neighbourliness

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Edited by Tony Pilch

AGE Concern

THE **SMITH** INSTITUTE

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Foreword
Wilf Stevenson, Director, Smith Institute

The Smith Institute is an independent think tank which has been set up to undertake research and education in issues that flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives. In recent years the institute has centred its work on the policy implications arising from the interactions of equality, enterprise and equity.

The Smith Institute is pleased to be publishing this collection of essays on neighbourliness and gratefully acknowledges the support of Age Concern England towards this publication and the associated seminar.

Preface
Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern England

Age Concern is delighted to have worked with the Smith Institute to produce this monograph. Ideas about neighbourliness, community, family, clan and social capital have been returning recently to political discourse. It is a welcome return for those of us who saw relevance in such ideas in the 1960s and 1970s. I am sorry that it has taken increasing evidence of community breakdown and a lack of "respect" in communities and neighbourhoods to concentrate attention again on important ideas that are about the different ways in which human beings relate to each other and their shared surroundings. At Age Concern we have been thinking about those ideas and engaged with local people in local communities for long enough to know that these can be deceptively simple terms.

In commissioning this work, we wanted to look at the issues from different perspectives. We also wanted to learn more about how we and other voluntary and community organisations could best support older people, and what – if anything - we should be recommending that central and local government bodies do.

This project allows us – again - to challenge stereotypes about older people, including those that portray older people as a marginalised, minority group within a society that suffers from a limited vision and understanding of older people – who we are, how we live, what we want and what we can offer. Questions about integration, social cohesion and good relations between communities involve older people more than many others, because our lives may be more circumscribed by problems that arise from limited money, mobility and social networks. We may also be more able and more willing to contribute to the glue that holds families, communities and neighbourhoods together.

The growing number of people aged over 50 in the UK, as elsewhere in Europe and the wider world, means that older people are such a large group that many issues that affect us also affect people of all ages. Age Concern's interests are correspondingly wide. Although we have a particular interest in the relationships between older people and neighbourliness, this should not detract from the wider debate about the interdependence of everyone in communities and neighbourhoods.

The various chapters in this monograph bring us new information and insights. One important message is that we need to consider neighbourliness in both its active and its latent forms. The importance of neighbourliness in sustaining people and contributing to

their well-being may lie not in the most heroic forms of help and support, but in small and unremarkable actions and behaviour that give people a sense that they are secure and at home in their own places. Older people need to understand enough about local risk – as well as about the disproportionate effect of criminal activity on older citizens – in order to make real choices about how they spend their time and what they choose to do.

This monograph provides interesting ideas about the relationship between neighbourliness and people at different ages. There are suggestions that the importance of older people to neighbourliness and the importance of neighbourliness to older people, may not be a cohort effect but rather an effect of being out of the workplace, perhaps combined with the impact of becoming less mobile. This perspective is a useful counterbalance to alarmist talk about future generations of older people being more selfish and less likely to help others, either informally or as volunteers.

The chapters in this monograph support Age Concern's view that understanding the role that older people play in neighbourhoods helps us to understand neighbourliness in general. In addition to the research reviewed here, the results of continuing work into informal support networks by researchers interested in older people make a useful contribution to our understanding of the characteristics of neighbourliness. This enables us to build on research and insights as varied as Putnam's analysis of US,[1] Italian[2] and wider[3] communities, Machiavelli's insights into Renaissance Italy[4] and the various reports into the UK Home Office's community development programmes of the 1970s. People have been writing about the interactions between people in communities at least since Homer – we should open our minds to that history and experience in ways that enable us to learn and to profit from it.

Older people seek to be interdependent – to contribute as well as to receive – rather than be dependent on others. "That bit of help" assists older people to sustain their independence and remain involved in the wider community.[5] Achieving the balance necessary for interdependence is difficult. Godfrey et al[6] found that the acceptance of help is subject to

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1 Putnam, RD *Bowling Alone: the Collapse & Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000)
2 Putnam, RD *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton UP, 1993)
3 Parr, SJ and Putnam, RD *Disaffected Democracies* (Princeton UP, 2000)
4 Machiavelli, N *The Discourses* (Penguin Books, 1970)
5 Clarke, H, Dyer, S and Horwood, J *That Bit of Help: The High Value of Low-level Preventative Services for Older People* (The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998)
6 Godfrey, M, Townsend, J and Denby, T *Building a Good Life for Older People in Local Communities: The Experience of Ageing in Time & Place* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004)

complex negotiation and that mutual exchange is a feature of valued relationships with family, friends and neighbours. Their study revealed a rich pattern of reciprocity, with active older people playing a significant role in giving help. As people became more restricted, they continued to place a high value on giving and not just receiving. For some, memories of the help they had given others in the past enabled them to come to terms with accepting support for themselves.

As people grow into older age, they experience life changes that can significantly affect their ability to maintain social networks outside their immediate environment.[7] These transitions include retirement, bereavement and long-term medical conditions that can lead to restricted mobility. They increase the importance of neighbours as a social and practical support network. Some groups are at risk in being unable to establish and maintain the social networks that underpin neighbourliness. Older men, including those divorced, never married and widowed, are particularly likely to be socially excluded - a reflection of their lack of skills in establishing and maintaining social networks.[8]

The influence of geographical proximity on neighbourliness – living near to each other - is likely to be a factor, but the impact and conditions are not clearly understood. The dynamics of neighbourliness in densely populated urban areas are different from those in rural areas, where neighbours might be further apart. However, it does not follow that people in more isolated areas are less likely to be neighbourly. A research study in rural North Wales concluded that loneliness among older people, measured by state of mind and negative feelings about levels of social contact, was greater in the more densely populated areas.[9]

Ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status all play a role in the experience of older people in giving and receiving social support. Evidence from the US indicates that deprived neighbourhoods produce higher levels of distrust and social isolation, together with lower levels of social support, and that this is particularly pronounced for older people living alone.[10] Such neighbourhoods also tend to have a smaller voluntary welfare sector.[11]

7 Parry, J, Vegeris, S, Hudson, M, Barnes, H and Taylor, R *Independent Living in Later Life* (Department for Work & Pensions, 2004)
8 Davidson, K and Arber, S "Older Men: Their Health Behaviours and Partnership Status" in Walker, A and Hagan Hennessey, C *Growing Older: Quality of Life in Old Age* (Open University Press/McGraw Hill, 2004)
9 Burholt, V *Factors Contributing to Loneliness for Older Men & Women in Rural North Wales*, unpublished working paper (Centre for Social Policy Research & Development, University of Wales, 2005)
10 Thompson, EE and Krause, N "Living Alone and Neighbourhood Characteristics as Predictors of Social Support in Late Life" in *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences & Social Sciences* 53b (6) (1998), pp354-364
11 Fyfe, NR and Milligan, C "Space, Citizenship and Voluntarism: Critical Reflections on the Voluntary Welfare Sector in Glasgow" in *Environment & Planning* 35 (11) (2003), pp2069-2086

Research as part of the ESRC Growing Older Programme highlights that although social support is an important component of quality of life for all older people, it may be experienced differently between different ethnic groups. In terms of community, social and family networks, ethnic minority older people fare as well or better than white communities.[12] However, there is also evidence that some black and minority ethnic older people's experience is becoming more like that of the white population, for example, the regularity with which black and minority ethnic elders live on their own[13] and, probably, the extent to which this is a matter of choice.

The study by Godfrey et al[14] highlights an interesting perception of neighbourliness. In the localities studied, people remarked on the decline in neighbourliness, despite examples of regular help provided by neighbours. This was explained by the shift from close-knit, locality-based networks spanning generations, to individual support by specific neighbours, which was seen as more fragile. This study, like other evidence cited in this monograph, suggests that there is a common-sense view of neighbourliness, that people know what neighbourliness is even if they cannot define it.

It is interesting that this study highlights the possibility that when people are thinking about "real" neighbourliness, it is linked closely to family and to communities in which extended families live close together over time. We need to understand the links between family and neighbourliness, and to ask how neighbourliness will change as families change. In terms of public policy, we also need to understand the implications of increasing diversity within neighbourhoods and to think about the ways in which older people might be a bridge between different ethnic, religious and other groups.

