



Changing places: stories of innovation and tenacity in five Birmingham neighbourhoods

Research commissioned by The Pioneer Group
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FOREWORD



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Foreword

There has been a recent renaissance in Birmingham in working at a neighbourhood level - from localised service delivery, community asset transfer and co-production, through to neighbourhood planning and more recently community-led housing. Birmingham City Council have set out their locality policy to shape a “better deal for neighbourhoods”, with a commitment to drive citizen governance, neighbourhood management, devolution deals and neighbourhood agreements.

A neighbourhood summit was hosted by the Place Directorate of the City Council in December 2016. This explored how practitioners, agencies and residents can work more collaboratively to make our neighbourhoods and communities the best they can be. A number of themes emerged, around coordination of neighbourhood data, partnership working, a recognition that one size does not fit all, how best to join up services, build community capacity and resilience, and ensure a neighbourhood focus in city-wide strategies.

Birmingham is home to excellent examples of community-based organisations and networks that have continued to exist, and thrive, despite the reduction of resources available to public services over the past seven years.

Between 2005 and 2007 the Home Office funded the national Guide Neighbourhoods Programme to explore the effectiveness of resident-to-resident learning in promoting positive change in neighbourhoods. Three Birmingham neighbourhoods - Castle Vale, Balsall Heath and Witton Lodge - took part in the programme, and cascaded the learning within Birmingham.

Taking the experience of the Guide Neighbourhoods, together with the key themes that emerged from the neighbourhood summit, we believe the time is right to establish a Birmingham-wide network of active neighbourhoods and communities. This can share learning and information, and champion and advocate for place and neighbourhood based structures and networks.

The Pioneer Group have commissioned this report to focus on the experience of five Birmingham neighbourhood organisations, demonstrating how they have proved resilient in navigating the challenges of public sector budget cuts against the backdrop of increasing poverty and need. These case studies of neighbourhood innovation and resilience are not the only examples of this approach in Birmingham. In Bromford, Witton Lodge, Handsworth and other places there are strong examples of sustained neighbourhood working, each with its own distinctive story to tell.

We invite you to join us to help our new network flourish!

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About this report

This report was commissioned by The Pioneer Group, to make the case for neighbourhood working and its contribution to Birmingham's communities.

The report is based on conversations with the five case study organisations and a review of data on four of these areas. The research has been carried out by Nicola Bacon, David Moynihan, Ife Akinroyeje and Paul Goodship from Social Life.

About Social Life

Social Life was set up by The Young Foundation in 2012 to work on innovation and placemaking. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live. We work in the UK and internationally.

www.social-life.co





Introduction: stories of innovation & tenacity

Introduction

This report describes how five neighbourhood organisations and networks in Birmingham have found new roles and purpose at a time of public sector austerity and growing social pressures, demonstrating the value and potential of local community-based neighbourhood working.

Many neighbourhood-based community organisations have struggled since 2010 as the funding streams that sustained them have dwindled and competition for other funding has intensified. However, in Birmingham, neighbourhood working has continued, supported by a number of hubs and networks that have taken entrepreneurial and imaginative steps to secure their futures. These are now providing a range of services to support communities hard hit by austerity, where many are experiencing profound poverty.

In January 2018, it was revealed that Birmingham had the fourth highest level of child poverty of all UK councils, 42 per cent of children in the city live in poverty. Birmingham Ladywood had the second highest child poverty level of all parliamentary constituencies, with 53 per cent of children in poverty. In contrast, in Sutton Coldfield only 13 per cent of children live in poverty.¹

Neighbourhood-based initiatives - neighbourhood management, neighbourhood policing and a stream of different regeneration funds - were a feature of public policy and public sector service delivery in the first decade of this century. With the change of government in 2010, both political support from government and targeted government funding streams became largely a thing of the past. As a council, Birmingham has had a commitment to devolving power and some resources to neighbourhoods and has experimented with different models of community governance and investment. The city is large and is home to different kinds of neighbourhoods, from Sutton Coldfield and Moseley's suburban centres, to inner-city Digbeth and super-diverse neighbourhoods like Lozells and Sparkbrook.

This report describes the work of five very different Birmingham neighbourhood organisations: in Balsall Heath, Bournville, Castle Vale, Stirchley and a smaller case study of Lozells.

In Castle Vale and Balsall Heath we see two of the original Birmingham Guide Neighbourhoods which have brought innovation to service delivery for more than 25 years. In Bournville we see a historic approach that has evolved and sustained itself over several generations. In Stirchley we see how an asset based approach has revitalised grassroots community activity in the area, bringing a fresh and dynamic approach to co-production. The fifth - Lozells - illustrates the effectiveness of a network of individuals and agencies who have come together over the last seven years.

All five have had to change and adapt to find a role and sustainable income over recent years, and all are innovating in how they meet the needs of their local communities, work with their partners, and develop new models of working that will make them resilient into the future.

Critical to their longevity and resilience - at a time the majority of similar organisations have failed - is that they have profound and durable relationships with their local communities, and that their plans and prospects are based on leveraging the value of capital assets. Without these assets, or networks of local relationships, their history over the last decade may have been very different.

Understanding Birmingham's neighbourhoods

Birmingham's neighbourhoods are diverse, between and within different areas. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (last updated in 2015) captures the complexity of different forms of deprivation. Three of our case studies - Balsall Heath, Castle Vale and Lozells - are in areas of particularly high deprivation. Deprivation influences a range of social outcomes from health to educational achievement.

Social Life have developed a method of matching data about residents' perceptions of place, taken from surveys run by government and research councils, to small local areas. This allows us to predict how people are likely to feel about their relationships with their neighbours, their attitudes to other groups and their levels of belonging.²

When we reflect on the experience of our four case studies we need to take account of the different vulnerabilities and assets of the local communities. We are used to thinking about the difficulties local communities face - crime, unemployment, poverty - all these are deficits, things that are lacking in an area. However our case studies all illuminate how the assets of an area, however deprived - the social relationships between neighbours and people from different backgrounds, the sense of belonging and local identity - can come together and support residents to get by, even thrive, in the face of adversity.

All the case studies have successfully leveraged their local social assets: from Balsall Heath's show of solidarity and determination to eliminate dangerous and damaging crime and prostitution, which catalysed the setting up of the Forum; to Bournville Village Trust's strong civil society and pride in the area; Castle Vale's proliferation of flourishing community organisations; Stirchley's new energy and activism, where new residents are joining with longer standing residents to improve their area; and the commitment and energy that key individuals and organisations in Lozells have put into their neighbourhood.



The five case studies

On the following pages are maps of data which paint a portrait of the wider area surrounding the case studies. These show levels of deprivation across the city, and how this changed between 2010 and 2015, and also predicted levels of belonging and local social relationships, created using Social Life’s method of mapping national data to small areas.³ These maps help us understand the context in which the different case studies are working, taking account of deficits - what is missing or problematic - as well as the social assets that support community life.

Castle Vale Community Housing

Castle Vale Community Housing is the story of long-term neighbourhood regeneration, catalysed by the physical transformation of the neighbourhood, now sustained by a number of neighbourhood anchor institutions.

Lozells

In Lozells, we see how a group of committed activists have come together to improve their neighbourhood through formal and informal networks.

Balsall Heath Forum

Balsall Heath Forum was set up after a particular set of issues around prostitution and anti social behaviour was tackled by grassroots action. This has been sustained by a powerful model of neighbourhood management for over 25 years.

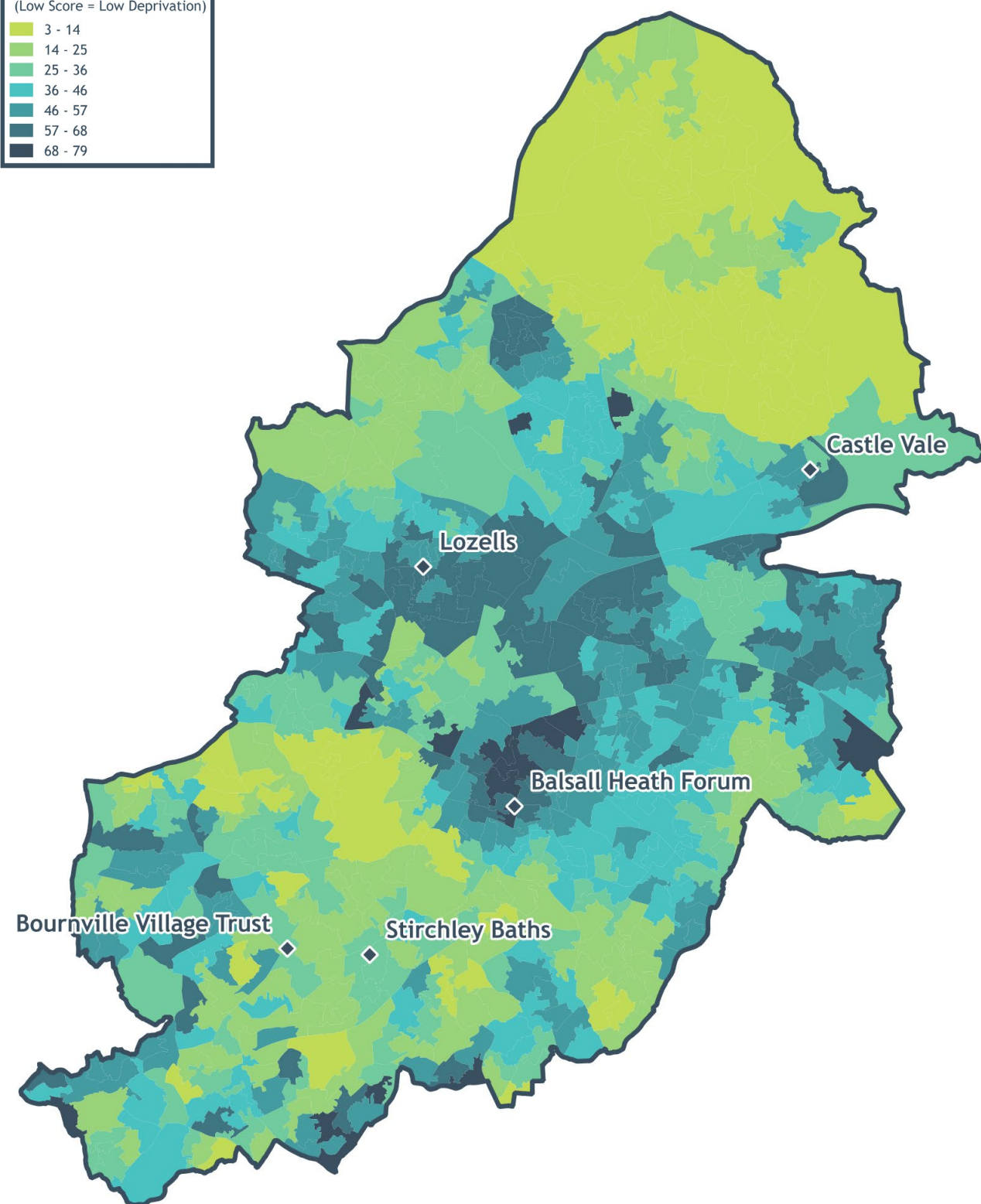
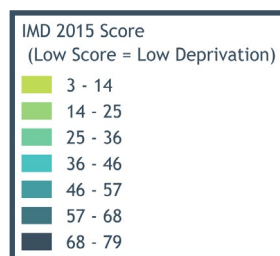
Bournville Village Trust

