



The Old Library

An early stage evaluation of Grahame Park's new community hub

November 2021

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Summary

This report sets out findings from an early-stage evaluation of the Old Library, a temporary community hub created on Grahame Park estate, Colindale. The renovation was led by Notting Hill Genesis (NHG) and the Colindale Communities Trust (CCT) and supported by the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund. The evaluation was undertaken in September and October 2021, a few months after the re-opening of the Old Library.

Key achievements

- The renovation has been positively received and has created a new resource for residents on Grahame Park's Concourse, which has seen the closure of numerous amenities and facilities.
- The Old Library has already succeeded in building a strong ecosystem of organisations and activities, improving access to services among residents, and leveraging extra resources into the area.
- The Make it Happen economic inclusion offer has brought statutory agencies together with tailored support services to create a unique asset for local people looking for work, or to set up a business.
- Users are generally accessing multiple activities or services and report positive outcomes, particularly around building new relationships within their community.

Key challenges

- The constraints of adapting an existing building into a community hub means the space has limited capacity to accommodate a range of parallel uses. This is likely to become more of an issue as usership picks up.
- Building engagement is a challenge and some services are struggling to recruit users. This risks undermining collaboration among project partners where there is overlap between services.
- Links between partners working at the Old Library are uneven and have been slow to establish. This can partly be attributed to COVID-19 which slowed momentum around the opening of the space.
- The Old Library is stretching the capacity of the CCT who are responsible for the practical maintenance and financial sustainability of the building, delivering the One Stop Shop alongside a range of other activities, and acting as community connectors.

Recommendations

- Continue to strengthen links within the Old Library ecosystem by bringing together project partners through a range of formal and informal events.
- Build engagement by offering more services in the building that are a draw to a range of users. These could include stay and play sessions which appeal to local families, fitness classes at different times of the day for working residents and those at home, or film screenings which reflect the interests of particular groups.
- Promote the Old Library itself as a facility and community resource. This could be by building a dedicated online presence with a website and email, improving signage around The Concourse, creating a noticeboard outside with a timetable, or hosting an open day event.
- Develop outreach and promotion channels to build engagement. Approaches could include tapping into online residents groups to spread the word, or leveraging the communications of local partners such as Barnet Homes.
- Test more activities that provide a ‘drop-in’ feel, such as a lunch club, which allows users to spend time at the Old Library, or installing a coffee vending machine to draw in residents.
- Set up a user group or forum to provide ongoing input into the Old Library. This could build the skills and engagement of residents and develop community champions who will promote the Old Library in their networks.
- Develop a set of volunteer roles with project partners which appeal to a range of interests, time commitments and skills - these could range from one-off activities, such as helping out at an open day or bringing food for a lunch club, to more regular tasks such as greeting people at the Old Library, or being on a user group.
- Invest in the core capacity of the Old Library to develop engagement among residents, from developing relationships with users, managing volunteering, to promoting its services. Funding for this could be sought through trusts and foundations, or counterpart support from local partners or agencies.

Lessons for the future community hub

- There is a high demand for places to spend time or have a coffee locally. Creating a café within the hub could act as a significant draw for residents, provide a valued local asset and help cover the costs of the building.
- Designing a flexible and adaptable space that offers different configurations, as well as series of private spaces, will be important to ensuring all the potential uses of the hub can be catered to.
- Creating balanced programming and uses will be key in gaining a broad constituency of users from across a changing area. This may mean less

of a focus on employment and more on community activities, or providing workspace to bring in a different groups of users.

- Creating a forum or process for meaningful resident engagement from the early stages of its design could help build involvement, skills, and a sense of ownership from the start. This could provide an opportunity to engage local groups who are currently under-represented to understand their needs and priorities.

1. Introduction & approach

This is an early-stage evaluation of the Old Library, a new community hub on Grahame Park. The project is a partnership between the Colindale Community Trust (CCT) and Notting Hill Genesis (NHG), who are leading the regeneration of the Grahame Park estate.

In 2019, the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund awarded funding towards the £300,000 renovation of the Old Library, which was also supported by NHG and Barnet Council. The works were completed in April 2021. The refurbished library is intended to become a multi-use enterprise, skills, and community hub, providing holistic support for residents and bringing people together. It will act as a temporary hub, building engagement and skills that will support the establishment of a new community hub as the regeneration progresses - this is likely to be built in five years or more.

The Old Library forms part of a wider Neighbourhood Change strategy for the area, which underpins the work of community partners and agencies in the ongoing regeneration of the Grahame Park Estate. The strategy has four key goals which guide the delivery of activities:

- **Influencing public spaces** Ensuring opportunities for diverse communities to engage and influence public spaces and community facilities and services.
- **Economic inclusion** Increase enterprise, employment, education and training opportunities by having more robust inclusive platforms that enhance and empower community aspirations.
- **Community safety** Collaborative approaches between the community and agencies in sharing responsibility to identify and deliver community safety solutions.
- **Health and wellbeing** An increase in community-led holistic approaches to improve health, social and economic wellbeing.

Colindale Communities Trust

The CCT is a charity which aims to improve the economic and social wellbeing of local residents. It acts as an anchor organisation in the area, working with a range of partners through the Colindale Consortium. Prior to the renovation of the Old Library, the CCT managed the One Stop Shop from another premises on Grahame Park, while delivering a range of other community activities. It continues to run these services from Old Library, as well as managing the space.

Notting Hill Genesis

NHG is a housing association leading the regeneration of Grahame Park. This has been ongoing since 2005. Alongside physical redevelopment activities, NHG delivers a range of community development activities to support local residents. Its community development team is now based in the Old Library and it is responsible for the 'Make it Happen' economic inclusion programme being delivered in the space, alongside a range of other activities such as the outdoor gym and community garden.

The Old Library

Located on Grahame Park's central precinct, The Concourse, the Old Library sits at the heart of the existing estate. Built in the early 1970s, it was closed five years ago when a new library was created as part of the regeneration. In recent years, the Old Library hosted youth activities but was in an increasingly dilapidated state.

The renovation was conceived as an opportunity to bring together different organisations and services in the area and create a hub for local agencies and residents. It is intended to provide holistic support, addressing the different needs of residents - from advice services and employment support, to fitness classes and social activities such as bingo. It forms part of a growing physical network of spaces in and around The Concourse, including a new outdoor gym and community garden.

The CCT's One Stop Shop, a place for residents to receive advice and support, has moved into the Old Library along with its offices. It now delivers some of its community activities and training courses in the Old Library. Notting Hill Genesis has also established offices within the Old Library. A range of statutory, voluntary and commissioned project partners have been brought in to deliver services, including economic inclusion activities under the 'Make it Happen' umbrella. The Old Library is also intended to act as a platform for other projects, such as the community garden and outdoor gym.

The Old Library will serve residents of Grahame Park estate, as well as the wider Colindale area. Grahame Park is a diverse neighbourhood with a high level of need. The ongoing regeneration means that it is currently home to many residents on temporary tenancies, often individuals and families in particularly vulnerable positions. There are also new residents coming into the private housing being built through the regeneration. The Old Library is seeking to bring together residents in this diverse and changing place.

Evaluation context

The Old Library renovation was undertaken and completed during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of re-opening, lockdown measures were still in place, placing limits on indoor activities and encouraging all those who could to work from home. The gradual lifting of these measures over the summer months allowed the Old Library to build up its programming and engagement.

At the time of our research in September and October 2021, most project partners had established their activities at the Old Library - however many were only a few weeks into delivery. A continuing high prevalence of coronavirus and enduring health concerns are likely to have impacted the use of the space by a portion of residents.

Our approach

The scope of the evaluation was informed by the early stage at which it took place, as well as the nature of the Old Library as a hub bringing a wide range of activities and services together.

We explore some of the enabling factors that will underpin the future success of the Old Library, such as the level of collaboration among project partners, the extent to which programming matches user needs, and how residents are being involved in shaping activities. Instead of examining individual project outcomes, we seek to explore the additionality of the hub and the co-location of services. We also captured the initial perceptions of the space, how users are finding out about it, and what participants would like to see taking place.