In giving weight to the importance of older people in neighbourly relations, we should reject simplistic notions about younger people being less likely to contribute to neighbourliness and think about how our attitudes, practice and policy can contribute to removing some of the barriers between the generations. We often portray younger people as those most likely to behave in antisocial ways, indulging in behaviours that make neighbourhoods feel threatening and unsafe. In celebrating the positive benefits of neighbourliness, it is important that we recognise the continuing contribution of younger

12 Nazroo, J, Bajekal, M, Blane, D and Grewal, I "Ethnic Inequalities in Quality of Life at Older Ages" in Walker, A and Northmore, S (eds) *Growing Older in a Black & Minority Ethnic Group* (Age Concern England, 2004)
13 Butt, J and Moriarty, J "Quality of Life and Social Support among Older People from Different Ethnic Groups" in Walker, A and Northmore, S (eds) *Growing Older in a Black & Minority Ethnic Group* (Age Concern England, 2004)
14 Godfrey et al, op cit (2004)

people and consider the opportunities to ensure mutual support and good relations between generations.

There are many interesting questions raised by this monograph, which evoke commonplace experiences and ask us to look at our daily lives. It reminds us to focus on the ordinary things that people do without really thinking, but which make all the difference to our own lives and those around us. It asks us to think carefully about how we foster the circumstances in which people of all ages can create communities in which we all feel at home. It highlights a need to implement and evaluate initiatives that will increase our understanding and experience of neighbourliness, to define the things that will enhance and sustain it, and to confirm the benefits for givers and receivers.

Introduction
Tony Pilch, Researcher at the Smith Institute

The active involvement of citizens within neighbourhoods and communities is crucial to the achievement of a wide range of government objectives. It can help to achieve civil renewal, promote social inclusion, reduce crime and build social capital. Because of this, policies that stress the importance of neighbourhood-based social networks in turning around "failing" or deprived neighbourhoods are at present experiencing a resurgence in the UK.

This may seem strange when we are constantly being told that our lives are shaped by global forces beyond the neighbourhood level which are breaking down traditional patterns of community. Yet despite projections about the potential of these forces to disrupt traditional concepts of neighbourhood and community, it is clear that the neighbourhood, rightly or wrongly, has regained the attention of policy makers as part of a broader agenda for democratic renewal through the local community. In his January 2005 speech to the Volunteering Conference, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

The community where I grew up revolved not only around the home but the church, the youth club, the rugby team, the local tennis club, the scouts and boys' brigades, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the St John and St Andrew's ambulance societies … community not in any sense as some forced coming together, some sentimental togetherness for the sake of appearances, but out of a largely unquestioned conviction that we could learn from each other and call on each other in times of need, that we owed obligations to each other because our neighbours were part also of what we all were: the idea of neighbourliness woven into the way we led our lives. And my vision is of communities no longer inward-looking and exclusive, but looking outwards, recognising that when the strong help the weak we are all stronger. National leadership not seeking centre stage, but creating space for the neighbourliness and voluntary energies of millions of people to light up our country.[15]

The Chancellor's emphasis on the importance of neighbourliness is interesting because it implies a need for something more than just neighbourhood-based initiatives intended to promote strong local areas. Neighbourliness, it seems, implies an emphasis on the interactions that take place between people within shared communities, based on common interests.

15 Speech by the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Volunteering Conference (31 January 2005)

But how do we define what it is to be neighbourly? Despite the vast literature on different types of social networks, there is very little focus on the concept of neighbourliness. Is it about developing close friendships, borrowing or lending the odd item, or the casual hello in the street? The striking feature of social network literature is that there is very little focus on, or any real attempt to define, neighbourliness. Nor do we understand the factors that underlie it.

In Chapter 1, Ray Forrest and Gary Bridge, of the Centre for Neighbourhood Research at the University of Bristol, define neighbourliness as "the exchange of small services or support in an emergency against a background of routine convivial exchanges (greetings, brief chats over the garden fence or in the street)". They go on to discuss the various aspects of neighbourliness as well as the academic literature that surrounds it.

Chapter 2, by Dominic Abrams from the Centre for the Study of Group Processes in the Department of Psychology at the University of Kent, discusses the psychology of neighbourliness, suggests six propositions and concludes that "for people to be neighbourly they must feel their neighbours are worth supporting. By implication, they must want a sense of connection and value for their neighbourhood."

Despite these rather downbeat approaches, Chapter 3 draws on recent evidence to suggest that neighbourliness is alive and well. In this chapter Peter Marsh, Director of the Social Issues Research Centre, presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Halifax and conducted in May 2005. Although the relatively small sample size means that firm conclusions about neighbourliness should not be drawn, the results, according to Marsh, show that "the large majority of people think that this valuable commodity of neighbourliness is not in decline – and many think it has improved".

Beyond enhancing our understanding of contemporary neighbourliness and the processes that explain it, a crucial issue for policy makers is whether to promote it, and, if so, how. As the essays show, there is a fine and delicate balance to be struck by government in trying to promote neighbourliness: one person's idea of neighbourliness may be another's idea of a nuisance. An added difficulty is the remoteness and incapacity of government institutions and processes to affect change at the neighbourhood or street level, where structures matter less and where informal practices and relationships become more important.

Yet, as Chapter 4 shows, the government has a strong interest in, and a rich programme for, the development of neighbourliness. Joe Montgomery, Head of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit at the ODPM, argues powerfully that "promoting neighbourliness is as vital as improving public services and maintaining the public spaces in our neighbourhoods. Government cannot manufacture neighbourliness, but it does have a crucial role to play in putting the basics in place and in providing sensitively tailored support. If we can get this balance right, we can unleash the potential of residents to create an active brand of neighbourliness that can accelerate the process of renewing our poorest neighbourhoods and creating sustainable communities."

But government cannot do this on its own. Promoting neighbourliness will require a real and close knowledge of the needs and concerns of local communities, which may be beyond the scope of central bureaucracies. As Chapter 5 shows, voluntary and community organisations are well placed to supplement the work of central government and step in to foster the informal support networks that may become increasingly important, as the authors of this chapter, Simon Northmore, Ryan Sampson and Stephanie Harland, of Age Concern England, show.

The booklet closes with a series of case studies that show the importance of neighbourly activity, in this case towards elderly people. The examples presented by Penny Thewlis from Age Concern demonstrate the enduring importance of informal, convivial and reciprocal activities between people and imply a continued need to focus on ensuring that they are supported.

Chapter 1

What is neighbourliness?

Professor Ray Forrest and Dr Gary Bridge,
Centre for Neighbourhood Research at the University of Bristol

What is neighbourliness?
Professor Ray Forrest and Dr Gary Bridge

Contemporary popular views of neighbouring and neighbourliness tend to converge around the general belief that there is less of it than there used to be. And within the context of a general decline of manifest neighbouring as socialising or informal assistance, it is popularly believed that it is an activity particularly associated with poor, working-class neighbourhoods and elderly people. In a more fluid, individualised society, those of a younger generation seem to have little inclination to get to know their neighbours and appear to operate in a social world that has spatially diffuse social networks.

Thus the current policy interest in neighbouring and good neighbour schemes seems to be at odds with the dominant social trends. If we do not need neighbours any more, or at least not to the same extent, is there any purpose in building social interventions around assumptions that may be anachronistic? It may be, however, that we still interact with neighbours but in a more socially uneven way and for more specialised reasons. In other words, neighbourliness remains important as a source of social identity and informal assistance but there are also an increasing number of other sources.

Neighbourliness can be defined as "the exchange of small services or support in an emergency against a background of routine convivial exchanges" (such as greetings or brief chats over the garden fence or in the street).

