourhoods. However, although designed to create traffic free routes through the city, some young people are afraid to use them. This means that the high-traffic, arterial roads that bound each neighbourhood grid square effectively render young people 'stuck', unable to safely cross the busy dual carriageways and afraid to take the underpass.



In Deighton & Brackenhall, young people feel that their neighbourhood is neglected and has been deprioritised for environmental maintenance and care compared to wealthier areas within the borough. They explain the disparities they feel about their neighbourhood by drawing comparisons with other areas.

“Sometimes the council listens here but if you live in a poor area they won’t listen to you. If you have some money, probably it’s a 50 / 50 chance they listen. Then there are the rich people, then the council will listen to you”

(Brandon, male, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

“Many of the rich areas get all the refurbishment ... it’s not fair”

(Bisah, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

**COUNCIL NEEDS TO
SEND PEOPLE
WITH POWER TO
MAKE CHANGES!**

“My dad lives in a richer area than my mum. He needed something fixing and the council helped. A brick was thrown through our window, and the council didn’t come and fix the window.... the richer parts are clean”

(Sabryna, female, aged 12,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

The systemic disparities in the distribution of economic resources experienced by young people in our study reinforce their sense that they have fewer opportunities to flourish and that this is linked directly to their status as 'poorer', and their neighbourhoods as less deserving places. There are budgets for 'police', 'education', and 'planning and development services' that are primarily controlled at local authority level and despite the challenges that young people felt about planning in their neighbourhoods, they have a clear sense of how their local areas could be improved through better planning and design, care and maintenance, and how even small modifications to the design and delivery of neighbourhood services can improve access to parks and places to play (see section 3.7).

4.3.2 Young people are not being listened to

Despite the many insightful ideas that young people have about their areas, they felt that they were not being listened to and did not see tangible actions even when they participated in meetings or shared their perspectives with decision-makers at the city, district or borough council level. For example, young people describe how they were not consulted about plans to remove and re-site a playground to provide a 'leisure and learning hub' as part of Towns Fund development in Mablethorpe. Their concern was both the loss of the playground and that they had not been informed or involved in plans to re-site it.¹³

"We don't have a park anymore, it got knocked down to build a swimming pool"

(Ruby, female, aged 11,
Mablethorpe).

"... there's a park literally right over there and it's just got baby stuff ... a roundabout and a tiny slide"

(Ethan, male, aged 9,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"I don't think the council listen that much because of what they did with the park. They took the stuff out, the swings and stuff so you can't play in there anymore"

(Tim, male, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

Whilst playground provision exists in Woughton, young people feel that too often their parks are designed for younger children that are age-inappropriate to them and don't offer them a place to hang out together. Similarly in Deighton & Brackenhall, young people consider that the playgrounds are designed with younger children in mind while the lack of places for older children and young people is exacerbated by the council's removal of parts of the playground.

This suggests a policy disconnect between hyper-local knowledge – the insights that young people, local volunteers, parents, youth and community workers who, through (often) long standing commitments to young people at a neighbourhood level, are familiar with young people's ideas and concerns – and decision-makers at the local authority level and the lack of effective mechanisms to include young people in decision-making at this level.

¹³ In Mablethorpe, attempts to engage with young people have changed over time. In 2020 consultation to shape investment plans for the town was done "on the streets and through 'My Town portal' online. This was targeted at all community members. During the course of the project, the research team was invited to an exhibition event in November 2023. The event showcased the "transformational improvements being delivered for Mablethorpe and Skegness"(CCB,2023). As part of this event, the CCB sent invitations to primary schools in Mablethorpe and Secondary schools in Louth and Alford. The event allocated an hour for young people to attend, meet project leads and learn more about the projects being developed. The setup of the room included a table with a flipchart and post-its for young attendees to leave comments. The research team support this process by explaining the purpose of the flipchart and encouraging them to leave comments. In January 2025, a second exhibition event took place at the new Leisure and Learning Centre. The event included a "crafts stand for young people" and a "postcard competition with children invited to design a postcard for Mablethorpe"(CCB,2025).

4.3.3 Young people's concerns are not being acted upon

Financial constraints, including emergency budgetary measures, mean that where young people are consulted at neighbourhood and ward level, their views do not always appear to filter through to planning decisions. At best, young people in our study feel that local authority decision-makers are deaf to their concerns, and at worst, indifferent. For example, young people in Mablethorpe were active in raising their concerns through ad hoc mechanisms such as youth groups within the town supported by volunteers or longstanding local authority youth workers. However, their perspectives did not always appear to have been acted upon by local decision-makers at borough, city or district council level, and their efforts to develop and embed more sustained mechanisms for youth voice faced numerous obstacles.

**"The stuff we have done before
hasn't really done anything... they
just carry on and we can't really
track it down can we?"**

(Declan, male, aged 13,
Mablethorpe).

**"When you try to say something,
they never ask if they want
something, they just build it."**

(Nicole, female, aged 11,
Mablethorpe).

**"I don't think we really do
that, have our say"**

(Ruby, female, aged 11,
Mablethorpe).

**"Last year we started a youth
council but that kind of like,
faded away"**

(Isla, female, aged 13,
Mablethorpe).

This disconnect between hyperlocal young person-led solutions and local authority decision makers is echoed in Deighton and Brackenhall. Supported by local youth workers, young people from Deighton & Brackenhall, acting in their capacity as members of the Asbrow (Ward) Youth Panel, gathered young people's perspectives about how the local area could be better managed. Their ideas about how their local areas could be improved included better management of fly tipping, improved street lighting and converting derelict shops into a community centre, were shared with members of the local authority.

"Make the alleyways brighter so you can see instead of having trees blocking the sun. Currently you literally can't see where you are going"

(Sophia, female, aged 13,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

"We need a collection of the dumped household items"

(Brandon, male, aged 12,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

However, after several months the young people had not received any feedback from the local authority visitors and were told by the community support workers that the boarded-up shops which they had identified as rat-infested, dangerous and stigmatising (see section 3.4) that they had proposed be made into a community space, had been awarded planning permission for housing. This left the young people feeling that their perspectives have been overlooked and that the consultation was spurious.

"We brought everything to the Youth Panel and we prepared everything for the council. But they didn't listen to us anyway. They had already decided what they wanted to do"

(Young people's focus group,
Deighton & Brackenhall).

Limited opportunities to be genuinely listened to and taken seriously were also concerns for young people in Woughton who felt that, as a result, services were developed in ways that did not take account of their perspectives. They also felt undermined and dismissed due to their status as young people.

In all three research sites, despite the existence of 'voice' and 'influence' teams at a local authority level, young people experience frustration and report feeling overlooked and "easy to ignore" (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2022):

"When we have tried things before nothing has happened or it can't be tracked. The Youth Council faded away because of lack of support from the Town Council"

(Declan, male, aged 13, Mablethorpe).

"It's quite often we don't get listened to properly. If there was someone to listen properly and take notes, I think there'd be a lot more help for young people rather than it just being 'ah you're just a kid'"

(Young people's focus group, Woughton).

"Take it to a youth council or proper council and they can take it from there, but obviously because we are kids they don't listen so much"

(Niamh, female, aged 15, Woughton).

"We are sometimes ignored because of where we come from. We are dismissed as 'hood rats'"

(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).

These examples suggest that local authorities need more transparent ways to include young people in consultation and planning cycles, including explaining why things have not happened or why budgets have been reallocated elsewhere.

Working with young people means both listening to and valuing their perspectives in planning and decision-making in ways that celebrate and serve the diverse needs of young people, their communities and neighbourhoods. This includes being very clear about timeframes for action and explaining what actions have or have not been taken and why. Including young people in decision-making requires structures, initiatives and actions that are young people focussed and inclusive and that draw on young people's capabilities to promote and sustain collective action that improves local service for them and their communities (see section 5.3 for our recommendations about how this can be achieved). In the following section, we explore how the local policy dialogue events that we facilitated on all three research sites begin to bridge this gap between young people and local authority decision makers.

4.4 Local policy dialogues and priorities for change

To address the disconnect between young people and local authority decision makers and building on the earlier young person-led community change projects, we facilitated a series of local policy dialogues in each of the study neighbourhoods. These were events where young people took the lead in meeting with local decision makers to share their research findings, the outcomes of their change projects, and identify priorities for change. In providing a space for participatory dialogue, the events were intended to harness the capacity of statutory and voluntary sector partners to work collaboratively with young people, identify the next steps for change in their areas and generate key messages for national policy makers (see section 4.4.1 for local recommendations and section 5.3 for key national recommendations).

Our approach with young people included finding ways that both recognise their rights to be included in decision-making (Articles 12 and 13, UNCRC, 1989) and for young people and adult stakeholders to work together, bringing their diverse knowledges and perspectives into dialogue "to challenge and reshape dominant narratives and generate new insights (Moje et al., 2004). In centring young people as experts, knowledgeable about their lives and neighbourhoods, we sought to purposefully shift the hierarchy of more traditional research (and consultation) which places emphasis on adults presenting their views and inviting responses. The young co-researchers took the lead in presenting their research and identifying what needs to change (Anyon et al., 2018) and adults, through these 'provocations' (Woodward, 2020) were invited to respond.

"(the policy dialogues event enabled) new opportunities for young people to be heard and help make changes"

(Young person, feedback at the local policy dialogue, Woughton).

Framed by the Capabilities Approach which recognises young people's capabilities to positively influence their lives and the lives of others (Sen, 1999) and underpinned by the 'attentive methodology' we used in phase two and three of the project, we sought to meaningfully attend to "how children wanted to be in the space" (Lomax and Smith, 2024). This included recognising the different ways that young people communicate through different verbal and non-verbal modalities. Rather than a purely verbal activity, multimodal approaches recognise how touch, gaze, gesture and movement are important ways that young people (and adults) convey meaning and how this is mediated through 'things' (art, music, text). To facilitate these diverse communicative preferences, we made available the young people's scrapbook, animated film, booklet and banners (see section 4.5) providing different modes of engagement for young people. This included, in accordance with their wishes, roles as speakers and discussants.

To create a participatory structure for the local policy dialogue events, we drew on Juanita Brown's World Café principles which relies on an appreciation of local knowledge (Greenwood and Levin, 2007) for fostering collaborative dialogue and creating opportunities for action and change (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). These seven design principles (The World Café Community Foundation, 2025), illustrated in Figure 4.4.1, framing how we worked with the co-researchers to plan and shape the events with them in each of the research sites.