The evaluation aims to provide an early indication of how the Old Library is delivering on the social value outcomes set out in the Good Growth Fund:

- Bringing different communities together in a diverse and changing place.
- Enabling as many residents as possible on Grahame Park to have access to flexible employment and skills support within the community hub.
- Creating a space that will build knowledge, skills and community engagement to help develop a new community hub in the future.

Methods

The evaluation used primarily qualitative methods to engage users and project partners, seeking to build a detailed picture of initial perceptions and experiences of the Old Library.

User survey

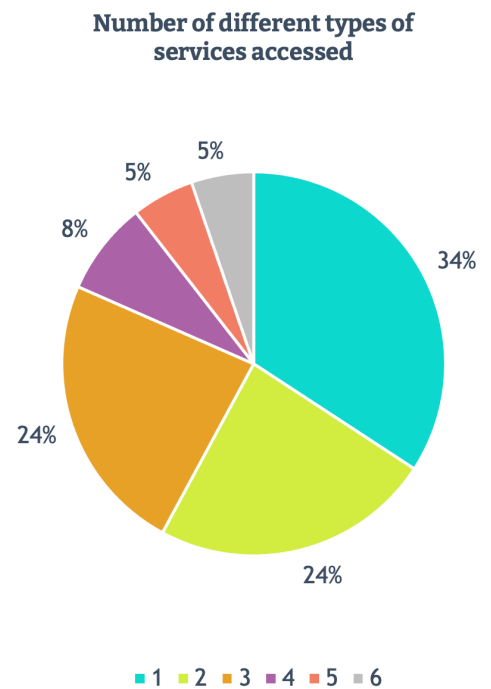
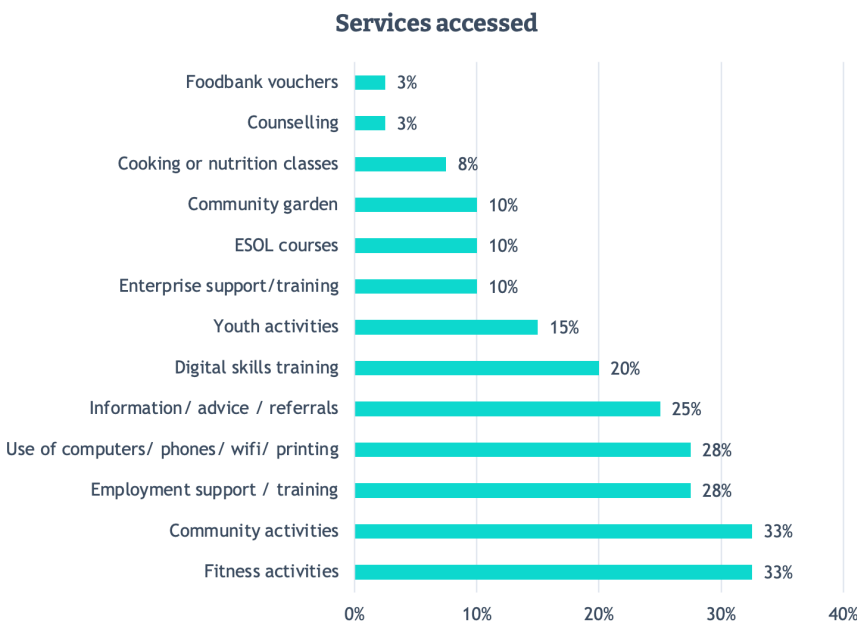
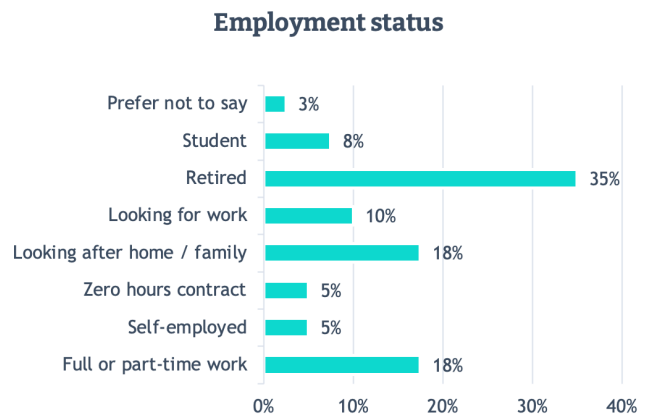
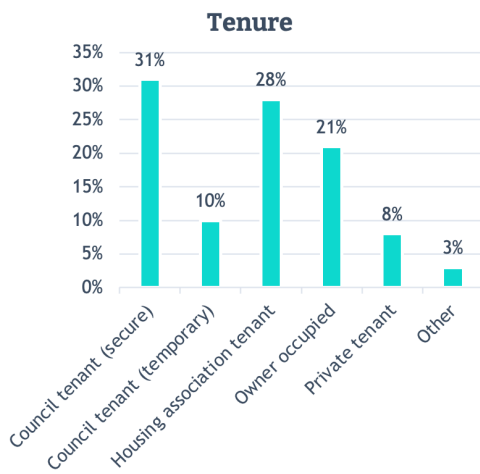
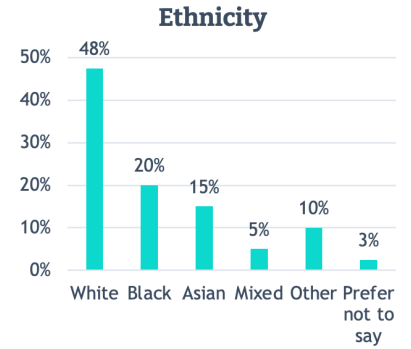
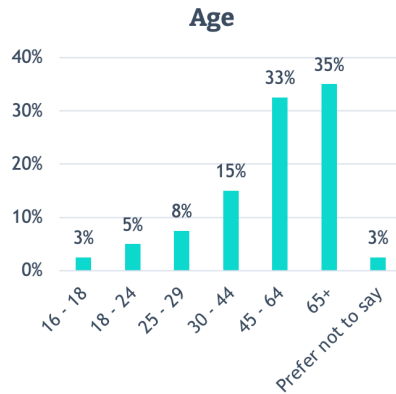
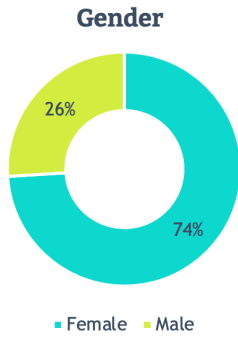
We spoke with 40 individuals using the Old Library or attending activities or events associated with the Old Library - such as the launch of the outdoor gym or bingo at the community centre (see details of who we spoke to overleaf). Interviews were conducted on different days of the week and at different times in order to reach users accessing a variety of services. The survey also captured the views of volunteers at the Old Library.

A structured questionnaire with predominantly open-ended questions was used. Questions addressed a range of themes, including perceptions of the space, the activities users had accessed and what they felt they had gained.

There are some imbalances in who we spoke to - the survey targeted over 16s, hence the views of younger users are missing. Project monitoring data suggests we spoke to proportionally fewer individuals accessing training courses at the Old Library, these may be a younger demographic than those accessing social activities. On p20 we explore which groups are likely to be accessing the Old Library and how this compares to the area as a whole.

