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The Making of a Liveable Community at New Wortley, Leeds

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009 academics and students at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) embarked upon a design project with the community of New Wortley to provide a new community building. What transpired was something much more meaningful and profound. In the eight years since, a collaborative co-design process between LBU and a diverse collective of stakeholders has sought to establish a more cohesive and liveable community environment in Leeds' most deprived area. Passionate collaboration has empowered this previously marginalised community through a groundswell of mutual action referred to by the writers as 'Emergent Community Governance'¹.

New Wortley, an inner-city suburb of southwest Leeds is the city's most impoverished with 34% of people claiming out of work benefits. Rows of red brick back-to-back terrace housing were collapsed into their basement in the 1960's slum clearance. In their place, a Radburn design estate of poor quality semi-detached and adjacent high-rise dwellings were erected. The traditional high street has been slowly eroded by legislative moves and piecemeal demolition. Today New Wortley has little urban quality or identity to be proud of or relate to, it is a harsh and disconnected physical environment. This is matched by the social situation where the needle exchange at the pharmacy next door to New Wortley Community Centre (NWCC) is the most heavily used in Leeds. Coupled with the highest suicide rate in the city, New Wortley has an average life expectancy of just fifty years of age.



Figure 1. New Wortley, Leeds (Irena Bauman)

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New Wortley Community Association's (NWCA) aspirations had significantly outgrown their existing community centre, a 1982 building no longer fit for purpose and in need of repairs. Although the building has been in continued and popular use, little investment in its up keep and a total reliance on volunteers created a hand to mouth existence.

Having no funds to commission traditional architectural consultancy, NWCA approached the Leeds School of Architecture at Leeds Beckett University requiring a 'concept design' for a new community centre, situated adjacent to the existing. The purpose of the design work would be to act as the catalyst for fund-raising. The brief called for an inspirational multi-purpose space with commercial functions, enabling the centre to expand its reach and sustain itself in the future. Development of the project was overseen by Project Office, Leeds Beckett University's in-house architectural consultancy organised as a collaborative research facility between staff and students making ethical, social and resilient architecture, working with like-minded communities, organisations and individuals.

The new building opened its doors to the community on 29th July 2016. Funded by a £759,497 Big Lottery Reaching Communities grant. Delivering the new building on time and on budget proved a facilitator for continued further investment including an Our Place initiative grant, an NHS pilot scheme to create a Health & Wellbeing Centre and Power to Change funding to explore the creation of social housing. The new building supports an expansive range of activities, programmes and collaborations managed by NWCA including an ex-offenders programme, housing advice, employability skills, creative arts groups, health and wellbeing activities, youth groups, breakfast club, and much more.

This paper describes a co-design model where university students use their academic learning environments and productive endeavour to co-design meaningful and positive contributions to society with a network of social participants, as one strategy for creating Liveable Urban Futures. The paper goes on to establish the social and economic impact of the collective endeavour upon the community to date. The architecture project is only one part of the co-production practices within New Wortley. The writers have previously described this as 'emergent community governance'¹. The Community of Practice is changing the governance structures and methods of participation within the Community of Place.

DEFINITIONS

Co-design

The term co-design is used in numerous ways, including as an umbrella term for participatory design, and variants thereof, or co-creation. For the context of this paper however it is more specific. Co-design is the act, or methodology, used to enable forms of participatory design where all participants are learners within a 'situated learning environment' building on Sanders and Stappers² definition as "the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process". In New Wortley, this definition is furthered to inculcate the work being undertaken is *for* the non-design trained group of participants. The initial co-design saw a collaborative process between LBU students and community stakeholders to design and deliver a new community centre building, for that community.

