



Project Report

# Mapping Communities in Gloucestershire

Produced for:

Gloucestershire County Council on behalf of Leadership Gloucestershire

By

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## Executive Summary

Phase 1 of the research found a wide range of initiatives, which divided roughly into those concerning local service delivery and those involving local decision making and priority setting. Not all of the initiatives are specific about the boundaries of their areas or how they were selected. The most common practice appears to be to base them on electoral wards or groups of wards (Bradford, Derby) or, less commonly, on groups of parishes (Herefordshire).or whole Districts (Staffordshire).

Only Wiltshire made a conscious attempt to base their community areas on 'natural communities' around market towns. This was based on a historical study as well as on public consultation and appeared to result in generally coherent areas with which people identified. Key community identifiers emerged in Wiltshire around schools, travel to work patterns and connections to local service centres. This confirmed a close alignment between people's notions of 'community' and the actual community areas delineated for the mapping exercise. It is possible that this was facilitated by the geography of Wiltshire which naturally centres on its market towns. Indeed, people expressed a strong sense of identity around the market towns, as might be expected, although this connection diminished, the further away from a market town that they lived. Wiltshire County Council is now introducing Campus Hubs, which will deliver Community services from a campus in each community area. This initiative is intended to deliver a huge cost saving, through a reduction in the number of office sites.

The aims of the initiatives studied tended to focus on identifying and meeting local needs and encouraging civic participation rather than specifically on streamlining or localising organisation. Richardson's (Richardson, 2011) review of Bradford City Council's scheme found good progress on service and neighbourhood improvement but less clear evidence on the second aim of encouraging active citizenship. However, many of the projects in the Herefordshire have been facilitated by extensive community involvement and some have led to other community initiatives and in Wiltshire, the Audit Commission (2007) identified an increase in satisfaction with council services. (Audit Commission, 2007, p.28)

Although saving money was not an explicit aim of the schemes, there does seem to be some success in reducing cost and streamlining Council organisation (report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Manchester City Council (2012) and report to the Scrutiny and Performance Panel of Staffordshire County Council (2009)). Additionally, some of the Herefordshire projects had brought matched funding into the locality. However, at least one council, Birmingham, seems to have abandoned its initiative on the basis of loss of funding and the need to make savings in expenditure.

The mapping of administrative and service delivery boundaries in Gloucestershire revealed that, although key service boundaries such as health and policing are closely aligned with administrative areas (county and districts respectively), there exist significant differences in spatial relationships between other service providers at a more fine-grained level with particular inconsistencies in some places. The importance of natural topographical boundaries and man-made physical boundaries, such as main roads and railway lines, was apparent. Also, the dominance of major centres of employment and commerce both within and without the County may have a significant effect on people's perceived communities.

The case study of the Neighbourhood Management Area of Swindon Village and Wymans Brook on the northern fringe of Cheltenham, whilst not necessarily representative, did highlight some interesting and relevant issues and allow some tentative conclusions on the nature of community in this particular area.

1. Physical boundaries such as major roads and railway lines are more significant to most people than administrative boundaries
2. Open space also acts as a boundary in the sense that it separates and defines settlements
3. Neither Swindon Village Parish nor the Neighbourhood Management Area has boundaries that mean anything to local people,
4. People tend to go outside the community for advice on official matters, but are likely to get practical help from friends and neighbours within the community.
5. The lack of an informal meeting place such as a village shop or a pub is seen as a limiting factor on community cohesion.
6. The friendly community and easy access to Cheltenham and elsewhere were the most valued things about living in the area, followed by the surrounding countryside.
7. Community leaders were split on the internal strength (or bridging social capital) of the community and on its external links (or linking social capital).
8. All four community leaders who lived in the area were adamant that the community would take action to protect its assets, although they disagreed on the chances of success.
9. There was a threat to the countryside around Swindon Village at the time of the research and an action group led by one of the parish councillors had been formed when the threat first became apparent.
10. In response to an enquiry as to what would make the community stronger, two respondents mentioned the need for a physical focus – a place where people could meet - and one mentioned the need for an issue to focus around.
11. It seems that whereas the village can and will work together to protect its valued assets, there may be less likelihood of a proactive campaign to provide or improve facilities.

In conclusion, it appears from this small study that 'community' is seen on village scale but can be quite exclusive of other places, even those that may share some of the village facilities. The areas with which people identify are strongly affected by physical boundaries such as roads and open space but not by administrative boundaries. It seems then that to introduce a neighbourhood system with which people identify it would be necessary to prioritise physical boundaries. Even so it is unrealistic to expect a sudden increase in community spirit and a flowering of the Big Society as a result.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of the Mapping Communities in Gloucestershire Project, as outlined in the project proposal submitted to Leadership Gloucestershire by the University of Gloucestershire, is to establish a baseline for the assessment of community boundaries in Gloucestershire and to enable service providers to take into account 'natural communities' in the delivery of their services. The following tasks were identified in order to achieve this aim:

### Phase 1

1. Review of relevant previous approaches to delineating 'natural communities' within and outside of Gloucestershire.
2. Map existing boundaries used by local government and other service providers in Gloucestershire;

### Phase 2

3. Conduct a detailed study of two contrasting communities within Gloucestershire in order to assess the extent to which local people identify with the boundaries assigned to them and investigate the availability of social capital to protect/provide services within those boundaries.

Phase 2 of the Project was carried out by The Countryside and Community Research Institute. In the event it was decided to study only one community in depth. The area was one of Cheltenham's Neighbourhood Management Areas – Swindon Village and Wymans Brook. Residents of the community and community leader were interviewed and asked to map key places and the area that they considered to be 'their' community. These maps were superimposed to show how they related to each other.

Section 2 of this report summarises Phase 1 of the research, which is described in more detail in the interim report. Section 3 explains the choice of case study area, Section 4 then describes this area. Section 5 describes the methodology used in Phase 2 and Section 6 describes the results. Section 7 then draws conclusions from both Phases of the research.

## 2. Summary of Phase 1 of the Community Mapping Project

### 2.1 Wiltshire Community Areas

The then Department of the Environment, in its Policy Guidance to the Local Government Commission for England in 1993, outlined the concept of 'natural communities' based on the idea that local governance works best if the local units of government have some resonance with people on the ground. (Layard, 2012). There was broad interest at this time in defining 'natural communities' and work undertaken by Eastleigh Council and in Somerset provided inspiration for the Wiltshire project. (Milton, 2012).

Wiltshire County Council commissioned a historian - John Chandler - to investigate what these 'natural communities' might be and where their boundaries may lie. Wiltshire then sought to further refine its natural community areas, in consultation with communities themselves, in order to deliver community, administrative, health, education and electoral functions. The objective was to create areas of a manageable size, somewhere in scale between the district

and individual parish level that offered meaning and connection for communities, and the possibility of local empowerment to effect informed change. (Wiltshire County Council, 2007). This idea has resonance in 2013, with central Government policies contained in the 2011 Localism Act. The resulting community map was then tested through consultation with the 256 town and parish councils and also with County Councillors (Wiltshire County Council, 2007, p. 11). The community mapping exercise generated 20 natural Community Areas for Wiltshire, each based around a market town or city as shown in Figure 1. In 2001 a Community Plan was established for each of the Community Areas.

In 2007 the validity of the community areas was checked against the range of services and facilities at each of the local service centres within each community area. This included analysis of school catchments, travel-to-work patterns, mid-point analysis of distances between settlements (a proxy for journey times) and other variables. Some changes to the transport infrastructure resulted (Wiltshire County Council, 2007, p. 13).

Community areas in the south and south west of Wiltshire have now been combined, leaving 18 areas in total. Area Boards exist for each of the 18 areas and Wiltshire County Council's website says:

*'The area boards are a way of working to bring local decision making back into the heart of the community. They are a formal part of Wiltshire Council that try to find solutions for local issues such as road repairs, traffic problems and speeding in villages, litter, facilities for young people and affordable housing.'*

*People who work with the 18 area boards include councillors, community area managers, democratic service officers together with one member of the council's top decision making committee, the cabinet. It also includes the local NHS, fire and emergency services, police, town and parish councils, community area partnerships and many other groups.*

*By working in partnership with local communities, the council can achieve so much more than it ever could on its own. We hope this will lead to better services, better communities and a better quality of life for everyone in Wiltshire.'*

(<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/areaboards.htm> accessed 3rd March 2014)

Over time, more and more service provision and delivery has been overlaid onto the framework, and notions of community shape have become embedded. The new localism agenda, and the devolution of services to communities themselves, reinforce the importance of this framework and give communities some ownership of their future and direction (Milton, 2012). The November 2012 Area Board team's newsletter 'Localism in Action' announces the launch of community blogs linked to the Community Areas.

Wiltshire County Council is now introducing Campus Hubs, which will deliver Community services from a campus in each community area. This initiative is intended to deliver a huge cost saving, through a reduction in the number of office sites. They are being marketed as community hubs and a public consultation is taking place to establish the facilities that people would like included

(<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/communityandliving/communitycampuses.htm#Community-campuses-where-what-Anchor> accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014).