This definition makes a distinction between overt and observable patterns of neighbourliness and more implicit or latent shared feelings or attributes among residents that may underpin and be reinforced by such activities. Skjaeveland, Garling and Maeland (1996) distinguish between research on neighbouring and research on psychological sense of community. The former can be regarded as manifest neighbouring, namely "observable social interaction and exchange of help and goods".[16] Warren (1986) refers to this aspect as neighbourhood sociability. "How often do the people in the neighbourhood have face to face contact with each other? How many neighbours are in contact with others in this way?"[17]

Manifest neighbourliness
The most direct way to define manifest neighbouring is to look at how various analysts have sought to operationalise it in studies of local social interaction. What kinds of

16 Skjaeveland, Garling and Maeland (1996), p415
17 Warren (1986), p313

socialising have been typically included? The largest studies of this aspect of neighbouring have been in the USA and have involved analyses of specific questions in wider-ranging surveys. These studies have the benefit of scale and longitudinality but are inevitably limited in scope by the number of neighbouring specific questions included in a survey with a more general purpose.

Guest and Wierzbicki's analysis[18] of some 20 years of the US General Household Survey examines responses to two questions which have been asked in 15 of these surveys between 1974 and 1996. Respondents were asked how often they "spend a social evening" with someone from their neighbourhood. A further question then asked how often they "spend a social evening with friends who live outside their neighbourhood". As Guest and Wierzbicki emphasise, neighbouring in these surveys is quite explicitly defined in terms of socialising. What the survey offers is a longitudinal measure of the relative importance of socialising with neighbours compared with socialising beyond the neighbourhood.

The relationship between social life within and beyond the neighbourhood is the key focus of the Guest and Wierzbicki study. Although the questions are limited in scope, their analysis offers some clear answers as to whether neighbourly activities have declined, whether extra local socialising has grown in relative importance, and what differences there are in these patterns between particular subgroups. In summary, their reanalysis of the 1974-96 surveys indicates the following:

• a slow but continuous decline in social ties at the neighbourhood level, as measured by two questions on neighbourhood and non-neighbourhood socialising (see earlier);
• a smaller upward growth in non-neighbourhood socialising;
• a positive relationship between socialising with neighbours and non-neighbourhood socialising - those who socialise a lot outside the neighbourhood also tend to be active neighbourhood socialisers.
• higher levels of neighbourhood socialising in rural areas;
• that relative to non-local ties, the greatest local ties were found among elderly people, those with a large number of children, those who stay at home (rather than go out to work or attend school) and the least educated;
• little change in absolute levels of neighbouring over the two decades among elderly people and those outside the labour force.

18 Guest and Wierzbicki (1999)

Essentially, the Guest and Wierzbicki study confirms a longstanding secular decline in socialisation at the neighbourhood level. They suggest that neighbourhood and non-neighbourhood socialising are becoming increasingly disassociated over time, indicating a clearer distinction between "locals" and "cosmopolitans" in contemporary US society. They stress, however, that the signs of a positive association between the two domains means that a sharp dichotomy is not supported by the evidence. Moreover, while subgroup analysis provides support for the view that the neighbourhood retains greater significance for elderly people and those outside the formal labour market, the data also indicates that neighbourhood socialising continues to perform an important function for some people in all subgroups.

As they conclude, "How can we reconcile the evidence that neighbouring and extra-neighbouring roles are becoming increasingly independent in the general population with the finding that the extent of specialisation is somewhat ambiguous? What seems possible is that neighbouring is a more voluntaristic activity chosen only by some".[19] Of course, as Guest and Wierzbicki acknowledge, the data from the US General Household Survey provides only a measure of socialisation. It may be that other forms of local social interaction, such as political or caring activities, are increasing and this could involve significant subgroup variation.

Other studies, with a more specific focus on neighbouring, offer an expanded set of questions to explore local social interaction and forms of socialising. These often include measures of how much information residents have about one another, the exchange of favours, or more casual chatting. Kleit (2001), for example, explored the closeness and function of neighbourhood networks through analysis of how often a respondent spoke to neighbours on a weekly basis. However, the pivotal issue that runs through the key texts on neighbouring behaviour distinguishes, explicitly or implicitly, between *socialising* and *forms of mutual aid and reciprocity*.

Unger and Wandersman's (1982) development of a survey instrument to explore urban neighbouring contains 10 measures. The first five measure recognition, socialising and friendship patterns among neighbours (for instance, "How many of the names do you know of the people who live in this block?"). The second five ask with how many neighbours respondents would "feel comfortable" in relation to performing a number of

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19 Ibid, p109

favours such as borrowing a tool or watching the house when they were away or in talking about a personal problem.

There are numerous variations on this format (see Buckner, 1988) but all contain similar sets of measures of manifest neighbouring. Berry et al (1990), for example, distinguish between the *task* and the *emotional components* of neighbouring. Their construction of a task index consisted of questions concerning whether neighbours might be called upon to watch the house, run errands or lend money if hospitalised for two weeks. The emotional index had two elements concerning willingness to confide (a) about personal problems or crises and (b) rely on neighbours for emotional support if hospitalised for two weeks.

The most developed analysis and exploration of the role and meaning of neighbouring as care and assistance can be found, however, in the large body of work by Philip Abrams (1978, 1984, 1985). Abrams was intrigued by the motivations of neighbours to help one another. To what extent was neighbouring, as social care or assistance, explained by notions of reciprocity or altruism? Was it possible to distinguish between the two? Did altruistic and reciprocal neighbouring both represent forms of exchanges from which the different actors derived different benefits? Abrams' work involves a detailed analysis of these issues through a number of empirical case studies. For the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to note that part of what neighbouring seems to be is an act from which people derive a sense of well-being and personal satisfaction. It makes them feel good about themselves in a way that is difficult to articulate. Bulmer's (1986) review of Abrams' work summarises this as follows:

One of the most striking things was the virtual unanimity with which members of Good Neighbour Schemes insisted that they got great personal satisfaction out of the work they did, combined with their virtually universal inability to say precisely what that satisfaction was. There was, as it were, an inexpressible reciprocity involved. Good Neighbours got as much as they gave but found it very difficult to give an account of what they got.[20]

This is where manifest neighbourliness shades into latent or ambient neighbourliness.

20 Bulmer (1986), p107

Latent or ambient neighbourliness

A distinction has already been made between overt and measurable aspects of neighbourliness and what we might think of as a background hum of sociability and support. It is this ambient neighbourliness which is often captured in references to a shared sense of belonging, community or identity. However, in research terms, it is more difficult to measure. Manifest acts of neighbourliness such as taking in parcels, feeding pets or having neighbours round for dinner are typically used as quantitative indicators of more latent aspects of neighbourliness. But the absence of, or low levels of, manifest acts of mutual assistance and support should not be interpreted as necessarily being indicative of an absence of a more general atmosphere of neighbourliness.

Peter Mann (1954) suggested that latent neighbourliness is a sentiment unleashed in an emergency or event. Feelings of well-being via neighbouring may have as much to do with the potential of neighbouring as the activity routinely documented in neighbourhood studies. Mann argues that latent neighbourliness may be the most important factor in social cohesion. Sleepy neighbourhoods are the most socially secure. Too much manifest neighbouring may lead to resentment. High levels of latent neighbourliness are more generally acceptable in neighbourhoods.

While some degree of local conviviality generally emerges from the literature as an essential element of neighbourliness, this can range from a cursory nod of acknowledgement through to passing the time of day in more extended but non-intimate, non-consequential conversation. Neighbouring with this type of exchange seems to be consistently high across neighbourhood types and national locations.

And these "light" convivial interactions can have more significant consequences. They might be the building blocks for more involved relationships. Ball and Ball's (1982) study of informal neighbouring notes the significance of observation neighbouring (passing the time of day, talking about the weather) as a first step towards support-type relationships.

Equally, information exchange of this kind can act as a form of mutual exploration of attitudes out of which informal social norms are sustained. The participants in neighbourly conversation use each other as reference points. Warren (1981) noted how, during the process of informational interaction, subtle and overt norms on a range of topics are exchanged, for example on how to decorate your house.

It is also the case that active neighbouring is not an essential ingredient of the good neighbour. In Keller's (1968) study of the urban neighbourhood, she makes the point that the idea of what constitutes a good neighbour will vary. Culture, class, age and gender will all impinge on what are expected and acceptable social norms of neighbouring. A neighbourhood where people kept to themselves and minded their own business could be regarded as a positive attribute.