Bournville Village Trust is a story of how a neighbourhood has grown over time underpinned by the values of the Cadbury family and by a particular model of neighbourhood housing stewardship.

Stirchley Baths

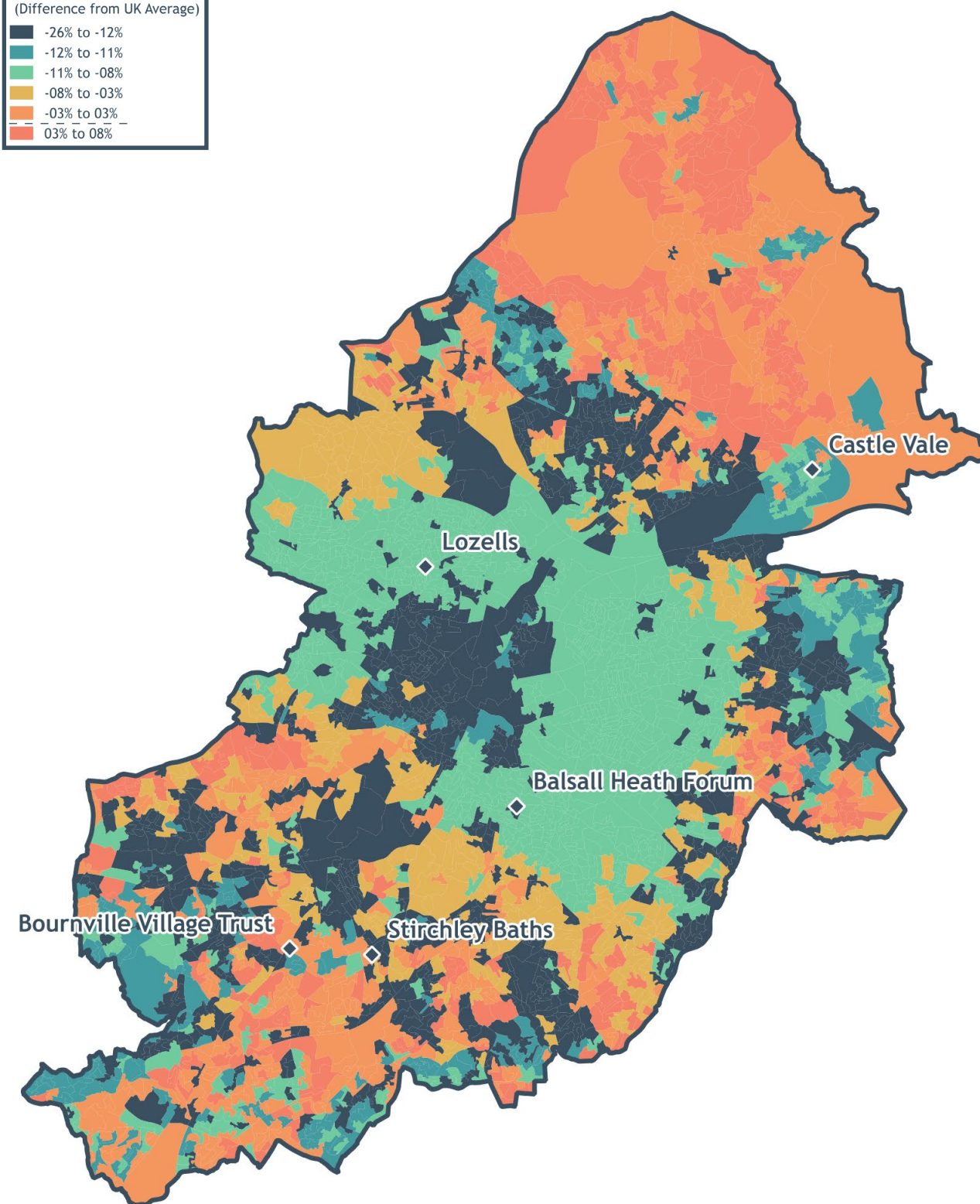
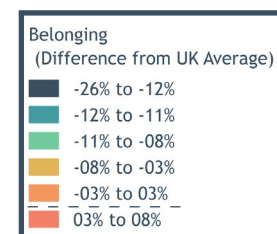
Stirchley Baths demonstrates how a major community heritage refurbishment has created a 21st century community hub, and breathed new life into the wider neighbourhood through an array of co-produced community activities.





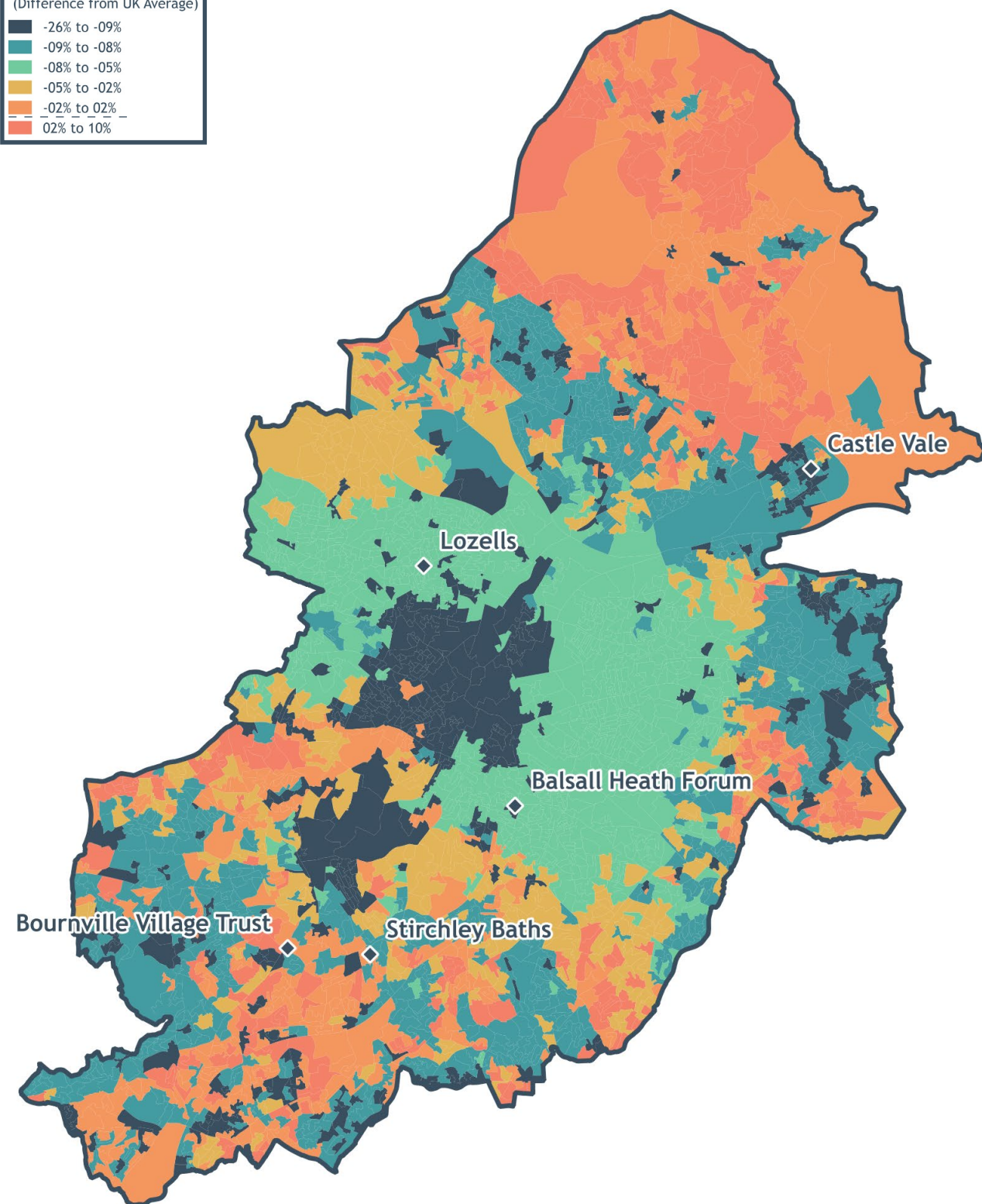
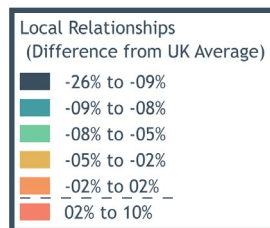
IMD score 2015

This map shows the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation - or IMD - which highlights the contrasts in affluence and deprivation between different areas of the city. It shows that deprivation tends to be concentrated outside the city centre.
Source: IMD 2015: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015



Predicted strength of belonging

This map shows how residents of different neighbourhoods are likely to feel about the places they live in terms of their sense of belonging, it is derived from Social Life's analysis of national data sets. It reveals that belonging is likely to be higher outside the city centre, especially towards the suburbs.
Source: Social Life 2018



Predicted strength of local social relationships

This map shows how residents are likely to feel about their relationships with others living in the same area, it is derived from Social Life's analysis of national data sets. It shows that the predicted strength of local social relationships is patterned similarly to belonging, however it is slightly higher in many areas outside the city centre.
Source: Social Life 2018



Case Study 1: Balsall Heath Forum

History

Balsall Heath is located in inner-city Birmingham. Formerly heathland, Victorian development in the area was tied to the growth of manufacturing in the city. Balsall Heath suffered bomb damage during the Second World War and, from the 1950s onwards, migrant workers, mainly from Pakistan, moved into the working class area. With the decline of manufacturing from the 1970s on, unemployment grew.