However, it could be argued that the geography of Wiltshire makes it possible to have reasonably equally sized community areas based around market towns that might not be possible elsewhere. Part 2 of Phase one looked at initiatives to devolve governance in other local authority areas.

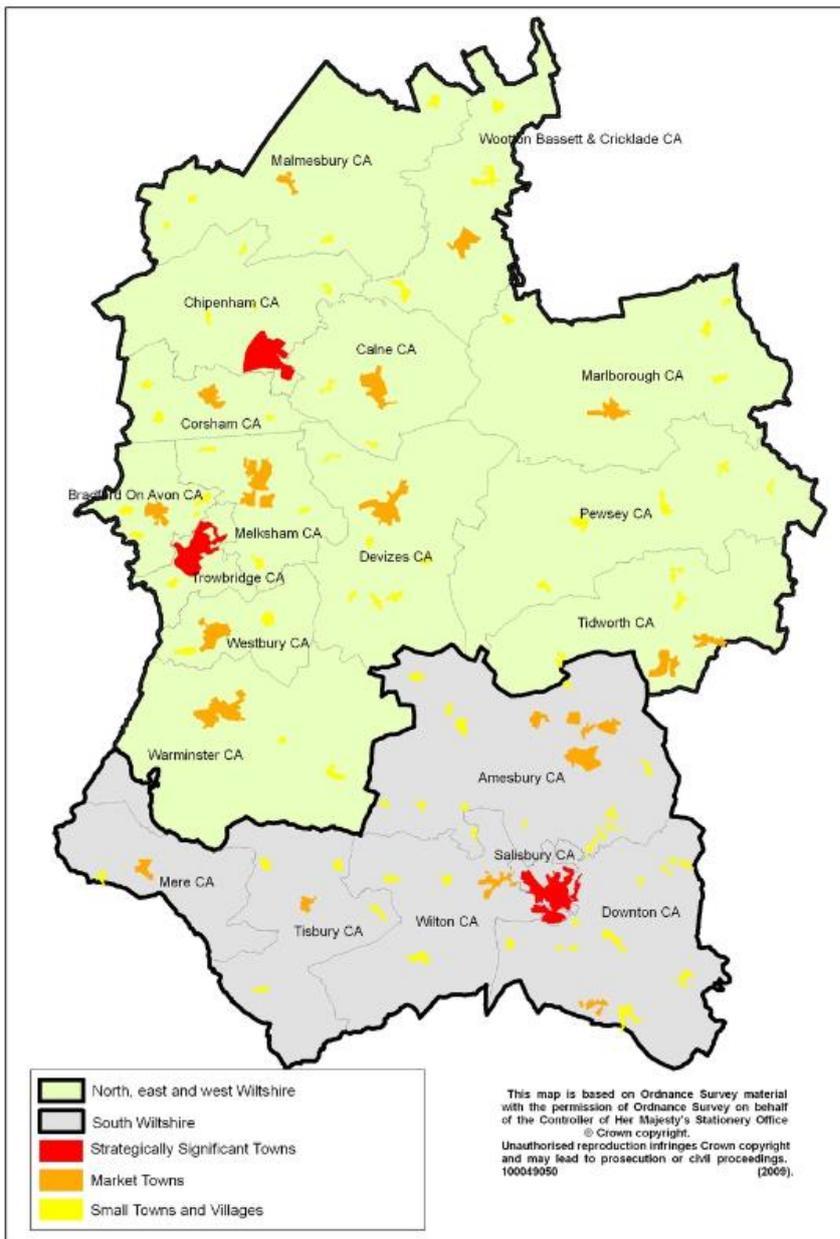


Figure 1: Wiltshire Community Areas

## 2.2 Other Initiatives

A large variety of Local Authority initiatives involving governance and or service delivery at a local level were found. The Authorities involved are a mixture of County Councils, Unitary Authorities and District/City/Borough Councils. This section summarises some of the findings from sixteen of these initiatives.

Not all of the initiatives are specific about the boundaries of their areas or how they were selected. The most common practice appears to be to base them on electoral wards or groups of wards (Bradford, Derby) or, less commonly, on groups of parishes (Herefordshire).or whole Districts (Staffordshire). Bradford has a three tier system based on neighbourhood areas (groups of six wards), wards and, on a smaller scale, 80 neighbourhood partnerships. No attempts to base the boundaries on the areas with which people identify were found apart from in Wiltshire.

Whilst most of initiatives discussed here cover the whole of the Local Authority area, some such as Slough and Newport, only have pilot projects in part of their areas. Wakefield Council has seven areas covering the District and has also identified 12 Priority Neighbourhoods most in need of help.

The initiatives can be divided into two categories:

- Devolution of decision making (sometimes with a devolved budget)
- Devolution of service delivery

The majority of initiatives identified emphasise community decision-making through neighbourhood partnerships or similar. These often have a devolved budget and a dedicated officer or team of officers based in the area. They may also involve meetings between council officers whose responsibilities include listening to local views and co-ordinating a response. This last group includes Wolverhampton and Norwich. Other councils, such as Bristol City, have officers assigned to cover two or more neighbourhoods. These neighbourhood partnerships may involve organisations such as the police and community safety partnerships as well as community groups and (where they exist) parish councils, The Area Partnerships may be responsible for producing local area or neighbourhood plans, as in Buckinghamshire (Local Area Plans) and Northampton (Area Action Plans). These are distinct from Neighbourhood Development Plans, introduced under the Localism Act of 2011 and normally co-ordinated by a Parish or Town Council where one exists.

Devolution of service delivery, in the sense of re-organising of service delivery in line with neighbourhood boundaries, is less common. However, an example is Manchester City Council whose Neighbourhood Services Directorate has restructured service delivery into six geographical areas, with some specialist back-up services at a City level.

In the majority of cases, it was not possible to easily obtain an independent evaluation of the scheme. However, in two cases Scrutiny committee evaluations were identified and in one case, Bradford, an evaluation commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was available.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Richardson, 2012) assesses the value of neighbourhood working in Bradford under two headings:

- Strengthened partnership working
- Encouraging active citizenship and the 'Big Society'

The present research identified two other possible benefits:

- Improved relationships
- Financial benefits

### **Strengthened partnership working**

In her 2012 report Richardson says:

*'In Bradford, staff from the neighbourhood services area offices brought stakeholders together to deal with problems such as anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, and derelict and neglected communal land. neighbourhood officers played a co-ordination role, bringing partners together, a brokerage role – for example negotiating between departments – and an entrepreneurial role, to solve problems creatively.'* (p.4)

Successful partnership working was found to be based on:

- Consistent yet flexible structures.
- Proactive structures.
- Skilled individuals, with 'local knowledge'.
- Strong personal relationships
- Creative problem-solving.
- Nurturing civic entrepreneurs.

A number of local authorities refer to the different needs of different neighbourhoods and the need to tailor service provision to the area. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Birmingham City Council (Birmingham City Council, 2011) referred to success in strengthening partnership working particularly in the more deprived areas of the city. And Herefordshire's 'Locality Toolkit' (Herefordshire Council,, undated) describes the outcomes of several local initiatives arising from the 'Localities' scheme. They include the setting up of community libraries following the withdrawal, for cost reasons, of the mobile library service and the introduction of a county-wide loyalty card, 'Truffle Herefordshire', to support local businesses.

### **Encouraging active citizenship and the 'Big Society'**

Many of the projects were introduced in part to encourage community cohesion and self-help and most have the potential to do this by bringing people together and giving them a voice. Success on this front was less clear. In Bradford, Richardson (2011) found '*unfulfilled potential to generate more community self-help*' (p.13). However, many of the projects given as examples in the Herefordshire Toolkit have been facilitated by extensive community involvement and some have led to other community initiatives.

### **Improved Relationships**

Neighbourhood working also has the potential to improve relationships between the council and local people and groups. Moseley et al (2006) refer to the Staffordshire District Working initiative as follows:

*'It was believed to have considerably improved their working relationship with District Councils and the other local stakeholders. Elected members were initially worried that the DPOs [District Partnership Officers] might undermine their role, but in practice had found that they could assist local members with their own issues. It had helped backbench members to be more fully involved.'* (p.20)

### **Financial impact**

There seems to be some success in reducing cost and streamlining Council organisation, although this was not an explicit aim of the schemes. However, at least one council, Birmingham, seems to have abandoned its initiative on the basis of loss of funding and need to make savings in expenditure. Additionally, some of the Herefordshire projects had brought matched funding into the locality.

In conclusion, this part of the research shows that the initiatives studied were generally successful in improving service delivery and tailoring to local need and also in improving relationships between councils and local people. However, there is less evidence of increased active citizenship and self-reliance and of financial gain.

### **2.3 Analysis of Existing Boundaries in Gloucestershire**

The purpose of this part of the research was to map the boundaries used by local government and other service providers in Gloucestershire in order to establish the extent to which boundaries used for different purposes coincide or conflict. Along with topographic mapping and spatial data relating to various geographic features, it was hoped that the results of the boundary mapping exercise would provide a useful baseline for identifying ways forward, particularly in helping to inform the choice of the two case study areas.