Who we spoke to

40 individual users
64% Grahame Park residents



Project partner interviews

We conducted 12 interviews with project partners from 11 organisations. These were semi-structured, in-depth interviews addressing relevant evaluation themes. Two further interviews were conducted with project partners delivering services at the Old Library as part of the user survey. Individuals from the following organisations were interviewed:

- **BOOST LB** Barnet's employment and benefit advisory programme, now based in the Old Library as part of Make it Happen.
- **Bread n Butter** Social enterprise teaching skills for cooking and healthy living, run workshops on Grahame Park.
- **Colindale Community Trust** Local community anchor organisation, lead partner for the Old Library, manage the One Stop Shop and deliver a range of community activities.
- **DWP** Youth coaches from the Job Centre are based at the Old Library as part of Make it Happen.
- **F.U.S.E.** Run a range of youth activities and a youth club at the Old Library, including prior to the renovation.
- **Love London Working** Employment support programme from a collaboration of twelve housing associations, now based at the Old Library as part of Make it Happen.
- **Notting Hill Genesis** Housing association leading regeneration of Grahame Park, run Make it Happen economic inclusion programme alongside other community development activities from the Old Library.
- **Shared Enterprise** Social enterprise providing support to develop entrepreneurial skills and ambitions through a range of courses and an enterprise club, delivered at the Old Library.
- **Groundworks** National social enterprise who run The Loop, a community reuse hub on Grahame Park's Concourse, as well as the new community garden.
- **Tutors United** Education charity providing free after-school tuition to pupils in year five and six at the Old Library.
- **Youth Engagement Solutions** Provide youth-focused employment support at the Old Library as part of Make it Happen.

Secondary data review

We reviewed other data sources relating to the Old Library and the local context. These included the CCT's 2021 Grahame Park Community Survey, which captures the experiences and views of residents, including their priorities for facilities in the area and their awareness of the Old Library. We examined the Neighbourhood Change Framework for Grahame Park, which helped frame the evaluation. We also reviewed a 2017 report by Social Life evaluating NHG's community investment work on Grahame Park.

Some limited project monitoring data has also been compiled and included.

Workshop

On November 4th 2021 a workshop was held with NHG and CCT staff, and a small number of project partners. Initial findings from the evaluation were presented and partners shared what was already being done to address some of the issues highlighted. These are set out as **'Action being taken'** in the report.

The workshop was also an opportunity to develop ideas around other responses to the findings, these are included in the recommendations.

2. The space

This section sets out participants' and project partners' initial perceptions of the Old Library. It also explores the functionality of the space and the extent to which it is meeting the requirements of the services being delivered.

Perceptions of the renovation

Nine in ten users we spoke to were positive about the renovated space. It was described as a bright, spacious, welcoming, clean, and friendly space.

“Used to take kids here before when it was still a library, it's completely transformed. Before it was dark and gloomy, you just wanted to get in and out, now it feels so inviting.” (Old Library user)

Two thirds of users we spoke to had previously accessed services now available at the Old Library, or used the library itself. For a couple of respondents who had accessed the One Stop Shop before it relocated to the Old Library, it represents an improvement on the previous space. Those who knew the library prior to the renovation were also pleased with the changes that had been made, saying it was cleaner and more welcoming.

“Yeah, it's much easier to access information about what's going on. It's all laid out nicely, all open and easier to access.” (Old Library user)

“The youth centre, it makes it more pleasant to go in there. It's light and airy. It used to be like a dark dungeon. It didn't give the right impression. It's more welcoming now, especially for children.” (Old Library user)

There were concerns raised by several projects partners and a small number of users around the echo in the hall, which impacts the acoustics and is an issue for some individuals who are hard of hearing. Uncomfortable chairs in the hall were raised as an issue by one project partner.

While the lack of clutter and cleanliness of the space was appreciated by a portion of users, one described the space as “soulless” compared to when it was a working library. The opportunity to create a more personalised space, for example through community artworks, was also expressed by one project partner.

Action being taken: Community artworks relating to the area's RAF history which are currently on display in the Grahame Park Community centre are scheduled to be relocated to the Old Library.

The renovation has created a new asset open to the public on The Concourse, a precinct where many businesses and facilities have been shuttered in recent years and, according to the CCT Community Survey, many residents feel unsafe. This was noted to be a positive by several users, while others were happy to see investment in the area. However, several respondents said they still feel unsafe on their journey to the Old Library.

“The facilities are better, the rooms are better for those that engage but it's not opened up a new load of people to the centre.” (Project partner)



Top image: main hall
Bottom image: enterprise suite

Functionality

The main hall is a large and flexible space, able to accommodate a variety of uses, from a youth club, to training courses. However, given its size, many activities which take place in the space do not make full use of it, while programming is constrained by having a single large space available for group activities.

The co-location of NHG's offices alongside employment services and the CCT is felt to be a significant benefit. This has allowed NHG to build relationships with local groups and agencies, as well as providing a greater interface with residents. However, the separation of the reception area, out of which the One Stop Shop operates, from the CCT's offices (located upstairs) has created some difficulties in supporting volunteers manning the reception, who frequently depend on CCT staff for guidance.

Action being taken: A professional receptionist is being recruited for the One Stop Shop.

For project partners whose services are more confidential in nature, such as employment counselling, there is a need for more private spaces to meet their users. This will be a growing challenge as usage picks up. Several project partners also expressed a desire for more of an interface with residents, as there were limited opportunities to engage with users from their base in the Enterprise Suite. There is a break-out area in the reception which was considered suitable, however this is often occupied.

The management of the building creates ongoing demands on the CCT's time, placing an extra burden on their core organizational resources. Balancing the need to generate revenue to sustain the running costs of the building, while bringing in programming and partners who deliver community benefit also presents challenges.

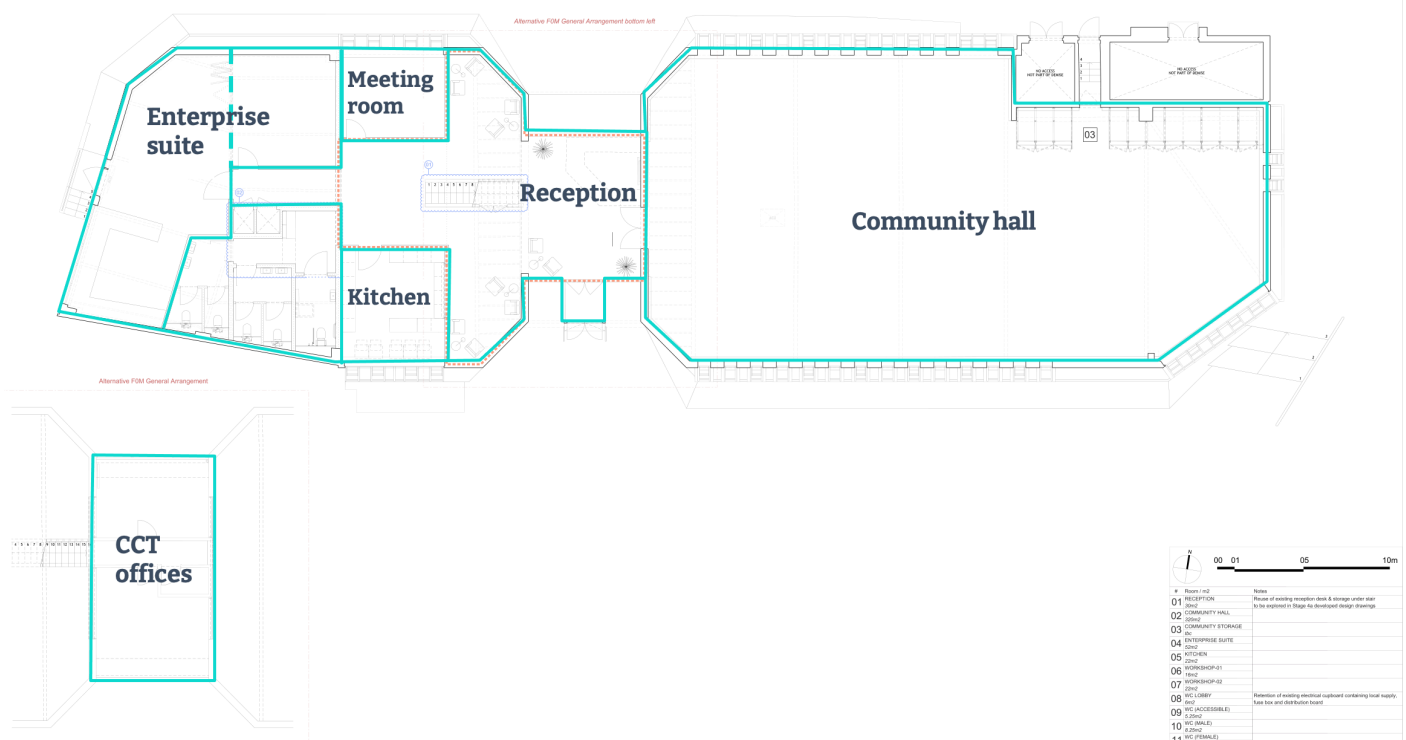


Image: Old Library floorplan

3. Programming & partnerships

In this section we set out some of the key needs of residents and detail the services currently on offer at or through the Old Library. We also highlight what users we spoke to felt might increase their use of the Old Library and any gaps they, or project partners, identified. Lastly, we highlight how partnerships and collaboration are being built within the hub.