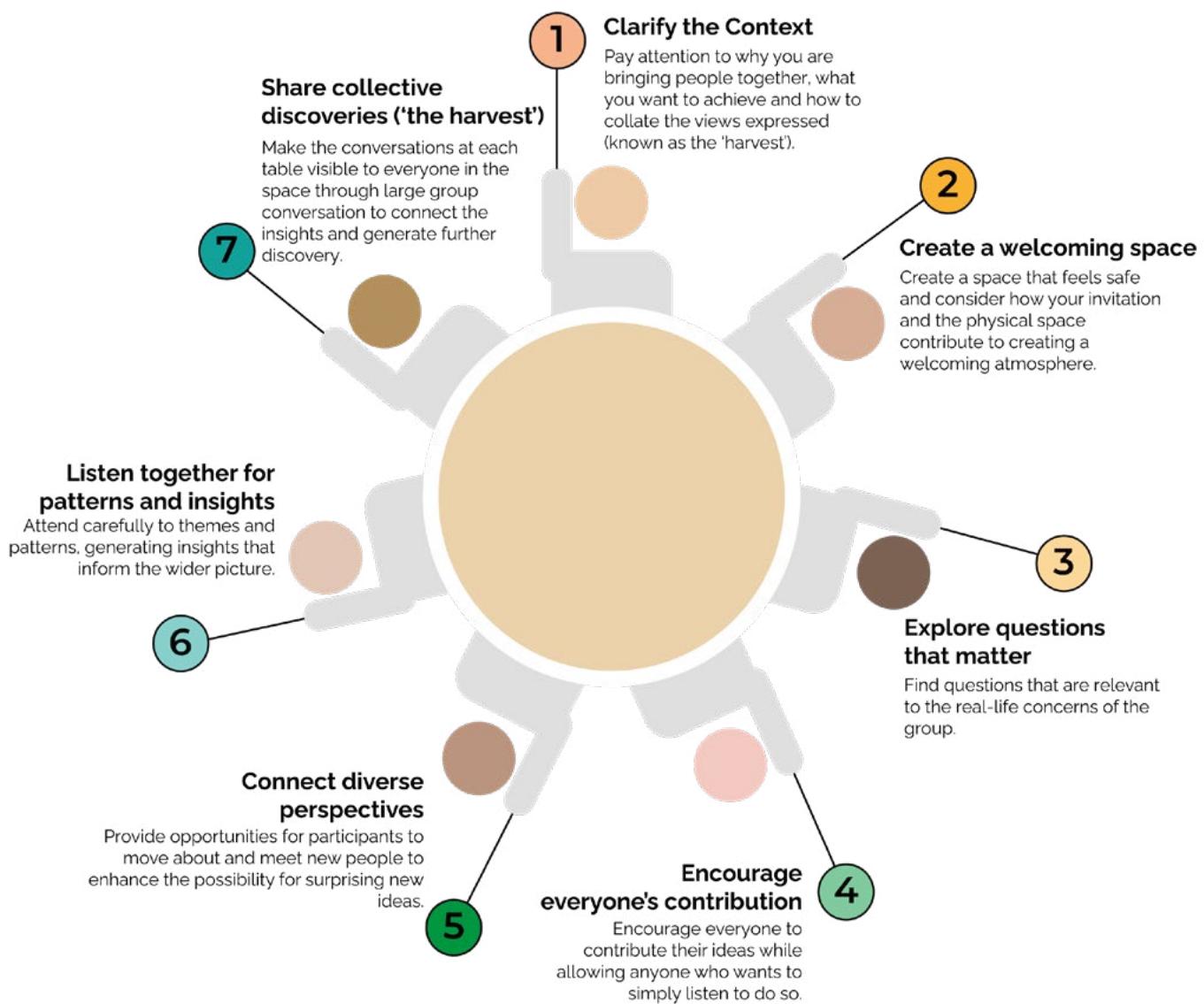


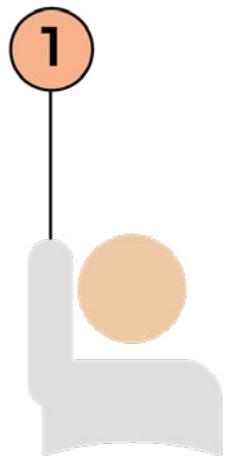
Figure 4.4.1
Seven design principles of the World Café approach

The following section describes how we planned and organised the local policy dialogues, how this was supported by the World Café principles, and how these were adapted across the three sites to reflect young people's preferences, enable them to represent their ideas, generating productive intergenerational dialogues. To illustrate this, we focus on each principle in turn and how they informed our co-planning and co-delivery of the events with the co-researchers.

Clarifying the context

Planning the policy dialogue events in partnership with the young co-researchers enabled the young people in each research site to take a proactive role in setting the agenda for the events. This included:

- Identifying key decision-makers to invite: Deciding who should attend involved the co-researchers and members of the academic research team carefully discussing together 'who should be part of the conversation' (Ward and Lundy, 2024). It resulted in the attendance of over 90 decision-makers, third and voluntary sector influencers (approx. 30 per site). Across all sites, attendees included: Youth services, public health representatives, sport and leisure services, housing and community services, mental health charities; neighbourhood policing and violence reduction teams, local City and ward-level councillors, acting and deputy mayors and mayoral candidates, health trust leads, faith leads, family centre workers and school representatives.
- Being clear in the invitation to stakeholders, what we, as the academic and co-research team, hoped to achieve. This included, in the written invites, a request that decision-makers commit to listening, responding and identifying positive solutions together with young people.



About this event

'Children's Lives in Changing Places'

We are researchers from the University of Huddersfield and young people who live in Deighton and Brackenhall.

We have been researching together to understand where young people like to spend their time, what affects their lives, what opportunities are available and how young people can help make decisions about their local area.

As part of the project, we are hosting an event at **Heritage Quay at the University of Huddersfield** on **Friday 26th April**.

This event will bring together decision and policy makers to listen and talk with young people about growing up in Deighton and Brackenhall, what's good, what most needs changing and how to involve young people in that change.

Creating a welcoming space & encouraging everyone's contribution

As part of involving young people in planning the event, one of the key elements was identifying a safe, welcoming venue so young people felt able to share their opinions and ideas with adults. In Mablethorpe the event was held in the familiar and comfortable primary school hall. In Woughton these were held in a community hall meeting room, which was familiar to the young people and used widely by the community. In Deighton & Brackenhall, the event was hosted on the University campus at the request of the young people, who, being mostly unfamiliar with the campus, were keen to visit. An informal but contemporary open-plan space, the room is also distinctive and comfortable, with a large, curved screen to display the young people's artwork. The walls have soft fabric, creating a warm, soft environment in contrast to the brightly lit lecture theatre spaces common in universities. This extended space also houses an important heritage collection of art, music, sport and the political history of Huddersfield that the young people could explore, as well as quiet areas for young people to take themselves out of the space for a break if they wished. We chose this room as a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views.

Across each of the research sites, we sought to create an informal cafe setting, for participants to engage in dialogue together in small groups. Tables were organised in cafe style, with multi-coloured post-it notes, coloured pens, pencils and other creative materials chosen by the young people. In each venue we laid out refreshments to evoke the feeling of a café to allow participants to move freely and encourage relaxed and open conversations between young people and adults.

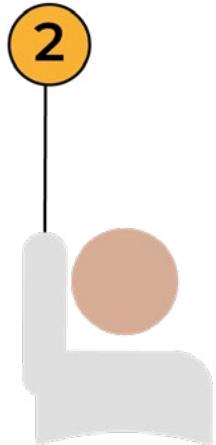


Figure 4.4.2
Set-up for the policy dialogue event, the room has a large curved screen and soft fabric walls, Deighton & Brackenhall



Figure 4.4.3
Table of scrapbooks created by young people, Deighton & Brackenhall

To ensure that young people's voices were prominent, their research was displayed prominently in each of the venues. As described and illustrated below, in Mablethorpe this included a striking display of young people's postcards; in Woughton the room was decorated with young people's banners; and in Deighton & Brackenhall this included a display of the young people's scrapbooks.



As part of the preparatory activity in each site, the young people were invited and arrived before the adults to allow us time to meet and welcome them. In Mablethorpe young people also helped to set up the artwork and in Deighton & Brackenhall, we were able to play some familiar games together to support their wellbeing and confidence before the start of the event. As Steier et al. (2015) suggests these activities were part of a process that sought to create a sense that this is "not an ordinary meeting", but rather one in which the usual routines and authority structures are suspended". As the adults arrived in the space, they were each given name badges to ensure all the young people in the space could read the name and role of the adults, some of whom they had not met before and would not know. This was an important and often overlooked way of levelling power differentials between adults and children, to ensure that young people know who the adults are in the space.

Designing the activities for the events, the academic research team worked with the young co-researchers, sensitive to their preferences and choices. For example, creative art materials and methods were used to focus discussion, encourage everyone's contribution and provide an effective way of capturing the ideas as these emerged at different stages during the event. Most importantly, the materials we included in the space were familiar to and chosen by the young people - flipcharts, posters, post-it notes, coloured pens and other creative materials such as pipe cleaners that they had used throughout the earlier research phases were set out on each table (see section 2.3). Rather than their perception as 'childish', in our experience, and as was the case here, these were well-received, creating a welcoming and convivial space for adults and young people alike.

The range of materials also allowed for different modes of collaboration. Participants were able to alternate between sitting quietly, using the creative resources to document their responses; to create shared responses with those on their table or contribute to the wider discussion, posting ideas on to flipchart paper (Deighton & Brackenhall) and pledges pegged to a fishing net (Mablethorpe) to be read by the whole room.



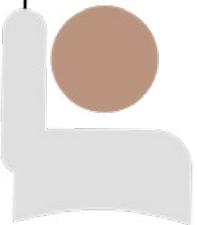
Figure 4.4.4
World Café table, with art materials, refreshments, flipchart paper, timer and "10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town" booklet created by young people, Policy Dialogue Event in Mablethorpe

Connecting diverse perspectives

5

Young people presented the outputs of their research and the community change projects they had undertaken in alternative ways to formal routes of adult-led consultation. This meant starting with the voices of young people in their various forms in ways which enabled adults to 'see' their perspectives. This included:

- In Mablethorpe: Launching the event with a screening of their **animated film** - "It's all about the beach town", highlighting how they feel about and what they need from their town (animated film).
- In Woughton: The co-researchers presenting their **Wellbeing and Safety Pack** showcasing the work they had done to support other young people in the area.
- In Deighton & Brackenhall: Screening their online **Scrapbook**, "We are more than our headlines" capturing their experiences of growing up in their neighbourhoods through their art, music and words. This also included one young person opening the event with a rousing tune, bringing everyone in the room to attention and announcing the start of the policy dialogue.



Together the co-researchers welcomed the participants, speaking directly from the front of the room using a script that they had drafted with a member of the academic team to provide an overview of the research in each area. The young people took a lead in speaking about the participatory roles they had as co-researchers. This included, in Deighton & Brackenhall, young people opening the event alongside the project lead – each taking the mic to welcome the guests and introduce the project and our collective vision for exploring 'questions that matter'. In this way the policy dialogues were launched by young people through their words, music and other communicative media (animation, digital scrapbook, audio-visual presentation).



Figure 4.4.5
"Welcome" - Young person
 playing a rousing tune at the
 start of the local policy dialogue,
 Deighton & Brackenhall

Drawing on these different media enabled young people to give voice to their experiences according to their communicative strengths and preferences in ways of their choosing. Moreover, young people's audio, images and texts offer audiences diverse, multi-layered accounts of their experiences, enabling audiences to engage with children's experiences beyond the purely verbal (Rutanen et al., 2023). In Deighton & Brackenhall, we also pre-recorded a young person's voice-over and included young people's pre-recorded music so participants could listen to the voices and music of young people whilst exploring the key themes of the research. These representations offer a way of hearing children which makes visible the complexity of children's experiences and, of relevance for the World Cafe principles, 'provoke' (Woodward, 2020) audience responses but do not reduce children's experiences to a single story (Lomax and Smith, 2022).

To support audiences to articulate their responses, the young co-researchers developed sets of pre-prepared questions for the adult decision makers. In Woughton this included two preparatory workshops during which the young people reflected together on the themes they had identified in their wellbeing and safety pack and, between them, identified what they thought was most important and how they could ask the adult decision makers to help address these issues.



Figure 4.4.6
"Young people have a lot of strategies"
Supporting parents to understand at the local policy dialogue, Woughton

This preparatory process was enabled by the academic research team in Woughton who helped the young people to prepare a set of prompt cards on to which they wrote their questions, supporting the young co-researchers to initiate discussions during the event. During the World Cafe itself, the young people worked in pairs and/or small groups of three, according to their preferences, to ask questions to a small group of adults on their table, a process which supported the exchange of ideas with diverse stakeholders. In Deighton & Brackenhall, young people started the dialogue about the scrapbook with a prompt: "what feels important, surprising or challenging from what you have just heard and seen?" The adults were given the opportunity to respond whilst a member of the academic team captured the feedback and discussion on flipchart paper on each table. Participants were also invited to draw and write their points on the paper to enable participation 'beyond words' (Hackett et al., 2020) and so we could capture free flowing ideas in artwork and words as they emerged.