A total of 54 separate digital spatial datasets were acquired, processed and input into a Geographical Information System (GIS). These data layers can be sub-divided into six main groups:

1. Administrative and census units
2. Service and other boundaries
3. Historical boundaries
4. Places and points of interest
5. Physical features
6. Topographic base mapping.

The spatial data layers were analysed in two ways: 1) a quantitative analysis of boundary lengths and boundary similarities; and 2) a visual analysis of boundaries by overlaying them in a GIS.

It was found that, although key service boundaries such as health and policing are closely aligned with administrative areas (county and districts respectively), there exist significant differences in spatial relationships between other service providers at a more fine-grained level. There are often large geographical differences, for example, in catchments between community/neighbourhood areas (e.g. Village Agents, Neighbourhood Management areas), children's services and education. Also, few of these boundaries match established

census/statistical units closely, although many areas/catchments share a common boundary with districts, to varying degrees.

### 3. Choice of Case Study Area

The decision to look at only one case study area was taken in order to enable a more in depth study. It was decided to choose one of the Cheltenham Neighbourhood Coordination Areas (NCAs) as they represent an attempt to introduce Neighbourhood Management in the county.

The 14 Neighbourhood Coordination Groups (known by a number of different names) were originally introduced by the police. In 2010, the management of some of them was taken over by the Borough Council, Cheltenham Partnership and two parish councils ([http://www.cheltenhampartnership.org.uk/info/27/community\\_pride/13/neighbourhood\\_management](http://www.cheltenhampartnership.org.uk/info/27/community_pride/13/neighbourhood_management)) and their role was extended. The role of a Neighbourhood Coordination Group is to provide *'long term resolutions to local issues. It is these issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour, poor footpath maintenance, and lack of facilities for young people, that can often blight local communities and when resolved, local residents will have a better quality of life and local partners will be better able to manage and direct their resources to areas most in need.'* (Davies and Down, 2013). Figure 2 is a map of Cheltenham showing the NCG areas.

The Swindon and Wymans Brook NCA was chosen as a case study for the following reasons:

1. It encompasses urban and rural areas;
2. Its demographics are mixed as can be seen from Figure 3 which shows that, according to the 2010 index of multiple deprivation, part of the NCG area is in the highest deprivation quintile and part although the bulk of the area has a much lower multiple deprivation index.
3. It suffers from more than its fair share of boundary issues, being on the border of Cheltenham and Tewkesbury and in Cheltenham Borough but in Tewkesbury parliamentary constituency.

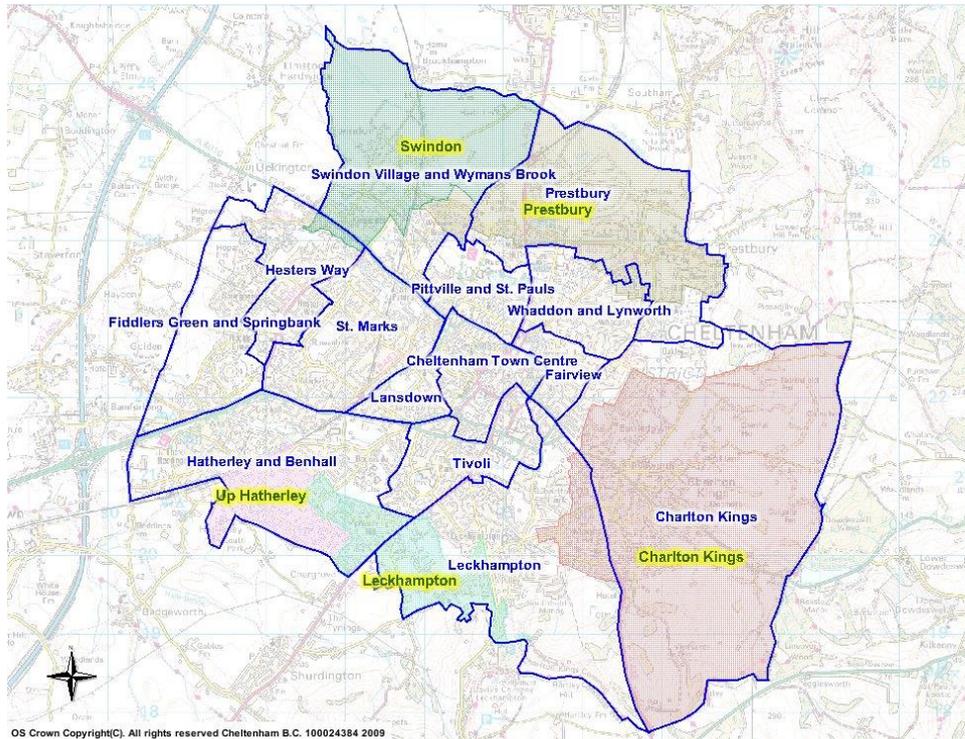


Figure 2: Neighbourhood Coordination Areas in Cheltenham

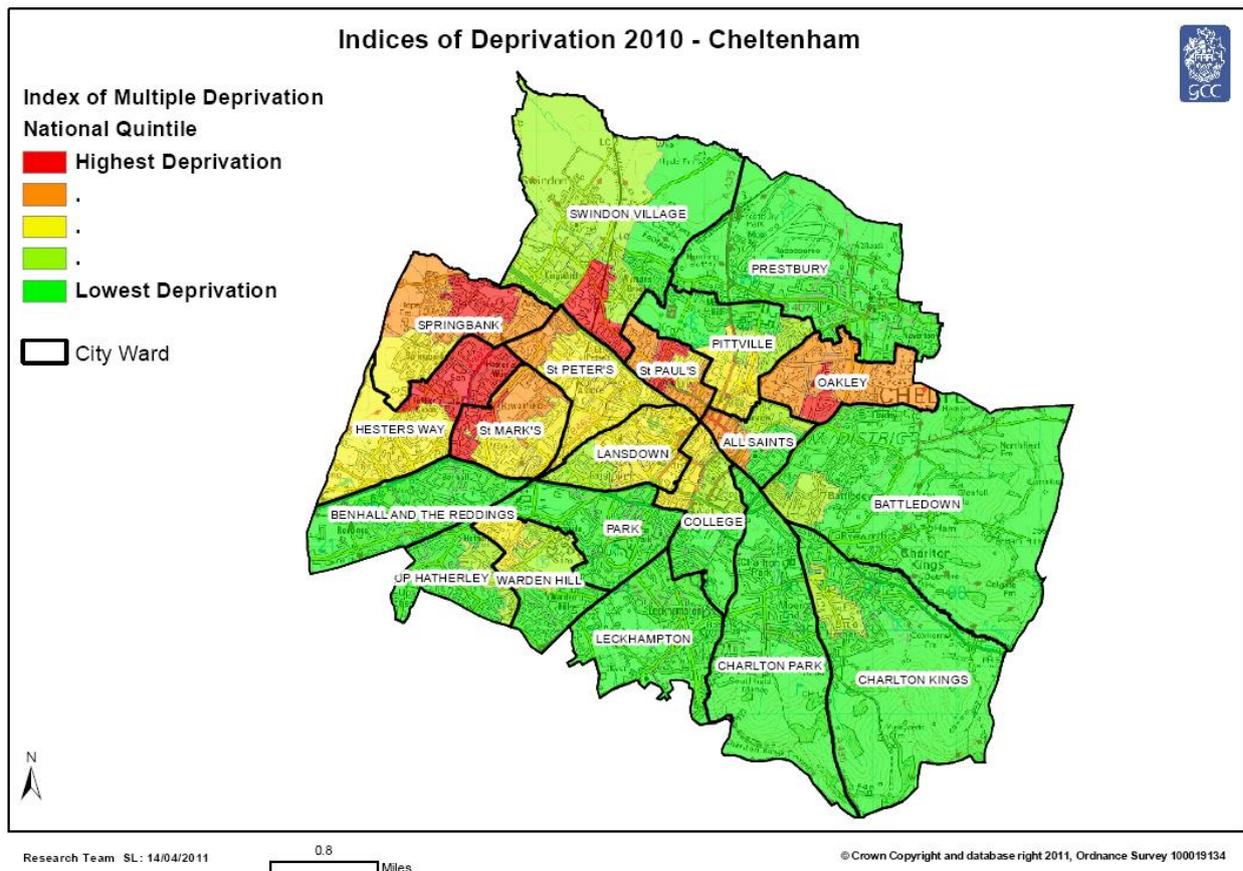


Figure 3: Indices of Multiple Deprivation in Cheltenham – 2010 figures. (Gloucestershire County Council)

#### 4. Swindon Village and Wyman's Brook

The Swindon Village and Wyman's Brook Neighbourhood Co-ordination Area comprises an industrial estate, Kingsditch, and two main areas of housing Swindon Village and Wyman's Brook, together with part of St Peters which adjoins Wyman's Brook. The area is bounded by the A4019, most of which is dual carriageway, in the south and a disused railway line becoming the restored Gloucestershire-Warwickshire Railway to the East. The western and northern boundaries follow the boundary of Swindon Village Parish Council. The mainline railway, from Cheltenham to Birmingham, cuts through the middle of the area, with Kingsditch, Swindon Village and a small part of Wymans Brook on one side and the rest of Wymans Brook on the other. Between Swindon Village and Wymans' Brook, there is a playing field used by both communities. The population of the neighbourhood was 5060 in 2011 with a population density of 10.28 persons per hectare (Maiden database, accessed 17/12/13). Statistically, the area is covered by four super output areas – Swindon Village 1, 2, 3 and 4.