Research into the nature of neighbours' reciprocity has also raised the question of over-reciprocation. Neighbourly relations can easily be felt to be intrusive. There is a fine line between good and bad neighbouring. This was noted some time ago by Foley (1952) who referred to limited neighbouring with reserve. This is captured by Pfiel (1968) in the idea of the neighbourly greeting which is at once a turning towards and a turning away. Equally Kingston (1972) notes that qualities of helpfulness and respect for privacy are more significant attributes than the personal qualities of neighbours. In a more recent study Crow, Allen et al (2002) suggest that it is a skilful achievement for neighbours to maintain the balance between being nosy and keeping one's distance. Thus, good neighbouring is as much about restraint, non-involvement and latent qualities as it is about activities that social scientists and community activists can investigate and record.

Constructing neighbourliness?
Finally, does research indicate ways in which neighbourliness might be encouraged or facilitated? Here we need to distinguish between positive neighbourliness as opposed to more defensive forms of mutual support among those living in a dangerous neighbourhood with high levels of crime and insecurity. Rising crime rates may, indeed, generate more manifest forms of active neighbouring to cope with insecurity. Equally, however, Merry (1981) found that in high-poverty neighbourhoods routine interactions were highly circumscribed because of a pervasive atmosphere of threat.

Perhaps unhelpfully, the research literature tends to produce contradictory results on factors that inhibit or promote neighbourliness. However, even if high levels of crime were shown to produce a marked increase in neighbourliness, this could hardly be taken as an indicator of a healthier, more cohesive and supportive society. As Fukayama (1999) has pointed out, a growth of neighbourhood watch schemes may involve more informal local activity but it is neighbouring based on a shared sense of mistrust rather than trust.

More positively, age and length of residence typically emerge as being positively correlated with high levels of neighbourliness. Thus, it might be expected that demographic ageing

linked perhaps to lower levels of residential mobility would create the conditions for higher levels of both manifest and latent forms of neighbourliness. This might suggest that if governments are concerned about a perceived decline in neighbourliness they need do little but merely sit back and observe the consequences of an ageing population.

As regards more active and plausible interventions, considerable attention has been given to the physical design of buildings and settlement patterns in the promotion of neighbourly interaction. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that the physical layout of the neighbourhood is a significant factor in levels of neighbourly activity. Festinger's (1950) early work suggested that cul-de-sacs encouraged neighbouring.

In a study of public housing residents in Bergen, Skjaeveland and Garling (1997) found some strong links between the physical morphology of the neighbourhood and neighbouring activity. The neighbourhood types included were housing in the central city, houses in post-war areas with detached homes on the outskirts of the city, and suburbs with blocks of flats four to 12 storeys high. The study cross-tabulated their neighbouring index (14 dimensions) with physical characteristics such as street layout, building diversity, zoning size, interactional spaces, architecture, age and aesthetic condition.

Variance in neighbourly activity was explained significantly by spaciousness, dwelling density, semiprivate space and structured open space. Perceived spaciousness (room to wander and a wide view) is associated with low levels of neighbour annoyance and high levels of neighbourhood attachment. Semiprivate space (front gardens and verandas) gives a degree of territorial control with the option of active contact with neighbouring properties if desired. Residents who have semiprivate space are involved with its upkeep, which increases the possibility of social contact with neighbours. More densely populated dwellings produced less supportive acts of neighbouring. Poor building quality and overcrowding hinder supportive acts of neighbouring. These findings confirm the research suggesting that neighbourliness involves distance and privacy as well as closeness and conviviality.

In a similar vein, Oldenberg (1989, 2001) points to the importance of certain "third spaces" facilitating neighbourhood sociability. These consist of bars, coffee shops, hair salons and the like. They are significant in a number of ways, according to Oldenberg: they promote neighbourhood sociability, help diffuse local information, and consolidate social norms and trust.

Concluding remarks

Latent or ambient neighbourliness forms a vital backdrop, an implicit contract if you like, against which more manifest acts of neighbouring can happen, but also against which mutual distance and respect can be maintained. This is a situation in which neighbours can feel some individual control over their relations.

This balance of civility with propinquity is something that Jane Jacobs captured so well in her depiction of a thriving New York neighbourhood. The mixed uses (commercial, residential, leisure) meant constant pavement use throughout the day and evening; the density of residence and the diversity of activities pursued in the space ensured eyes on the street and a neighbourhood hum that acted as a guarantor of personal safety and control over the environment. It was a form of neighbourliness that drew its strength precisely from the fact that it was an implicit contract, to some degree unpredictable and open to difference and innovation, as well as a platform to relations outside the neighbourhood.

We leave the last word to Jacobs:

A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel or balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact or help from people around. This balance is largely made up of small, sensitively managed details, practised and accepted so casually that they are normally taken for granted. [21]

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21 Jacobs (1993 [1961]), pp77-78

Chapter 2

The psychology of neighbourliness

Professor Dominic Abrams, Centre for the Study of Group Processes in the Department of Psychology at the University of Kent

The psychology of neighbourliness
Professor Dominic Abrams

Neighbourliness is both a form of behaviour and an orientation. Neighbourliness may sometimes seem to be a rather benign or even trivial aspect of social life, but it can also be argued that neighbourliness embodies and reflects some of the core aspects of human survival and thriving. If this is so, neighbourliness may be an important manifestation of the health of a social environment. Evidence of positive neighbourliness is likely to be evidence of a society that is at ease with itself. This chapter uses social psychological theory and research to set out the nature, causes and some consequences of neighbourliness.

The importance of neighbourliness
At a simple economic and material level the benefits of neighbourliness are illustrated by voluminous experimental evidence on behaviour in social dilemmas.[22] A social dilemma is a situation in which individuals may gain resources for themselves by behaving selfishly, but only if the majority of others behave unselfishly. If everyone behaves selfishly, however, the pool of resource becomes so depleted that everybody loses out. Neighbourliness is just such a resource.

If everyone takes a little responsibility for helping/cleaning up/reporting incidents/ watching out for neighbours then everybody benefits enormously and it does not matter if one or two people do not or cannot participate. The benefits may be material, such as higher house values, but also social and psychological, such as lowered anxiety over crime, pride in one's home, trust in others, being relaxed about allowing children to sit outside the front door or play in the street, and having a clean and attractive environment.

However, if a significant number of households care only and entirely for themselves, these common goods are less secure, and all other households may resort to securing their own personal environment, ultimately at much greater personal cost and in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.

A working definition of neighbourliness
Being a neighbour has been described as a social role that carries associated obligations and expectations (such as reciprocity).[23] Social psychological research suggests that

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22 Parks, CD and Sanna, LJ *Group Performance & Interaction* (Westview Press, 1999)
23 See Bulmer, M *Neighbours: The Work of Philip Abrams* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp21-22

another way to think of neighbourliness is in terms of people's sense of identity.[24] I propose the following definition to embrace this idea:

Neighbourliness involves non-obligatory willingness to take social and practical respon-sibility for others with whom people share an area of residence. It may also involve the implicit presumption that there is a set of people who have the same willingness toward oneself. It is likely to be founded on a sense of common interest, common purpose and common identity. It may range from seemingly trivial instances of nodding one's head towards a familiar face, or removing some litter outside a neighbour's home, to much more substantial investments of time such as providing services, care and support. Neighbourliness depends on recognition that oneself and the other person are part of the same entity in terms of locality and social space. Neighbourliness is part of what people do concretely to establish and maintain that entity.