Local needs

Grahame Park is an area of high deprivation, it is classified among the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England; this is particularly acute in the employment, income, and access to services and housing domains of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.¹ Census 2011 data shows low educational qualification levels locally, a quarter of over 16s in the area were with ‘no formal qualifications’, such as GCSEs or A-Levels.²

At the last Census, the area had a relatively young population - 45% of residents in 2011 were under the age of 24. Provision for young people and children was a key priority in research undertaken by Social Life in 2016/17. Grahame Park also has a highly diverse population, including a large population of recent migrants. In 2011, two fifths of residents were born outside of the UK in non-EU countries. Some residents will therefore face additional barriers to accessing services.

Partners working locally report that there are a significant portion of residents with complex needs, including high levels of substance abuse, mental health issues, debt, and housing problems. COVID is considered to have compounded many of these problems locally.

The CCT’s Community Survey indicates that there are high levels of digital exclusion on Grahame Park, with 17% of respondents stating they do not have Wi-Fi at home.³ We also encountered several users who did not have sufficient devices at home for their families.

There are high numbers of temporary residents housed on the estate. These residents are likely to be particularly vulnerable. There are also growing numbers of residents in private tenures with the regeneration. Bringing residents together in this context of growing inequality will be a key challenge.

Safety is a key issue on Grahame Park and a concern for many residents. The CCT’s Community Survey highlights particular issues around The Concourse, where 46% of respondents reported feeling unsafe during the day. A number of facilities and amenities have closed or moved away from The Concourse and there are few places for residents to meet and spend time locally. This was a key demand from the CCT’s Community Survey.⁴

*“Commonly [our users] have a multitude of mental, financial, family, domestic problems - they all seem to be triggered by the other. Mental health and substance abuse services are so oversubscribed at the moment, they have nowhere to go.”
(Project partner)*

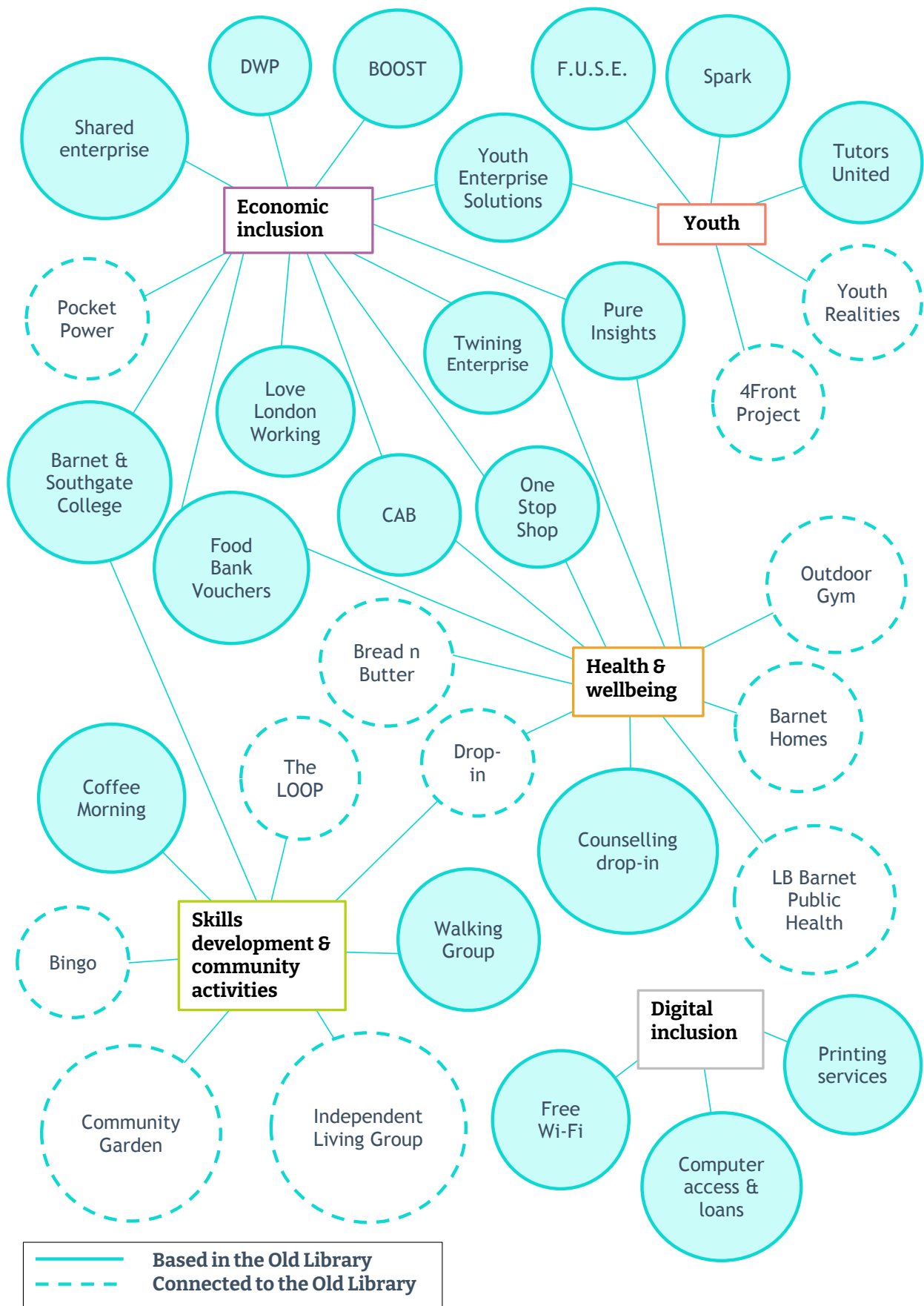
¹ Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019.

² At the time of the research, 2020 Census data was not available. Changes in the local population since the 2011 Census will have been accentuated by the regeneration.

³ Colindale Communities Trust (CCT), Grahame Park Community Survey, 2021.

⁴ CCT, 2021.

The Old Library Ecosystem



The Old Library Ecosystem

The diagram provides a snapshot of the services on offer to users of the Old Library. It is not exhaustive but highlights the breadth of activities and support, as well as the range of partner organisations delivering services at, or in connection with, the Old Library.

Some activities listed take place at the Old Library itself, others at the adjacent Community Centre on The Concourse, while some are remote services, accessed online. The Community Garden and Outdoor Gym are projects which have been spurred through the creation of the Old Library and are situated nearby.

The Old Library brought together a range of existing services and activities, such as the One Stop Shop and F.U.S.E. youth project, alongside new services - principally focused on economic inclusion.

Current programming

Economic inclusion

There is a very strong economic inclusion offer at the Old Library under the umbrella of 'Make it Happen,' which responds to a wide range of needs and circumstances, including targeting those 'furthest from the labour market,' and providing specialist services for young people. This was considered to be a gap in local provision prior to the renovation.

Make it Happen has brought the DWP into the Old Library, which is used by its job coaches to meet young benefits claimants currently seeking work. This provides an opportunity for direct referrals into the other support services on offer, which are tailored to individual needs and aspirations.

There are a range of employment support services, such as Love London Working and BOOST (LB Barnet's job brokerage service), who work with their clients one-on-one to develop their pathways into employment and are linked into job opportunities locally and further afield.

A number of organisations deliver training courses to develop the skills of residents. Shared Enterprise and Youth Enterprise Solutions also provide support for those looking to set up their own businesses through courses, workshops and one-on-one support.