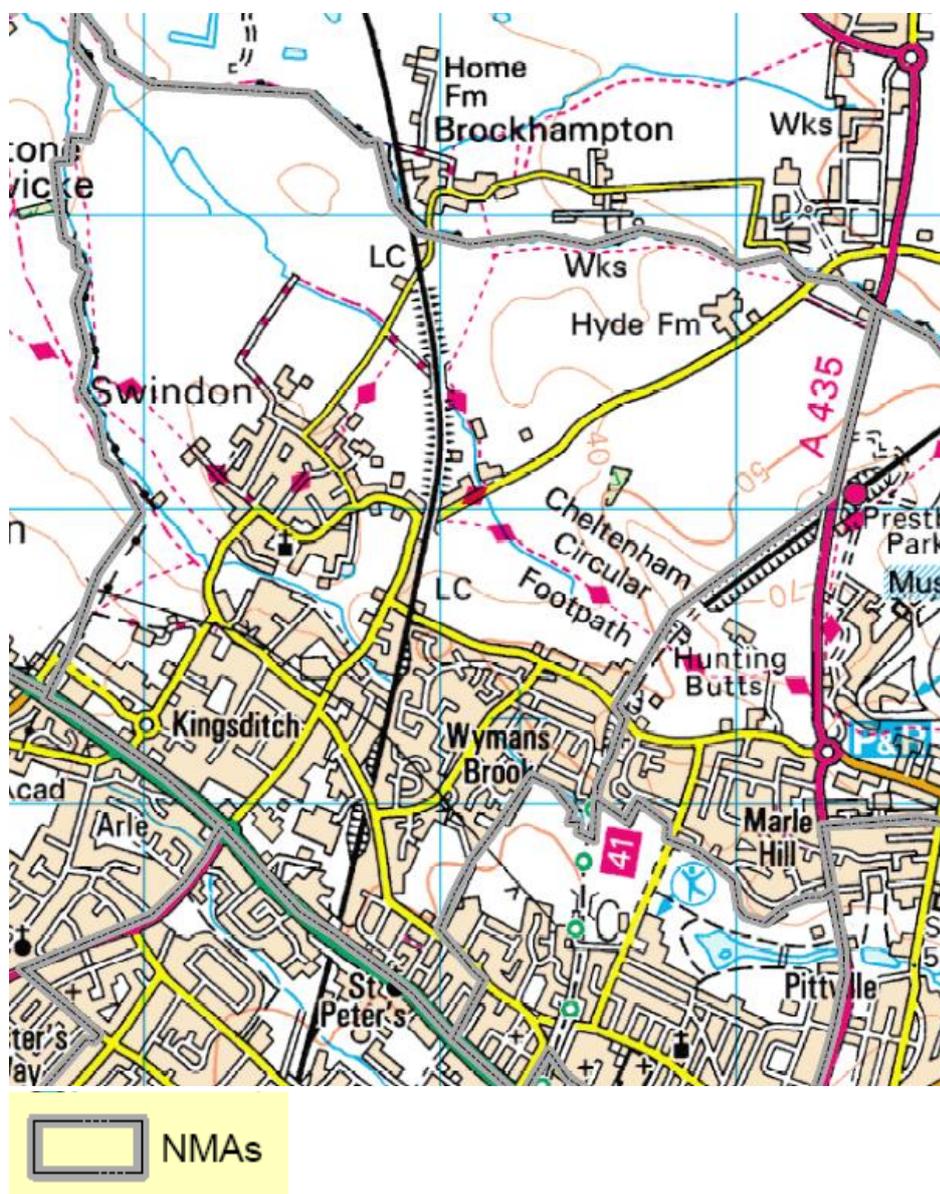


Figure 4: Swindon Village and Wymans Brook

Figure 3 shows most of the area to be in the 60-80% least deprived areas in the country (2010 figures) i.e. in the second least deprived quintile, with the south-east corner being within the most deprived quintile. Swindon Village and Wymans Brook will be described in more detail below.

#### **4.1 Swindon Village**

As can be seen from Figure 4, the parish of Swindon Village covers an area somewhat larger than the village itself, encompassing a small section of Wymans Brook and a small amount of housing south of the A4019. The parish has a population 2605 (Maiden database accessed 5/12/13). There is a primary school on the eastern edge of the village, about half of its intake being from the village, and a church to the south. The village also has a village hall. There are no shops in the village itself but there is a retail park within the parish, accessed via the A4019.

#### **4.2 Wymans Brook**

Wymans Brook is a 1970s housing estate on the northern edge of Cheltenham but partially separated from it by allotments and school playgrounds. The estate has a small shopping centre and a pub but no primary school or community hall. It is bounded on 3 sides by two railway lines (one of them disused) and a major road, and on the fourth by countryside as shown in Figure 4. Some of the primary age children attend Swindon Village Primary School and some attend Gardners Lane Primary School to the south.

About half of the Wymans Brook area that is not in Swindon parish is in the parish of Prestbury the other half is unparished. It also overlaps more than one super output area, making it difficult to access statistics for Wymans Brook alone.

### **5 The Research Methodology**

In the time available, this research could only provide a flavour of the ways in which people define and relate to their 'local community'. Due to the nature of the research it was decided to carry out in-depth interviews with a few people rather than aim for a representative survey. Respondents were identified through Swindon Village Parish Council, Swindon Village School and other avenues as they became available. Nine residents, including the clerk to the Swindon Village Parish Council, three parish councillors and an ex-parish councillor, and two non-residents, the head teacher of Swindon Village Primary school and the Fair Shares time broker for Cheltenham, were interviewed. In the event, most of the respondents were from Swindon Village rather than Wymans Brook where it proved harder to make contacts.

The methodology was based around the concept of community mapping. Two separate semi-structured interview schedules were devised. The first was aimed at residents, who were first asked to mark on a map their home address and other key places (where relevant) as follows:

- Children's school
- Doctors
- Shops used most often
- Shops used for main grocery shop
- Leisure activities
- Work place
- Anywhere else they feel is important

They were then asked to draw the boundaries of ‘their community’ as they see it. The map data was collated and the results are described in Section 6.

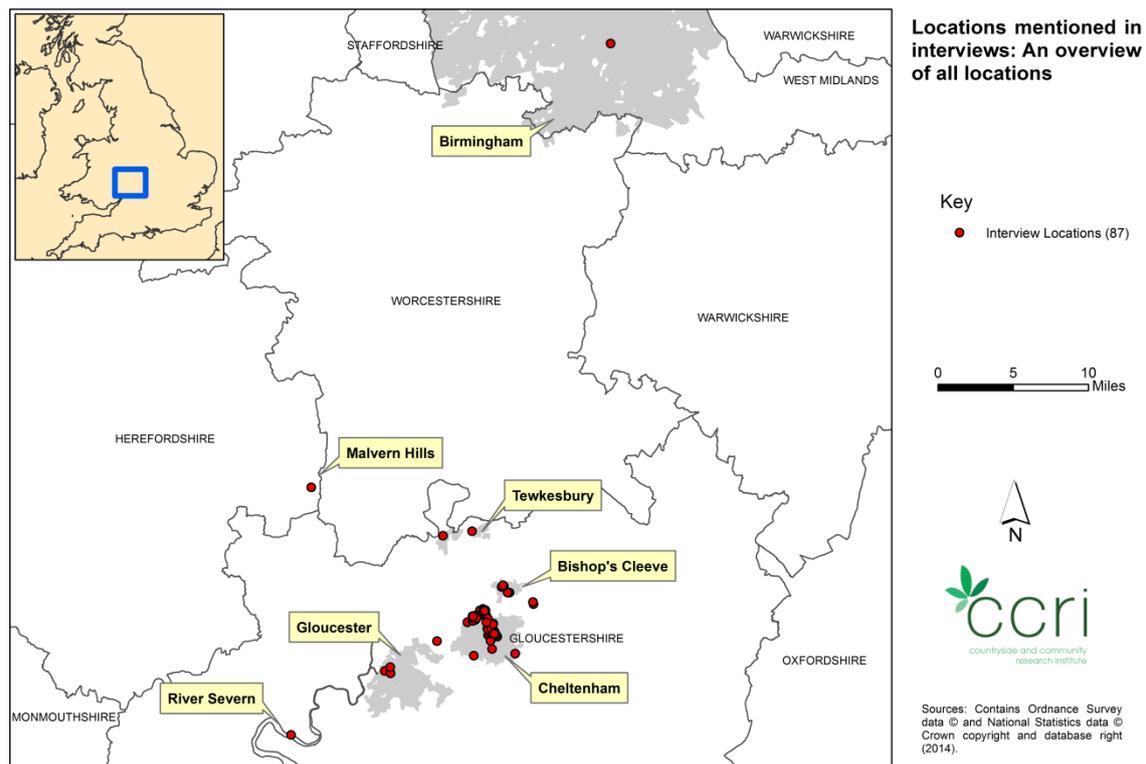
Respondents were also asked if they knew where the administrative boundaries were. They were then asked about their involvement in the community, where they would go if they needed help and the best and worst things about living where they do. Finally, they were asked how they felt about their local community and were given the opportunity to add any other comments.