Community

Halsey³ suggested the word *community* has "so many meanings as to be meaningless..." but this is the very word residents and activists use to denote themselves. Thus, in the context of New Wortley, the definition builds on Sutton & Kolaja's⁴ description as "a number of families residing in a relatively small area within which they have developed a more or less complete socio-cultural definition imbued

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with collective identification and by means of which they solve problems arising from the sharing of an area” but goes much further than a *number of families* to include a diverse collective, not all of whom live in the defined local vicinity, but all participate and have a vested interest in the social coherence, governance and regeneration of the area. Consequently, the notion of community in this instance has an extended affiliation to those engaged with the processes of making a more liveable New Wortley, and cites Wenger-Trayner’s⁵ definition, as illustrated in Figure 2:

1. Community of Place.
Everyone who resides within the geographic locale and subsequently are the intended recipients of NWCA amenities and services.
2. Community of Interest.
An amalgam of individuals and groups, external to the geographic locale, interested in working, supplying, or engaging with New Wortley.
3. Community of Practice.
The overlap between the Community of Place and Community of Interest, where members collaboratively work on specific projects to facilitate investment and continued improvement in this previously overlooked locale, including a number of political, professional and academic figures such as LBU, who have embedded themselves over a number of years.

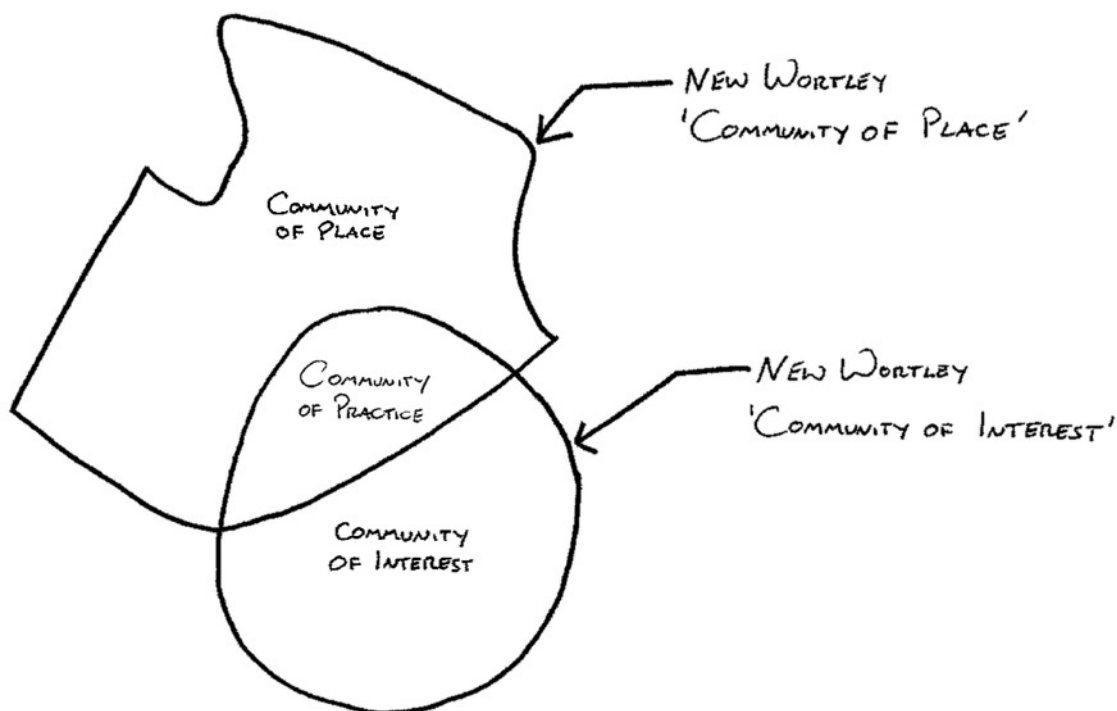


Figure 2. Relationship of Intersecting Communities

NWCA

The New Wortley Community Association is a volunteer organisation which has “existed since 1982 and works to provide services and support to the people of New Wortley, one of the most deprived parts of Leeds. We operate and run the New Wortley Community Centre, which is a hub for services and support. The Community Centre is owned by the Community Association, a registered charity and an organisation that exists to help the people of New Wortley. New Wortley Community Centre was the first community owned Community Centre in Leeds!”⁷

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A board of directors, all giving their time for free, oversee NWCA. It comprises five individuals (four of whom live locally) including a Leeds City Councillor, nursery manager and a pharmacist. It also employs a business development manager who was pivotal in the funding application process and the everyday running of the community centre, a catering manager and numerous others, whilst supervising the volunteer programme discussed in greater detail later. NWCA seeks to represent everyone within the Community of Place looking to engage with improving New Wortley as a liveable urban area and thus NWCA is used throughout this paper as the terminology expressing the output from the Community of Practice's collective endeavours. This includes numerous projects such as the new community centre building, pocket park, green walkway, Our Place initiative investment, health & wellbeing centre pilot scheme, and various other investments.