The area became known as a centre of crime and prostitution. By the 1980s this was openly taking place in the streets. In the 1990s the violence increased. Home owners in the area could not afford to move away, and many homes were virtually unsellable. The police and the council were seen to be ineffective in tackling the problem. Two murders in 1993 proved a turning point.

A small group of residents began to take action, picketing street corners, noting the license numbers of people looking for prostitutes, demanding “our streets back”. Churches, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, and other local organisations became involved in the campaign. The police and the council began to engage with the residents, supporting the new resident-led “Streetwatch” and blocking off streets to stop through traffic. Within as little as six months crime levels had dropped dramatically.

The Balsall Heath Forum emerged from this period of activism. Other local organisations including the St Paul’s Foundation, Anawin and the Jericho Foundation worked with the Forum to tackle the area’s problems, and give the residents voice and influence.

The Forum’s first offices were in the Benmore Estate. In 1995 the council offered a site on St Paul’s Road which needed considerable work. Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and the Home Office supported the new organization and emerging neighbourhood management structures.

The Forum became a neighbourhood management pioneer and part of the government’s “Guide Neighbourhoods” programme. A 10-person environmental team was set up to work alongside Streetwatch.

Balsall Heath Forum was praised by politicians - including David Blunkett as Home Secretary and David Cameron as Prime Minister - however it continually faced problems with funding. Although the council, housing associations and different government funds contributed financially there was no core asset or funder to hold the work together. The forum’s only long-term assets were its community supporters, its volunteers and the relationships it established with statutory services and local partners.

“Our proudest achievement is the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan, achieved 2011-15. It represents the wishes of the community, based upon extensive consultation. It is the first, and so far the only, neighbourhood plan in Birmingham. The challenge now is to make it happen on the ground.”

- Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath Forum

One of the Forum’s founders - sociologist Dr Dick Atkinson - had a particular interest in how the activities of the Forum and similar neighbourhood organisations saved money for the council and central government. The cost of policing the area before 1993 was estimated at £10 million a year,⁴ this was substantially reduced after local activism reduced crime.

There is evidence that as a result of the work of the Forum the local environment, the economic value placed on the neighbourhood (in terms of house prices for example) and social wellbeing all improved, well ahead of the Birmingham average.⁵

After 2010 and the beginning of public sector austerity, funding became increasingly scarce. After 2011 staff numbers reduced, the five-person warden team became one person.

However, using new powers introduced in the Localism Act 2011, the area became a neighbourhood planning frontrunner, the first neighbourhood in Birmingham to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan. A Neighbourhood Planning Forum was set up to lead this work. Consultation started in May 2011 and went on for the next year, including a series of communal meals and children’s workshops in the five local primary schools. Drafts were circulated through the newsletter “the Heathen” and at public meetings.

89 per cent of residents who voted for the Plan supported it - however turnover was relatively low, at only 22 per cent of local residents. On 8th November 2015 Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Development Plan was adopted into the City Council’s Local Development Framework and has been used since then to guide planning decisions in the area.

Interest in devolution of budgets continued, the forum was a pilot for Neighbourhood Budgeting.

The University of Birmingham attempted to quantify the benefits of the Balsall Heath Forum’s work.

Only some of the benefits of the Forum proved possible to analyse in economic terms, but they help to form a picture of the contribution of the Forum to the welfare of residents and to the cost-effectiveness of local public services.

- The value of public sector savings from reducing or dealing with fly-tipping, and the value of volunteering to improve the environment was calculated.
- Taken together, the different cost savings and social benefits calculated in the study amount to a total value of £172,802 (equivalent annual value).
- These activities were undertaken during four-and-a-half months by two members of staff - accounting for about £24,000 annual costs.

The benefit-cost ratio is over seven to one, this indicates a very positive benefit-cost ratio from Balsall Heath Forum’s enhanced activities.

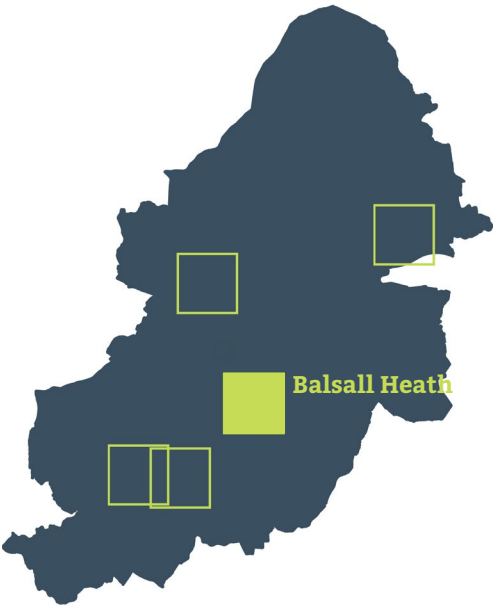
University of Birmingham 2016⁶

Maps & data

Balsall Heath is in an area of profound deprivation, some parts of the neighbourhood fall into the most deprived 10 percent of neighbourhoods nationally. Deprivation relative to other areas in the country did not change significantly between 2010 and 2015. Child poverty is significantly higher than the Birmingham average.

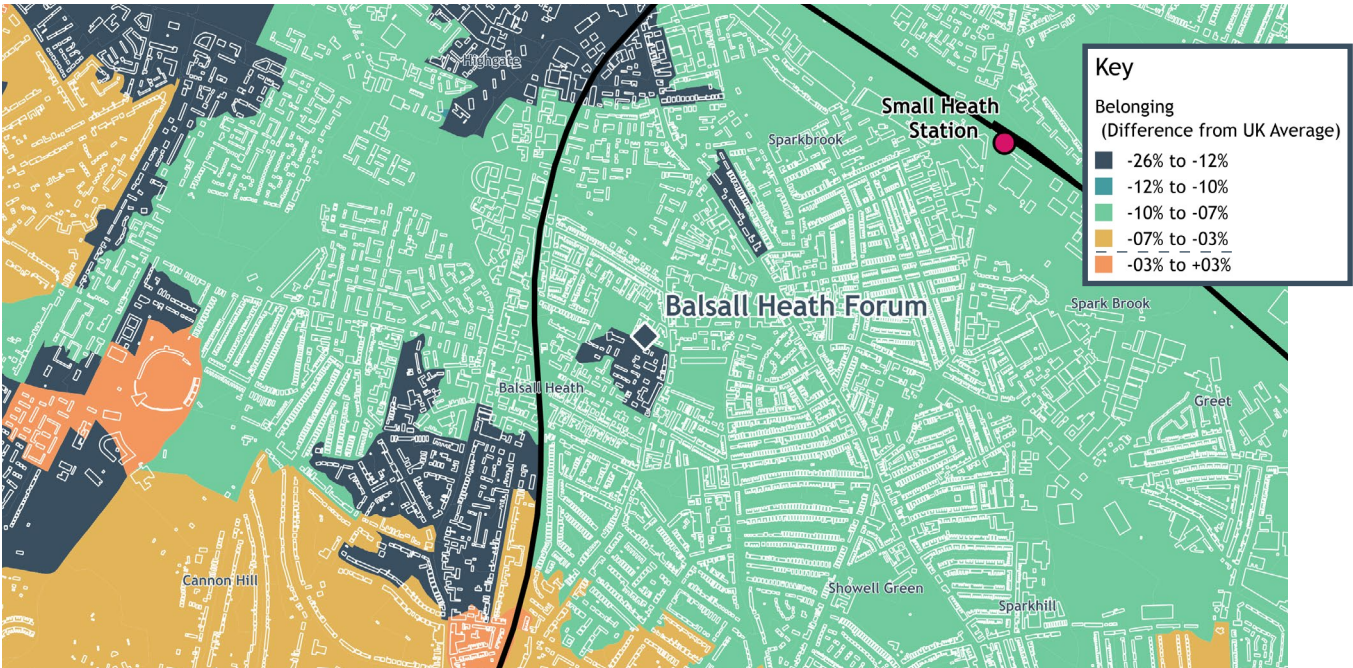
Social Life’s predictive data shows that residents’ sense of belonging and their perceptions of local social relationships are likely to be weak. However, comparing the predictive data with actual experience we see how the strong social relationships that have developed in the area, and the strong sense of local identity and belonging, are strong social assets in the area. These have been nurtured and leveraged by the Forum and other local community organisations. This has helped residents to get by, in spite of high levels of material deprivation.