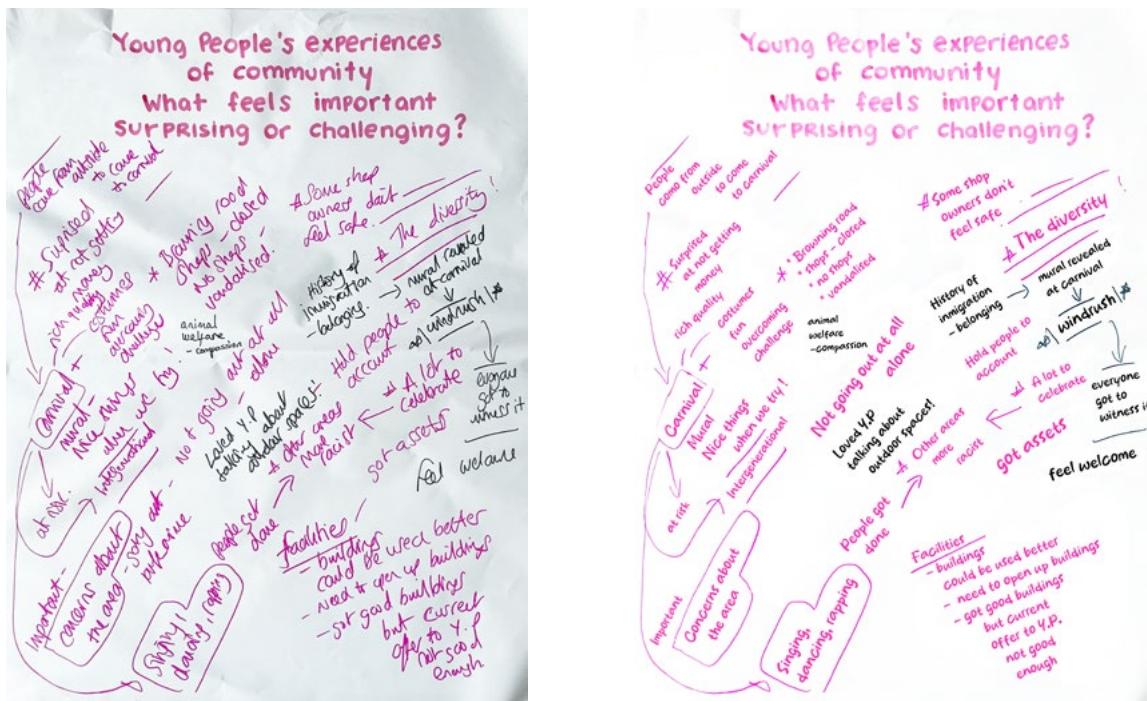


Figure 4.4.7
Young people's experiences - What feels important, surprising or challenging? Flipchart paper used to capture the responses of young people and adults, Deighton & Brackenhall. (Right: Original / Left: Digital Version)

Listening together for patterns and insights

In Mablethorpe, 'listening together' was facilitated through the exhibition of the messages and artwork that young people and adults shared via the intergenerational Postcard Exchange activity (described in section 2.2.2). Conducted during the earlier research phase of the study, this activity involved the co-researchers' writing postcards to adults in the community with messages about their town and adults replying with their own messages and art work. The activity generated important insights, intergenerational connections (a shared sense of belonging) and concerns (such as safety and litter) as well as a recognition of the intergenerational inequalities that exist in Mablethorpe. Displaying the postcards at the event ensured that young people's (and adult community members) perspectives were central and set the tone for the event as an opportunity for listening. Enlarged and printed on glossy Perspex, participants had the opportunity to view the postcards throughout the event and during the public exhibition that followed, supporting the generation of new insights to inform a wider picture about life in Mablethorpe for young people.

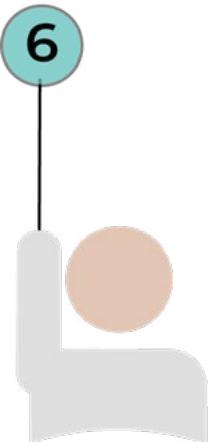


Figure 4.4.8

Photos of the intergenerational Postcard Exchange, exhibited at the policy dialogue event in Mablethorpe

Sharing collective discoveries

Making the conversations held at each table visible to everyone through a large whole-group conversation was a valuable way of connecting insights from across the cafe and generating a further layer of discovery. In Mablethorpe, to ensure that the conversations held at each table were shared across the wider cafe space, the co-researchers designed a participatory activity based on the booklet, "10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town" that they had written earlier in the research (see section 3.7).

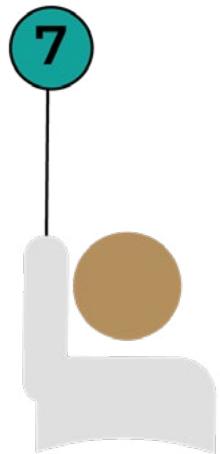


Figure 4.4.9
List of "Ten things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town"

During the Café, this was facilitated by a card-based activity in which the young people ranked a set of cards, depicting the '10 Things' in order of importance to them, and the difference this would make to their lives. The cards were then transferred to a large, printed grid and placed them on a vertical axis in order of importance and priority. At the same time, adults were invited, using the same cards to rank the '10 Things' in order of ease/difficulty to achieve.

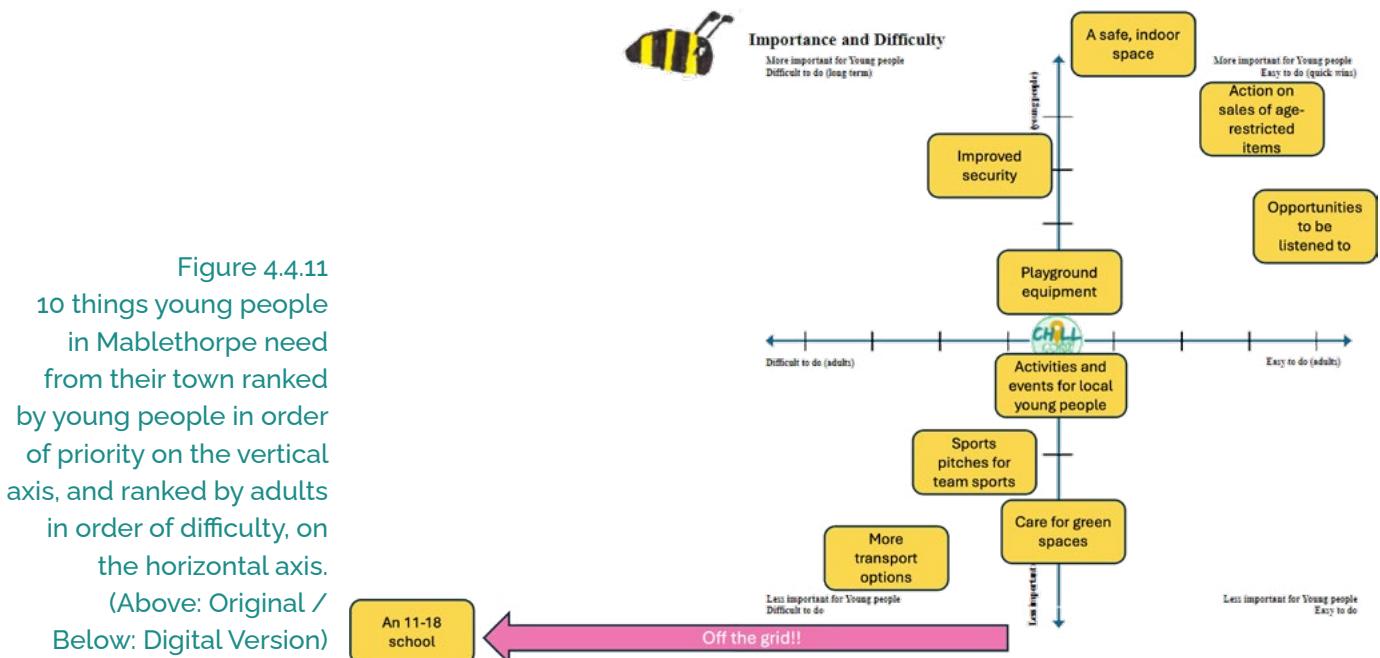
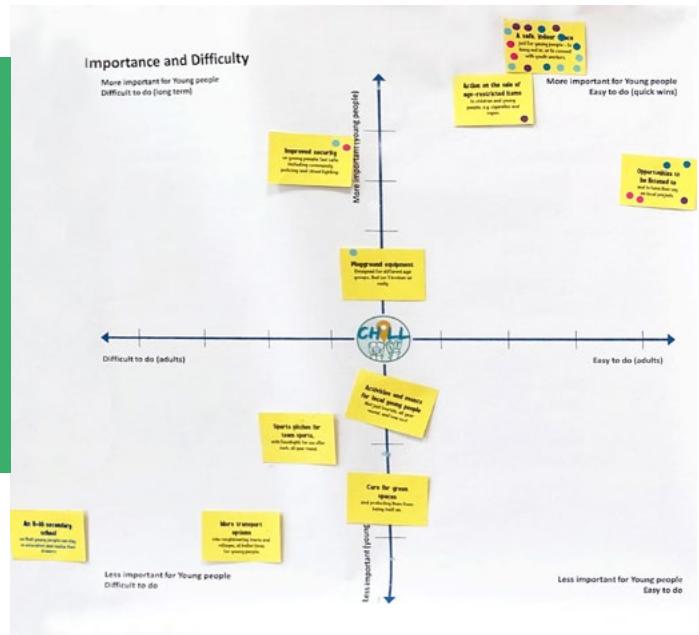
Underpinned by the principle "we are all experts in the room" - that young people have the expertise in what they feel is most important to make a difference to their lives whilst professionals have the expertise about the challenges of achieving these things in practice, the young co-researchers designed an activity that enabled these two things to be mapped against each, providing opportunities to gain consensus on where effort should be focused to make change and how potential barriers could be tackled.



Figure 4.4.10
Cards for ranking at the local policy dialogue event in Mablethorpe

Following discussion between tables to compare rankings and share discoveries, the cards were then moved along the horizontal axis to reflect adults and young people's priorities. This physical moving of the cards was an activity that was easily undertaken by one of the younger co-researchers, who enjoyed this active role, especially when it was agreed that one of the '10 Things' was so difficult it needed to be located off the grid, necessitating her physical movement across the span of the hall. This process resulted in the '10 Things' being shared and visible for all participants. This included, as illustrated in figure 4.4.11, five of the '10 Things':

- A safe indoor space.
- Action on sales of age-restricted items.
- Improved security.
- Opportunities to be listened to.
- Improve playground equipment.

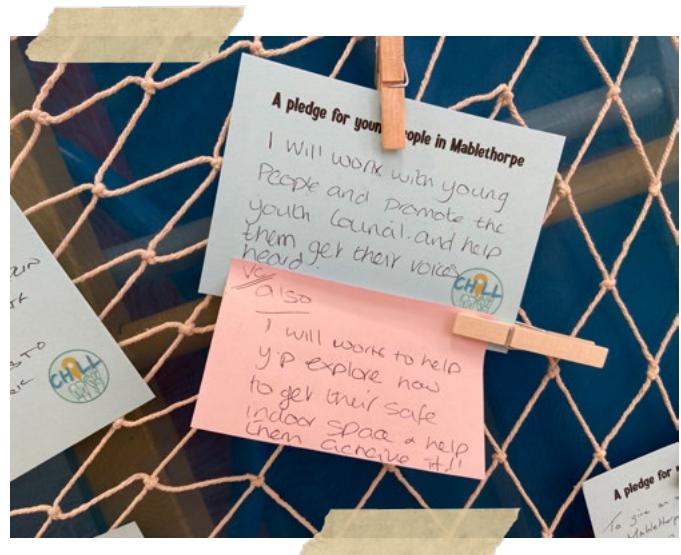
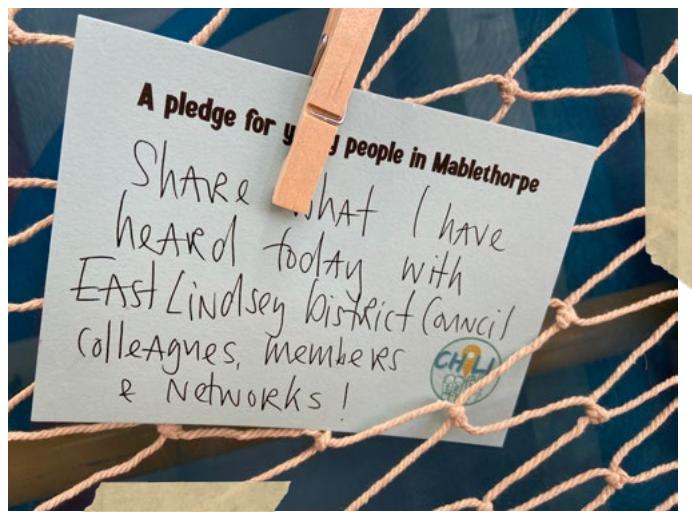


These are clearly located in the top right quadrant, identifying them as both priorities for young people and seen as easy to achieve by professionals. At the same time, the need for a secondary school in Mablethorpe was identified as both the lowest priority for the young people and the most difficult to achieve.

This activity was followed up with a voting activity, in which each table was given a different coloured set of stickers and asked to stick them on the matrix to indicate their preference for the issue that they wanted to explore in more detail on their table. The issue with the most votes/ stickers was then prioritised for discussion for the remainder of the session, with each table considering what needs to happen next and identifying who should take responsibility for leading that change. Finally, the adults in the room were asked, based on what they heard at the event, to make written pledges to the young people. In keeping with the Worls Café principle to make conversations visible and with the 'it's all about the beach town' theme of the event, these were pegged to a fishing net, offering a visual display of wider community commitment to young people in the town.