CO-DESIGN

The nascent co-design process forged between NWCA and LBU catalysed the series of impacts outlined in this paper. The model creates 'situated learning environments'⁸ where students, their live project educators, and client team all gain knowledge and understanding. Many third sector organisations are in desperate need of specialist input to improve their facilities and thus the services they offer, but have no finance to achieve this. Seeking support for such improvements requires a design and budget estimate, costing money the organisation doesn't have, and thus a catch-22 paradox. The solution advocated by this research uses the productive endeavour of a student body to generate the feasibility studies required for a client to obtain funding. In this instance, a second-year undergraduate architecture project in January 2010, resulted in a £759,497 BIG Lottery Reaching Communities grant to build a new community centre. The process was overseen by the University's in-house RIBA Chartered Architecture practice Project Office. Students from four further courses participated: Architectural technology, graphic design, product design and landscape architecture. In total the co-design engaged 196 people, including client team, principal contractor, volunteers and building consultants. Through participation, each individual meaningfully contributed to society whilst simultaneously learning from those around them.

David Harvey⁹ stated "the orchestrated production of urban image can, if successful, create a sense of social solidarity, civic pride and loyalty to place." To this end, the New Wortley co-design process and resulting new building, has generated such civic pride in the Community of Place that NWCA has capitalised upon the interest to grow beyond the range of services they had first imagined. Delivering the project on time and on budget has led to continued investment through bodies including Power to Change, Our Place, and the NHS, totalling nearly £750,000. The co-design also continues, a new entrance to the existing community centre building is being developed following another second-year architecture student's design, though the possibility of totally redeveloping the existing building into a new health & wellbeing centre is also being discussed. Ideas for social housing are about to be developed, with NWCA becoming a registered social landlord. A skills map is being curated to understand more about the social capital. A large proportion of the Community of Place live in four Leeds City Council owned tower blocks, many of whom are asylum seekers struggling to integrate into the area, but may have professions / trades which can be utilised. Thus, the skills map intends to aid migrant integration through deploying their abilities appropriately.

DATA COLLECTION

A series of studies have been undertaken considering the social and economic impact upon the Community of Place by NWCA's actions. Both are important. The project is about people, evidenced through qualitative responses, yet financial implications are more widely understood, supported and exported as exemplarily practice, through quantitative data, thus, both are collated.

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Initially a logic model was created, listing the full range of participants and stakeholders, resulting in a number of realisations. This led on to two surveys focusing upon crime & safety and service usage, followed by focus groups with service providers. A programme of bi-annual data collection is now in place, such that provisions are continually monitored, developed and improved upon.

The logic model is a live document compiled by specific community activists within the Community of Practice including the NWCC manager and Project Office. At the time of writing seventy-three stakeholder groups exist ranging from centre users and service providers, to local government agencies, university departments and many local businesses. It became clear through the logic model that a core component of the influence on liveability in the immediate locale is the range and quantity of interested parties involved.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Prior to the new community centre building, NWCA offered fourteen services over forty hours per week, run by two paid members of staff with the aid of eight volunteers. The creation of the new building, the interest generated and the additional space available means NWCA now has fifteen paid staff and fifty-three volunteers providing forty-two services over eighty-five hours per week.

Clearly the increased range of services available is beneficial to those wanting to use the community centre. User numbers have increased dramatically in line with the improved offerings, from just over 200 people per week in 2014, to nearly 900 per week in 2017, illustrating the greater influence upon those living in the Community of Place.

Impact of Paid Staff

The effect is further demonstrated when the situation pertaining to new members of paid staff are analysed. Thirteen new salaried employees were economically inactive for a total sixty-six years prior to their appointments by NWCA. Analysis of House of Commons Library¹⁰ data shows that in the most recent financial year available, 2011/12, the total UK benefits expenditure was £61bn, distributed across 5.2million individuals. An average unemployed individual claims £4,027 per year. In addition, the loss to the Treasury of potential income tax is an average of £7,703 per claimant. Thus, the overall cost to tax payers of an unemployed claimant is £11,730. Therefore, the sixty-six years of economic inactivity by the now employed individuals at NWCA cost the Treasury approximately £775,000.