Several services offer targeted, in-depth support, aimed at providing the building blocks for sustainable employment for those further from the labour market. Twinings provides employment support specifically focused on refugees and migrants, while Pure Insights supports those with mental health needs through counselling.

Beyond employment or enterprise support, Pocket Power helps individuals reduce their household bills. Benefits advisory services are also available through the One Stop Shop.

Other services

A programme of other activities are also delivered at or through the Old Library which address a range of needs.

- **Community activities** These include a walking group, a bingo session, and a coffee morning organised by the CCT. They take place at the Old Library or in the adjacent community centre. The activities are aimed at bringing people together, reducing isolation and improving people's wellbeing.
- **Skills development** Many training courses take place in the Old Library, from creative skills, such as sewing, to ESOL and hairdressing. Courses on offer are shaped by the demands of residents, many are delivered in partnership with Barnet and Southgate College. Residents have also received training to deliver their own courses and sessions.
- **Health and wellbeing services** A range of activities are on offer that address both mental health - including counselling support - and physical health, such as the outdoor gym which was recently constructed on The Concourse, or healthy eating courses delivered by Bread and Butter. There are also a range of fitness classes on offer, including a women's only group. A health and wellbeing 'drop-in' is also run by the CCT, which hosts sessions addressing a range of health needs, such as diabetes, or mental wellbeing.
- **Advice services** The One Stop Shop operates from the Old Library's reception, providing information on applying for benefits, accessing services, and distributing food bank vouchers. The Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) is also scheduled to start regularly operating from the Old Library.
- **Youth services** A regular youth club operated by F.U.S.E. Youth Project takes place in the afternoon and evenings at the Old Library, this was in place before the renovation. Tuition support is also available from Tutors United, alongside some occasional tailored activities, such as a youth leadership programme.
- **Digital access** This is a core part of the Old Library's offer. It includes free Wi-Fi, which extends onto The Concourse. Printing, photocopying and scanning services are available through the One Stop Shop. There is a computer which can be accessed in the reception area, as well as laptops available for loan.

Potential gaps

Community activities

Users we spoke to were mostly satisfied with the offer at the Old Library - six in 10 said that they could not think of anything that would encourage them to use the space more.

A small number of participants suggested additional activities they would be interested to attend. These ranged widely, including arts and cultural activities, such as a drama group, knitting club or film screenings; fitness activities, such as yoga in the evenings; or activities for children - a toddler

*"If it had computer sessions for children to do their homework. All their homework is online now, and I have four children and no computer at home."
(Old Library user)*

group, and music lessons were mentioned. One respondent mentioned a desire for a homework club where children could access computers.

“I wouldn't mind coming to study here and if the environment was quiet... it should just be open more so you can do your own thing.” (Old Library user)

The CCT's Community survey indicated there is a high demand for 'cafes and places to eat or meet' locally, while several respondents highlighted the value of being able to come in for a cup of tea or coffee. Outside of the coffee morning, there is not considered to be the space or capacity to accommodate those simply looking for a space to come in and spend time. It was also noted during the workshop that there will likely to be a growing demand for local workspace in the future.

Advice and support services

Intensive support and advice services were felt to be a gap at the time of research, given the limited capacity of the One Stop Shop for in-depth engagement with the complex issues some residents face. Housing support for tenants of Barnet Homes was also felt to be a gap.

Action being taken: An agreement is now in place with Citizen's Advice Bureau to deliver clinics at the Old Library.

Action being taken: A connection with Barnet Homes has been strengthened.

High levels of substance abuse and mental health needs also indicate that more programming addressing these issues could be beneficial.

Action being taken: A partnership with the Public Health team at LB Barnet is being developed to deliver satellite services on Grahame Park, such as drug, alcohol or sexual health support.

A stronger connection with the local GP was also felt to be a weakness, efforts have been made to improve social prescribing links but were proving challenging.

Economic inclusion

The Old Library offers extensive employment and enterprise support, some small gaps were identified. In relation to building skills, one user said that they would like to see courses that offer UCAS points. This echoes the findings of the CCT's Community Survey (2021), where respondents said they were most likely to attend courses or training which offer a qualification.

Support to find work is targeted at those currently not in employment, rather than supporting those in low paid work to improve their incomes. This could be a gap in addressing the high levels of income deprivation locally.

While enterprise support services help those with business ideas, an incubation service to help residents establish and grow their businesses was identified by one project partner as something missing locally.

Partnerships & collaboration

*“There’s something really valuable about having a place where people can come with their issues and questions and they can be addressed. One of the really valuable things is speaking face to face, having introductions rather than just being given a number. It’s more personal.”
(Project partner)*

The Old Library has brought a new range of partners onto Grahame Park, including agencies which had been difficult to access previously, or where efforts to increase their presence had failed in the past. The co-location of statutory agencies, housing providers, support services and voluntary groups is improving access to services for residents and creating the potential for greater partnership working. It is also leveraging in extra resources onto Grahame Park, including externally funded staff from five organisations: DWP, BOOST, Twinnings, Love London Working and YES.

The value of having personal contacts and organisations in situ was emphasised by several project partners, who highlighted the ease of direct referrals. This was contrasted to slow online referral processes which often result in individuals not accessing services. A number of successful referrals were reported, such as a volunteer who had accessed employment support, however this was at an early stage.

At the time of the research, links between project partners were weak or uneven given the staggered arrival of partners at the Old Library as a consequence of COVID-19. Signposting and referrals were not systematic and relied on informal relationships among partners.

Action being taken: two working groups bringing together Make it Happen project partners have been established to facilitate collaboration.

Links between groups and activities outside of Make it Happen are also patchy and we found limited awareness among some project partners around what is on offer at the Old Library.

It was noted that low numbers of users could undermine collaboration, as services compete to recruit - particularly in relation to economic inclusion, where there is some overlap among services.

4. Resident engagement

In this section we set out who is using the Old Library and its services. We explore how residents have found out about what is happening and any barriers to use. Lastly, we present our findings relating to volunteering and how the Old Library is incorporating resident voice in the design and delivery of programmes.

Who is using the Old Library?

User data shows that the Old Library has logged 2011 attendances since its reopening in April 2021, comprised of 764 individual users of the different activities and services on offer. Among respondents to our user survey, the majority had accessed two or more activities or services (see p8 for details on the breakdown of users we spoke to).

Overall, the Old Library attracts an ethnically diverse range of users. Of the people we spoke to, 48% were from white ethnic groups, this is somewhat higher than the 37% who identified as 'white' at the last Census, 20% were from Black ethnic groups, and 15% were from Asian backgrounds. Some specific minority groups were noted to be difficult to engage, such as the Somali community. All respondents that had visited the Old Library more than once agreed that it is a place that brings different groups together and the ethnic diversity of the walking group and bingo were noted.

"I feel really comfortable here, there is diversity from people from my culture and background. Definitely, it's a nice building and a nice area. It's nice in here, I wish they could do up the community centre. There is a new fresh feel." (Old Library user)

Female users outnumbered male users three to one in our survey. This may not be representative of services across the Old Library (we had a lower representation of youth services and training courses), however community activities - such as the bingo, walking group and the coffee morning - are likely to attract many more women and a higher portion of older individuals. This may relate to the appeal of these activities to a certain demographic, the availability and need of different groups for social activities during the day, as well as the wider difficulties many projects face in engaging men.⁵

Of users we spoke to, around a third were private tenants or owner occupiers, while two thirds were from social rent tenures. This broadly reflects the make-up of the area at the 2011 Census, however the regeneration will have brought in new private tenants and leaseholders over the last decade, who may be under-represented and are less likely to need many of the services on offer at the Old Library.

Most respondents had accessed activities before the renovation and claimed a longstanding engagement with the One Stop Shop and the former library, suggesting that the Old Library has a group of dedicated users that return to

⁵ Johal, A., A. Shelupanov, W. Norman. Invisible Men: engaging more men in social projects. The Young Foundation, 2012.

the space. Around a third of respondents were not residents of Grahame Park, over half of this group were former residents. This suggests the Old Library is making some limited progress on its ambition to bring in users from the wider area. The DWP and training courses are key draws to individuals from beyond Grahame Park who have not accessed other services previously.