The remainder of this chapter will develop the following six propositions about neighbourliness:

- First, it is useful to understand neighbourliness as an *orientation* that may or may not be manifested behaviourally, depending on people's circumstances and opportunity.
- Second, neighbourliness is an important aspect of *social inclusion* and exclusion, and therefore will be affected by things that increase or decrease exclusion.
- Third, neighbourliness will depend on the extent to which the neighbourhood is understood by members to be a *meaningful entity*. Factors that increase the tangibility of that entity will also lay the ground for increased neighbourliness.
- Fourth, membership of a neighbourhood can provide a *social identity* which people will value and protect though neighbourliness.
- Fifth, neighbourhoods with different characteristics have different potential for *socialisation* of their members, and therefore will manifest different levels of neighbourliness.
- Sixth, neighbourliness is *generative*. That is, while neighbourly people make places neighbourly, neighbourly places will encourage people to be more neighbourly and to thrive as a result of stronger engagement with a meaningful social community.

24 Abrams, D, Hogg, MA, Hinkle, SW and Otten, S "The Social Identity Perspective on Small Groups" in Poole, MS and Hollingshead, AB (eds) *Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Sage Publications, 2005)

Neighbourliness as an orientation

Instances of neighbourliness are easily brought to mind. However, what people regard as neighbourly is likely to differ according to their expectations and needs. What one person sees as offering help may be viewed as interfering by another. Friendliness from one perspective is intrusiveness from another. Consequently, being neighbourly is about fitting in with others' needs and expectations, not just a persistent effort to be helpful or polite.

This means that at some times good neighbours simply respect one another's privacy, whereas at others they form an actively supportive social community. Therefore, rather than defining neighbourliness in terms of specific acts, it is useful to understand neighbourliness as an *orientation* that is sometimes manifested behaviourally, depending on circumstances, needs and opportunities.

A neighbourly orientation is essentially a set of assumptions, expectations and motives about sustaining the value and coherence of one's community or neighbourhood. This orientation is likely to be reflected in active forms that may support (socialising, offering help and so on) and protect (removing litter, reporting suspicious behaviour) people whom one regards as neighbours. It can also be reflected in passive forms (such as showing tolerance and compromise when neighbours do something inconvenient).

Social inclusion as a basis of neighbourliness

There are strong psychological reasons why people might value neighbours and why they might want to be neighbourly themselves. A large body of evidence supports the idea that people generally desire a sense of belonging and acceptance in social groups. Evidence about the consequences of not belonging, or being ostracised, is very striking. It shows that people who are excluded become defensive, hostile and unable to work effectively, suffer low self-esteem and fail to take opportunities for self-improvement.[25] Therefore neighbours can be a very valuable resource for well-being, for a sense of selfhood, and for confident engagement with the practicalities of life in a complex society.

What people gain from connections with others goes well beyond the notion of social capital. Social relationships are the very basis for effective living. People depend heavily on social consensus for their understanding of what is important, relevant, positive, negative, valuable and valueless in the world.[26] When faced with uncertainty people turn

25 Abrams, D, Hogg, MA and Marques, J *The Social Psychology of Inclusion & Exclusion* (Psychology Press, 2005)
26 Festinger, L "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes" in *Human Relations* 7 (1954), pp114-140, and Moscovici, S *Social Representations: Explorations in Social Psychology* (Polity Press, 2000)

to others, either because they are experts, or more likely because they are peers and associates who we think share our perspectives. Conversely, being part of a group is likely to provide a greater sense of certainty and confidence about engaging in social relationships with other members of that social group or network.[27]

If one has no connection with others who care about an issue, it is difficult to sustain any confidence that it matters. If someone has no sense of whether their neighbours are dissatisfied with the state of the pavements, or traffic speeds, or vandalism, it is likely to be difficult to take action as an individual. Neighbourliness has the capacity to provide people with a sense of inclusion, and thus greater certainty, by offering potential social reference points. It is likely to be an important vehicle of civic engagement and social participation.[28]

While exclusion from social groups is painful, people do like to have a sense of their own uniqueness or distinctiveness. For example, people tend to describe themselves in terms of things that both link them to others and set them apart – not just as "an MP" but as "the MP for …", not just "an academic" but "a social psychologist", not just someone from London, but "Islington, actually!".[29]

People are more attracted to groups that are manageable in terms of the number of relationships and commitments they entail.[30] Neighbours, unlike families, work groups, teams and ethnic, religious or cultural communities, may also offer precisely the balance between social connectedness and remoteness that people may find comfortable. We may elect to spend more or less time with them, to pay them more or less attention, as suits our own needs. There are also advantages in smallness from the perspective of the group. For example, as groups become larger and more heterogeneous it becomes more likely that each individual will neglect to contribute to group goals or, by extension, to be neighbourly.

Areas characterised by high levels of graffiti, littering and untidiness are likely to be ones in which people have neither a strong sense of individuality nor a strong sense of

27 Hogg, MA and Abrams, D *Group Motivation* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993)
28 Emler, NP "Social Structure and Individual Lives: Effects of Participation in the Social Institutions of Family, Education and Work" in Bynner, J and Silbereisen, RK (eds) *Adversity & Challenge in the Life Course in England & the New Germany* (Macmillan, 2000)
29 Brewer, MB "The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time" in *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 17 (1991), pp475-482
30 Williams, KD, Forgas, J and Von Hippel, W *The Social Outcast* (Psychology Press, 2005)

connection to others. If there is no sense of connection or accountability, there is unlikely to be a strong sense of mutual responsibility.

The upside of neighbourliness is clearly that when people share a neighbourly orientation they benefit from the increased certainty and confidence that they can navigate social and practical problems effectively and with support from others. They will also feel confident about offering support to others on the basis that their neighbourliness is shared. On the other hand, the downside of neighbourliness is that it introduces elements of uncontrollability. Neighbours can become unwanted dependants, or deep enemies, and of course neighbours can have unparalleled power as agents of social exclusion and rejection. Philip Abrams[31] observed that:

… throughout the literature in fact there are constant echoes of the folk wisdom quoted by Robert Frost: "good fences make good neighbours" – and not just good fences, but stout walls, thick curtains and discreetly averted heads too.

So, to the extent that neighbourliness is voluntary and self-directed it represents an opportunity. But to the extent that it is directed at oneself, perhaps uninvited, it may sometimes represent a nuisance or even a threat. People are likely to feel more comfortable in a neighbourly relationship to the extent that they feel they have some control over their commitment or obligation within that relationship.

The motive to be neighbourly may depend in part on whether people's needs for belonging, inclusion, meaning and certainty can be satisfied more readily by other means. People with more autonomy, wealth and access to multiple social networks may be less inclined to be neighbourly than those who are constrained socially, geographically or economically, and who have more to gain from neighbourliness. But, regardless of the threshold that people may have before they offer or seek neighbourliness, the *same* processes should underlie neighbourliness for everyone.

If we accept that neighbourliness is an orientation, we need to consider what it is that people orient towards, and what makes a set of neighbours form something that could be called a "subjective neighbourhood". The subjective neighbourhood is important because without it there is no basis, either in perception or motivation, for people to be neighbourly.

31 Abrams, P, quoted in Bulmer, M, op cit, pp30-31

The neighbourhood as a meaningful entity

A neighbourhood is sometimes defined with reference to explicit or objective criteria, as a set of dwellings that are encompassed by a common electoral ward or parish, delimited by particular road boundaries, or possibly by functional relationships such as the scope of a particular neighbourhood watch scheme or residents' association. However, subjectively a neighbourhood could be much more flexible. At times it might refer to one's own side of town, at others it might refer to a much more restricted set of people that are regarded as neighbours. In addition, people's views about the characteristics of the neighbourhood may be mixed or ambivalent. They may easily bring to mind both the typical, average or representative image ("This is a nice neighbourhood") and the problematic instances ("those noisy people at number 17").

Social psychological research has examined the factors that determine whether a set of people are perceived as a group or coherent entity. For example, Donald Campbell[32] proposed that groups are more "entitative" when members pursue a common goal, are interpersonally similar, are in close proximity and have shared and stable boundaries. More recent work has stressed that a more powerful determinant of entitativity is whether the group is perceived as acting in a co-ordinated way.[33]

Once people begin to think about themselves and others in terms of common group membership, their perceptions and behaviour change. A set of people perceived to be an entity are likely to be *treated* as if the members share common characteristics, goals and abilities. Consequently, a set of nigh-dwellers is more likely to act, and be acted towards, as if they are a part of a neighbourhood when they are in a situation that strengthens their entitativity. In a nutshell, entitativity is a basis for neighbourliness.