The financial benefits are not limited to the Treasury. Eight of the thirteen new employees live within the Community of Place, with a further two living within a wider West Leeds area. A 2013 FSB¹¹ report suggests for every £1 spent locally, 63pence is reinvested in a local economy, as opposed just 40pence of money spent in large local firms (for example Asda). The report focuses upon small scale SME's, however the writers would assert NWCA is comparable as a small location specific charity offering a basic range of financial opportunities. Thus, through employing and investing in local individuals NWCA is stimulating economic growth within the Community of Place.

The notion of economic stimuli is further enhanced when NWCA's annual turnover is considered. In 2013 this totalled £80,522, £43,000 of which was trading income, £0 received for service delivery, £5,842 from room hire, and £26,750 from café and catering. In the immediate twelve months following completion of the new building on April 20th 2016, NWCA turned over £623,000; comprising £145,287 trading income, £43,000 service delivery, £37,500 room rental and £30,200 café and catering. An almost eight-fold increase in turnover in the first year exemplifies the manner of effect NWCA is having within the Community of Place and supports the figures of increased user numbers and service providers. An area to note is the café and catering section, which increased by just 13%. The potential reasons behind this are discussed later.

Impact of Volunteers

More difficult to measure is the impact relating to increased volunteer numbers of fifty-three from eight. A 2013 Working Paper by the Department for Work and Pensions¹² built on Meier and Stutzer's¹³ 2004 study of German reunification in an attempt to determine the value of volunteering using subjective wellbeing data that regular volunteers placed upon their activities. This should not necessarily be seen as an amount that people would be willing to pay to partake in voluntary work, rather it is the monetary equivalent of the wellbeing benefit derived from volunteering. At 2011 prices, the study estimated this value to be £13,500 per annum, thus with fifty-three volunteers each working an average of ten hours per week, NWCA can be said to influence local wellbeing to a tune of £178,875.

The wellbeing estimate is however difficult to interpret in such a manner because the cost is notional. A more relevant expression might be the value of a volunteer when match-funding their time, such as in a grant application. Guidance from Leeds Community Foundation¹⁴ to NWCA values volunteers at £11.20 per hour for this purpose. Therefore fifty-three volunteers, each working an average of ten hours per week, are collectively worth £284,928 per annum assuming a forty-eight week working year. This is equivalent to an additional 45% on NWCA's latest twelve-month turnover figures, and thus the impact and influence of the volunteers cannot be overlooked or underestimated.

The NWCA volunteers are called Team New Wortley; it is a diverse assembly with varying intentions and agendas, unified in their requirement for stability and a purpose enabling them to move forward. Some individuals have learning difficulties and thus see NWCA as a long-term supporter providing a safe and secure environment outside of their own home. Others are recovering from illness or addiction and use NWCA as a springboard to obtaining employment, some are retired and stave social isolation by integration. A growing number have full time employment but care so deeply about their Community of Place's continued improvement they offer their free time willingly. Thus, at the core of this liveable urbanity sits an enclave which shelters, feeds, upskills, and ultimately empowers its members to the benefit of the Community of Place. This is the crux, exemplified by the social impact statistics.



Figure 3. NWCA

Social Impact

Building on the logic model two surveys focusing upon crime & safety and service usage have been conducted, followed up by focus groups with service providers. Over 100 individuals have been interviewed to date with the results illustrated below. All questionnaires took place within the Community of Place, however a shortfall in the data is the likelihood of those being questioned to be at least aware of NWCA. A strategy of participation for those unwilling to engage is being developed but not yet implemented, should return more accurate results.

Despite this, the clear trend of results indicates the work undertaken by NWCA is having an extremely positive effect on the liveable nature of the Community of Place, whilst simultaneously engaging an ever-widening realm of Community of Interest partners.