	Balsall Heath Forum [Sparkbrook ward]	Birmingham
Child poverty after housing costs (2017)	56.3%	42.3%
Claimant count as proportion of residents aged 16-64 (Jan 2018)	6.8%	4.3%
IMD (2015)	10% most deprived	n/a



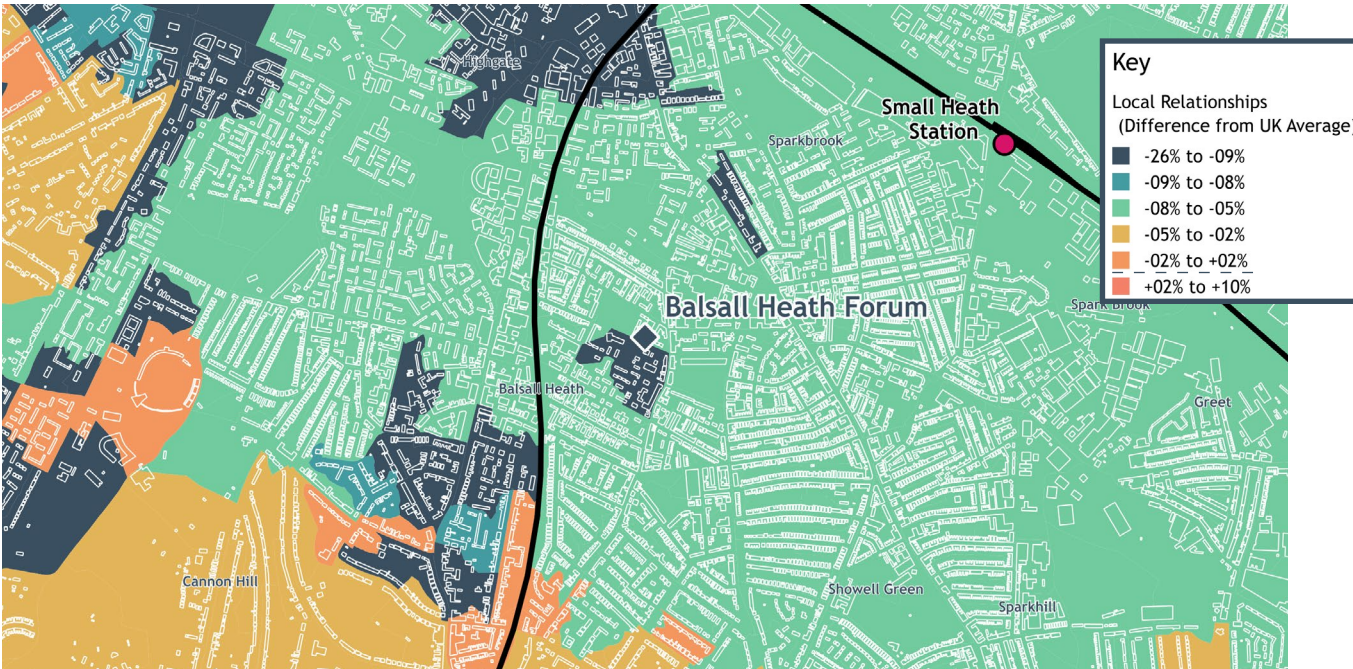
Data sources:

Child poverty: Compilation of child poverty local indicators, update to September 2017, Laura Valadez-Martinez and Donald Hirsch, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University for End Child Poverty
 Claimant count: NOMIS, Claimant count January 2018
 IMD 2015: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015



Predicted strength of belonging

This shows how belonging is likely to be weaker than comparable areas (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of belonging). However, actual experience has shown that this is an area with a strong sense of identity. The area is faring better than expected. Source: Social Life 2018



Predicted strength of local social relationships

This shows how local social relationships are likely to be weaker than comparable areas (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of local social relationships). However, as with levels of belonging, actual experience has shown that this is an area with strong social relationships at the local level and that the area is doing better than would be expected. Source: Social Life 2018

Governance

The Forum is a Company Limited by Guarantee, its membership is open to all residents in the neighbourhood who are over nineteen years old. There are several hundred members.

The executive is made up of 18 elected resident members. Each year the full membership elects six residents to the executive, while six step down. The eighteen select a chair, two vice-chairs, a secretary and treasurer. They also co-opt four others to join them, giving a total of twenty-two on the executive. The full executive meets every month.

In the wider area, 15 residents associations feed into the Joint Action Team, which also includes housing and the police. Sitting above this is the Neighbourhood Strategic Partnership, chaired by the Balsall Heath Forum. This was originally set up to manage devolved budgets, it is now developing a health plan.

Today

Balsall Heath Forum is dependent on small grants and income from their garden centre to fund their work.

“The biggest challenge is to continue to exist. The Forum is in crisis, with its previous major sources of funding no longer supporting it.” (Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath Forum)

The Forum describes its current work as having two elements: community safety and local environment. In partnership with the council’s Wellbeing Service, and funded by Sport England, a programme is also being run to encourage isolated people to become involved in the community. There is a wish to explore the possibility of social prescribing.

“Our strengths are the record of community involvement which has been built up by the Forum since the 1980s, and the resilient community networks which are the result of this, together with the accompanying sense of collective identity, which exists despite the various indices of deprivation which characterise the neighbourhood.” (Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath Forum)

The environment team’s capacity is now diminished - 2017 was the first year that the Forum have not been able to replant planters or hanging baskets. The focus now is on fly tipping, and educating residents about refuse disposal.

“The biggest challenge is to continue to exist.”

- Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath Forum

The “heart of gold awards”, an annual awards ceremony, has been held since 2010. Last year was the first time more awards went to women than men.

The Forum describe how in recent years, the local environment has declined and crime has increased, at the same time as their capacity to bring people together has decreased. New problems are emerging around gun and knife crime. One volunteer described, “brazen criminality that reminds me of pre-94 days - like open dealing”. The Police are also struggling with reduced capacity because of budget cuts.

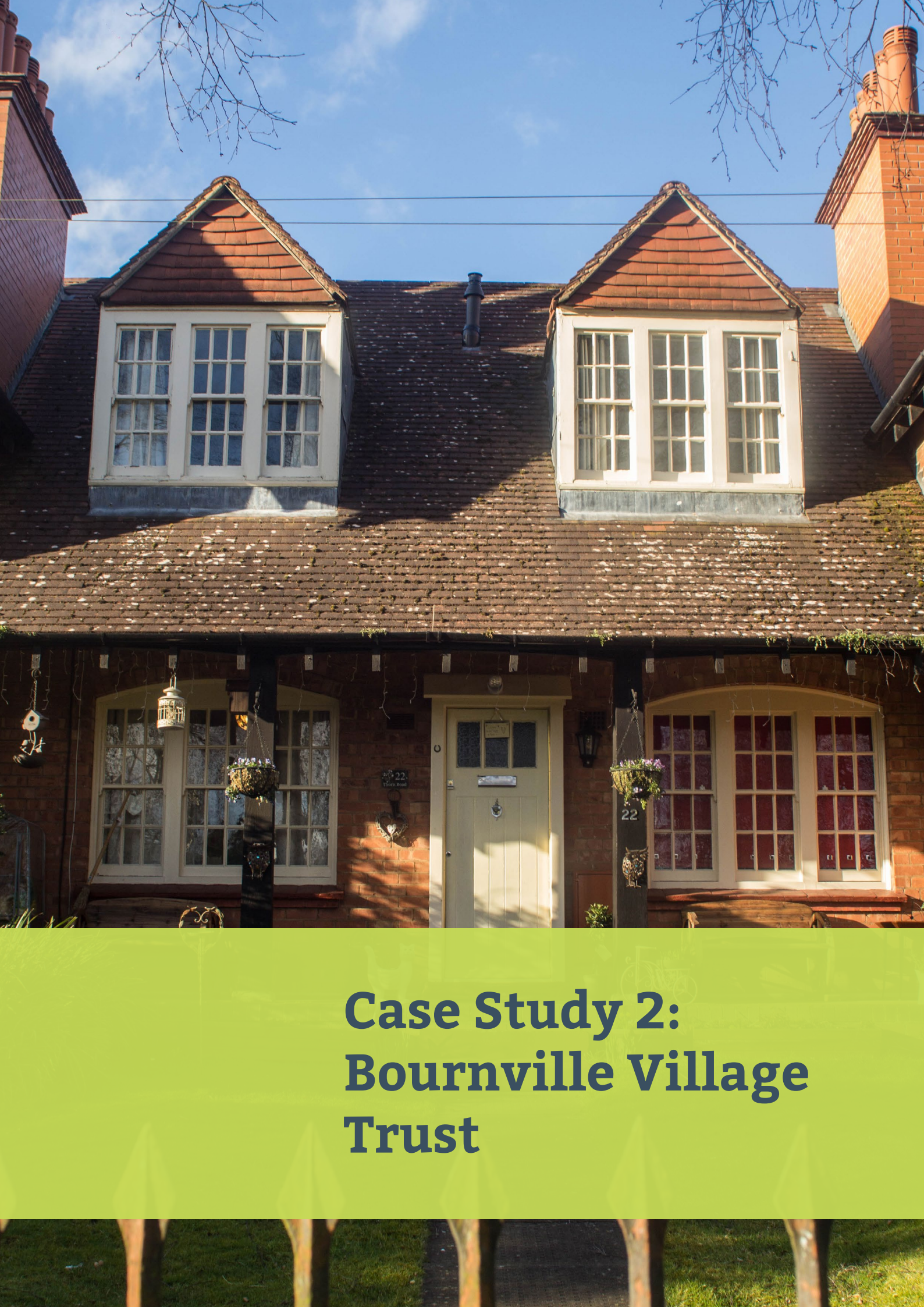


The future

Balsall Heath Forum has created an ambitious plan to develop community-led housing on the site of the school. This would give the Forum income and an asset that could help underpin a more resilient business model. The plan is in development and needs council support to go forward. Castle Vale Community Housing are helping develop this model.

“The Forum needs to reinvent itself, but it needs to identify sources of funding in order to achieve this.”

Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath Forum



Case Study 2: Bournville Village Trust

History

The charity Bournville Village Trust was founded by chocolate maker and philanthropist George Cadbury in 1900. George founded the Trust following the death of his brother Richard in 1899 to provide alternative housing to the slum conditions of inner city Birmingham. The establishment of the Trust meant that even after his death, the homes George had lovingly developed would still benefit those in need. Bournville was conceived for people from a wide range of backgrounds and not just for workers of the chocolate factory, which relocated from Birmingham city centre to Bournville in 1879.