‘Community leaders’, such as parish councillors, were asked additional questions concerning their role and their views of the community and its integration and resilience.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Personal Mapping

Figure 5 shows the locations identified by respondents. As might be expected, there is a cluster of locations around Cheltenham and, to a lesser extent, Gloucester and Tewkesbury with outliers in Birmingham and on the river Severn.



**Figure 5: Locations identified in the interviews**

Respondents were asked to draw on the map the boundaries of what they considered to be their community. It can be seen from Figure 6 that these tended to centre on Swindon Village even when the respondent did not live in the village. In fact one respondent (coloured brown) did not include their own house within their community, rather they identified with Swindon village calling it their ‘borrowed community’.

However, this cannot be taken to be typical of residents in the whole case study area as the respondents were contacted by snowballing from Swindon Parish Council (which includes some of the area to the south of the Tewkesbury Road but only part of Wyman’s Brook as shown by the dotted line on the map in Figure 6) and the school (which is in Swindon Village) and so tended to be those living in or identifying with the village.

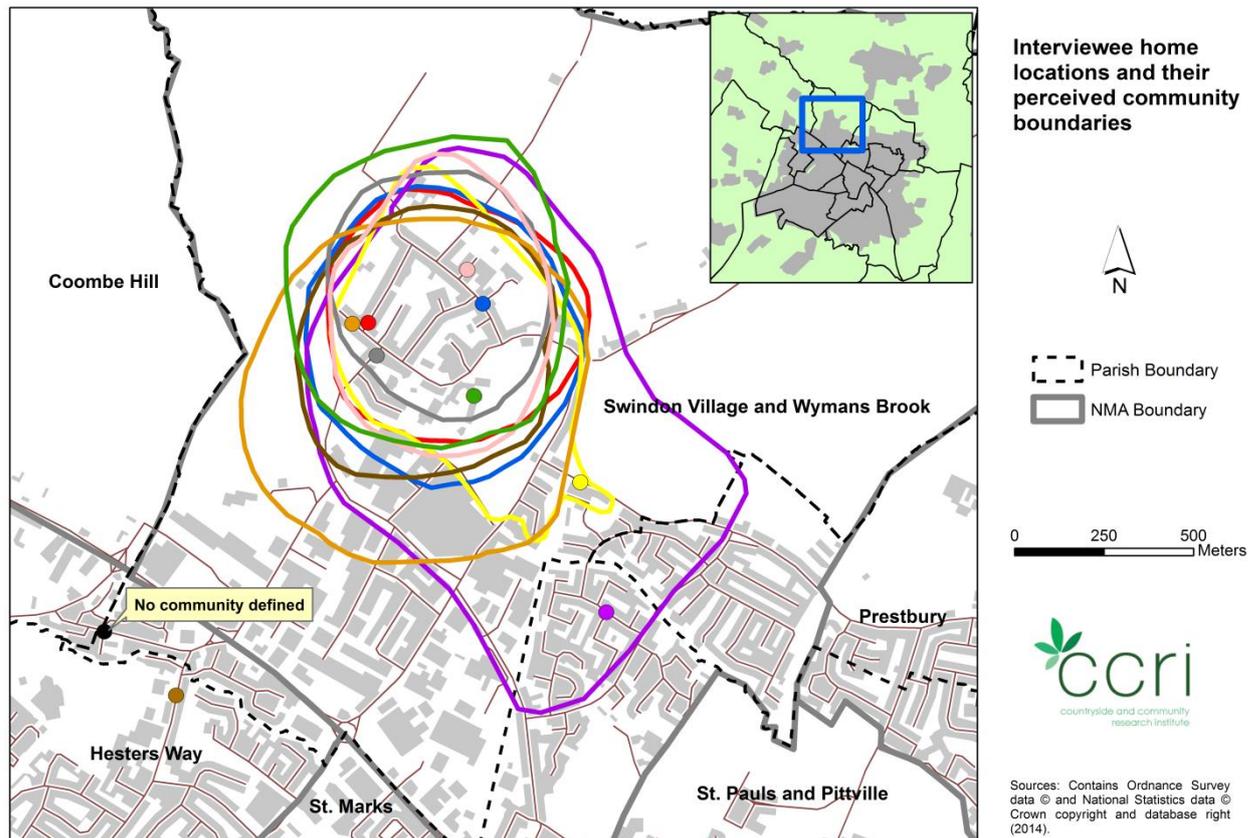


Figure 6: Interviewees’ home locations and perceived community boundaries

## 6.2 Administrative and Natural Boundaries

There was very little knowledge of administrative boundaries other than the parish boundary which most respondents claimed to know. There was some feeling that the parish boundary was not sensible:

*‘I think they [the parish boundaries] should incorporate Uckington and Hardwicke as they are so small but not include anything beyond the Tewkesbury Road.’*

*‘A boundary just around the village would make sense – not beyond that’*

In this respect, the findings are consistent with the view that people tend to identify with relatively small communities (Monaghan, 2012), with Dunbar (2011) suggesting 150 as an ideal number. However, in this case social differences are also likely to be significant.

Two respondents referred to the lack of co-ordination between the administrative boundaries:

*'All boundaries should be the same; there shouldn't be a difference between boundaries, especially the constituency boundaries. At the moment they are different and it is causing some confusion.'*

*'Cheltenham Borough Boundaries don't really make sense .....the parish is divided between Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.'*

The only 'administrative' boundaries thought to be significant were secondary school catchments. The primary school did not have a catchment but selected on distance from the school and other factors according to its admission policy and children at primary school tended to make friends according to which playgroup they attended (there were two in Swindon Village) rather than according to where they lived.

There were several references to natural boundaries such as roads and railway lines that split the community:

*'the railway is a definite boundary'*

*'Tewkesbury Road – 40% of the people in the parish live there, but there is hardly any connection. They probably also have bad feelings about it. There is no link.'*

Finally, a respondent from outside the area said:

*'Real life boundaries are very porous – different boundaries for different things. Physical boundaries are significant eg Tewkesbury Road, railway line, open ground (which can be positive but can also be a boundary).'*

### **6.3 Community Involvement**

The sampling process meant that interviewees were not typical in terms of community involvement as most were contacted either through the parish council or through the school. All were involved in the community in some way, with four being members of Save the Countryside (a group formed to fight a proposed development adjacent to Swindon village) and four being involved in the church. However, this did not mean that their activities were exclusively in the village as one respondent said:

*'No, not really involved apart from being a member of Swindon Village Society. All my activities are outside the area.'*

This respondent lived within the parish but not in Swindon Village itself. It seems that residents from outside the village who do not have a direct connection with the village (for example a child at the village school) tend to focus outside of the parish. This is reflected in the attitude of many villagers to people outside the village as not being part of the community.

*'The village itself has some village identity and people living here would like to keep it that way. Roads- Swindon Road, Tewksbury Road, are barriers, villagers see/view people living in these parts differently, they do not consider these people as being linked to the village.'*

Figure 7 shows the local activities in which the respondents were involved.

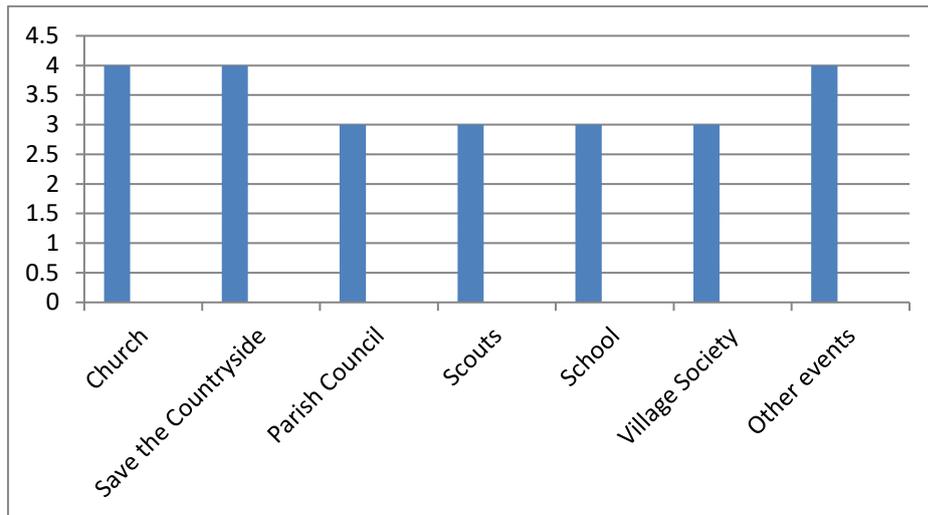


Figure 7: Involvement in Local Activities

## 6.4 Sources of help

Participants were asked where they would go if they needed practical help such as with childcare or transport and where they would go for advice on official matters. Respondents were split between those who would get help from inside the community and those who would go outside.