Which services are people using?

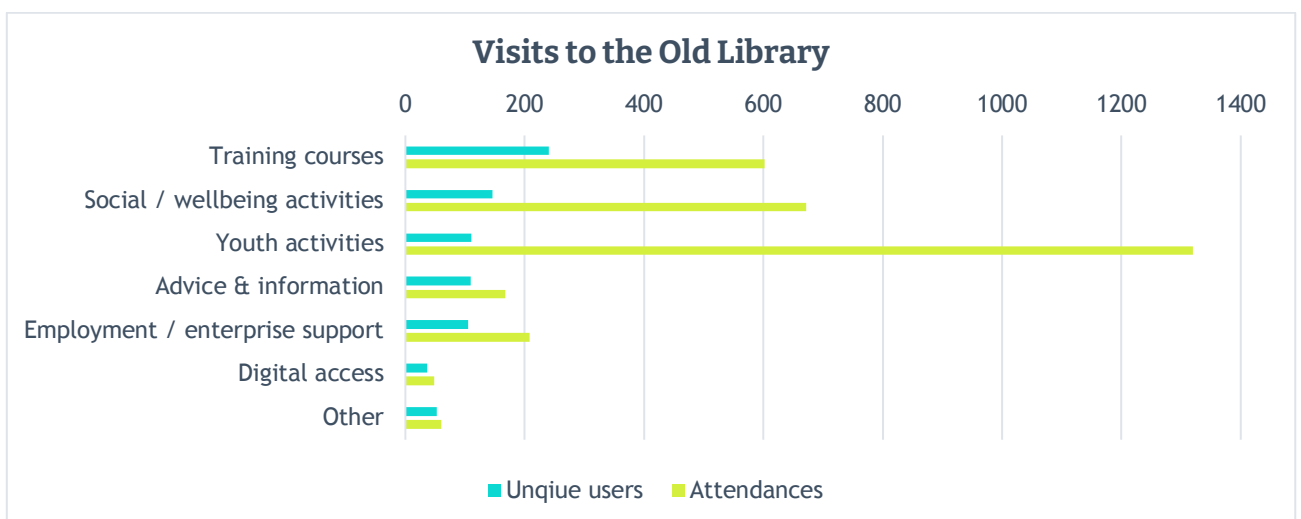
According to user data collected at the Old Library, training courses are bringing in the largest number of unique users. Social activities, such as the Walking Group, Tuesday Drop In, and Fitness classes are also popular and see high numbers of repeat visits. The Tuesday drop-in session (which features the Bingo) is especially popular, accounting for over a tenth of all visits.⁶

Youth activities have a high number of regular users, with 12 visits per individual on average since the Old Library reopened. For many users the Old Library has retained the function of the One Stop Shop, with around 1 in 3 coming to the building for information and advice, or digital access, according to CCT data. Among employment services, the DWP drives attendance. This is likely to be made up of a significant portion of users who are new to the Old Library.

*“Yes, for example if there were more people at this coffee morning it would be nicer. I am the only one who makes an effort. We should post about this group more”
(Old Library user)*

There are a number of activities that are struggling to recruit participants, ranging from employment services targeting young people to healthy eating courses. Several users also commented that they would like to see more people coming to activities.

The majority of users we spoke to had accessed two or more services at or through the Old Library. This suggests that, while knowledge of what is on offer is uneven, those engaged in services are successfully linking into some other activities.



NB: CCT data April - October 2021. ‘Other’ category includes access to Wi-Fi, advice on housing and benefits. There is likely to be an undercount on some services as the monitoring system was being established during this time.

⁶ Some activities hosted at the Grahame Park Community Centre are registered in the user data.

Awareness of the Old Library

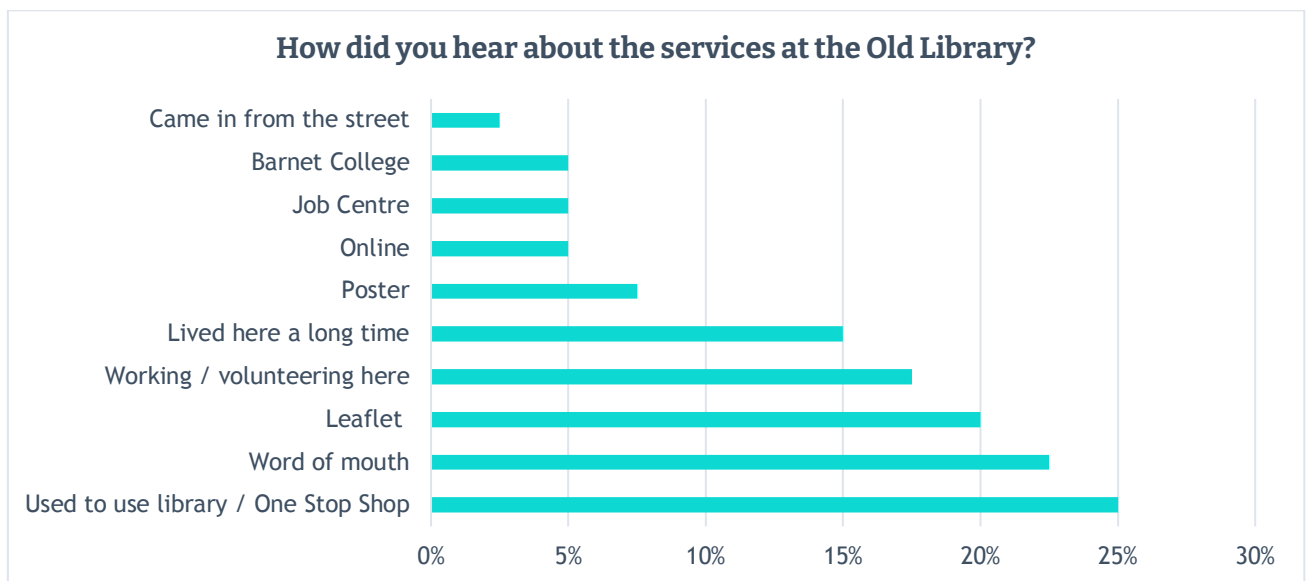
The CCT's 2021 Community Survey shows high awareness of the Old Library/ One Stop Shop among all demographics, with 92% of respondents overall stating that they have heard about it. Awareness was highest among older age groups. However, we found poor name recognition among some users of the space, who were unsure what the Old Library referred to, or confused it with the new library.

A range of approaches have been taken to marketing the services at the Old Library. These include the CCT's Activities Booklet, which is distributed to all households on Grahame Park, as well as leafletting in local businesses. Some project partners have promoted their services individually, through door-knocking or leafletting.

However, there has been little promotion of the Old Library itself as a resource, instead communications have focused on the different services and activities on offer in the space. COVID-19 has also created some difficulties around promoting the Old Library, as no launch event could take place.

Among our survey respondents, there was no dominant way of finding out about the Old Library and its services. Word of mouth, information through the door, or a previous connection to the One Stop Shop were cited equally. By contrast, the Community Survey showed that a higher proportion (56%) of participants heard about the Old Library from friends and neighbours, with printed materials taking on a much lower importance. Online engagement remains low, with both surveys showing that only around 5% of users hear about the Old Library online.

*"I found a community group before lockdown through a friend who introduced me. I joined the WhatsApp chat and heard about the events."
(Old Library user)*



NB: open-ended question, responses coded, some respondents indicated more than one source of information (N:40).

Barriers to use

A number of users raised concerns about getting to the Old Library. Some felt it was hard to find while others did not feel safe in the area. This echoes the findings of the CCT's 2021 Community Survey, where almost half of respondents reported feeling unsafe on The Concourse during the day and 67% felt unsafe at night.

A few users mentioned that health problems were preventing them from accessing more services. COVID-19 is also felt by project partners to have impacted the number of individuals engaging with services, in particular those with health issues.