Figure 4.4.12
Written pledges made by adults to the young people in Mablethorpe



In Deighton & Brackenhall, insights from the earlier discussions on the World Cafe tables were brought together by generating a whole group discussion across the cafe space. This activity helped the team to connect the diverse perspectives from different tables as part of an open plenary session. Everyone in the room was invited to respond to three key 'questions that matter' to work together to make change happen:



1. How can we ensure action after today?
2. What connections do you see across the different local agenda to support these changes?
3. If there is one thing we could do that would make a difference in response to all these issues, what would it be?

We used a couple of microphones in the space to support everyone's voices to be heard and young people who had not spoken up before were keen to take hold of the microphone: one young person called for a collection of the dumped household items and another young person spoke up about being consulted by the council but having their ideas marginalised: "young people sometimes do not feel heard because of where we live". Young people also spoke about their pride in the place they live: "It's important to recognise that there are things to celebrate and ways of bringing everyone together". Together, participants shared their worries, frustrations and hopes and the academic research team captured the dialogue in writing on flipcharts. These were stuck up on the walls in order to make the dialogue visible and to enable the participants to also 'listen together for patterns and insights' and 'visualise change' (Brown and Isaacs, 2005).

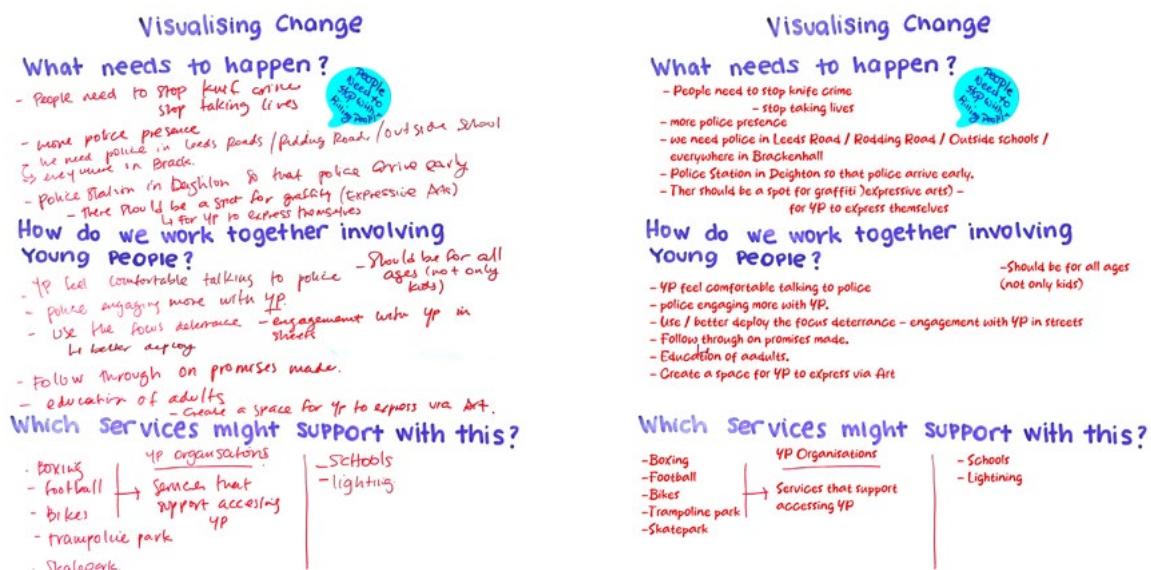


Figure 4.4.13
Visualising Change: Flipchart paper used to capture the responses of young people and adults, Deighton & Brackenhall.
(Right: Original / Left: Digital Version)

On all three research sites, there was a sense of hope for tangible agreements with adults making firm commitments to the young people.

For example, In Woughton this included: A pledge to incorporate young people's views in violence reduction plans; a commitment from the Mayor to include young people's voices in the 2050 City Plan and plans, by City Councillors to include young people in local democracy initiatives including holding surgeries in schools.

in Deighton & Brackenhall the local party-political representatives pledged to clean up and re-design the local park in consultation with young people from the area. They also made a commitment to share the findings of the research with the (then) Labour party initiative for a national network of Young Futures hubs, to bring local services together and deliver support for young people at risk of being drawn into knife crime, part of Labour's mission to halve knife crime within ten years of government (Labour Party, 2023). A youth work leader pledged to set-up a new Young Leaders Award with young people from the area which would lead to an accredited qualification: "Leading in Community Settings".



Young people and adults agreeing how to ensure action after the event and the connections across different local agenda to support these changes.

In Mablethorpe, premises were secured and a 15 year lease on an old Air Cadet training hut was been taken out by the Mablethorpe Area Partnership on behalf of young people. As we write this report, the youth team are looking to do an intergenerational day tidying up the place. They still need fire extinguishers and cleaning equipment, and help with the garden, painting and other jobs, but they are also applying for funding to help make the building carbon neutral, pay for a half time youth worker and costs towards a G2 Playzone MUGA.

Both the Playzone and the hut will be let out to the community to generate money to maintain them as a resource for young people and the youth worker will begin setting up and supporting a Youth Council to try ensure young people have more opportunities to impact local decision-making (an important point raised by the young people in their "10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town"!)

It takes more than one person to create change.

There needs to be greater accountability from decision makers.

The council should engage in dialogue with schools and community groups.

Young people need to know the action was taken.



These examples show the importance of making sure young people's views are communicated to the right people and that young people's views were taken seriously and acted upon (Article 12, UNCRC). The local policy dialogues enabled deeper insights, networking and linked ideas between young people and adults. Framed by an 'attentive methodology' (Lomax and Smith, 2024) and using the World Café principles (Brown and Isaacs, 2005) to design the event, was vital to the meaningful participation of young people.

These principles and methods provided a space for conversations between young people and adults that arose from the co-research and were grounded in young people's perspectives. Whilst most young people spoke out at the events, we also made a space for 'the voice beyond words' (Hackett et al., 2020) through the art materials, scrapbook, animation, postcards and banners enabling young people who were less comfortable with speaking to be heard. These events allowed time and space for communities to come together to listen to young people, to inquire and be curious and learn from each other's experience and perspectives and it cannot be underestimated the impact of immersing ourselves in young people's ideas and perspectives, feelings and hyper-local relationships by creating unfragmented time for young people's participation, inclusion and voice.



4.5. Local recommendations - sharing collective discoveries ('the harvest')

The previous section has explored how we facilitated a series of local policy dialogues where young people took the lead in meeting with local decision makers to share their research findings and the outcomes of their change projects. Harnessing the capacity of statutory and voluntary sector partners to work collaboratively with young people and identify what needs to change (Anyon et al., 2018), we placed coloured postcards and invited young people and adults to make key recommendations to national politicians and decision-makers. Almost everyone who attended the policy dialogues events in each of the study sites completed at least one card and these key recommendations were brought together by the academic research team to form the basis for the local recommendations in each of the areas as well as contribute to the recommendations of this research from young people to government and decision-makers (see Chapter 5).

As part of the World Cafe approach and 'shared collective discoveries' ('the harvest'), a further way of making the conversations held at each table visible to everyone and to connect the insights and generate a further layer of discovery, we brought a graphic artist Laura Sorvala into each of the local policy dialogues on each site. Her participation throughout the events involved creating a visual representation of each of the local policy dialogues which can be seen below, alongside the key local recommendations that participants wrote on the postcards.



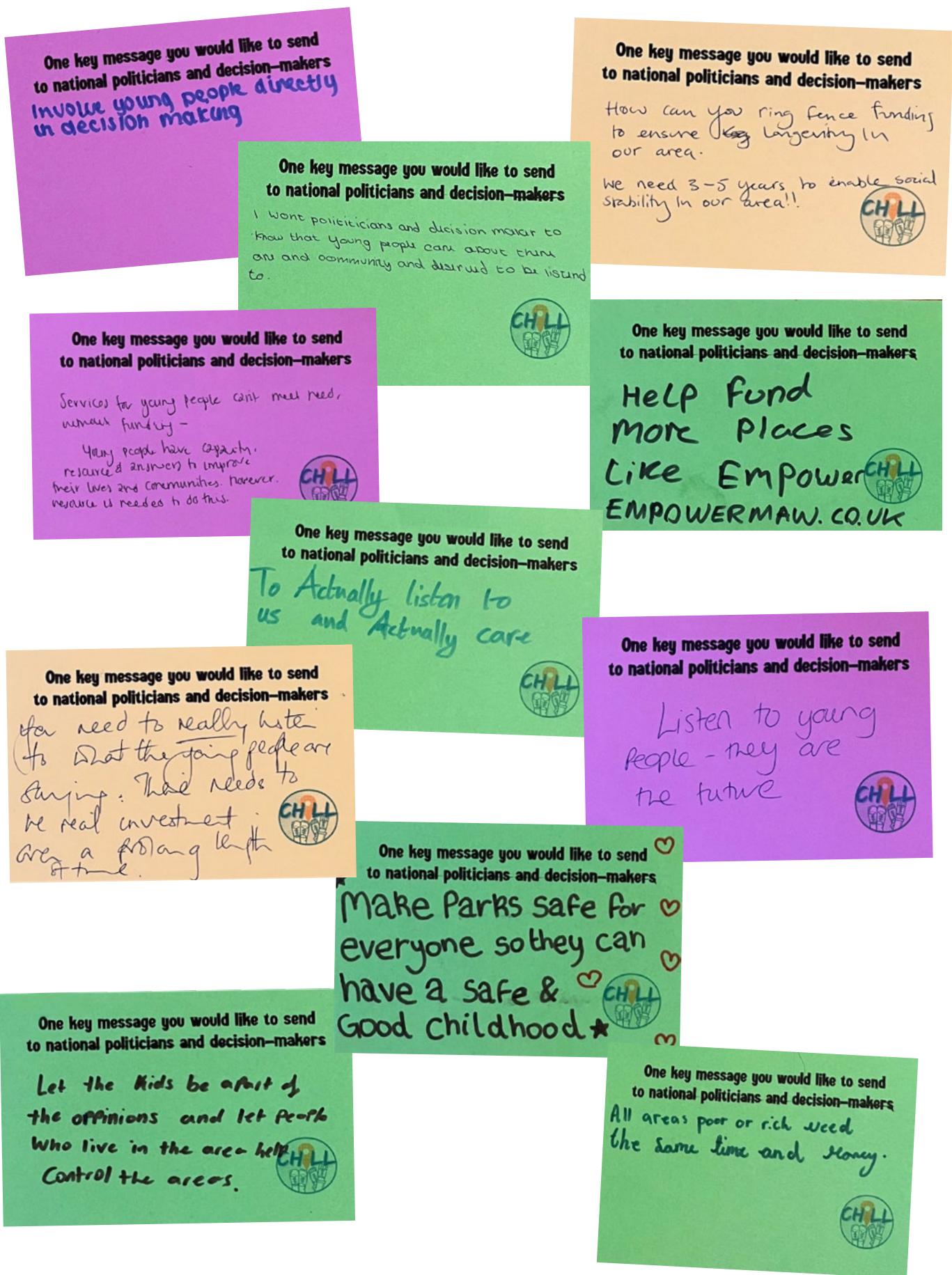


Figure 4.5.1

Postcards with key messages to national politicians and decision-makers, Deighton & Brackenhall

Deighton & Brackenhall Local Policy Dialogue: Key recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

Young people in Deighton and Brackenhall need:

Opportunities to connect with others

- Safe indoor and outdoor places to meet and participate locally.
- Access to well-maintained local green space to support their physical, social and mental wellbeing.
- To be included in community activities and events - young people want to feel part of a community because it affects their everyday lives, opportunities and sense of belonging.

Safe neighbourhood spaces

- Improved lighting at dusk in the winter months.
- Anonymous reporting of anti-social behaviour.
- Properly maintained public spaces - how the area looks and feels is important to young people, they want it to be 'taken care of' and 'well managed'.

To be included in decisions about where they live

- Involved in decision making about where they live, being listened to at all levels of decision-making.



Figure 4.5.4
Visual representation of key themes in Deighton & Brackenhall policy dialogue

Mablethorpe Local Policy Dialogue: Key recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

Young people in Mablethorpe need:

Opportunities to connect with others

- A safe indoor space where they can hang out with friends, especially in the winter after school when it is cold and dark.
- Multi-functional outdoor play spaces that are inclusive of different ages and needs.
- Dedicated activities and events for young people throughout the year (not just for tourists in summer).
- Sports pitches for team sports with flood lights for use after dark all year round.

Safe neighbourhood spaces

- Young people have concerns about their safety that need to be listened to and addressed by the police and wider community.
- Action on the sale of age restricted items through a robust multi-agency response to prevent underage vaping.