Early in the development, George found people were buying up the beautiful arts and crafts homes to sell on for profit. His response was to build homes for rent. Known as the 'Ten Shilling' or 'Sunshine Houses', these homes were set at an affordable rent to help families on low incomes. Today, the Trust continues to be influenced by the Quaker principles of its founder, and homes are still rented to people on low incomes.

The design of Bournville has become a blueprint for many other model villages in Britain. The village has been credited with influencing the development of garden cities and introducing the benefits of open space into modern town planning.

Governance

The overall responsibility for the governance of Bournville Village Trust sits with its board of Trustees. Trustees meet at least quarterly and seven Committees are responsible for the Trust's detailed policies.

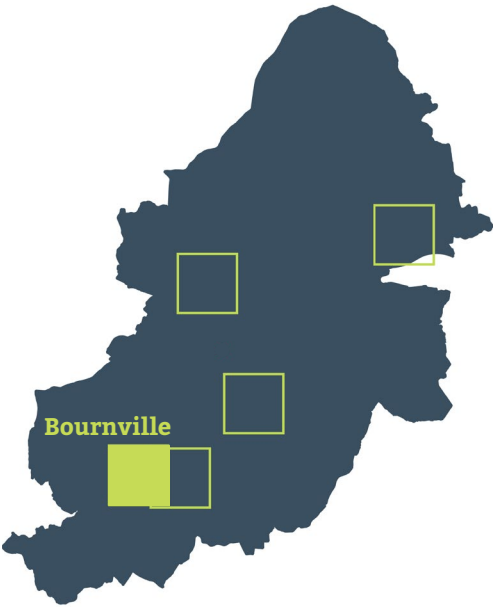
Originally it was stipulated that three-quarters of Bournville Village Trust's board be descended from the Cadbury family but this no longer applies. Currently seven out of 12 Trustees are from the family.

Maps & data

Bournville is a mixed area, deprivation scores vary between small areas with relatively low scores and small areas with scores above the national average. Between 2010 and 2015, some parts of the wider area improved in terms of their relative deprivation while others have stayed the same. Child poverty is significantly higher than the Birmingham average.

Social Life’s predictive data shows a mixed picture of residents’ likely attitudes to their area and to local social relationships, with some areas showing strong levels of predicted belonging and social relationships and others having weaker levels. This picture reflects the social mix of the area, and how Bournville Trust have been part of creating a community that brings together people from different economic backgrounds.

	Bournville Trust [Bournville ward]	Birmingham
Child poverty after housing costs (2017)	25.2%	42.3%
Claimant count as proportion of residents aged 16-64 (Jan 2018)	3.1%	4.3%
IMD (2015)	30% most deprived	n/a



Data sources:

Child poverty: Compilation of child poverty local indicators, update to September 2017, Laura Valadez-Martinez and Donald Hirsch, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University for End Child Poverty
 Claimant count: NOMIS, Claimant count January 2018
 IMD 2015: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015



Predicted strength of belonging

This shows how residents’ sense of belonging is likely to vary considerably across the area (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of belonging). However, despite the predictions, actual experience indicates that overall this is an area with a strong sense of belonging and local identity. Source: Social Life 2018



Predicted strength of local social relationships

This shows how residents’ perceptions of local social relationships a likey to vary considerably across the area (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of local social relationships). Nevertheless, actual experience has shown that overall this is an area with strong social ties and it is faring better than expected in that regard. Source: Social Life 2018

Today

Today Bournville Village Trust's Head Office is still in Bournville. However, its housing and estate management services have expanded across to other areas of Birmingham and Telford.

In the 1970s it became a registered housing association which gave it access to grant funding. The Trust currently provides services to 8,000 homes and 25,000 residents.

There are a mix of tenures and types of housing in Bournville. This includes homes for social rent and retirement housing, as well as supported accommodation for 16-18 year old care leavers. The Trust also manages commercial units and agricultural land.

Important current projects include a major development of new homes at Lightmoor Village in Telford, and a new care village in Bournville.

“There is much to be proud of but our master planning and partnership work to create College Green, our Care Village in Bournville, is something that we are particularly pleased with. It's a prime example of recognising the needs of older people within our communities and developing housing and social care facilities to meet those needs.

“By integrating housing and health in this way, we believe that we will be able to tackle a range of health concerns amongst older people including loneliness, which is often perpetuated by unsuitable housing, isolation and poor health.

“Developing new homes for older people has also allowed us to free up some of our rented family homes in Bournville for younger families in housing need.” (Annette Homer, Director of Housing and Community Services)

Bournville Village Trust has a strong commitment to mixed tenure. It is committed to pepper-potting different tenures throughout its developments, and to ensuring that tenure difference is not made obvious through design or position.

The overall aim is to create and sustain communities “where people choose to live”.

Bournville Village Trust are keen to continually improve their services and tackle the negative stereotypes that often appear in the media about being a social housing tenant, by sharing positive stories about residents.

There is a focus on long-term stewardship, which aims to make sure all communities are:

- a safe place to live
- a place where people are valued and everyone is able to make a contribution
- a place where people come together and demonstrate inclusiveness, diversity and sustainability
- a place where individuals and the community as a whole are empowered and motivated to take ownership of the community
- a place where opportunities exist and are promoted to improve individuals' health and wellbeing.

“We have a number of strengths as an organisation that will help us to thrive both now and in the future. We have a clear vision and values which shape everything that we do, from developing new homes in mixed tenure communities to providing valued community services that go above and beyond the work of many associations.

“Most importantly we have committed and passionate colleagues and trustees who work hard to deliver high-quality services that make a real difference to residents' lives.” (Annette Homer, Director of Housing and Community Services)

The work that the Trust does has significant challenges. Changes to welfare benefits from April 2018 will impact on residents and on the organisation as a whole. It continues to work in an environment with reduced funding, and services need to be continually reviewed and adapted.

“Like many housing associations, one of the biggest challenges that we face is supporting residents affected by the introduction of Universal Credit.

“The changes have already started to impact residents financially in Birmingham and we fully expect this to extend into Telford when this new benefit is rolled out later in the year. We have learnt that in areas where Universal Credit has already been rolled out, rent arrears have increased significantly. Of course it is our rental income that pays for the services we deliver and therefore it is imperative that tenants pay their rent.

“We have therefore put in place a dedicated Welfare Reform Officer and Income Management teams that are helping residents to manage their money, maximise their income and improve their digital skills, all to prepare them to successfully navigate the changes.” (Arthur Tsang, Head of Housing and Customer Services)

The Trust's homes and communities have proved sustainable and popular. Although low density housing is not the current focus of housing policy, Bournville Village Trust highlight that their homes have stood the test of time. To quote Chief Executive Peter Roach:

“it can be easy to overlook the role long-term stewardship plays but, without it, new developments can struggle to take root. New places don't become successful automatically, they must be nurtured.” (Peter Roach, Chief Executive)

The future

Regardless of the challenges they face, Bournville Village Trust are optimistic about the future of the organisation and aim to continue providing high quality housing and services to residents.

“If there was one thing that I could change to help our organisation over the next few years it would be for housing to be considered politically on par with health and education. To integrate health and social care, with strong links to quality housing provision is essential for the wellbeing of our communities.

“A secure and affordable home is a key ingredient in living a healthy and happy life and it's vital that the work of housing associations in providing social housing is taken seriously and supported.” (Jess Allan, Community Development Manager)





Case Study 3: Castle Vale Community Housing

History

Castle Vale Community Housing was set up in 1997, initially to develop and manage new homes on the Castle Vale estate after residents voted to create a Housing Action Trust. In 2003, 3,500 homes were transferred to Castle Vale Community Housing from the Housing Action Trust.

The Castle Vale estate was built in the 1960s. The original estate included 4,800 homes built in 34 tower blocks, of which 3,400 were council homes. A swimming pool, two churches and two shopping centres were constructed at the same time.

The new housing was initially welcomed by residents, but the problems of mass unemployment in the 1980s were compounded by deteriorating housing, and the estate fell into disrepute.

Castle Vale Community Housing's central aim since its beginning has been to break the seemingly endless cycle of decline that so many neighbourhoods experience, where one regeneration programme succeeds another, yet underlying poverty and disadvantage prove intractable. The housing asset that the organisation took on from the council has been critical to the organisation's growth and sustainability. It has meant that Castle Vale has avoided dependence on government funding programmes, helping it to be resilient in the face of change.

The physical regeneration of the Castle Vale estate included the demolition of over 30 tower blocks, and their replacement with 1,500 low rise homes. Social regeneration has now become the key priority, including a focus on reducing crime, increasing employment, and providing opportunities for young people.

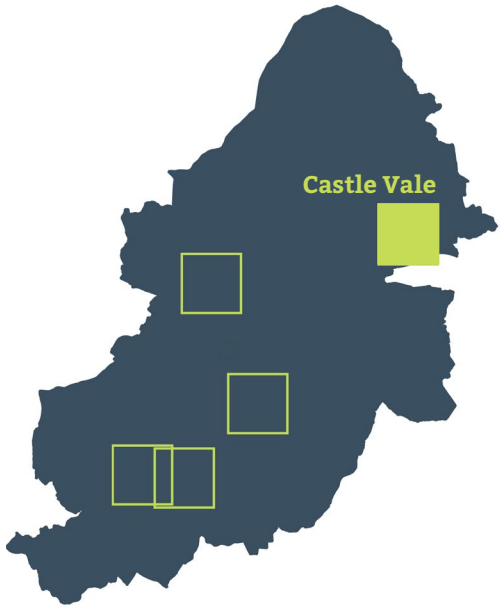
"Our proudest achievements are the successful community asset transfers of Castle Vale Library, pool and football stadium which are now managed on a sustainable basis by local third sector organisations; the role of partners in Castle Vale in helping to bring about a new build for Greenwood Academy - our new purpose built secondary school in the heart of Castle Vale; and the Castle Vale Flipbook published in 2017 which perfectly illustrates the rich diversity and vibrancy of community life on Castle Vale." (Ifor Jones, Neighbourhood Partnership Co-ordinator)

Maps & data

Castle Vale is in an area of profound deprivation, some parts of the neighbourhood fall into the most deprived 10 percent of neighbourhoods nationally. Deprivation relative to other areas in the country did not change significantly between 2010 and 2015, although in some parts it has worsened slightly. In spite of overall deprivation, child poverty is lower than the Birmingham average.