“We're struggling to engage the people whose mental health has deteriorated over the pandemic and are not coming out of their houses. We've lost some of our core participants” (Project partner)

For some users we spoke to, the timings of activities meant they could not attend - some requested more evening activities outside of work hours, while others, due to childcare responsibilities, wanted more things on during the day.

A lack of awareness of what is on offer at the Old Library is also likely to be stopping people accessing services and coming into the space. Our conversations with users indicated a portion had little awareness of the range of services on offer at the Old Library - some expressed a wish to see services, such as employment support, that are already well-provided in the building.

Among those with more complex needs, engaging with services was noted to be a slow process which would rely on gradually building trust and relationships. This is a resource intensive process and there is limited capacity for such in-depth engagement.

High levels of awareness of the Old Library with limited engagement of new users, suggests there may be a lack of activities on offer to draw residents in. As highlighted earlier in the report, the Old Library does not offer a regular space for residents to spend time or have a coffee, while many activities are 'need-led' and may not have a broader appeal for residents.

Volunteering

There are volunteer roles available in the Old Library through the CCT and One Stop Shop - principally supporting the reception. A number of more informal voluntary opportunities were also mentioned, such as helping out at the bingo or with the walking group.

Since the re-opening of the Old Library four volunteers and seven work experience learners have contributed to the running of activities and services. This represents a slight fall in numbers of volunteers for the CCT. This was attributed to the impact of COVID-19 and a reluctance among some to return to indoor activities, as well as several volunteers successfully getting into employment.

We spoke with a number of individuals who had volunteered at the Old Library. Of these, the majority were female and between the ages of 45 and 64. Individuals we spoke to reported gaining confidence as well as work

*“Through volunteering I have accessed enterprise support... they helped me with action plans. It's gotten me back on track to the path of work and is going really well.”
(Old Library volunteer)*

experience, providing a step towards employment. Several also described the enjoyment they get from contributing to and building relationships in the community.

“I need to get back into paid work, so it is a step to building my self-esteem, meeting new people and keeping occupied.” (Old Library volunteer)

The majority of users we spoke to were not interested in volunteering, principally due to time constraints, or, among some older users, a lack of energy. A small number mentioned that they might be interested to volunteer but were not aware of the opportunities.

Resident voice

Priorities for the Old Library were established through the ongoing relationships and knowledge of the key project partners, rather than through a dedicated consultation process with residents. This was attributed to short the funding deadlines to put together the proposals for the Old Library, alongside the difficulties of engagement with COVID-19s lockdowns. The CCT’s 2021 Community Survey, which obtained responses from circa 270 residents, will inform provision moving forward.

Extensive consultation is also being done around the wider regeneration of the estate, including engagement with young people. This information is being used to identify residents’ views and input to the next phase of the regeneration scheme which will include new homes, a community centre and other amenities. The consultation is also identifying resident priorities for community activities and services being delivered locally.

Informal engagement and other feedback loops, such feedback forms, help shape individual projects and activities taking place at the Old Library. These include a Youth Forum which shapes activities delivered by the F.U.S.E. Youth Project. For more recently established activities, there has been little in the way of users shaping the design or delivery thus far.

At this stage, there is no ongoing dedicated forum for residents to shape the Old Library, such as a users’ group.

Action being taken: User focus groups are planned by the CCT to capture in-depth information relating to residents’ experience and priorities.

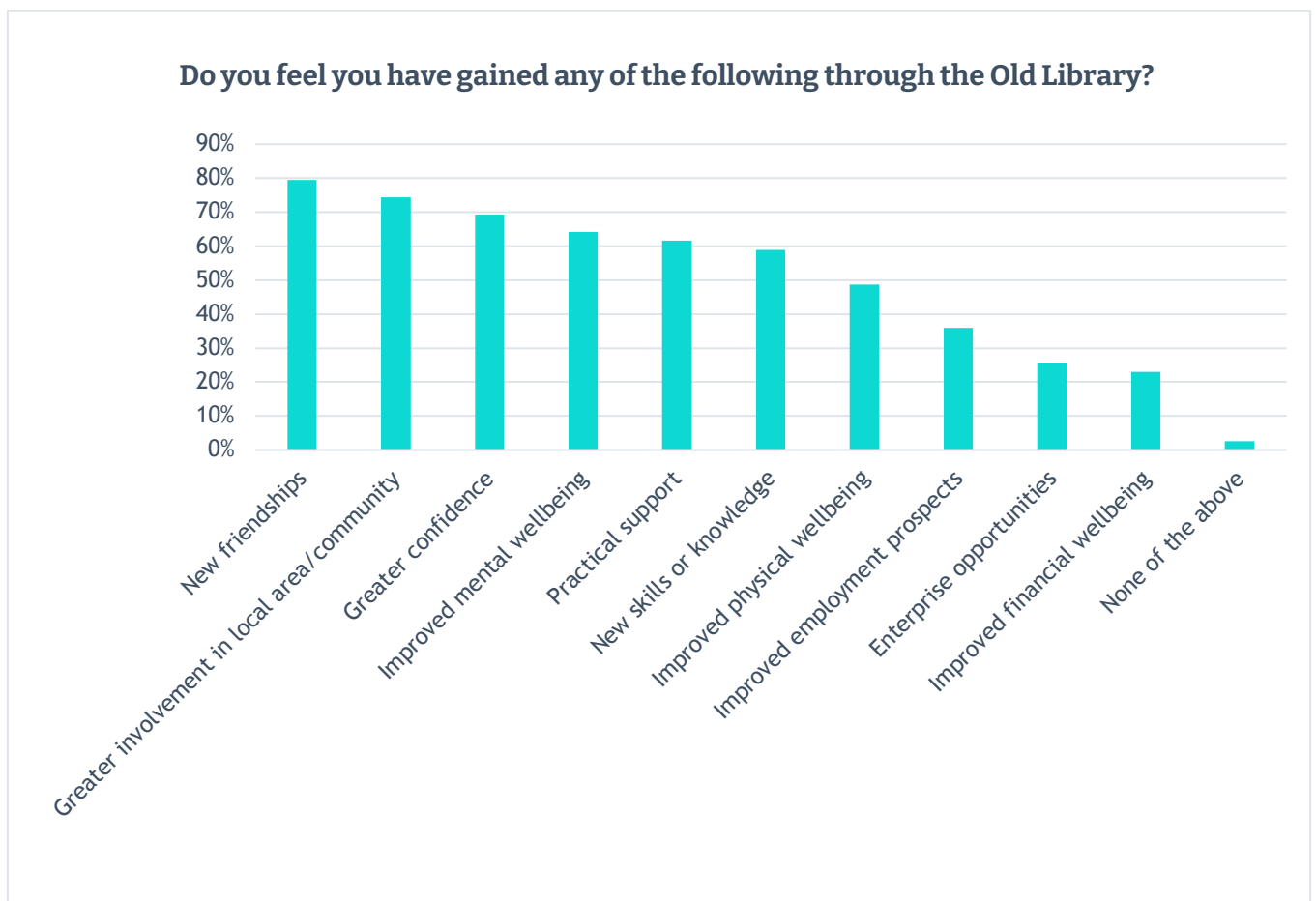
5. Impact to date

In this section we highlight some of the outcomes reported by users of their engagement with services and activities delivered at the Old Library. We also provide an indication of how the Old Library is contributing at this early stage to the three social value objectives set out for the Good Growth Fund. Lastly, we explore the role of the Old Library in the regeneration of the area.

What users have gained

The Old Library is supporting its users to build relationships. Four in five people we heard from reported they had gained new friendships through the activities linked to the space, and many also felt they had become more involved with their community. For some people, the activities were helping them overcome social isolation - many of these social activities were established prior to the renovation of the Old Library.

“The main thing is the friends I made. All so lovely and nice. During lockdown we would give each other a ring.” (Old Library user)



N: 40.

Over half of users we spoke to also felt they had gained confidence, improved mental wellbeing, practical support and news skills or knowledge through participation.