Group boundaries provide the basis for social control. People expect to have, and exert, influence over other members of their in-groups. They expect co-operation and support from in-group members, whereas they do not expect similar levels of co-operation from people outside the group, and indeed they may expect competition from out-groups.[34] It follows that people will expect members of their subjective neighbourhood to treat

32 Campbell, DT "Common Fate, Similarity and Other Indices of the Status of Aggregates of Persons as Social Entities" in *Behavioural Science* 3 (1958), pp14-25
33 Brewer, M, Hong, Y and Li, Q "Dynamic Entitativity: Perceiving Groups as Actors" in Yzerbyt, V, Judd, CM and Corneille, O (eds) *The Psychology of Group Perception* (Psychology Press, 2004)
34 Insko, CA and Schopler, J "Differential Distrust of Groups and Individuals" in Sedikides, C, Schopler, J and Inslo, CA (eds) *Intergroup Cognition & Intergroup Behaviour* (Erlbaum, 1998)

them, and to be treated by them, favourably. As a subjective neighbourhood becomes more entitative, neighbourliness will become more widespread.

Neighbourliness is not always characterised by warm, friendly relationships or helpfulness. Because the goal of neighbourliness is likely to be determined partly by a desire to sustain the meaning and value of the subjective neighbourhood, it will also involve efforts to limit or control those neighbours who threaten or challenge the image of the neighbourhood. Once people are part of the subjective neighbourhood, they are also seen as legitimate targets for social control. People may feel they have a right to ask neighbours to trim their hedges, or keep the noise down, or remove their DIY debris from the driveway. They may put informal pressure on neighbours to conform in terms of the way they decorate or present the outside of their property. They may even engage in practices such as ostracism as a means of controlling neighbours, or encouraging them to leave the neighbourhood.

People exert these forms of influence much more strongly over members of their own groups who contravene social norms than over members of other groups.[35] However, the general implications for neighbourliness are that, other things being equal, neighbour-hoods that are characterised more strongly as an entity are likely to be more harmonious and comfortable places to live, and will be able to sustain themselves more effectively.

Social identity as a basis for neighbourliness
Having a subjective neighbourhood provides a basis for, but does not necessarily motivate, neighbourly action, so the question is what encourages people to be prepared to be neighbourly, and what do people get from neighbourliness?

Research shows that people's self-concepts are based partially on the distinctiveness and value they attach to different social categories to which they see themselves as belonging ("a psychologist", "British") – their social identity.[36] People like to see themselves as part of a distinctive social group, such as a neighbourhood, that is regarded positively in comparison with other relevant groups, such as districts, towns and cities.

Entitative neighbourhoods are likely to form a basis for social identity, but the strength of identification with social groups depends on the social situation of the group as a whole.

35 Abrams, D, Marques, JM, Bown, NJ and Henson, M "Pro-Norm and Anti-Norm Deviance Within and Between Groups" in *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 78 (2000), pp906–912
36 Tajfel, H *Differentiation Between Social Groups* (Academic Press, 1978) and also Hogg, MA and Abrams, D *Social Identifications: A Psychology of Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* (Routledge, 1988)

Groups that have a legitimate and stable basis for a high-status position are likely to attract members and to provide a secure and positive social identity for those members. People may value enormously being a member of a distinctive and prestigious or desirable neighbourhood. They are likely to see opportunities to be neighbourly as ways of consolidating and verifying the value of belonging. Interactions are likely to be co-operative, positive and characterised by openness and engagement. Neighbourhoods that are highly entitative and offer positive social identity are likely to embody a higher level of neighbourliness.

On the other hand, people may fear being a member of a distinctive but low-status neighbourhood (for instance, one that is referred to by others as a "sink estate") as this is likely to be stigmatising and threatening to their social identity.[37] In this situation people are likely to leave the neighbourhood, or psychologically attach themselves to other communities. Opportunities to be neighbourly may be avoided, or at least restricted to immediate one-to-one exchange relationships, and people's interactions may be characterised more by avoidance and lack of trust.

Therefore, depending on the social and economic situation of the neighbourhood, the features that make a neighbourhood more distinctive, such as its size, location or degree of difference from surrounding areas, may equally well magnify advantages and disadvantages, and may therefore promote or inhibit neighbourliness.

From a policy perspective it may be crucial for the reconstruction or improvement of a neighbourhood to find ways to encourage people to stay. Neighbourhoods that are under threat but remain cohesive are those that are likely to find ways to act collectively to restore or improve their situation. This may take forms such as campaigning or lobbying for resources, protesting, or trying to redefine the terms by which the group is judged publicly (for instance by finding creative new ways to compare with other groups). These actions may be instigated in forms such as community groups acting to create new symbols of activity (such as through churches, community centres or activities).

It is possible that neighbourhoods that act together also benefit from a greater sense of efficacy or power. This can become a virtuous circle, as research shows that people with more power behave in a more flexible and often adaptive way. For example, when the South Darenth community was under threat from the development of the Channel Tunnel

37 Major, B and Ecclestone, CP "Stigma and Social Exclusion" in Abrams, D, Hogg, MA and Marques, J, op cit

Rail Link, those who identified more strongly with the community were both less stressed and more likely to be involved in community groups to negotiate with the council and British Rail.[38]

For some people, leaving an undesirable neighbourhood may be difficult or impossible, for personal or financial reasons. When the social identity conferred by the neighbourhood is negative and inescapable and there appears to be no legitimate way to improve the situation, the manifestations may be more adverse and antisocial. They may include emergence of youth gangs, acts of vandalism, and self-serving actions with no regard to the impact on others. These in turn make the neighbourhood less entitative and undermine the viability of the subjective neighbourhood for people living in the area. If these developments are not brought under control by informal or formal means, the consequence is likely to be widespread disengagement from the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood socialisation

A neighbourhood may well determine the neighbourliness of individuals within it more than vice versa. The evidence about behaviour of group members suggests very strongly that the situation of the group, more than the personalities or dispositions of the individuals, is the driving factor. In most groups most of the time majority viewpoints prevail.[39] Strong neighbourhoods will have a tradition, carried on by established members and their socialisation of new members, of defining the neighbourhood as an entity, securing members' commitment to the neighbourhood, and ensuring its legacy.

Research on the way groups receive, accept and lose members shows that there are different phases of socialisation that reflect the changing balance of commitments between individuals and the group.[40] Neighbourhoods will seek commitments from individuals and vice versa. To this end they each evaluate the contribution they make and receive. Strong neighbourhoods are likely to have relatively clearer forms of ceremony that mark the entry and exit of members as people move from being prospective members to new members, to full members, then become more marginal and finally ex-members.

38 Abrams, D and Chesham, D *Community Survey on the Impact of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link: Report to Sevenoaks District Council* (University of Kent, 1994)
39 Davis, JH "Group Decision and Social Interaction: A Theory of Social Decision Schemes" in *Psychological Review* 80 (1973), pp97-125
40 Levine, J, Moreland, RL and Hausmann, LRM "Managing Group Composition: Inclusive and Exclusive Role Transitions" in Abrams, D, Hogg, MA and Marques, J (eds), op cit

Members of newly created neighbourhoods (such as estates of newly built homes) will focus much more on establishing the similarities among members than on worrying about differences. For example, in North America, campus sororities start with a concern to define their norms and determine whether or not people fit the criteria for membership. This helps to define the group as a distinctive entity and to lay the ground rules for involvement and participation. Over time, however, the rules become more relaxed as people become more familiar with who is and who is not a member.[41] Similarly, it is likely that people joining a new neighbourhood will watch one another rather vigilantly to see if they fit in.