In some cases, the first call would be on relatives.

For practical help:

*'My father lives in Wymans Brook'*

*'My mother and friend in the community.'*

For advice:

*'My wife, who is a lawyer.'*

Others would go to friends or neighbours for practical help:

*'Would ask friends in the village first. I have some good friends here.'*

*'Neighbours – all of them. We have fantastic neighbours. My sister lives in the village, family'*

However, some participants responded in terms of official sources of help for practical matters as well as for advice.

*'Cheltenham social services, county social services.'*

*'Doctors in town – all other issues I would call a taxi'*

*'My solicitor in Cheltenham'.*

In general, participants went outside the community for advice on official matters, whereas just over half of those questioned would ask for practical help within the community. Again, it is important to remember the ways in which respondents were identified. They were probably more likely to be active and involved than the average community member.

## 6.5 Views about the community

Participants were asked for the best and worst things about living in the community. The results are summarised in Figures 8 and 9 below. In general, respondents found it much easier to think of the best things than to think of the worst things. On the face of it there are some contradictions between the two sets of results. For example, access is quoted as an advantage by 6 respondents but traffic (making access difficult) is quoted as a disadvantage by 3 and a lack of facilities in the village is quoted as a disadvantage by one respondent. It is likely that ease of access depends upon access to transport and time of day. Also, whilst most respondents see the community as friendly and one mentions that there is a nice age range and mix of generations, another sees it as mostly older people and cliquey.

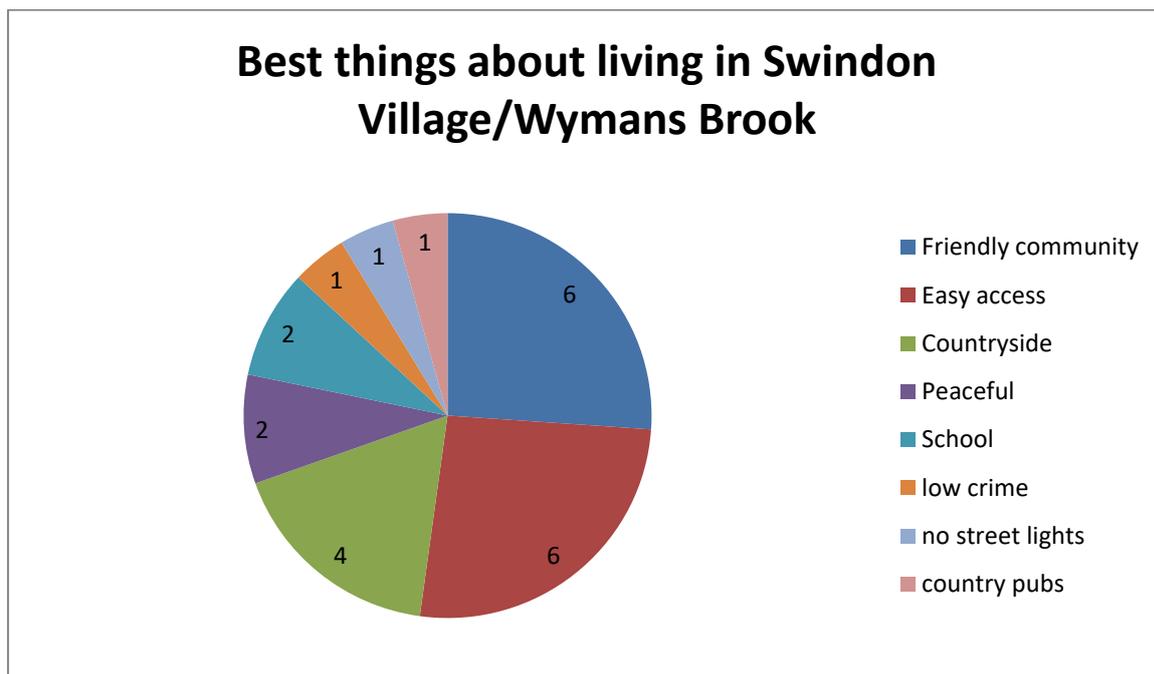


Figure 8

When asked how they felt in general about the local community, five of the eight respondents were very positive. Also, it seems that many people who used to live in the village maintain their connection and participate in village activities

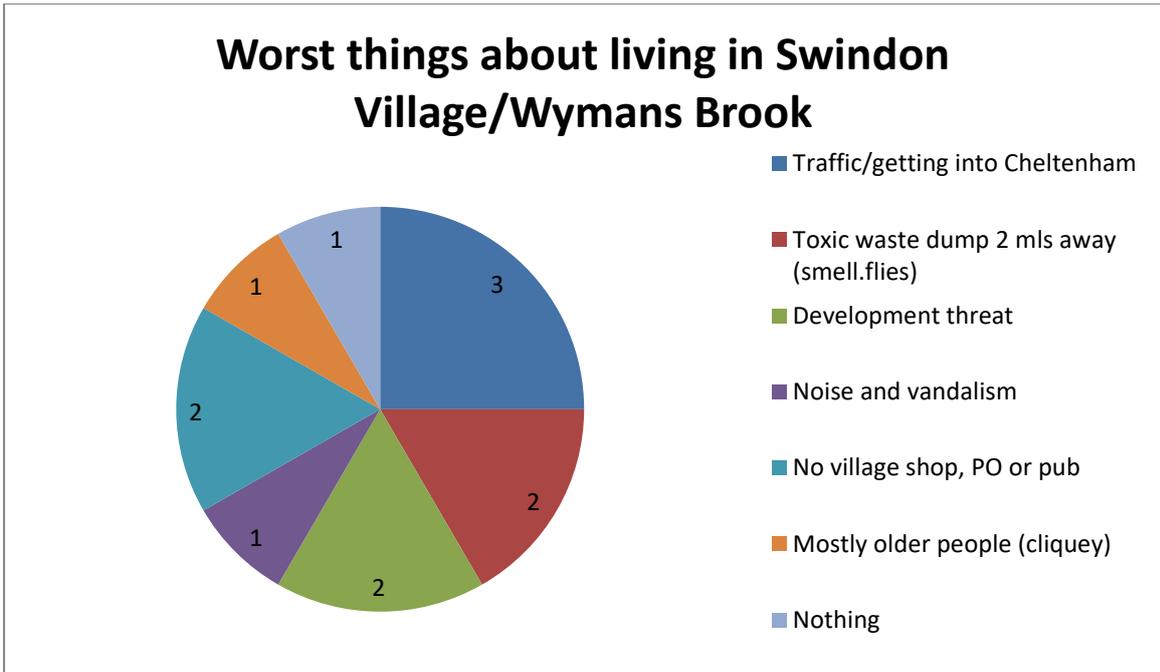


Figure 9

### 6.6 Other comments

Other comments concerned the need for more community activities especially for teenagers and the lack of shops in Swindon village and hence the lack of a focal point such as a shop or a pub. Wyman’s Brook has a small group of shops but lacks a community hall and a respondent from there pointed out the need for a meeting place to ‘bond the community’

*‘I am aware that there are probably lots of lonely people here, so it would be good if there was a place where they could go and have a chat and a cup of tea.’ (Wymans Brook respondent)*

Two Swindon Village respondents expressed a fear of losing the green belt and thus the nature of the village. A resident from south of Tewkesbury Road felt that the area needed ‘uplifting’. One respondent complained about traffic especially that generated by the industrial estate and the garages ‘down the road although another saw the industrial estate and the racecourse as assets. Another respondent was concerned about the plan to replace Cheltenham and Gloucester railway stations with a ‘parkway’ station serving both places.

### 6.7 Community Leaders’ Perspective

Seven community leaders were questioned consisting of:

- Three parish councillors
- An ex-parish councillor
- The clerk to the parish council
- The head teacher of Swindon village school
- The Fair Shares time-broker for Cheltenham

It should be noted that none of these directly represented Wyman’s Brook so the results are biased towards Swindon Village. They were asked in more detail about how they saw the

community and its potential. They were asked about the internal strength of the community, its external links, its inclusivity and its resilience.

### Internal strength

Regarding the internal strength of the community, answers were varied with 2 unequivocal 'yes's, one of whom said *'yes, very strong. It's about key persons – leaders within the community who drive that'*. Others were more measured with answers such as *'fairly strong'* and *'to a certain extent'*. One commented that young people were not much involved.

### External links

The two respondents who were convinced of the community's internal strength were also enthusiastic about the strength of its external links. Others were less sure with responses ranging from *'quite good'* to *'not particularly'*. There was a question about whether good physical access was matched by social links.