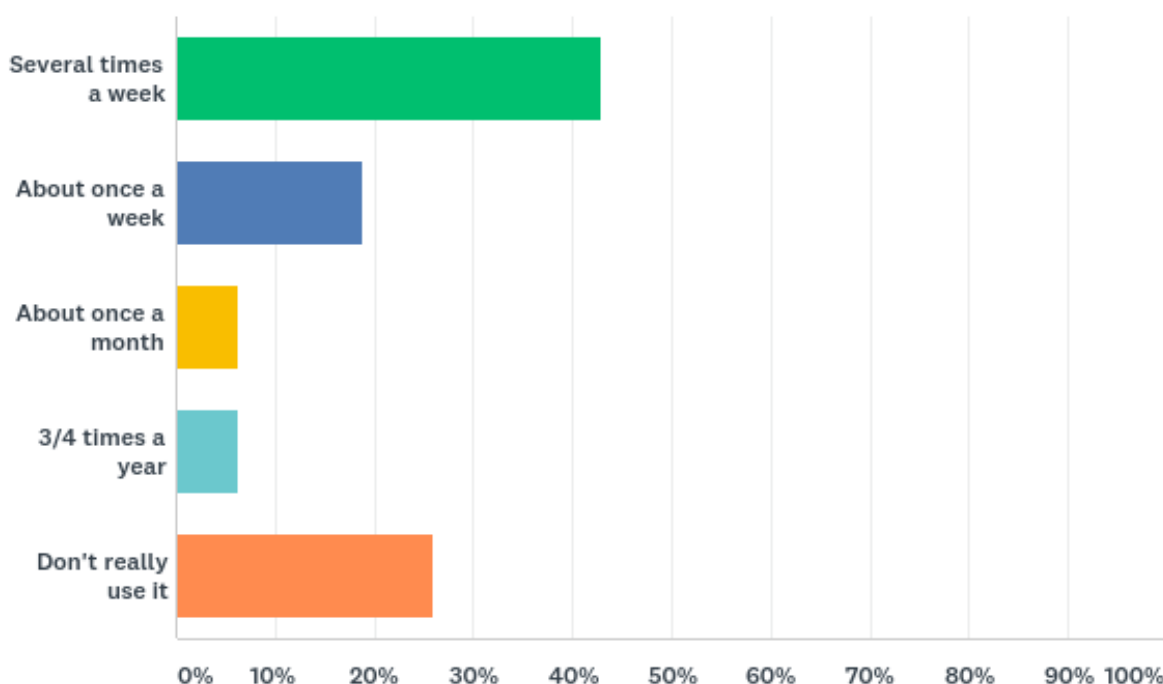


Figure 4. How frequently do you use the services and activities of NWCA?

NO	SAME AS BEFORE	YES	N/A	TOTAL
7.34%	19.27%	66.06%	7.34%	
8	21	72	8	109

Figure 5. Are you more likely to use the services and activities of NWCA now there is a new community centre?

Figures 4 & 5 should be considered together, with 66% of people questioned stating they are now more likely to use the NWCA’s services now than before. This is echoed by the 450% increase in participant numbers from 2014 to 2017. It is a remarkably strong indication after only 12months of the influence the new centre is having upon the Community of Place.

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LITTLE OR NO IMPACT	OK IMPACT	GOOD IMPACT	N/A	TOTAL
13.89%	10.19%	63.89%	12.04%	
15	11	69	13	108

Figure 6. Will services provided NWCA have a positive impact on your life?

Figure 6 is substantial in demonstrating the effect of NWCA upon the Community of Place, with 64% believing it is having a positive impact. It is likely that increased services aimed at helping people are the substantive reason for the increased usage statistics illustrated in Figures 2 & 3.

	NO IMPACT	A LITTLE BIT OF IMPACT	QUITE GOOD IMPACT	EXCELLENT IMPACT	N/A	TOTAL
Health & Wellbeing	17.12% 19	11.71% 13	24.32% 27	26.13% 29	20.72% 23	111
Education	28.18% 31	8.18% 9	21.82% 24	15.45% 17	26.36% 29	110
Employment	24.77% 27	10.09% 11	16.51% 18	14.68% 16	33.94% 37	109

Figure 7. Has being involved with NWCA had an impact on your health and wellbeing, education and / or employment?

Figure 7 states approximately 40% - 50% of those questioned identify NWCA as helping improve their health & wellbeing, education and / or employment. The importance of these findings is validated in an area where a third of adults are unemployed, 25% have no qualifications, with a further 37% having GCSE as their highest qualification¹⁵.

LESS SAFE	NO CHANGE	FEEL A BIT SAFER	FEEL A LOT SAFER	N/A	TOTAL
0.00%	28.04%	22.43%	32.71%	16.82%	
0	30	24	35	18	107

Figure 8. Do you feel safer in the Community now compared to before the new building opened?