Better transport

- Accessible transport options and infrastructure into neighbouring towns and villages including better provision of public transport, bike rental schemes and child friendly walking and cycle-paths.

To be included in decisions about where they live

- Opportunities to be listened in ways that are attentive to young people's everyday dynamics and ways of communicating.
- Engagement from local decision-makers, and community members to ensure a sustainable approach to protecting green spaces.

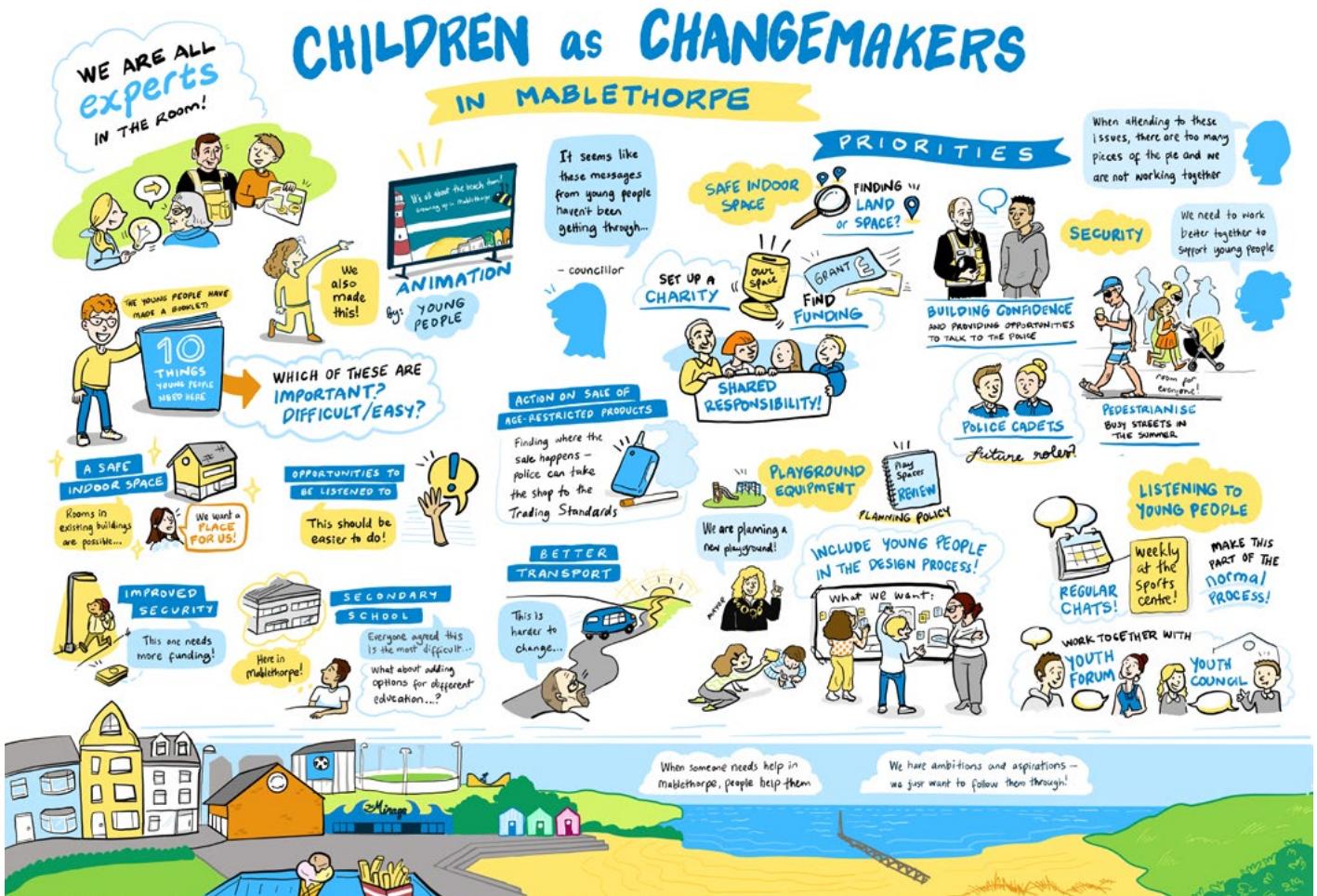


Figure 4.5.2

Woughton Local Policy Dialogue: Key recommendations prioritised by young people and local stakeholders

Young people in Woughton need:

Opportunities to connect with others

- More youth clubs and activities locally for young people.
- Investment in community projects for and with young people.

Safe neighbourhood spaces

- Improved safety in public spaces.
- Knife crime prevention.

Inclusive, responsive health and wellbeing services

- Better support for young people's mental health and quality of life locally.
- Signposted emotional support and information for young people.

To be included in decisions about where they live

- Inclusive spaces where young people are listened to and actions are taken.
- Decision-makers to visit the people and places that they make decisions about to identify issues with them early.
- Opportunities to share their ideas with local MPs, councillors and national decision-makers, including online.

CHILDREN as CHANGEMAKERS



Figure 4.5.3
Visual representation of key themes in Woughton policy dialogue

Through visual and creative arts, group discussion, reflection and local policy dialogues, young people in all three research sites took action, creating diverse spaces of participation and change in their neighbourhoods and inspiring decision-makers to take action with and on their behalf. While actions in each area are responsive to the particular neighbourhood context, the recommendations generated across each site have in common a focus on improving the material and social space of each neighbourhood for young people and the wider community and in transforming local democracy to include the voices of young people. These overarching recommendations and the actions generated are discussed in the following chapter.



5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Children's rights in economically disadvantaged places

5.2 Researching with young people: Key learning

5.3 Recommendations

5.4 Conclusion

5. Discussion and recommendations

"Treat young people as equals and consider their ideas... give young people a safe space to air their views"

(Young person, anonymous feedback at the local policy dialogue, Woughton).

"I just want them (decision makers) to know that children are alive, that we exist. They know we are here, but they don't think about us"

(Nicole, female, aged 11, Mablethorpe).

"Let the kids be a part of the opinions and let the people who live in the area help"

(Sophia, female, aged 13, Deighton & Brackenhall).



5.1 Children's rights in economically disadvantaged places

Growing up in economically disadvantaged places should not be seen as an inevitable part of a childhood but stems from the inadequacy of central government's and public authorities' support for young people, to protect young people and fulfil their rights as children (UNCRC, 1989). This creates economically disadvantaged places, perpetuates place-based economic disadvantage and exacerbates child poverty (Pickett K., et. al, 2021). Researching with young people to understand their (often overlooked) experiences of growing up in economically disadvantaged places, this study highlights why the rights of children (UNCRC, 1989) are critically relevant to what young people told us. In particular that we need to listen to and include young people's experiences and perspectives in local and national decision-making (Article 12 & 13) and we need to ensure that we do all we can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential (Article 6), have an adequate standard of living (Article 27), are protected from all forms of violence (Article 19) and have the opportunities to relax and play (Article 31).

Children's rights are as important and pressing now as ever. During the period of our study, indicators related to children's lives worsened as families were pushed into poverty and large increases to the cost-of-living increased financial hardship so record numbers of children in the UK now live in poverty (Chollet et al. 2024). Growing numbers of children experience poor mental health at persistently high levels whilst there is a "crisis in children's mental health and the services needed to support them... that stem[s] from a lack of prioritisation, at both a national and local level" (Children's Commissioner, 2024). These are challenging times and difficult circumstances for young people growing up in the UK, especially with regional differences that compound inequalities (Etherington et al., 2022). At the time of writing, the Government is consulting on its Child Poverty Strategy but has, not, as yet, lifted the two-child benefit cap that would bring 300K children out of poverty and help 700K children to live in 'less deep poverty' (CPAG, 2025, 2024). It has also proposed controversial reforms of the welfare system and cuts to benefits (Department for Work and Pensions, 2025) that will be far-reaching and impact children (CPAG, 2025). At the same time, it has launched its mission-led approach to government which includes breaking down barriers to opportunities for children and has introduced its Young Futures programme which aims to support young people in their communities, delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level, and returning decision-making power to local communities and young people. While the inclusion of young people in shaping youth services is a welcome policy shift, the overall direction of the government's approach to welfare and how this will impact children in economically disadvantaged places remains uncertain.

Article 6 (life, survival and development)

Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times.

Article 13 (freedom of expression)

Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

Article 19 (protection from violence)

Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

Article 27 (food, clothing, a safe home)

Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

Article 31 (rest, play, culture, arts)

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989.



Our research has shown that involving and including young people as co-researchers and decision-makers has the potential to enable decision makers at governmental and local authority level to have a better understanding of what matters to young people and how to improve their wellbeing and opportunities – important for children's lives as children and as they grow into adulthood to ensure the experiences of young people are understood and taken into account by decision-makers. We make a very specific contribution through our study which offers unique and rich insights into the lives of young people growing up in disadvantaged places that are directly informed by the perspectives of young people. Presenting evidence that place matters for the young people, for their quality of life and future, and that they care deeply about where they live, our findings include 'felt' experiences and deep attachments that young people have to the areas they live which can enrich economically disadvantaged communities and strengthen childhoods (Biggeri, 2020; Bunting, 2023; Lomax, 2015; Marmot, 2020a, 2020b). Through our research with and alongside young people, we have shown that young people are change makers in their neighbourhoods with a strong sense of belonging; that they want to be involved with decision-making, participating in change to ensure that their neighbourhoods support the wellbeing of the children and young people who live there.

We had the privilege to research alongside young people in all three sites who are passionate and care significantly about their neighbourhood. It is when we marginalise or ignore their views on these topics that we disempower and disadvantage them. We have also shown how young people's needs and perspectives can be recognised and incorporated in research and local decision-making that affect their future and neighbourhoods. The young people in this study have many and unique experiences and perspectives. They live in different places and may go on to live very different lives, however growing up in economically disadvantaged places has effects and produces inequalities on their childhoods, health and wellbeing, opportunities and futures (Marmot, 2020a, 2020b).



Our research suggests that hyper-local responses to children and young people growing up in economically disadvantaged places are important and are well placed to respond to the complex contextual factors that underpin and reinforce economic disadvantages. Hyper-local responses are particularly important for making a difference for young people in a context of diminishing local expenditure in a country where wealth inequalities have widened and economic disadvantage has become compounded (APPG, 2023; CPAG, 2024; Hayre and Pollock, 2022; Horton, 2016). In order to reduce the immediate and lifelong consequences of economically disadvantaged places and child poverty, young people need a commitment from national government and local authority stakeholders who must invest in the lives and futures of young people including ensuring that these hyperlocal services are properly funded and arrest the year-upon-year real cuts to young peoples' and neighbourhood services.

5.2 Researching with young people: Key learning

In all three research sites, **young people, youth and community workers, and local volunteers demonstrate how things can be achieved** (discussed in section 4.3). They highlight key priorities

PRIORITIES

for each area and how community change can happen through their long standing commitments to young people at a neighbourhood level where they are familiar with young people's ideas and concerns. Playing a vital role in providing an environment in which young people feel listened to and included, it is these micro relationships and ongoing commitments to and between young people and youth and community workers and local volunteers that help facilitate and sustain projects for young people and where adults listen and advocate for young people's voice in local decision-making. However, there is a disconnect between these hyperlocal responses to young people and the wider policy landscape in which children and young people's needs are marginalised. (discussed in sections 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3). Lack of opportunity for young people to be heard and involved or actively feed into national development processes, young people's participation needs resourcing supported by a commitment from national government to young people. By developing methods of co-producing research with young people, we have shown how adults can be responsive to the particularities of young people's diverse experiences of growing up.



To address the participation deficit in engagement with young people, **the arts-based approaches and methods that we have used in our study and learned from our engagement with young people can support both academics in research and public authorities**. The methods are underpinned by a capabilities approach (Biggeri, 2020; Sen, 1999) and attentive listening methodology (Lomax and Smith, 2024) which values and is attuned to young people's capacities and strengths. Together, these provide a framework for a participatory and rights-based approach that aims to support young people, taking their views and feelings seriously and including them in outcomes and social change that affect their lives.

Our methodological focus has been specially on arts-based methods and how these can support children to narratively and textually document and share their stories (see section 3.7 for examples) in ways which make visible young people's shared experiences of place while retaining their anonymity. Arts-based methods mean that young people's perspectives can be seen and listened to (Lomax and Smith, 2024) and can offer ways of actively involving young people in policymaking – derived from researching inclusively with young people to support richer understandings of their lives from their perspectives.