### Inclusivity

Firstly, respondents were asked about any physical, social or cultural barriers with the community that hampered integration. The following physical barriers were identified:

- Railway (3 mentions)
- Industrial estate
- Open ground
- Problems such as wheelchair access and disabled parking
- The boundary of the core village

Cultural and social barriers were mentioned by three respondents, one saying that River Leys was more deprived than the rest of the village. River Leys and Glynbridge Gardens (both south of the Tewkesbury Road) are not seen as part of the community, although they are part of the parish. Wymans Brook was thought to be 'pushed away'.

Respondents were then asked whether the community supported its weakest and most vulnerable members and whether any particular groups were excluded. Answers were very varied ranging from *'yes, there are good support networks'* through *'hard to say, more than in some other places but not hugely'* to *'a lot of people are lonely and isolated. They find it difficult to ask for help'*. Particular groups possibly being excluded were:

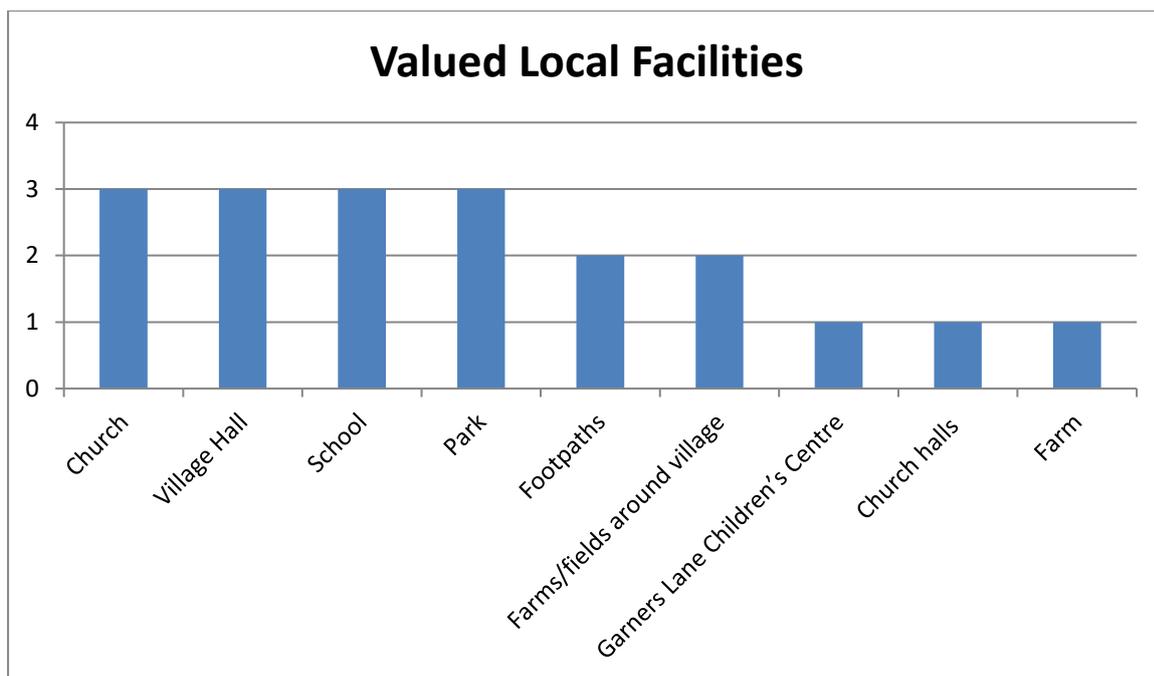
- Old and infirm people
- Mentally ill people
- Wymans Brook and other communities outside the core village

There was also an interesting comment on the ethnic make-up of the area:

*'Swindon Village .... is not that diverse, it's a largely white community, not ethnically mixed. Wymans Brook is much more diverse. There is an Indian and Pakistani community. I don't think they mix; not sure if they are integrated and how well. Wymans Brook is more ethnically mixed and not integrated.'*

### Resilience

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the most valued facilities and how the community would react if they were threatened.



**Figure 10**

Figure 10 shows the most valued local facilities to be the church, the village hall, the school and the park, although two respondents said that the church was only valuable to some and another that the village hall was used by certain groups but was not really a centre of the community and did not seem to be treasured in the same way as the school and the park. It is notable that three of these four facilities are in Swindon Village itself, whereas the park is within the parish but lies between the village and Wymans Brook. Garners Lane Children's Centre and the church halls mentioned are outside of, although not far from, the area considered. Wymans Brook does not have a church hall, village hall or school, with the children attending a number of local schools, including Swindon Village School. However, community involvement with the school came mainly from residents living within Swindon village itself.

The five community leaders who lived within the area were all adamant that the community would take action to protect their valued assets. The Parish Council, Swindon Village Society or Save the Countryside Campaign would be expected to take the lead and external support would be needed from the borough and (to a lesser extent) county councils and councillors. The MP was also mentioned by one respondent. Another respondent thought that the community would not need external support.

As it happens there was a threat to one of these assets, the green fields, at the time of the research. The Joint Core Strategy, a joint development plan of Cheltenham Borough Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and Gloucester City Council, included a number of housing allocation sites within the existing green belt, including a 23.4 Hectare site for 4829 houses to the north-west of Cheltenham and bordering Swindon Village to the north and west as shown in Figure 11. The opposition to this is being co-ordinated by a local group, Save the Countryside, led by a parish councillor and supported by the Swindon Village Society and the Parish Council.

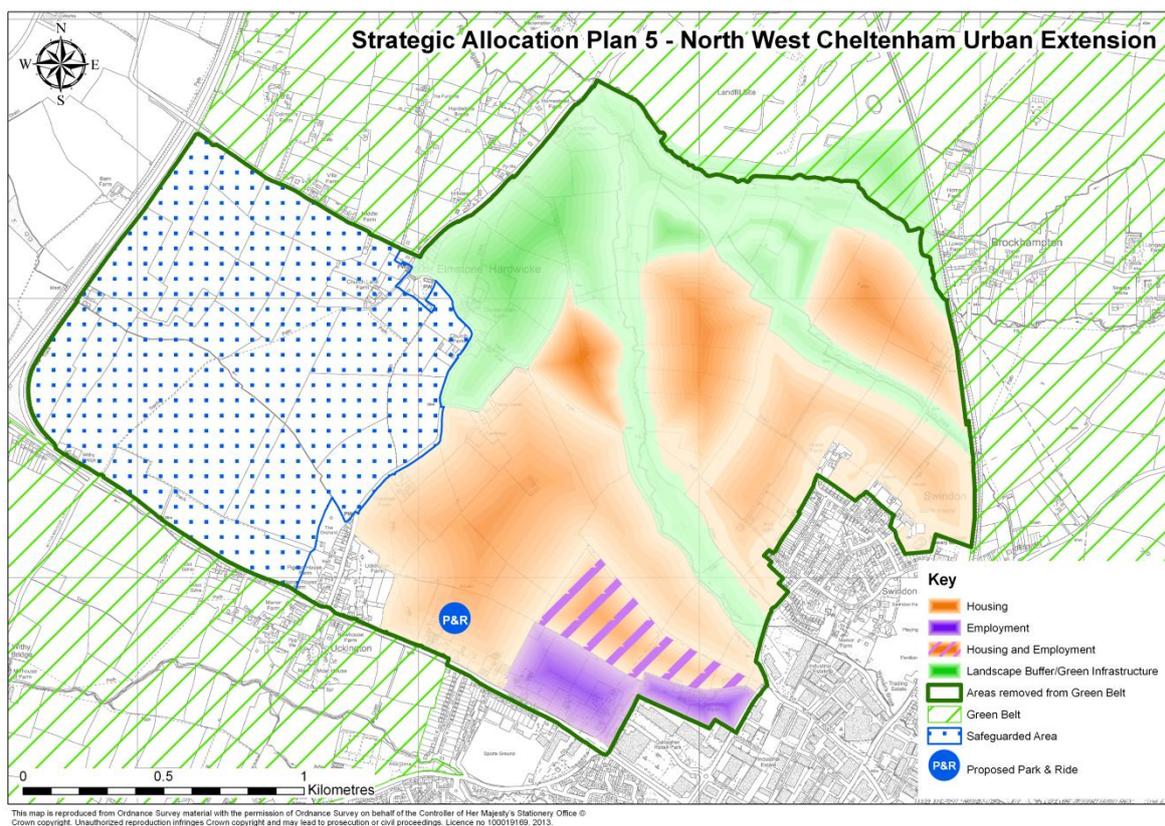


Figure 11: Proposed Development Area north west of Cheltenham, Gloucester City Council et al (2013) p.109

In general, most respondents thought that the community would be successful in resisting a threatened closure of a valued facility. However, the one respondent to refer directly to the current issue was less positive:

*'I think, especially with the plans for new housing development that we are a bit powerless. Decisions are taken on a higher level than us and we have to live with the consequences.'*

There was no mention of providing alternative facilities to any that might be threatened.

### Overall Community Strength

Finally, community leaders were asked whether they thought the community was strong and what they thought would make it stronger. Of the four respondents who answered these questions, two thought it was strong; one said 'medium' and the fourth said:

*'Yes, not necessarily the community represented by parish boundaries, but there is definitely a sense of community.'*

Only three respondents expressed an opinion as what would make the community stronger. Two of the answers concerned community facilities.