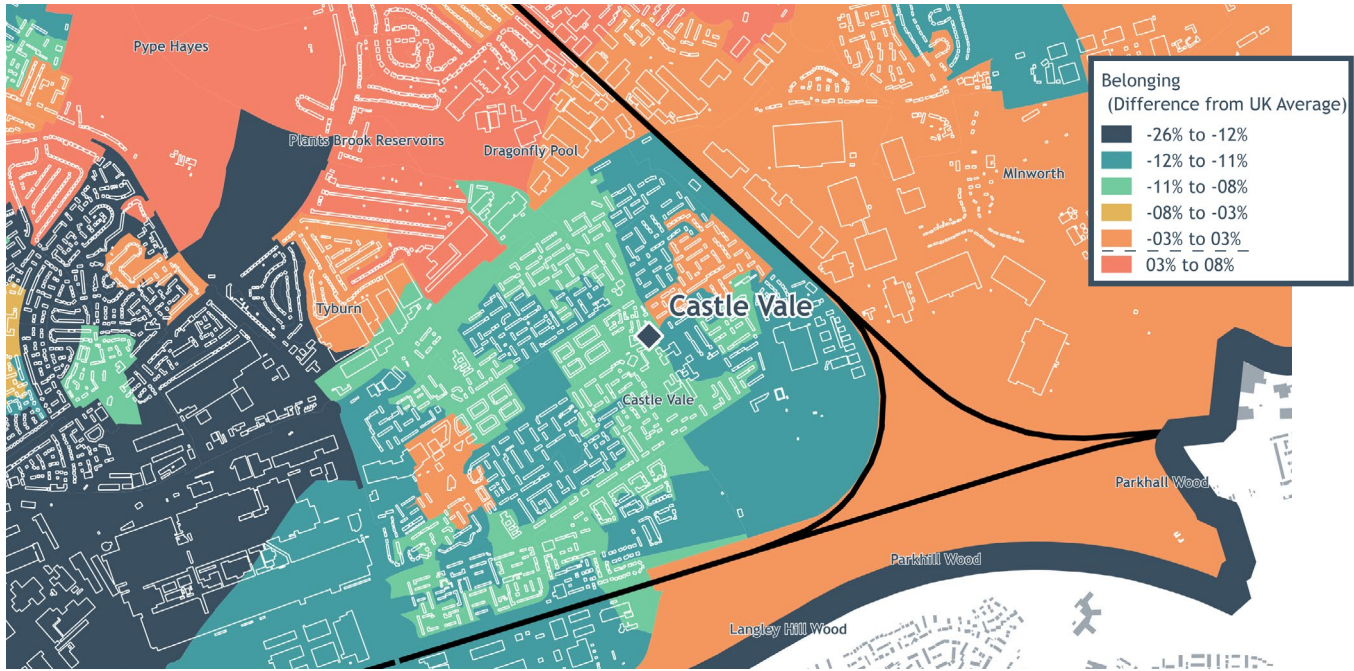
Social Life’s predictive data shows that residents’ sense of belonging and their perceptions of local social relationships are likely to vary across the area, although overall they are relatively weak. The strong social relationships that have developed in the area, and the strong sense of local identity and belonging are strong social assets, which have been nurtured and leveraged by Castle Vale Community Housing and other local community organisations. This has helped residents to get by, in spite of high levels of material deprivation.

	Castle Vale Community Housing [Tyburn ward]	Birmingham
Child poverty after housing costs (2017)	39.1%	42.3%
Claimant count as proportion of residents aged 16-64 (Jan 2018)	5.3%	4.3%
IMD (2015)	10% most deprived	n/a



Data sources:

Child poverty: Compilation of child poverty local indicators, update to September 2017, Laura Valadez-Martinez and Donald Hirsch, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University for End Child Poverty
Claimant count: NOMIS, Claimant count January 2018
IMD 2015: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015



Predicted strength of belonging

This shows how belonging overall is likely to be somewhat weaker than comparable areas, although it likely to be strong in pockets and in surrounding areas to the north and west (blue tones show low belonging and red tones show higher belonging). However, actual experience has shown that Castle Vale has a strong sense of belonging and that the area is coping better than expected. Source: Social Life 2018



Predicted strength of local social relationships

This shows how local social relationships are likely to be weaker than comparable areas, following a similar pattern to belonging, it is likely to be strong in pockets and in surrounding areas to the north and west (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of local social relationships). Nevertheless, actual experience has shown that this is an area with a strong social relationships, the area is faring better better than expected. Source: Social Life 2018

Governance

Castle Vale Housing Association became part of The Pioneer Group in 2015. The Pioneer Group was set up with Castle Vale Housing Association as its largest subsidiary. This repositioning enabled the organisation to widen its remit, recognising that a single area-based housing association would be weaker than one that was more diversified, geographically and in terms of functions.

The Pioneer Group has become network of complementary agencies, including Stockland Green Housing, Pioneer Places, and Compass Support - all working outside the neighbourhood footprint.

- **Compass Support** provides services targeting young people, families, vulnerable groups and older people from their base at **The Sanctuary**. They began as youth work providers but have grown their remit and locations.
- **Stockland Green Opportunity Housing and Training** is a new provider of affordable housing in North Birmingham - it is tackling the problems of poor quality private renting.
- **Pioneer Places** provides new housing, including through the re-purchase of homes, such as former Right to Buy properties, or empty homes. It offers market rented homes with certainty around rent levels, length of tenancy and quality of service.
- **Merlin Ventures** has now joined the group and provides Tiggy Winkles community nurseries in Castle Vale, affordable childcare to help parents in work.
- Separate from the Pioneer Group is the independent charity **Spitfire Support and Advice Services**, running the library and a community cinema. **Castle Vale Community Housing** commission Spitfire to provide advice, welfare support, and a drop-in to support people in financial crisis.
- **The Community Environmental Trust** delivers a Forest Schools programme, and manages the **Farnborough Fields Conservation Area** and **Castle Vale Community Pool**, which was transferred to the Trust from City.

Today

In 2015 The Pioneer Group announced a community pledge to set out their long term commitment. “This demonstrates that we are true to our values but also ensures we are investing in the long-term sustainability of an area where the majority of the group’s housing assets are located”.⁷ In 2016-17 this was updated, committing over £500m on top of core services. The remaining £1.5 million of the original £8 million Housing Action Trust endowment has been allocated for a neighbourhood fundraising programme. The goal is to leverage £1 million additional social investment up to 2021, and to bring in £250,000 a year after this.

In 2016-17 the community pledge investment was used to develop a “helping hands” service, run Digital Hub open days, support a new residents group for sheltered housing Phoenix Court, and to organise trips, car boots and activities to reduce isolation.

Castle Vale Community Housing Association runs and supports events to bring residents together, including afternoon teas for leaseholders, training residents in DIY, a volunteer fair, a photography project and a summer event “Rio on the Vale”. It provides free meeting places for residents, for knitting, arts and crafts, fitness and cooking or a catch up with friends. The 2016-17 Tenants Report cites other achievements: a partnership with the police and school, the Valewatch agreement, support for the pool group, the community café and facilities for young people.

Castle Vale Community Housing describe their strengths as their relationships with their residents, their internal culture of change and renewal, the quality of staff, the partnership structure, the dynamic and diverse community infrastructure, and their ability to leverage value from the substantial physical asset of their housing stock.

“In Castle Vale we have a number of neighbourhood anchor institutions which have developed into strong and sustainable institutions. These include Castle Vale Community Housing, Spitfire and Compass, and Castle Vale’s third sector organisations, the Community Environmental Trust managing the Farnborough Fields Conservation Area and local Forest Schools programme, and Castle Vale Community Pool delivering a range of wellbeing services.

Castle Vale local schools network - encompassing early years, four primaries and the secondary school developing a holistic approach through pupils’ journeys. A new long term Neighbourhood Plan overseen by the Neighbourhood Partnership Board and employment of a bespoke neighbourhood fundraiser.” (Councillor Lynda Clinton)

The local community is still highly involved in the running of the organisation, staff describe it as being “hardwired into governance... time needs to go into making it work and evolve, and to deal with emotions, good and bad”. They say: “it’s

essential to have challenge and thinking around us. If we get it wrong, they [the local residents] will be throwing eggs at us”.

There is a strong sense of local activism in the area. In 2012 the local secondary school, the Castle Vale Performing Arts College, had the worst GCSE results in Birmingham (and some of the lowest in Britain). Parents took direct action and protested vocally. As a result the school was relaunched with a new head teacher. The local third sector is rich and diverse, it is estimated that there are 100 different community organisations from church groups, to the Upcycling Group and Castle Vale’s Got Talent; these are beautifully captured in the recent Castle Vale Flipbook.

These local organisations, together with Compass and Spitfire, the Community Pool and Community Environment Trust form a network of provision and relationships which enable flexible responses to problems, for example Spitfire succeeded in retaining the local library when closure was threatened. Compass has built up skills and experience working with young people and schools, and is expanding outside the Castle Vale footprint.

Castle Vale has succeeded in keeping strong local partnerships going after Birmingham’s neighbourhood management and governance structures dwindled after 2013. The Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership was initially chaired by Lord Corbett, until 2016 by Lord Rooker, and now by the local MP Jack Dromey. Its third neighbourhood plan has just been drafted. This will focus on tackling the underlying social and economic inequalities on the estate: child poverty, low skills and high levels of life-challenging disease. It retains its mission of protecting and sustaining the quality of the built environment and neighbourhood, great quality housing, and strong and active communities. Statutory services are still engaged in partnership structures.