At the core of our approach is our commitment to **inclusion and young people's participation as more than a purely verbal activity**, making time and spaces for sensory and embodied communication that recognises how art materials, technologies and other tangible items such as emoji stickers and maps were mobilised by young people to make sense of their neighbourhood and convey meanings to us and each other (discussed in sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). Attending to young people's diverse ways of communicating can support inclusion in ways that are sensitive to their wellbeing; essential aspects for researching with young people growing up in economically disadvantaged places. As Chalwa (2001) suggests "children who may be hesitant to express themselves in words alone may be expressive in drawing and talking about pictures". But it requires adults to work alongside young people in accordance with young people's ways of knowing that can generate change that is locally responsive.

Scaffolding the phases of the engagement (discussed in section 2.5) with young people alongside using creative, arts-based methods and games, as a means of research generation and knowledge exchange, offers new opportunities for young people to exercise their agency as they have become increasingly actively involved in the research process. In our study this meant that each time we met with young people, we discussed how we might work together, supporting young people to contribute their ideas and voice their perspectives which shaped an inclusive research space and a participatory dialogue between us as adults and the young people over time. Choices of how to engage and opportunities to shape activities can create a dynamic research space and can help with retention as they offer young people creative and flexible ways of working in order to highlight the priorities most relevant to them.

Planning is central to working with young people. As researchers we developed an outline for each research session we scheduled with young people. These plans emerged from our ongoing observations of how young people participated, their individual and collective capabilities and what they liked to do. Working flexibly in this way enabled us to create decision-making moments in the space, in response to young people's suggestions as these emerged at each data point. This was supported by detailed field notes that we completed after every session alongside feedback from the young people. Within the sessions with young people, we deliberated and voted together to make decisions, building on discussion and consensus to make agreements. This meant that each session was bespoke to the young people we were researching alongside, their interests and what they enjoyed doing and the ways in which they liked to participate. All the activities were adaptable and changed in response to the needs of the young people, and enabled young people to lead different elements of the research (for example the '10 things' activity in Mablethorpe described in section 4.4 and the design of the peer survey in Deighton & Brackenhall described in section 2.5). We abandoned and changed activities where we sensed young people did not want to do them such as certain games that they outgrew over the time we worked with them.



Participation starts with young people. Identifying the interests of young people and issues in the area that affect young people is a key part of building a relationship. In our study this included seeking children and young people's views from the start and involving them in decision-making from the earliest stages. For example, we created a colourful illustrated 'About You' mini-booklet that young people could complete through writing or drawing to share their experiences and ideas about themselves with us. We also played games (such as throwing a ball with open questions written on the ball) to hear about young people's interests and we learned the wide and varied interests that they have including chess, drawing, football, music, basketball, dance, drama, reading and fishing. We were able to bring some of these interests into the research process. This offers a shift away from restrictive, formal forms of data gathering as we also made sure to offer a range of different methods of participation to attend to those young people who prefer to express themselves non-verbally or are quieter or silent. Participation also includes the right to not take part which is critical to young people's rights. In our research we gave lots of different choices about taking part or not and we held onto the belief that non-participation or being quiet or silent can be a form of decision-making. All young people have the right to withdraw entirely from participating, which we reiterated during our contact with them.



Formal structures can give young people a voice in their communities, however they are not always the most effective way to involve children and young people in decision-making. In our study young people were involved in youth panels and youth councils. These formal structures, that involved community support workers and were trusted by the young people, were highly effective in supporting the young people to put forward their perspectives and bringing decision-makers to meet with young people. However, despite meeting with local authority decision makers, young people did not always feel that their perspectives were acted upon, generating a feeling of distrust that decision-makers will deliver or put in place processes that facilitate young people's participation (discussed in section 4.3). Following up with young people and giving them feedback on outcomes about decisions and changes based on their views is extremely important. Whilst policy changes and development plans can take a long time to develop and implement, decision-makers need to tell young people about this and ensure they understand that it may take time before anything happens. Most importantly, young people should not be excluded and it's essential to find ways of following up with them as part of the participatory process.

Creating spaces where young people feel safe and supported to participate and express their views is important. However, we should not overlook the everyday places that children and young people already use. For example, in our study this included: schools, youth-focussed projects and clubs, and community development projects which were run by key trusted adults (parents and community volunteers known to young people). Spaces help to create a sense of safety for young people and, for the most part, should be spaces where young people already feel safe, where their perspectives are already listened to and acted on.

Using bespoke arts materials can support young people to express themselves (discussed in section 2.3 and section 4.4). In our study this included working with an extensive range of high-quality art materials (fine art pencils, coloured felt tips and sharpies, collage materials, washi tape, pipe cleaners etc) that young people used to sketch, collage, draw, colour and sculpt. Updating materials in response to young people's preferences can help to keep the research relevant and support young people to feel that they have been listened to and responded to. This included colouring books for those who didn't want to be part of large group discussions but liked to colour whilst listening to the broader discussion. We bought gem stickers for those who wanted their artwork to have a bit of sparkle for the important points! Emoji stickers were popular and young people also drew their own emojis, adapting the art materials as they wished. Providing each young person with a bespoke bundle of their preferred art material and a choice of additional materials to take home can support young people to have access to the materials they want and need to participate. This important point was reinforced by one of our young advisors who had experienced being less able to participate on a project previously as she was not given, and could not access due to her economically reduced situation, materials to support her participation. Giving each young person a box or bag, as they prefer, provides a way for them to take care of their materials and store them safely at home (discussed in section 2.3.1).



Adapting and responding to new methods that young people develop to express themselves can help ensure that adult researchers and practitioners hold on to and develop research practices done *with* rather than *to/on* children. For example, some young people brought in musical instruments (trumpet), others recorded their participation (piano, guitar), and we heard poetry and songs. Unprompted, young people took photographs of places that were safe and they loved, they danced and did stunts on their bikes, and introduced us to their cat! Providing opportunities for young people's participation can encourage them to bring their own interests to the process and creates the opportunity for young people to introduce and teach us their own methods and creative ways of working .

Adjusting methods in response to the research context is important to participatory research. We adjusted our methods to respond to the safeguarding requirements that became apparent early in the research (discussed in section 2.4.1). This meant that we modified our original research plan of doing street-based work with young people (walking, filming and taking photographs) and adapted methods to work in young people's schools, community centres and youth clubs. To accommodate the revised spaces required us to also adapt the materials and we used large printed full-colour maps or a jigsaw of a map of the area or photographs of key neighbourhood sites to prompt discussions from within the safety of these places. Young people could draw, map and discuss where they meet, where they feel safe and where unsafe, and how they navigated their neighbourhoods through these visual prompts, without having to be in places they did not like or felt unsafe or where they felt we might expose them to danger. Participatory research should accommodate the research context and ensure young people are safeguarded using methods that enable young people to give their views in ways that respect their right to be safe and protected from violence (Article 19, UNCRC).

Food and refreshments are important in any research project. But working in areas of economic disadvantage requires a flexible response to the context and requirements of young people and adults in the area. We provided refreshments and food for the young people as well as the adults who supported the research and worked in the youth-focussed community projects. We increased our budget for food and increased the amount of food that we brought into the space in response to the needs of young people. We also brought hot food at certain times and asked young people what food they enjoyed so they could make choices and we would bring what they wanted to eat and drink.

Working longitudinally (see Chapter 2.5) with young people at multiple touchpoints can enable adults to get to know how young people like to work and what they like to work with. The longitudinal design of our project supported this approach, and we learned about the ways each young person enjoyed researching with us. This included working on their own using an online art programme to combining pencil-sketches and ink-drawings and collage with a peer, participating in a noisy group game or hanging back after the other young people have gone for lunch and having a one-one conversation with a member of the research team. Working over time with young people can allow researchers to evaluate the different ways it is possible to involve young people in decision-making and check with them how those methods are working and if they enjoy them. It is important to give feedback to young people as well as get feedback from young people themselves about the ways they are being involved. This can help to disrupt adult centric assumptions about what young people value and enjoy. It is also valuable for the research team to reflect together and to evaluate and include the views of colleagues about how effective the participation methods are.

Multi-modal games, playfulness and responding to play (discussed in section 2.4) can support young people to express themselves in ways that exceed verbal communication alone. In our study some of the games were led and developed by the young people which helped to visually communicate and facilitate their inclusion, advance their creative engagement and bring them into dialogue with the adults and each other. Participation with young people can include bringing games and resources for play and suggested activities to do together in the space whilst also inviting young people to suggest activities and learning about the games that young people enjoy.



5.3 Recommendations

Young people in our study had five key recommendations for local and national decision-makers that would improve their neighbourhoods and opportunities. These recommendations, and the initiatives they inspired, illustrate the importance of listening to young people and embedding a children's rights-based approach in policy and decision-making (UNCRC, 1989; UNICEF, 2021-2022).



Young people have five key recommendations for local and national decision-makers:

- 1. Young people need to feel part of a community, for opportunities and a sense of belonging.**

For this they need:

- 2. Safe, healthy outdoor and indoor spaces to meet and participate locally.**
- 3. Well-maintained local green space.**
- 4. To be involved in local and national decision making.**
- 5. National and local decision makers to champion children and young people.**

These five overarching recommendations have been drawn by a graphic artist, Laura Sorvala, as a visual representation (figure 5.3.2 to 5.3.6). In the sections that follow the recommendations are discussed along with the actions that need to happen to support them.

Children and young people need to feel part of a community, for opportunities and a sense of belonging



Figure 5.3.1

Feeling we are part of a community is important for opportunities and a sense of belonging

To support this, local and national decision-makers need to:

- Acknowledge young people's strong sense of community belonging, recognising that many young people already participate in place-making activities where they live.
- Ensure that young people are at the heart of conversations about their community and the opportunities it offers for their social belonging and connectivity, involving them in dialogue with decision-makers to influence positive change.
- Invest in welfare, health and social care systems that support children and young people's wellbeing and belonging, ensuring resources are fairly distributed, proportionate to the needs of young people living in economically disadvantaged places.

- Increase resources to enable young people to make and contribute to public art, including sustainable funding for cultural events so that young people can participate in and celebrate where they live.
- Include parents, local volunteers and youth and community workers who work with young people and play a vital role in providing an environment in which young people feel listened to in the decision-making process. These trusted adults are well positioned to engage young people in community-based activities to improve local environments and opportunities for young people.
- Fund projects that young people attend that are youth focussed and inclusive. They can play a significant role in young people feeling part of a community, providing they are properly funded and integrated into local neighbourhoods.

Children and young people need safe, healthy outdoor and indoor spaces to meet in and participate locally



Figure 5.3.2
Safe, healthy outdoor and indoor spaces to meet in and participate locally

To support this, local and national decision-makers need to:

- Provide financial support and champion creative initiatives so that abandoned buildings and underutilised spaces can be utilised by young people as places to meet and to support arts, sports and other activities. These could provide vital alternatives to youth spaces that have been cut or closed due to budget cuts.
- Provide a safer outdoor environment for young people. This includes maintaining streets, play areas and other public amenities, preventing fly tipping, and removing dumped household waste and rubbish in a timely manner.
- Include young people in conversations and decision-making about safety in the area. Being listened to and included in change would help support young people to feel safer and offer alternative routes away from crime. Girls and boys can have different experiences of serious crime. Decision-makers may not be intending to discriminate, but girls and boys have different fears and risks as well as solutions to make them safer that need to be heard. This includes being accountable to young people who need to see commitments about safety made by national decision makers to them and their communities followed through.

- Support initiatives that enable young people to report crime concerns including feeling unsafe in indoor and outdoor places. There needs to be an option of not giving their name (remaining anonymous) as well as the opportunity to talk with someone supportive about issues that affect their safety including poorly lit streets, broken play equipment, safety hazards in public places, abandoned buildings, vandalism, fly tipping, littering and illegal drug paraphernalia.

Children and young people need well-maintained local green space



Figure 5.3.3
Well maintained local green space

To support this, local and national decision-makers need to:

- Recognise the importance of green space for young people, including how they value and use public parks and woodlands, canal tow paths, dunes and the beach and peripheral green spaces alongside roads, public footpaths and footways.
- Involve young people in initiatives to improve green spaces in recognition of their skills, creativity and interest in improving green space for people and for nature.
- Ensure that there is funding available to keep public areas and local green spaces clean, well-managed and accessible for young people.