Whilst the reasons have not yet been studied, NWCA feel the sense of greater safety and security felt by the Community of Place likely stems from the increased Centre user numbers and the associated consequence of individuals now knowing a greater number of the Community of Place populous. Further, the work being undertaken by NWCA is helping a growing number of individuals, with a specific target group of young men in danger of engaging in either gang culture or narcotic supply. A final component is the success of the prisoner greeting scheme, discussed below. Whatever the reason, the relevance of safety in social capital is crucial for continued local investment by, and within, the locale as discussed by Paul Whiteley¹⁶ who states that “Social capital is ultimately a set of social values and... that voluntary groups clearly help to facilitate the diffusion of trust throughout society” and perhaps more importantly that “findings support the idea, found in the work of several researchers, that values play a key role in explaining variations in economic performance, and they cannot be ignored in any properly specified model of economic growth.”

Prisoner Greeting Scheme

Run by a local ex-offender and NWCA volunteer, now a full-time member of NWCA staff, the Prisoner greeting scheme works with HMP Leeds situated less than a kilometre from NWCC. Already gaining national recognition following a Guardian¹⁷ article, the scheme seeks to help released prisoners from reoffending by aligning them with accommodation, benefits acumen and occupational opportunities.

The scheme has worked with eighty-two individuals to date. According to statistics released by the Department for Justice¹⁸, the most recent being 2015, the West Leeds reoffending rate is approximately 34%. Thus, twenty-eight of those individuals would usually reoffend. Only two have to date. Given reoffending costs are in the range of £112,500 to £168,750 per person¹⁹, the scheme run by NWCA has consequently saved the Treasury between £2,925,000 and £4,387,500. Factor in the £30,930 per year cost of an HMP Leeds inmate, and the figure in real terms is far greater.



Figure 9. Ken runs the Prisoner Greeting Scheme

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The positive impacts outlined in this paper are improving the quality of life for many inhabitants in the Community of Place, yet there is still a substantial amount still to achieve. The obvious downfall is people within the community as yet not being reached. There are numerous reasons including the range of services not yet providing something for everyone, a continued apathy amongst many members of this marginalised community, and a perceived sense by some of NWCA being a clique difficult to integrate with for newcomers. The Community of Practice will need to keep growing to be able to widen its effect over time.

In a strategic sense, the co-design process embedded at the core of this project highlights a number of issues which could discourage the undertaking of similar processes elsewhere. The single largest factor relates to the sheer investment of person-hours required to oversee and facilitate the project. Project Office has, particularly because of its privileged position within the university and the dedication of its co-directors, been able to provide service to the project over an eight-year duration to date. This means providing continuous facilitation, reflection and direction to the process, individuals

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and ensemble which manifests as a coherent whole. To do this successfully requires a dedication and sustained period of duty, which for many is unrealistic. The underpinning element in this experiment has therefore been longevity. Leeds Beckett University staff and students have worked with the Community of Place for over eight years to date, and continue to do so, which enables the commitment to be rationalised into appropriate parcels. This suggests educational establishments could contribute so much more directly to society.

A further issue, linked to the above, is reliance on the goodwill of participants in the Community of Practice. The process is open and anyone is encouraged to become involved. This can lead to frustrations and even arguments between collaborators, which are disruptive with potentially negative consequences. In co-design it falls to all participants as co-contributors to mediate when this occurs, attempting to ensure everyone remains engaged and positively contributing. However, as facilitator, Project Office's role is let this happen as naturally as possible with judicious intervention as required.

When co-designing, the aspiration is that all voices should be heard, but strong-willed participants can counter equal opportunity and forging the most beneficial path for the project; the opinion of he/she who shouts loudest must not necessarily prevail. In the co-design process therefore, a lead designer is required to remain impartial to safeguard objectivity and parity. On reflection, this is difficult to uphold in all instances. The writers' experience at New Wortley is amplified by some lovely but opinionated stakeholders who would strongly disagree with each other at times.