The future

The 2015 plan concluded that the physical transformation of the area is done but that the economy, and residents’ health and wellbeing are still weak. Residents in Castle Vale still aren’t getting the good jobs in nearby Fort Dunlop or Jaguar. There is still work to do.

“Our biggest challenge will be sustaining partnership working and delivering the Neighbourhood Plan given the budgetary pressures all agencies in the public and voluntary sector face. If we could do one thing to help the organisation thrive, it would be the successful implementation of our neighbourhood fundraising strategy which will continue through the fundraiser to bring investment into the plethora of community groups and community activities.” (Jack Dromey MP, Chair of Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership)

“Our biggest challenge will be sustaining partnership working and delivering the neighbourhood plan given the budgetary pressures all agencies in the public and voluntary sector face.”

Jack Dromey MP,
Chair of Castle Vale
Neighbourhood
Partnership



Case Study 4: Stirchley Baths

History

Stirchley Baths, formerly known as Bournville Lane Baths, was built in 1910 when Stirchley was a small village and most of the homes in the village lacked bathrooms. Many of its users were employees at the local Cadbury factory in nearby Bournville and the land on which the Baths were built was donated by the Cadbury brothers.

Designed in an Edwardian Baroque style, the Baths became a valuable local community facility, for bathing and swimming. The washing baths closed in the late 1960s, although the swimming pool stayed open until 1988. However, falling attendance compounded by severe structural problems with the building led to their closure. Led by a local residents' campaign, English Heritage gave a Grade II listing to the building in 1998 in recognition of its historic significance.



Though retaining its role as a familiar landmark in Stirchley, the building sat derelict for around 25 years and was home to pigeons and ferns. It was placed on Historic England's "at risk" register and it was approaching the point where urgent action was needed before the building became beyond repair.

In 2012, Birmingham Council developed a plan to restore the building and turn it into a multi-purpose community hub. Local residents accepted that it was not possible for it to reopen as a swimming pool. The restoration was made possible because of a capital receipt generated from the sale of the old community centre to Tesco, and a successful £1.2m bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

"The aspiration for the former Bournville Lane Swimming Baths, closed in the late 1980s, was to transform it from a well-loved and listed but delapidated eyesore into a 21st Century community hub ... Now Stirchley Baths is a well visited and much loved community hub with many different offers as well as the heritage, including community, arts and culture, health and wellbeing, learning, enterprise and commercial. You really can do anything from Arabic to Zumba and all in between!"
(Karen Cheney, Birmingham City Council project lead)

From the physical renovation (started in 2014) till now, there have been high levels of community involvement. Local residents were involved in co-producing aspects of building design, working with contractors, and in planning and programming. Residents, community groups, public sector employees and councillors acted as an informal wider stakeholder group, and a small number were directly involved as a steering group.

Residents were directly involved in the naming of the restored community hub as "Stirchley Baths" through a community competition. The building was originally known as Bournville Lane Swimming Pool. Residents were keen on using the "Stirchley" name to boost the neighbourhood's identity and also to keep "Baths" in the name to maintain the building's connection to its past use. Another resident-led suggestion was the creation of a community cinema in the space.

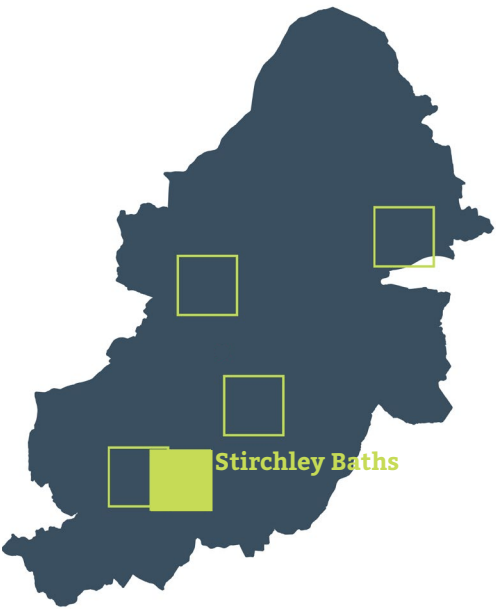
"The interesting thing about this project is the community engagement. We've been to so many public meetings and I don't think we have ever had a scheme which has had so much, and so many people wanting to know what is going on. The amount of people who have turned up at the forums and public meetings we've had has been incredible." (Architect, Mark Sloane)

Maps & data

Stirchley is an area of deprivation, however levels of deprivation vary across its neighbourhoods. Overall, deprivation worsened slightly between 2010 and 2015. Child poverty is lower than the Birmingham average.

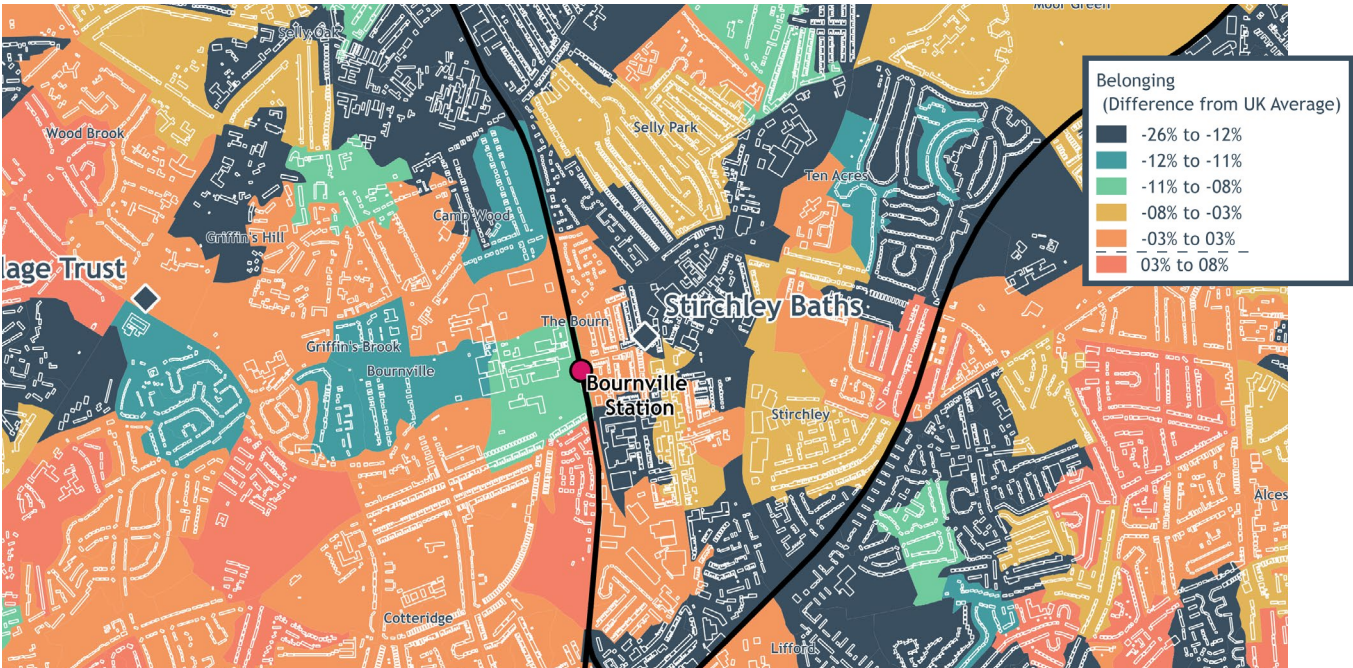
Social Life’s predictive data shows that residents’ sense of belonging and their perceptions of local social relationships are likely to vary across the area, with sense of belonging likely to be particularly weak in pockets. However, the strong social relationships that have developed in the area, and the strong sense of local identity and belonging demonstrate strong social assets in the area, which have been nurtured and leveraged by the Stirchley Baths restoration project and other local community organisations.

	Stirchley Baths [Bournville ward]	Birmingham
Child poverty after housing costs (2017)	25.2%	42.3%
Claimant count as proportion of residents aged 16-64 (Jan 2018)	3.1%	4.3%
IMD (2015)	30% most deprived	n/a



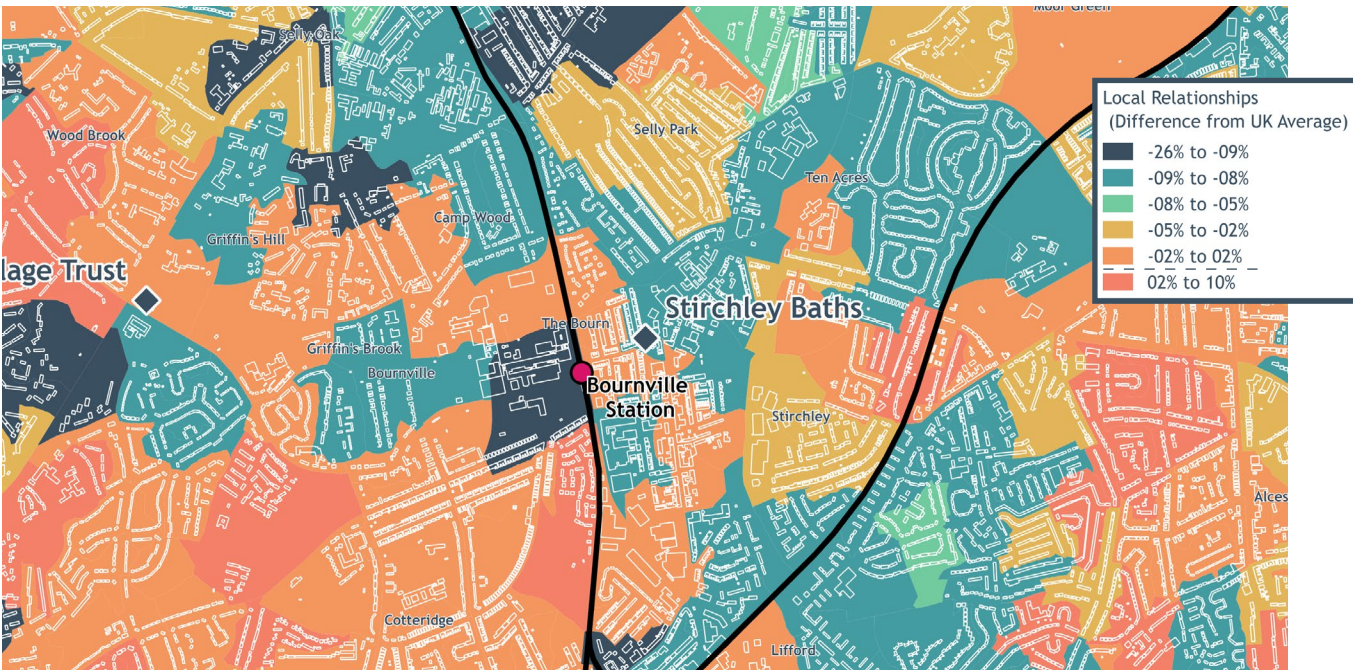
Data sources:

Child poverty: Compilation of child poverty local indicators, update to September 2017, Laura Valadez-Martinez and Donald Hirsch, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University for End Child Poverty
 Claimant count: NOMIS, Claimant count January 2018
 IMD 2015: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015



Predicted strength of belonging

This shows how residents’ perceptions of local social relationships a likey to vary considerably across the area (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of belonging). However, actual experience has shown that this is an area with a strong sense of identity. Source: Social Life 2018



Predicted strength of local social relationships

This shows how residents’ perceptions of local social relationships a likey to vary considerably across the area (blue tones show lower levels and red tones show higher levels of local social relationships). Nevertheless, actual experience has shown that overall this is an area where there are strong social ties. Source: Social Life 2018

Governance

The building is owned and managed by Birmingham City Council, but a key priority has been to enable residents to continue to be heavily involved in the life and running of the building. A very successful volunteer programme has run since the opening in January 2016. At first this was part of the Heritage Programme however it has expanded. Volunteers now provide general support including acting as weekend supporters, a maintenance task force, events volunteers, daytime “meet and greet” volunteers and a newsletter coordinator.

From the inception, digital and social media - including a website, Twitter and Facebook - were important in ensuring that the Baths were connected and networked with the Stirchley neighbourhood. This also allowed a wider audience to be aware of and involved in the hub.

The mid to long-term aspiration is for a transfer of the running of Stirchley Baths to a community group. The City Council staff team want to work with and support the community and ensure that community management is viable, and to support any interested group to succeed. The current pro-active, strong relationships with community groups and volunteers means that this aspiration should be achievable.

Today

Stirchley Baths has been open since January 2016, bringing back into community use an iconic and familiar landmark in Stirchley - a recognisable gateway into the area. It is regarded with great affection by local people.

The Stirchley area itself is going through transition. It used to be seen as a stepping stone for first time buyers who would move away when the opportunity arose. However it has now become a desirable neighbourhood in its own right, a place that people want to stay longer term. Young professionals and young families are particularly attracted to the area and are coming together in a number of active social networks, complementing longstanding structures such as the Stirchley Neighbourhood Forum.

Stirchley Baths plays an active part in these new networks and benefits from the new energy. The area is characterised as an enterprising and co-operative neighbourhood, it is also home to the crowd funded bakery “Loaf”, and a number of new cafes, a popular bike repair shop, the Stirchley Community Market and the “Stirchley, The Way Forward” group which brings together local businesses and community members.

“There is now a local community space available for use. There are regular exercise classes which I take part in, previously I would have had to travel to go to classes. The activities for children during the school holidays are great, my two young daughters really enjoy them.” (Local resident)

Stirchley Baths provides a wide range of community activities and services, including:

- a community café on site, run by a local Community Interest Company
- the Heritage Lottery funded heritage programme, an education programme, tunnel tours, a memory cafe and support for the development of Stirchley History Group
- a range of health and wellbeing activities, strong links with local GPs and a community approach to health and social care networks
- community arts, a base for the Selly Oak District Arts Forum and a Community Cinema Club
- education and learning, involving schools and bespoke adult learning courses
- co-working space for new community enterprises
- a venue for community activities and bookings, including groups from the old community centre
- capacity building and workshops for local groups and individuals about fundraising, social media, and Birmingham Community Matters
- sports and leisure activities
- commercial spaces, including bookings for conferences, parties and weddings
- a collection point for the local food bank and other fundraising activities, such as the First Night campaign and Stirchley Big Bake, which raises money for Birmingham Christmas Shelter.

Stirchley Baths doesn’t see itself as simply a service deliverer but more as an enabler, supporting community groups and citizens to put things on for each other and do “good stuff” in their neighbourhood - this is a subtle but important difference.

Some of these activities generate income, others are provided through grant or service funding. For those involved in running the Baths, balancing the commercial and community activity is important. Many activities are run by volunteers and the opening and closing of the building depends on them.

“People need to be aware that it is essential to develop and maintain a balance in programming activities at Stirchley Baths -that the local community feel a sense of ownership and relevance to the building but also that the building needs to be financially viable in order to keep it going. The centre takes commercial and private bookings but we also give reduced community rates and free bookings that benefit the local community; for example for Stirchley Community Market and Stirchley, The Way Forward group. It is about a balance between community benefit and value, and commercial viability.” (Karen Cheney, Birmingham City Council project lead)

Stirchley Baths has exceeded its original anticipated targets and outputs, both in terms of user numbers and income generation. More important are its outcomes for the local community. These include residents' sense of ownership, bringing different parts of the community together, supporting community cohesion, inclusiveness and integration. It provides an impressive range of activities and supports active citizenship, particularly through the Volunteers Programme.



The future

The renovation of Stirchley Baths has created a well-used hub for community activities. Those involved in the project believe there is much potential to expand its work to meet the needs of everyone in the area.

“It feels as if the baths are great at bringing all the different parts of Stirchley community together - through the heritage dissemination as well as other community events.

As the baths have such a big place in many people's hearts it feels having Stirchley Baths as a lovely venue gives people a sense of belonging to and pride in Stirchley back.” (Local resident)

Mini Case Study: Lozells

In Lozells, individuals and agencies have come together to take forward a number of initiatives and to work together to coordinate neighbourhood action. This grew out of the neighbourhood management programme between 2008 and 2011. When it ended, local residents and community organisations decided to keep the momentum going, and have done so over the last seven years.

A network of organisations is active in the area, including the Lozells Neighbourhood Forum, the Asian Resource Centre, Aspire and Success, St Mary's Convent as well as local councillors and residents.

“In the 1980s and 1990s Lozells didn't work when lots of money was being pumped into buildings. It did work when it began to focus on developing people and leaders. The 2005 riots were a catalyst for people becoming proactive within the community. Lozells has maintained success through building relationships and holding people to account.” (Councillor Waseem Zaffar)

One of Lozells's successful initiatives was created by a resident who turned spare tires into flower beds and put them in popular fly tipping locations, to stop people dumping rubbish. Residents took responsibility for watering the flowers. This ensured that local people cared for their neighbourhood and also prevented fly tipping. This is an example of how Lozells facilitates, whilst giving local people the responsibility.

There is a big stress on fostering better understanding between groups. For example, a cafe has been set up with Eritrean residents, helping this group feel comfortable within the community and allowing other residents to better understand the growing Eritrean population in area.

The area has high levels of deprivation, and social problems are increasing.

“Drugs are a huge issue in community ... people know its happening but are not doing anything about it; just hoping it'll go away. Cuts in housing and benefits have had a huge impact, destroying the fabric of Lozells. Families can't stay together, and many are forced to relocate to homes far from the community.” (Juma Begum, Asian Resource Centre)

One community activist described how there aren't enough council homes or housing association properties available, and how the costs of private renting are too high. But also described how people work together, through gardening and other activities, overcoming barriers.

“People take control of what happens in front of their homes.” (Shale Ahmed, Aspire & Succeed, and local resident)

Another community activist, Aftab Rahman, from Legacy West Midlands, has mentored people in the area for 10 years. He believes that the geography of the area and its clear natural boundaries have helped.

“There is a very strong community organisation and individuals who hold things together. No one dominant group. Power is shared.” (Aftab Rahman, Legacy West Midlands)



Conclusion: supporting Birmingham's neighbourhoods to thrive

Conclusion

These case studies show a range of approaches to mobilising residents and communities to tackle problems and improve local neighbourhoods. However, they are far from the only examples of neighbourhood working in the city of Birmingham.

In the Lozells area, a network of loosely-connected activists have been critical in taking action and galvanising community support for a number of different activities. This is very different to the formal structures of Bournville Village Trust, or the City Council-supported initiative in Stirchley. However, what is similar is the energy and commitment of local residents and the power of people, acting together, to respond flexibly and creatively to shape their neighbourhoods.



Our more long-established case studies, Castle Vale Housing and Bournville Village Trust, demonstrate what can happen when physical assets that generate income and surpluses are fused with community activism and support. How structures and assets can enable the community to thrive, and how community activism brings life and adds value to buildings and homes. In contrast, the work of Balsall Heath Forum, and activists in Lozells, show what local networks can manage with very little resource.

For the public sector, battered by years of funding cuts and facing growing pressures from increasing poverty and inequality, leveraging neighbourhood resources has become critical to city management. If the key local agencies, particularly the City Council, can support neighbourhood working in all its different forms, then local efforts can go further.

The support needed now is different to that needed in the past when substantial public programmes, often with national government support, were the drivers of neighbourhood working. In a time of few public resources, neighbourhood working has to be flexible, and networked. The public sector response needs to reflect this, by making contracts and statutory arrangements flexible and responsive, helping with relationships and networks, and providing resources and investment where possible.

This partnership of neighbourhoods and city will be needed in the future years to help Birmingham to thrive.

References

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- 7. Pioneer Group Tenants (2016) *Annual Report 2015-16*.

Image credits

Cover:	Stirchley Baths
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