Children and young people need to be involved in local and national decision making



Figure 5.3.5
We need to be involved in local and national decision making

To support this, local and national decision-makers need to:

- Recognise young people's agency and potential as change-makers in their communities. This includes acknowledging their lived experiences, aspirations, hopes and fears, and how living in an area affects them as young people and as they become young adults.
- Ensure meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in policy development through regular dialogue so that decision-making is informed by their views and experiences. This includes clearly communicating decision-making timeframes and providing feedback on what actions have or have not been taken and why.

Children and young people need national and local decision makers to champion children and young people

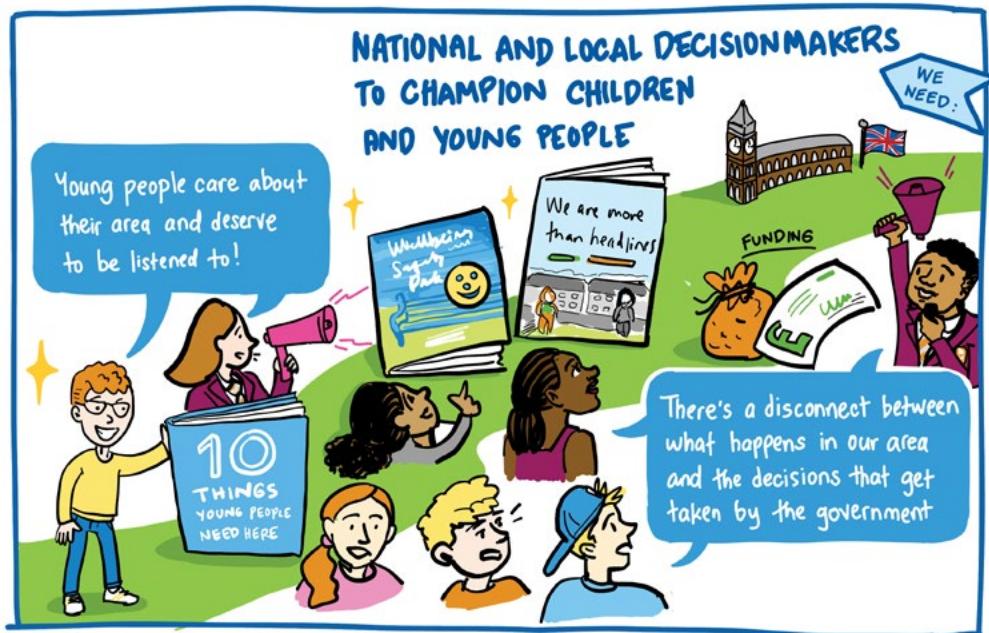


Figure 5.3.4
National and local decision makers to champion children and young people

To support this, local and national decision-makers need to:

- Create a national policy platform to capture the voices and different perspectives of young people so they can be heard and participate in decision-making.
- Incorporate some immediate changes and actions so that young people can see the impact of their suggestions. Policy development and national projects often take a long time to happen.
- Engage young people in decision-making using participatory approaches that enable their inclusion. This can offer ways of working whereby young people are valued as having expertise about their lives and the right to have their views taken seriously about the places that affect them.

Examples of initiatives by national and regional decision-makers inspired by the young people's change projects and the local policy dialogues events that illustrate how decision-makers can support young people's recommendations in the future, include:

In Deighton and Brackenhall:

- 'Kirklees Youth Alliance CIO' (charitable incorporated organisation), a membership organisation for voluntary, community and social enterprise youth organisations across Kirklees, established a new Young Leaders Award with young people from the area. The course leads to an accredited qualification: "Leading in Community Settings" and includes informal education (modules such as safeguarding, budgeting, risk assessments, project planning) and time for young people to develop and deliver their own volunteer project. It exemplifies a mid-tier action that is responsive to, and acknowledges, young people's sense of community, recognising that they already participate in place-making activities (**Recommendation 1**) and investing in them as young people and future citizens (**Recommendations 5**).
- Local decision maker 'Our Voice', Kirklees Children and Young People's Participation service, shared the research with key Kirklees partnerships and projects including: Prevention Pathway; the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy; and Kirklees Safeguarding Children Partnership-Promoting Healthy Relationships, to ensure young people's recommendations for change in the area are at the forefront of decision-making and are prioritised (**Recommendation 1**). The local secondary schools were invited to partner with Our Voice in order to support the involvement and increase the engagement of young people (including our co-researchers) in local projects and decision-making (**Recommendations 4**).
- National and local political representatives made a commitment to work in consultation with young people in the area to clean up and re-design the local park (**Recommendation 3**). The MP Harpreet Uppal also made a commitment to share findings with the Labour party initiative for a national network of Young Futures hubs to bring local services together and deliver support for young people at risk of being drawn into knife crime as part of Labour's mission to halve knife crime within ten years of government (**Recommendation 2**). In Westminster government, Uppal has pressed the Home Secretary to ensure West Yorkshire Police have the long-term resources needed to keep communities safe, particularly in tackling knife and violent crime and she has continued to try to deliver on her commitment to young people: "I have asked ministers for a Young Futures Hub to be placed in Huddersfield and I will continue to make this case"(KLT Online; Huddersfield Hub, MP Harpreet Uppal, April 2025) (**Recommendation 5**).

In Mablethorpe:

- In response to young people's needs for safe indoor spaces (**Recommendation 2**) a Youth and Community Hut was secured by the Mablethorpe Area Partnership (MAP) (representing local councils, business, tourism and community groups) with Lincolnshire County Council funding a youth worker to run activities. The youth worker will also support a Youth Council to ensure young people have increased involvement in local decision-making (**Recommendation 4**). This initiative exemplifies how local stakeholders can come together to champion young people. This could be supported by central government providing local government with the resources to revive disused spaces and closed youth clubs and, following the announcement of a National Youth Strategy (Gov.UK, 2024), to support local communities to deliver youth services that are responsive to young people's needs delivering the Government's missions to enable opportunities and make streets safer (**Recommendation 5**).
- The launch of a new strategy for engaging young people's views across the county (replacing the former Lincolnshire Strong Voices initiative) by the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner's Safe Communities team (**Recommendation 2**). The Safer Communities Leaders initiative will recruit between 15 and 20 young people, aged 14 to 21, all residing in Lincolnshire, to spearhead a county-wide, peer-to-peer engagement campaign to enable young people to contribute their views on policing, crime, and community safety (**Recommendation 4**).

In Woughton:

- In response to young people's clear demands to have their voices heard in the City and in acknowledgement of their lived experience (**Recommendation 1**), a commitment from City Councillors to build engagement with young people through holding surgeries in schools and attending local events 'where young people are' (**Recommendation 5**).
- A pledge to incorporate young people's views in violence reduction plans by the neighborhood policing team (**Recommendation 2**) and to improve the safety of public spaces (needles, broken glass and street lighting) and to include young people's voices about safety and violence reduction in the 2050 City Plan by City Councillors (**Recommendation 5**).
- A commitment from Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the City Council Violence Reduction team to incorporate young people's views (**Recommendation 1**) into programmes on public safety, knife crime and violence against girls and women (VAGW) (**Recommendation 2**).

5.4 Conclusion

Our research offers:

- New knowledge about the role of local neighbourhoods in young people's lives; what supports and what challenges young people to flourish in contexts of economic disadvantage and marginality.
- A novel methodology and methods that is responsive to young people and supports their inclusion in the generation of knowledge, social action and policymaking.



Our study shows how place matters for children. It sets out their evidence on the importance of good quality, safe public, including green space; the role of (under-resourced) youth services that foster these connections and young people's aspirations for where they live.

The outcomes from this project challenge simplistic assumptions about young people's voice that exceed formalised models of consultation, setting out an approach to participation that is attentive to young people and that utilises different media (audio, images, animation and texts) to enable young people to give voice to their experiences and for adult decision-makers to engage directly with young people's perspectives. Our approach exemplifies the value of embedding children's rights (UNCRC, 1989) to express their views, access information and achieve their full potential (Articles 6, 12,13 and 17) through co-research and participatory action in the everyday lives of young people in their communities.



Actions arising from the policy dialogues include:

- The launch of a Young Leaders Award enabling young people to develop accredited community leadership skills.
- The active commitment of a local MP, informing Labour's commitment for a national network of Young Futures hubs.
- The acquisition of a Youth and Community Hut for use as a youth centre, enabling young people to organise and attend activities, where no provision had previously existed.
- The inclusion of young people's voices in a new Multi-Agency Safety Hub to improve safety in the area.
- The incorporation of young people's views in violence reduction plans to ensure their perspectives inform the approach.
- The championing of young people's voices by the local Mayor, ensuring their inclusion in the 2050 City Plan.

Our study highlights the importance of listening to and including young people's perspectives in local and national decision-making. It contributes new knowledge about what young people need to flourish and offers novel methods to support young people in generating knowledge, identifying priorities for change and engaging collaboratively with decision makers. In offering a methodology, methods and evidence about how young people can imagine, plan, take action and collaborate with peers and stakeholders to create positive outcomes for young people, our project contributes to the academic literature on youth involvement in the policy process, exemplifying the type of facilitation and forms of dissemination that constitute successful engagement in the form of tangible policy actions and better outcomes for children (Macauley et al, 2022). Our research exemplifies examples of good practice in youth participation as described by the 2020 European Commission report on Good Practices of Youth Participation (Borkowska-Waszak et al., 2020). At the highest level, these constitute entrusting young people to develop ownership over initiatives to influence policymaking (Macauley, et al, 2020). However, further action is needed to ensure that young people's recommendations and voices are sustained at national and local level in accordance with their rights (UNCRC, 1989). This includes their rights to express their views and be listened to when people make decisions that involve them (Articles 12 and 13); an adequate standard of living (Article 27); develop to their full potential (Article 6), protection from violence (Article 19) and opportunities to relax and play (Article 31).

Young people's recommendations from this study are directly relevant to the new government's missions, in particular the focus on 'Safer Streets' and 'Break(ing) Down Barriers to Opportunity'. However, they also crosscut these missions and suggest the need for a whole government approach to ensure young people's needs are considered at all levels and across all departments to break down fragmented policymaking and minimise unintended consequences for children (British Academy, 2022). This demands co-ordinated government action to ensure that children's needs, that fall across all areas of government, are represented. Whilst responsibility for the rights of children lies primarily with the Government who have specific responsibilities and are legally obligated to protect and uphold children's rights, local authorities are also obliged and should fulfil their responsibilities and effectively meet their duties to children (UNICEF, 2021-2022). In order to meet these obligations, in accordance with young people's views and suggestions from children's right's organisations, our recommendations include: the appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children to champion the voices of children at the highest level; the full incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law and making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement for all new policy and legislation (Barnardo's, 2024; Longfield, 2024a; Save the Children, 2023).



'Those working in policy and other key actors within the policy ecosystem should avoid making assumptions about what children think or want. Good policymaking explores the range of possible impacts on different groups in society before policies are put into practice. Engaging children directly in the design of policy, and interrogating the available evidence base, will improve the assessment of policy impact on children in different contexts, increasing positive outcomes for a larger number of children and avoiding unintended negative consequences or contradictions.'

(British Academy, 2022).

"I want politicians and decision-makers to know that young people care about their area and community and deserve to be listened to"

(Sabryna, female, aged 12, Deighton & Brackenhall).

Appendices



Children's lives in changing places

Research Project Information Sheet



Kate



Maria

Hello! Our names are Kate and Maria. We are researchers from the University of Huddersfield. We are doing a research project to understand young people's experiences of growing up in their neighbourhood. We would like young people to help us to do the research as they have important knowledge to share.

What's the research about?

The project is about finding out where young people like to spend their time, what affects their lives, what opportunities are available and how they can help make decisions about their local area.



Where will the research be happening?

The project will work with young people and their communities in Deighton in Huddersfield, Coffee Hall in Milton Keynes and Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire.