It may be difficult to sustain neighbourliness in areas that undergo rapid change. In the absence of a stable pool of members, it is more difficult for people to register contributions made by individuals to the neighbourhood and vice versa. Several kinds of change might have this effect, such as increases in population resulting from brownfield development, changes in employment opportunities, migration that reflects changes in the desirability of surrounding areas, schooling options, losses of important amenities such as pubs, churches and post offices, and changes in the physical situation such as increased severance due to traffic or the presence of barriers and gates. Similarly, demographic changes such as a widening age gap between old-timers and newcomers might reduce the potential common ground and reduce the perception of the neighbourhood as a single entity. This would weaken the capacity of old-timers to engage in socialisation of newcomers.

Against these factors are changes that might well enhance the capacity for neighbour-hood socialisation. Older people are less likely to move. A neighbourhood with a higher proportion of older people will therefore be more stable and predictable. It will be relatively easier to socialise new members and easier for those members to understand how to join. Even if the capacity of some individuals to show neighbourliness might be limited, the overall capacity within the neighbourhood may remain considerable.

Similarly, an influx of younger people intending to start families may increase neigh-bourliness if it is accompanied by a focus that enhances their link to the neighbourhood, such as the presence of a local primary school. A further very important element is the presence of organisational structures designed to manage neighbourhood socialisation. These may include the local church or a residents' association. Although there may be key

41 Ryan, CS, Robinson, DR and Hausmann, LRM "Group Socialization, Uncertainty Reduction and the Development of New Members' Perceptions of Group Variability" in Yzerbyt, Y, Judd, CM and Corneille, O (eds), op cit

individuals that work to sustain these organisations, in principle such individuals can be replaced and the organisation will continue to function in a similar way.

The generative potential of neighbourliness

Some might regard neighbourliness as a form of empathy in which people help someone in need because they have adopted the perspective of that person and imagine how that person feels. However, evidence suggests that although personal empathy seems to increase helping of another individual it does not generalise to the group as a whole,[42] so acts of kindness to a particular neighbour may not generalise to all neighbours. Therefore it is unlikely that encouraging people to adopt an empathy-based approach will encourage neighbourliness.

An alternative is to encourage people to take responsibility for one another. Ironically, classic social psychological research shows that the more bystanders there are the less likely it is that any one individual will intervene to help someone in need – a so-called "diffusion of responsibility". However, a person is more likely to help if he or she correctly interprets the situation as an emergency, recognises that he or she has the expertise to help, and acknowledges that responsibility to help is his or hers.[43] So, if someone knows for certain that a neighbour is in need and that only they can help, they may well do so. What is needed is a way of reducing the threshold before people feel able to request and offer help.

Much of the ambiguity and reluctance to help in such situations appears to be eliminated when people believe the person in need shares their own group membership. People are substantially more likely to help a person who is visibly an in-group member than if the same person appears to be an out-group member.[44] If the people around us are *not* viewed as members of a shared social group, it is unlikely that we will expend much effort on their behalf.

Such evidence underlines the point that a sense of common in-group membership is a fundamental basis for neighbourliness. For example, research on volunteerism shows that

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42 Batson, CD, Polycarpou, MP, Harmon-Jones, E, Imhoff, HJ, Mitchener, EC, Bendar, LL, Klein, TR and Highberger, L "Empathy and Attitudes: Can Feeling for a Member of a Stigmatized Group Improve Feelings Toward the Group?" in *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 72 (1997), pp105–118
43 Latané, B and Darley, J "Bystander 'Apathy'" in *American Scientist* 57 (1969), pp244–268
44 Levine, M, Prosser, A, Evans, D and Reicher, SD "Identity and Emergency Intervention: How Social Group Membership and Inclusiveness of Group Boundaries Shapes Helping Behavior" in *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 31 (2005), pp443-453

interventions that focus people's attention on their community increase both their sense of community and also their intention to engage in activism and broader civic participation. Moreover, volunteers often recruit their clients to become future volunteers, and the number and strength of social connections in the community increase, as do the health and well-being of its members.[45] There are benefits in monetary terms and also in establishing a stronger culture of care.

In a similar vein, research into giving and receiving support among older people[46] shows that economic reciprocity is not the main motive in these relationships. In fact, people experienced greater self-esteem if they gave more help than they were receiving, and they felt bad if they were denied the opportunity to reciprocate in some form. Encouraging older people to adopt helping roles may be an effective way of improving the psychological state not just of the recipient but also of the donor of help.

Building opportunities and a repertoire for good neighbourliness is something that people may find attractive and intrinsically rewarding. A conclusion from this research is that being neighbourly in the context of a meaningful community is likely to be just as good for the giver as for the receiver of neighbourliness. Neighbourliness is constructive and generative.

Conclusions and policy implications

This chapter has proposed six important elements of neighbourliness. Neighbourliness is an orientation that is an aspect of social inclusion and exclusion, and thus has potential to provide people with a strengthened sense of meaning and confidence in their world. Neighbourliness will be strengthened when the set of people living in one's vicinity are viewed as a social entity and when one identifies with those people as part of one's own group. It is sustained and managed through local socialisation practices, which different neighbourhoods may be able to perform more or less effectively. Neighbourliness has the capacity to benefit both donors and recipients, and to enrich the quality of life of all participants. Although kind and good people make good neighbours, it is also likely that neighbourliness promotes constructive and positive behaviour from others.

45 Omoto, AM and Snyder, M "Considerations of Community: The Context and Process of Volunteerism" in *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (2002), pp847-867
46 Liang, J, Krause, NM and Bennett, JM "Social Exchange and Well-being: Is Giving Better than Receiving?" in *Psychology & Aging* 16 (2001), pp511-523

If neighbourliness is regarded generally as a good thing, we need to find ways to support the structures that can promote it. Residents' associations and parish councils, local services and social centres are very important as places that allow people to make the neighbourhood (and its membership) something tangible and entitative. These structures allow the development of common goals and action, which in turn provide a firm basis for neighbourliness.

Equally important is that for people to be neighbourly they must feel that their neighbours are worth supporting. By implication, they must want a sense of connection and value for their neighbourhood. If policies support initiatives that help people to develop positive value for their neighbourhood, neighbourliness is likely to be a part of the outcome.

It is also important to recognise that different people are in different positions to offer and receive neighbourliness, and that people's capacity to be neighbourly is an important community resource. It seems more fruitful to use an "each according to his/her ability" approach than one that exhorts everyone to be more neighbourly. Neighbourliness may be manifested by relatively few but experienced and felt by many more. Opportunities to make that shared feeling more tangible may well be an important boost to the overall capacity of a neighbourhood to elicit neighbourly action. In particular, older people and others who may have time, skill and experience are likely to be more readily able to offer, as well as to receive, neighbourly activity. To build neighbourliness it would make sense to recognise and invest in these resources.

Chapter 3

The Halifax "Neighbours" survey

Dr Peter Marsh, Director of the Social Issues Research Centre

The Halifax "Neighbours" survey
Dr Peter Marsh

This short report relates to a study commissioned by the Halifax and conducted in May 2005. There is no significant discussion of theoretical perspectives of neighbourliness, nor significant concern with definitional issues. These are dealt with in some depth in other contributions to this collection of essays. Rather, it should be seen as a modest snapshot of community life as seen by "ordinary" members of British society.

The telephone survey was conducted by TNS using a representative sample of 1,012 adults over the age of 16.

In summary, the survey revealed that Britain remains a neighbourly country, despite gloomy assessments to the contrary.

- Over half of women and over 60% of men think that nothing has changed in this respect over the past five years, irrespective of age.
- Nearly a fifth of men (19%) think that relationships with neighbours have actually improved, compared with 22% of women. Older respondents of retirement age (65+) were more likely to take this positive view (27%).
- Fewer men and women (13% and 20% respectively) think that relations with their neighbours have declined over the past five years.[47] Younger respondents were more inclined to this view (20%) compared with older people (14%).
- The overall trend is that things are much the same but perceived improvements in neighbourliness are more significant than perceived deterioration.

Respondents were asked to rate their relationships with neighbours on a five-point scale from "I've never or hardly ever spoken with my neighbours" [1] to "I would count some of my neighbours as close personal friends" [5].