“This place is helping me and my mental health. It gives me something to do and be occupied with. The coffee morning has boosted my friendships and confidence. It also allows me to move around a lot more which is good, and the mind is active engaging in activities.” (Old Library user)

Economic inclusion

A third of the users we spoke to were accessing employment and enterprise support services offered through Make It Happen. Although some had received little engagement so far, feedback was positive; most felt the support was useful or interesting, and responsive to their needs. There were no issues identified around timing or flexibility.

Role in the regeneration

We asked how the Old Library had impacted people’s feeling about the regeneration of Grahame Park. Around two thirds of users we surveyed told us that it was positive to see some change. The increased availability of information, or activities for residents was mentioned by a few respondents, some felt any investment coming in or change was a good thing, or were optimistic that the Old Library might be the start of more improvement.

“Yeah, it's better they are finally doing something more and you can see the change now.” (Old Library user)

*“It makes me feel more positive about the regeneration. There’s lots more on offer now, you can do so much more than in the One Stop Shop and people are friendlier. The environment is more welcoming and supportive now.”
(Old Library user)*

For some users it had little or no impact on their views or experiences of regeneration. A few respondents highlighted concerns regarding their own housing situations which dominated their feelings about the change happening locally. Some cited the slow rate of improvement in the area, or anxieties around losing their homes.

The decline in services available on The Concourse was also mentioned by several respondents. The closure of the post office and the relocation of the library to another part of the estate were felt keenly by these residents. This suggests that bringing new life and amenities into The Concourse will be important in improving some residents’ experiences of the area.

The Old Library is helping to build up life and activity in Grahame Park’s central precinct. Beyond the walls of the building itself, it is at the centre of a new network of amenities including the outdoor gym and community garden, which should help increase footfall and improve residents’ sense of safety in the area.

The space is also creating the opportunity to build partnerships, engagement and test activities, which can inform the development and design of the future community hub, helping ensure it responds to the needs of local residents and partners.

Good Growth Fund outcomes

1. Bringing different communities together in a diverse and changing place

- The Old Library attracts an ethnically diverse range of users. There are considered to be some gaps - for example the local Somali community, or other recent migrant groups. Social activities tend to attract older residents who are predominantly female, this suggests they may be enabling mixing among a more narrow section of the community.
- The majority of services being delivered are targeted towards the needs of more vulnerable residents. While this is important in delivering positive social outcomes, there is less to attract newer residents moving into private accommodation and build bridges across the community.

2. To enable as many residents as possible on Grahame Park to have access to flexible employment and skills support within the community hub

- Under the umbrella of 'Make it Happen' a strong economic inclusion offer has been created, bringing statutory agencies together with tailored employment support services and skills development. This represents a unique asset for local residents looking for work, or to set up a business.
- Service users so far are positive and feel the support was flexible and responsive to their needs. However, at this early stage, some services are struggling to recruit users.

3. To create a space that will build knowledge, skills and community engagement to help develop a new community hub in the future.

- Training courses are well-established and drawing many users into the Old Library. These include courses designed to build skills to deliver community training, as well as youth leadership courses.
- There are a number of volunteer opportunities at the Old Library which provide meaningful experience and help build skills and confidence, however CCT volunteer numbers are down.
- Thus far, there have been limited opportunities for residents to become involved in shaping the space or activities.
- COVID-19 is likely to have impacted uptake and some activities are struggling to build engagement.
- The strong ecosystem of partners already in place is building relationships and testing approaches which will contribute to the design, delivery and effectiveness of the future community hub.

6. Conclusion

The Old Library has been successfully renovated into a new community hub for Grahame Park. Through the strong ecosystem of organisations it has brought together, it has gone a significant way towards achieving its aim of providing a holistic support system for local residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the Old Library's first months; the staggered arrival of partners, reluctance among some residents to engage, and the absence of a launch event lessened momentum around the opening. In recent weeks, there has been the opportunity for more linkages to be made among project partners. Forging these connections will be important in realising the potential of the hub.

New programming at the Old Library has been weighted towards economic inclusion around employment and enterprise. This responds to a previous gap in local provision. However, only a relatively small portion of residents will be actively seeking work, many others still will be in low paid work. Balancing services to meet this range of needs will be important.

Engaging more users is another key challenge for the Old Library as it moves forward. There appears to be high awareness of the facility, however drawing residents in will require more promotion and potentially a different mix of activities. Yet given the limited capacity of the space, it may be necessary to prioritise some resident groups, such as more vulnerable or isolated individuals, over bringing in a wider constituency of users.

For such individuals with more complex needs, building trust and relationships will be a first step to engaging with services. The CCT acts as a lynchpin in building these connections with residents. Strengthening the core capacity of the Library to do this groundwork will help ensure some of the most vulnerable are served.

Monitoring the future impact of the Old Library

Old Library partners have a range of targets to achieve tied to funding agreements. These centre on the quantitative outputs, such as of people engaged in activities or accessing the space, volunteer hours, or numbers of people progressing in relation to employment or enterprise objectives.

Ensuring the more qualitative aspects of the Old Library's work are also captured will be key understanding how it is delivering on its objectives and where improvements could be made. For example, beyond monitoring volunteer hours, this could include capturing the experiences of volunteers and what they gain from their positions.

A key aspect of the Old Library's value is in its holistic approach. Effective monitoring and evaluation should try unpick the extent to which users are accessing a range of services and whether signposting and referrals are working effectively. Reviewing the ecosystem and the strength of links between partners at a future date could also help illuminate how well the Old Library is

working as a hub. Tracking user journeys through case studies, or one-off studies could also provide insights.

Limiting duplication and diminishing consultation fatigue will also be key factors shaping monitoring. Many project partners have their own data collection systems in place and some gather feedback from participants. Users may have limited patience for further questionnaires - using community researchers to gather data could help, or using more informal or less structured approaches.

Recommendations

- Continue to strengthen links within the Old Library ecosystem by bringing together project partners through a range of formal and informal events.
- Build engagement by offering more services in the building that are a draw to a range of users. These could include stay and play sessions which appeal to local families, fitness classes at different times of the day for working residents and those at home, or film screenings which reflect the interests of particular groups.
- Promote the Old Library itself as a facility and community resource. This could be by building a dedicated online presence with a website and email, improving signage around The Concourse, creating a noticeboard outside with a timetable, or hosting an open day event.
- Develop outreach and promotion channels to build engagement. Approaches could include tapping into online residents groups to spread the word, or leveraging the communications of local partners such as Barnet Homes.
- Test more activities that provide a 'drop-in' feel, such as a lunch club, which allows users to spend time at the Old Library, or installing a coffee vending machine to draw in residents.
- Set up a user group or forum to provide ongoing input into the Old Library. This could build the skills and engagement of residents and develop community champions who will promote the Old Library in their networks.
- Develop a set of volunteer roles with project partners which appeal to a range of interests, time commitments and skills - these could range from one-off activities, such as helping out at an open day or bringing food for a lunch club, to more regular tasks such as greeting people at the Old Library, or being on a user group.
- Invest in the core capacity of the Old Library to develop engagement among residents, from developing relationships with users, managing volunteering, to promoting its services. Funding for this could be sought through trusts and foundations, or counterpart support from local partners or agencies.

Lessons for the future community hub

- There is a high demand for places to spend time or have a coffee locally. Creating a café within the hub could act as a significant draw for residents, provide a valued local asset and help cover the costs of the building.
- Designing a flexible and adaptable space that offers different configurations, as well as series of private spaces, will be important to ensuring all the potential uses of the hub can be catered to.
- Creating balanced programming and uses will be key in gaining a broad constituency of users from across a changing area. This may mean less of a focus on employment and more on community activities, or providing workspace to bring in a different groups of users.
- Creating a forum or process for meaningful resident engagement from the early stages of its design could help build involvement, skills, and a sense of ownership from the start. This could provide an opportunity to engage local groups who are currently under-represented to understand their needs and priorities.

Social Life is an independent research organisation created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. Our work is about understanding how peoples' day-to-day experience of local places is shaped by the built environment - housing, public spaces, parks and local high streets - and how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas.

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