*'More facilities for people to get together in the village, some clubs and activities for young people - there are many for older people. Wymans Brook has got a pub but not Swindon Village.'*

*'Having a social focus – centre/place to gather – social focus that is not the church, e.g. pub (we have one down the road but we really do not relate to it).'*

The third answer concerned the need for an issue or a threat to focus around.

*'Fast reaction; demonstrate point of difference, action or important success on key concerns, disaster – e.g. flood, snow – they always bring the community together. Causes for celebration – e.g. Queens Jubilee party.'*

## **7. Conclusions**

### **7.1 Reviewing community governance and service delivery initiatives**

Phase 1 of the research found a wide range of initiatives, which divided roughly into those involving local service delivery and those involving local decision making and priority setting. Not all of the initiatives are specific about the boundaries of their areas or how they were selected. The most common practice appears to be to base them on electoral wards or groups of wards (Bradford, Derby) or, less commonly, on groups of parishes (Herefordshire) or whole Districts (Staffordshire).

Of the initiatives studied, only Wiltshire made a conscious attempt to base its community areas on 'natural communities' around market towns. This was based on a historical study as well as on public consultation and appeared to result in generally coherent areas with which people identified. Key community identifiers emerged in Wiltshire around schools, travel to work patterns and connections to local service centres. This confirmed a close alignment between people's notions of 'community' and the actual community areas delineated for the mapping exercise. For example, 83% of all pupils in the county both lived and attended school in their own community area and for many areas, this percentage was higher. Similarly, in terms of travel-to-work patterns, areas with the strongest links to each of the local service centres proved remarkably similar in pattern and scale to the twenty community areas. It is possible that this was facilitated by the geography of Wiltshire which naturally centres on its market towns. Indeed, people expressed a strong sense of identity around the market towns, as might be expected, although this connection diminished, the further away from a market town that they lived.

Some community areas have since been combined and there are now 18, each with an area board which includes councillors, community area managers, democratic service officers together with one member of the council's top decision making committee, the cabinet. They also include the local NHS, fire and emergency services, police, town and parish councils, community area partnerships and many other groups. Wiltshire County Council is now introducing Campus Hubs. Community services are going to be delivered from a campus in each community area. This initiative is intended to deliver a huge cost saving, through a reduction in the number of office sites. They are being marketed as community hubs and a public consultation is taking place to establish the facilities that people would like included.

The aims of the initiatives studied tended to focus on identifying and meeting local needs and encouraging civic participation rather than specifically on streamlining or localising

organisation. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Richardson, 2012) based on the Bradford initiative, assesses the value of neighbourhood working under two headings:

- Strengthened partnership working
- Encouraging active citizenship and the 'Big Society'

Richardson's (Richardson, 2011) review of Bradford City Council's scheme concludes that '*on the first aim of service and neighbourhood improvement, there has been good progress*' (p.11) and the neighbourhood partnerships had been able to '*better target the work of each service as well as undertake joint work*' (ibid). Evidence on the second aim was less clear. Richardson (2011) found '*unfulfilled potential to generate more community self-help*' (p.13). However, many of the projects given as examples in the Herefordshire Toolkit have been facilitated by extensive community involvement and some have led to other community initiatives. In Wiltshire, the Audit Commission (2007) identified an increase in satisfaction with council services from "53 to 64 per cent at a time when there was a downward trend nationally." (Audit Commission, 2007, p.28)

Although saving money was not an explicit aim of the schemes, councils are inevitably concerned with financial benefits and disbenefits. There does seem to be some success in reducing cost and streamlining Council organisation, although this was not an explicit aim of the schemes (report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Manchester City Council (2012) and report to the Scrutiny and Performance Panel of Staffordshire County Council (2009)). Additionally, some of the Herefordshire projects had brought matched funding into the locality. However, at least one council, Birmingham, seems to have abandoned its initiative on the basis of loss of funding and the need to make savings in expenditure.

## **7.2 Mapping boundaries in Gloucestershire**

The Gloucestershire mapping revealed that, although key service boundaries such as health and policing are closely aligned with administrative areas (county and districts respectively), there exist significant differences in spatial relationships between other service providers at a more fine-grained level. There are often large geographical differences, for example, in catchments between community/neighbourhood areas (e.g. Village Agents, Neighbourhood Management areas), children's services and education. Also, few of these boundaries match established census/statistical units closely, although many areas/catchments share a common boundary with districts, to varying degrees. There were particular inconsistencies in some places, particularly on some local authority boundaries, such as west and north-west of Gloucester where Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester City Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council meet.

When the maps were studied with a view to seeing how the county might be divided into Neighbourhood Areas, a number of issues became apparent. Firstly, the importance of natural topographical boundaries and man-made physical boundaries such as main roads and railway lines was particularly apparent in Stroud District, which is divided naturally by the Cotswold escarpment and also by the M4 motorway. It was also apparent in Forest of Dean District where the A40 constitutes a boundary between the north and south of the District. Secondly, the dominance of major centres of employment and commerce both within and without the County may have a significant effect on people's perceived communities. For example, Bristol exerts an influence over the south of Stroud District as Gloucester does over the north. Thirdly,

urban districts such as Gloucester and Cheltenham may be harder to divide than a rural county such as Wiltshire. These factors fed into the choice of case study area.

### 7.3 The Case Study

Such a small case study, consisting of a limited number of interviews in one community, could never be entirely conclusive. However, it did highlight some interesting and relevant issues and allow some tentative conclusions on the nature of community in this particular area. .

1. Physical boundaries e.g. major roads, railway lines are more significant to most people than administrative boundaries
2. Open space also acts as a boundary in the sense that it separates and defines settlements
3. Neither Swindon Village Parish nor the Neighbourhood Management Area has boundaries that mean anything to local people, rather people, including parish councillors, identify with the village of Swindon.
4. People use different boundaries for different purposes.
5. People tend to go outside the community for advice on official matters, but are likely to get practical help from friends and neighbours within the community.
6. The lack of an informal meeting place such as a village shop or a pub is seen as a limiting factor on community cohesion.
7. The friendly community and easy access to Cheltenham and elsewhere were the most valued things about living in the area, followed by the surrounding countryside.
8. However, it was pointed out that there are likely to be lonely people and it would be good if there was a place in Wymans Brook for them to go for '*a chat and a cup of coffee*' and also facilities for young people and teenagers.
9. Community leaders were split on the internal strength and external links of the community and also on whether the community supported its most vulnerable members. Old and infirm people and the mentally ill were suggested as possibly being excluded. It was also suggested that areas outside the core village were excluded.
10. All four community leaders who lived in the area were adamant that the community would take action to protect its assets, although they disagreed on the chances of success.
11. There was a threat to the countryside around Swindon Village at the time of the research and an action group led by one of the parish councillors had been formed when the threat first became apparent.
12. In response to an enquiry as to what would make the community stronger, two respondents mentioned the need for a physical focus – a place where people could meet - and one mentioned the need for an issue to focus around.
13. It seems that whereas the village can and will work together to protect its valued assets, there may be less likelihood of a proactive campaign to provide or improve facilities.

In conclusion, it appears from this small study that 'community' is seen on village scale but can be quite exclusive of other places, even those that may share some of its facilities. The fact that the Parish Council covered a larger area, did not seem to affect the loyalties even of parish councillors. The areas with which people identify are strongly affected by physical boundaries such as roads and open space but not significantly by administrative boundaries.

Although it was not specifically mentioned, it seems that there is also a tendency to identify with people of the same level of affluence or the same social class.

## **7.4 Overall Conclusions**

There have been a range of attempts at area working in the UK but a lack of independent evaluation of these schemes. What evidence there is suggests that these schemes can be successful in improving local services through increased co-ordination and tailoring of services to local need. There is also some evidence of financial savings and of the attraction of matched funding. However, there is little evidence of an increase in community spirit and community involvement. There is no clear evidence as to which boundaries work best, although from the Wiltshire example, it seems that basing boundaries around market towns can be successful.

In Gloucestershire, area working around market towns would be possible in some Districts such as Forest of Dean but it is hard to see how it could be applied in Gloucester and Cheltenham. The attempt at a limited form of area working through the Neighbourhood Development Areas in Cheltenham does not appear to have been successful in involving local people, at least in the Swindon Village and Wyman's Brook area.

It appears from the evidence of the case study, that to introduce a neighbourhood system with which people identify it would be necessary to prioritise physical boundaries, which often do not coincide with administrative boundaries. It also appears that it would be necessary to make special effort to integrate across social and cultural boundaries. Even so it is unrealistic to expect a sudden increase in community spirit and a flowering of the Big Society as a result.

For an attempt at area working to be successful in involving the community, it needs to be based on extensive research into residents' views and to be based on areas with which people identify. The methodology used in this research could form the basis of research in other areas. Specifically, residents could be asked to draw their own community on a map. Use of laptops or tablets would make it easier to superimpose the individual maps, as well as perhaps, increasing the interest of younger members of the community.

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