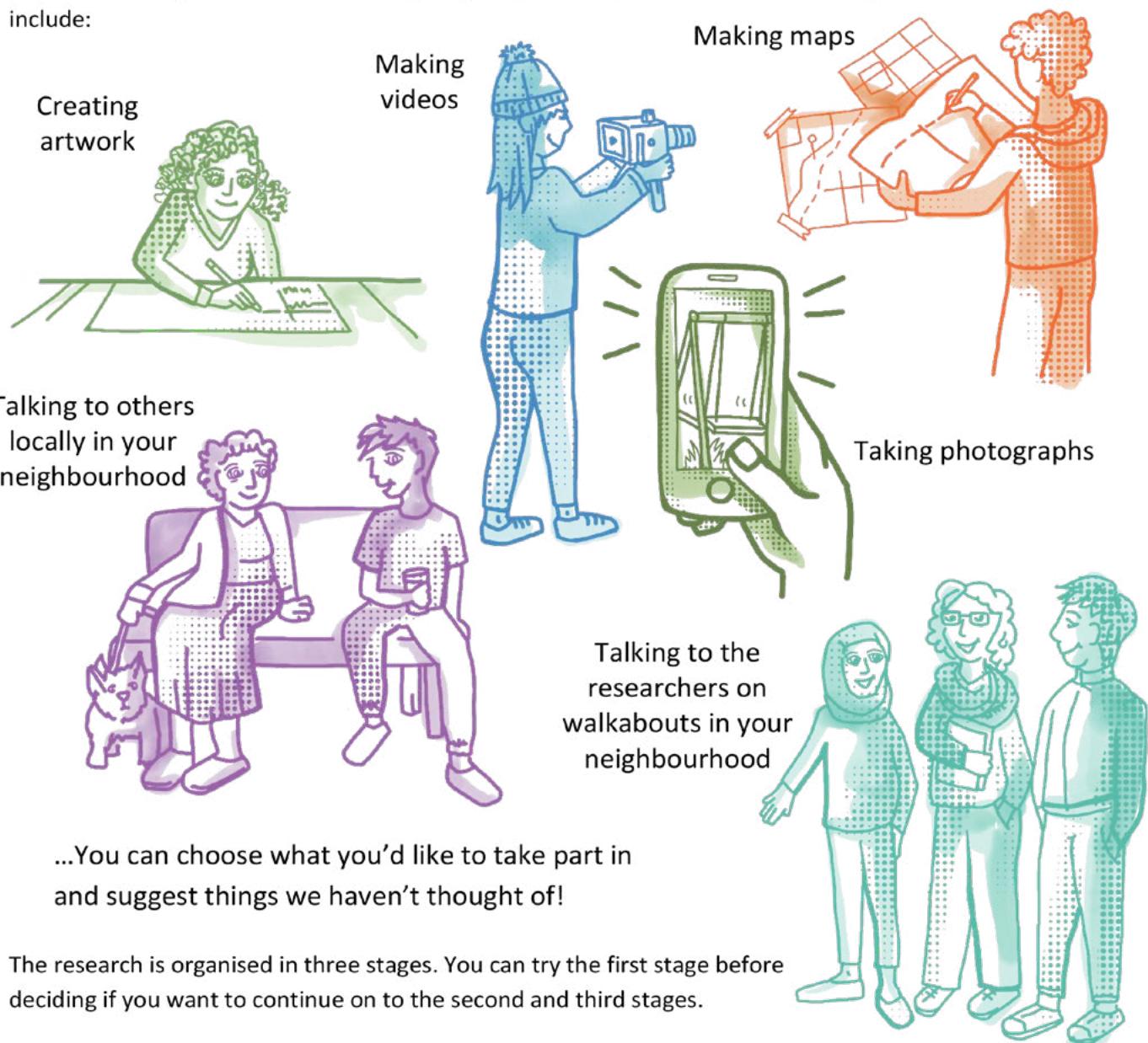


Why are you being invited to take part?

We are asking 20 young people aged 10-15 from each neighbourhood to work closely with us. You are being invited to take part because you live in Deighton. We will also be working with some adults in your community such as parents, carers and community workers. Later in the project we aim to work with a further 20 young people in each neighbourhood.

What will the research involve and how long will it take?

We will be doing lots of activities with young people to help us understand their experiences. This might include:



The research is organised in three stages. You can try the first stage before deciding if you want to continue on to the second and third stages.

Stage 1: November 2022- March 2023: Working with art, photography, film and mapping.

Stage 2: April- August 2023: Developing research skills to find out about other people's experiences in your neighbourhood.

Stage 3: September 2023 – May 2024: Presenting the research to the wider community such as parents, carers, community workers and the council.

If you decide to take part you will be supported throughout the project, choose which activities you would like to do and have the opportunity to gain new skills.

At the end of the project young people will receive a gift voucher as a thank you.

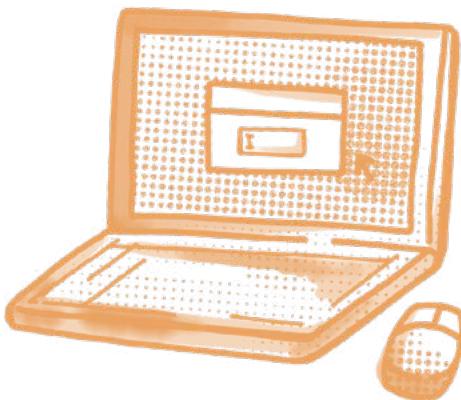


How will the research be shared?

We plan to share the research findings with local and national decision-makers with the aim of improving young people's lives and helping to make neighbourhoods better places to live. You will also be able to have a say in how the research is shared, including the opportunity to help us organise an exhibition and to write our research report.



How will the information be used?



We will make sure that everything you and other people share is kept safe. We will keep what you say or create anonymous, which means no one will know who has said what. If we believe someone is in danger or we are concerned about someone's safety, we will discuss this with the person about best to support them and make sure they are safe.



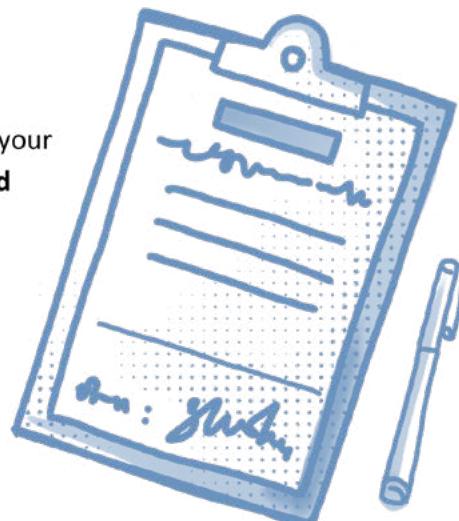
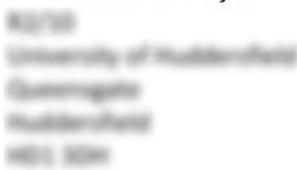
If you agree to take part now, can you change your mind later on?

Yes, you can stop at any point and you can ask for what you have said or created to be left out. You don't have to give a reason.

What happens next?

If you would like to take part you will need to get permission from your parent/s or carer(s) who will need to read this leaflet. **Both you and your parent/carer need to sign the consent form (one each)** and return to us at the address:

Kate Smith & Maria Alfaro-Simmonds
CHILL Research Project



We would also like you to complete the **About You sheet** in this pack. You can do this by yourself or with your parent/s or carer(s).

Who to contact if you have any questions

Kate Smith: kate@chill-project.org

Maria Alfaro-Simmonds: maria@chill-project.org

Contact Kate or Maria on [0121 323 1000](tel:01213231000)



[\(Helen\) and Mobile:
\[\\(Barry\\)\]\(tel:07775323100\)](mailto:kate@chill-project.org)



Children's lives in changing places

Please read the information provided in this pack and ask questions if you need to.

If you agree that your child may take part please tick the boxes below and sign at the bottom. We will also need your child to sign that they are also in agreement.

Please put a tick in the box if you agree

I understand that my child can choose to take part and they may stop taking part at any stage without giving a reason.

I agree that my child will be recorded using audio, photographs or video and that recordings will be stored securely at the University of Huddersfield in compliance with GDPR for up to ten years.

I have read the project information and understand the purpose of the research.

I understand the research team will exercise a duty of care in making sure that my child is safe and prevented from harm during the research.

I understand that if the researchers have a concern for my child's safety they will discuss this with them to make sure they are safe.

I agree that the research team can use my child's anonymised words and pictures in published material from this project such as reports, academic papers, exhibitions and the project website. They will check that my child is happy with any images first.

Please indicate your preference by circling yes or no below:

I give permission:

For a pseudonym (a pretend name) of my child to be included in the credits for the art work

Yes No

For anonymised information including photographs of activities and artwork to be:

Shared within the research team

Yes No

Included in publications and research outputs

Yes No

Archived for use by other researchers in the future

Yes No

Please complete:

Your name:

Relationship to the young person:

Your contact address:

Your email:

Your phone number:

Young person's name:

Please indicate your preference by circling yes or no below:

Please send me information about the research findings Yes No

Send me information and an invitation to the final event to share the research findings Yes No

I agree for a member of the research team to contact me at a later date e.g. to ask my views about my child taking part in the project Yes No

If you are happy to be contacted, please tell us your preferred method of contact
(tick all that apply):

- Email (using the address above)
- Post (using the address above)

Please note: In compliance with GDPR this information will not be shared with third parties and will be kept secure.

If you have any further questions about the project and/or the use of your data please contact Kate or Maria

Or the project leads - Helen Lomax helen.lomax@nottingham.ac.uk and Barry Percy-Smith barry.smith@nottingham.ac.uk. The
University of Nottingham, Queen's Gate, Nottingham, NG2 2EE
TEL: Office Line 0115 951 3959 (Helen) and Mobile: 07895 200000 (Barry)

Signed..... Date..... (parent/ carer)

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from The School of Education Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

Artwork by @gemmawhitelockillustration



Children's lives in changing places

Please read the information in this pack so that you understand what being part of the project means. Please ask questions if you need to.

If you are happy to take part please tick the boxes below and sign at the bottom.

We will also need your parent or guardian to complete the other consent form in this pack and sign that they agree you can take part. We use the word anonymised on this form. This means nobody can tell it is you.

Please put a tick in the box if you agree

Young Person Consent Form

I have read the project information and understand the purpose of the research.

I agree to be recorded using audio, photography or video and for recordings will be stored securely at the University of Huddersfield.

I understand that my involvement is my choice and I may stop taking part at any stage without giving a reason.

I understand that if the researchers have a concern for my safety they will discuss this with me to make sure I am safe.

I understand the research team will be careful to think about my safety and will try to avoid harm from the research activities.

I agree that the research team can use my anonymised words and pictures in published material from this project such as reports, academic papers, exhibitions and the project website. They will check that I am happy with any images first.

Please indicate your preference by circling yes or no below:

I give permission:

For a pseudonym (a pretend name) to be included in the credits for the art work

Yes No

For anonymised information including photographs of activities and artwork to be:

Shared within the research team

Yes No

Included in exhibitions, films & reports

Yes No

Stored securely for use by other researchers in the future

Yes No

Please complete:

My name:

My chosen pseudonym (for use in crediting creative work. This can be decided later if you prefer)

Contact address:

My phone number:

My email:

Please indicate your preference by circling yes or no below:

I would like information about the research findings

Yes No

I would like information and an invitation to the final event to share the research findings

Yes No

I agree for a member of the research team to contact me at a later date e.g. to ask my views about taking part in the project

Yes No

If you are happy to be contacted, please tell us your preferred method of contact (tick all that apply):

- Email (using the address above)
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- Phone or text message

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If you have any further questions about the project and/or the use of your data please contact Kate or Maria

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TEL: [0191 334 47627](tel:019133447627) (Helen) and Mobile: [07795 200000](tel:07795200000) (Barry)

Signed..... Date..... (parent/ carer)

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from The School of Education Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

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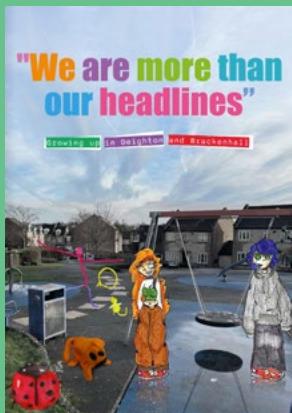
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Read, watch and listen to words, images and music by young people to communicate the findings of the research to policy and decision-makers.



"We are more than our headlines" was co-produced with young people capturing their experiences of growing up in Deighton & Brackenhall through their art, music and words.

Click here to read the Scrapbook



"10 things young people in Mablethorpe need from their town" was a booklet written and designed in consultation with young people.

Click here to see the animated film



An animated film - "It's all about the beach town" - was created using young people's art, words and music to highlight how they feel about and what they need from Mablethorpe.



Click here to read the banners

In Woughton, a series of banners was created with young people as a travelling exhibition to showcase the research project.

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Project Website: <https://chillprojectuk.wixsite.com/chill-project>

Nuffield Website: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/childrens-lives-in-changing-places>



Sheffield Hallam University

Young people as researchers and change-makers in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK : Report from a study funded by the Nuffield Foundation

LOMAX, Helen, SMITH, Kate, ALFARO-SIMMONDS, Maria Jesus, BOND-TAYLOR, Sue, HUMPHRY, Debbie, TURNER, Wendy and PERCY-SMITH, Barry

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