Another aspect of the collaboration between the community and the institution that required careful management by the educators is harmonisation of the client brief and the learning outcomes of the educational courses the students are enrolled on. Sometimes these do not match and the educators' responsibility is to make sure that where required the client brief be expanded in content or complexity to suit the particular course module that the student is engaged with. This can have the complication that without good communication to the Community of Practice there is a misunderstanding of what the aim of the work is. At New Wortley this was managed effectively through the co-design process, an example being the co-design for the landscape. The requirement was for a landscape strategy only around the immediate building. The landscape tutors felt this was not sufficiently complex to meet module learning outcomes, therefore the problem was discussed with key members of the Community of Practice, particularly board members. It emerged they had an aspiration to make New Wortley 'look' better. From this the student project was extended to the urban design strategy of an area much larger than that around the building. Students through the co-design process successfully produced a range of expansive and creative ideas. In this instance a simplified version was adopted which met NWCA's requirements for the area around the building. NWCA unsuccessfully (to date) applied for funding to carry out some of the aspects of the urban design strategy, however the success of the landscape design process is that by working through this paradox collectively, i.e. between the project's needs and student learning requirements a significant breakthrough was made in identifying and redefining the urban context through co-design. The urban strategy, although not implemented, remains an ambition of the community to achieve when capacity and funding is realised. The writers experience is that apparent paradoxical situations if confronted as opportunities will produce virtuous results.

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Figure 10. Landscape design presentation

When considering finances, the café has not performed as successfully as other aspects of NWCA's business model, probably due to an architectural error in the co-design process. For security, the new community centre building has one entrance requiring all guests to sign in, from here one may transition into the café. Passing footfall wishing to purchase a coffee are unlikely to undertake the process, thus the café should have been separately accessed. With redevelopment of the existing building a potential future phase, this is an element to address.

The final lesson to be learnt sees NWCA a victim of their own success. In the range of services now offered a number have become so popular advance booking is required, potentially alienating the very people they are designed to serve. The prisoner greeting scheme has outgrown the space available entirely, requiring NWCA to now hire additional offices. Whilst to be celebrated in one regard, these issues raise serious questions relating to the actual possibility of achieving what NWCA aspire to – reaching everyone within the Community of Place. Thus, whilst the existing building will receive a facelift and a small increase in space in autumn 2017, funding is now being sought to at least double the current footprint. The continued influence of NWCA, and impact on the liveable future of the Community of Place, requires it to be found.



Figure 11. New Wortley Community Centre

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research outlined in this paper exemplifies a non-standard practice for locally led improvements with the goal of creating a liveable urban future for the Community of Place in New Wortley, a component of which saw a co-design process between NWCA and Leeds Beckett University. The situated learning environment created through the endeavour of staff and students both galvanised a populous to take ownership of their locality, and provided the catalyst required to gain funding and grow influence and impact.

The co-design model undertaken in New Wortley and the aspirations of NWCA are ongoing and thus the areas for improvement identified are to be addressed as the project continues. Indeed, with each milestone reached, NWCA's intentions grow, meaning the eight years of collaborative working to date are likely to continue for at least that length of time again. The most recent development is a £75,000 Power to Change grant to develop a social housing strategy pilot scheme. The Community of Place's existing housing stock is inadequate for the majority and thus replacing this will, overtime, ensure many more members of the Community of Place collaborate with NWCA, with the likely outcome being a host of additional ideas for continued improvement.

NWCA now plays a pivotal role in its Community of Place and with a track record of gaining funding and delivering on intentions, intends to keep advancing until all inhabitants are offered a higher quality of life than they have become accustomed too, all of which has been made possible following the co-design process initiated in 2010.

In relation to LBU's role in this project, the writers have reflected profoundly upon how working with disadvantaged communities fits into education systems, specifically UK universities. The writers' know there are many more projects in the city region needing help to get off the ground, sadly because of the lack of capacity, Project Office has to turn away many similar projects. It is an objective to undertake further mapping exercises to determine the number of third sector organisations in Leeds who would benefit from co-design input.

Through the writers' initial enquiry, the range of support required is diverse, implying the model would work across many university subject areas including law, business, quantity surveying, engineering, health, dietetics, marketing, music, social care, etc... This further supports the ethos of this paper; co-design exposure to working professionally in multi-disciplinary environments equips students with the necessary skillset for professional careers whilst simultaneously providing vital support for third sector organisations, which ultimately creates a more liveable urban future.

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