- The most common response (33% of males and 31% of females) was a rating of relationships with neighbours at the midpoint of 3.
- Significantly more respondents, however, rated their relationship above the midpoint than below – 44% of men and 51% of women tended towards the "close friends" end of the scale, compared with 23% and 17% respectively responding towards the "hardly ever spoken" pole.

47 The difference between the sexes in this context is statistically significant: $x2=9.647538$, df=2, p<0.01

- Although women were slightly more likely than men to say that relationships with neighbours were worse than they were five years ago, they still rated them as being more positive than did men.[48]
- There were, again, some interesting age trends. Older respondents were more likely to give positive respondents than were younger people. This may reflect, however, the fact that they were more likely to have lived in a particular neighbourhood for a substantial period of time than were younger respondents.

When asked to rate the more general sense of community where the respondents lived, the majority tended towards feeling that people looked out for each other and a sense of community prevailed. They were asked to respond on a five-point scale from "People around here don't look out for their neighbours at all" [1] to "People around here are very community minded and always look out for each other" [5].

- The most common response was, again, the midpoint of the scale, but with significantly more responses above the midline than below.
- In this context women were slightly more positive than men, but there were no significant differences between either the sexes or the various age groups.
- This is consistent with the dominant view that getting along with neighbours and the local community remains an important aspect of everyday life.

Having good relations with neighbours was also seen by the majority of respondents (nearly 60%) as a way of reducing stress and feeling happier and healthier.

- This was particularly marked among people in their 40s and 50s, with nearly 70% expressing this view.[49]
- A strong sense of community is clearly seen as a major factor of personal well-being.

Both men and women overwhelmingly feel that having good relationships with their neighbours increased their sense of safety and security.

- 84% of males and 82% or women were of this view.
- The firmness of this view increased with age – 88% of over-65s felt more safe and secure because of their relationship with neighbours, compared with 79% of under-24s.

48 The difference between the sexes in this context is also significant at the 95% confidence level.
49 The difference between the ages in this context is very statistically significant: $x2=50.50675$, df=16, p<0.001

- The rise of neighbourhood watch schemes and similar local initiatives may reflect this dominant sentiment.
- For people of retirement age, neighbours tend often to be also good friends with whom they socialise.
- Younger people, on the other hand, tend to distinguish between neighbours and their main circle of friends, and socialise much less frequently with people in the immediate vicinity.[50]
- When asked to respond to the statement "My neighbours and I socialise together", 49% of those in the 45-54 age category of both sexes said that the statement applied to them "somewhat" or "quite a lot", compared with only 29% of those aged between 25 and 34.
- These age differences may reflect the fact that younger people have not yet put down their roots in the local community to the same extent as have those of more mature years.

Neighbourliness, however, has its limits, and undoubtedly has always had its limits.

- From the responses to the telephone survey it was clear that most people (57%) were happy to nip round and borrow next-door's lawnmower or the traditional cup of sugar. And they were equally happy that neighbours should call on them for such favours. Over half felt that way.
- Around half would also rely on neighbours to look after the cat while they were away or water the plants. They might similarly rely on neighbours to help them when they had locked themselves out. These tendencies increased with age.
- The more we socialise with our neighbours, of course, the more such interactions are likely to take place. But even among those who never ordinarily spoke to their neighbours, nearly a quarter still felt able to ask for the loan of a garden tool.
- The limit of neighbourliness appears to come when we need to seek personal or financial advice. Here it is family and close friends we turn to, rather than the people who just happen to live nearby. Only around one in six respondents thought that it was appropriate to "burden" neighbours with such things and only one in four of those who said that their neighbours were also close friends would do so.

What the results of the Halifax Neighbours study reflect is, perhaps, the enduring human need for a sense of belonging with others around them. Our cities, towns and lifestyles

50 This difference between the age groups is the most statistically significant effect in the whole survey:
$x2=30.06986$, df= 4, p<0.001

may have changed quite markedly over the past century, or even the past decade. But our need to be part of a community and have social relationships with those close by remains. While the places in which we live may seem rather faceless and anonymous compared with the small communities of yesteryear, we are quite clearly capable of recreating the kinds of social interaction that seem to be so essential to our well-being.

The study also, perhaps, helps us to work towards a better definition of neighbourliness. While neighbours can also be close friends – particularly for older people – they are not necessarily so. Even if they are, we might chose to share more intimate aspects of lives with different types of close friend or, in many cases, with members of our family. What neighbours provide most is a feeling of security, in both the protective sense and the social sense, alongside help with practical issues and resource sharing.

The fact that the large majority of people think that this valuable commodity of neighbourliness is not in decline – and many think it has improved – is a welcome challenge to the commentators whose pessimistic view is often that neighbourliness is in decline and that our communities are socially disintegrating. Perhaps such doomsayers should ask ordinary people what they think first.

Chapter 4

Renewing neighbourhoods; strengthening neighbourliness

Joe Montgomery, Head of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
at the ODPM

Renewing neighbourhoods; strengthening neighbourliness
Joe Montgomery

John Smith articulated his understanding of the power of neighbourliness when he spoke of the "extraordinary potential of ordinary people", the capacity of individuals and communities to achieve things together which they could not achieve alone. I want to highlight the value of investing in this "extraordinary potential", the importance of harnessing it to the government's strategy for renewing our poorest neighbourhoods, and some of the basic principles which should underpin government action to promote neighbourliness. This is a vital component of the government's drive to create sustainable communities. The resurgence of interest in neighbourliness is a welcome development and I am grateful to the Smith Institute and to Age Concern for the opportunity to participate in this crucial debate.

The importance of neighbourliness
At the root of this renewed interest in neighbourliness is the concern that we have lost a common appreciation of the rights and responsibilities that bind us together as a society. The media focus on crime and antisocial behaviour, the decline in local election turnout (particularly in the poorest wards), the fall in the proportion of people who feel they can influence local decisions; all of these suggest a sense of social malaise in which the basic interactions between citizens have become more difficult and tense and our communities have become increasingly fragmented.

The classic expression of this concern was Émile Durkheim's notion of *anomie*, which he used to describe a social state in which mutual bonds and obligations disappear in the face of unchecked individualism. The 19th-century experiment with laissez faire capitalism was in danger of destroying itself, he argued, because the economic atomisation that it encouraged had to be balanced by a regulatory moral schema which governed people's social interactions. Without a sense of shared obligations and norms, "it is the law of the strongest that rules, and a state of warfare, either latent or acute, is necessarily endemic".

More recently, commentators and academics have explored the impact of economic and social changes on our lives, as individuals and communities, and have asked how we can re-establish the ties that those changes have undone. The rise of consumerism and individualism alongside the perceived weakening of class and national loyalties, the decline of deference, and the transformation of social institutions such as the nuclear family, traditional churches and nine-to-five/job-for-life working patterns have all

brought benefits. Most people are more mobile, have more awareness of other cultures and lifestyles, and feel more empowered to exercise choice and express their views.

Authors like Amitai Etzioni, Francis Fukuyama and Richard Sennett have dug a little deeper into these changes and explored their potential downsides. Like Durkheim, they worry that increased individual freedoms need to be balanced by stronger social bonds. Perhaps the most well-known current example is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: the Decline of America's Social Capital*. Putnam highlighted that although bowling was more popular than ever, the number of people bowling together in local teams had declined dramatically. Americans had more time and money to enjoy their favourite pastime, but fewer opportunities to do it with colleagues and neighbours. Society was richer and freer, but lonelier and less able to make the informal connections that underpin strong and active communities.

In response to these concerns, attention has focused on the importance of neighbourliness as a way of reducing isolation and increasing trust and respect between people. The neighbourhood is posited as the most effective area in which to re-engage individuals and reforge the links between people that generate a sense of belonging and identity. These links are not only important for individual well-being, they are also crucial for society. They form the bedrock of social capital, the capacity within communities for mutual support and common endeavour.

Though neighbourliness itself requires physical proximity and usually occurs on a small scale, it has much wider significance and repercussions. The importance of neighbourliness as the glue that holds society together has long been acknowledged, from the ancient Greeks, who valued participation in civic affairs as the noblest duty of the citizen, through Rousseau to de Tocqueville's celebration of local associations as the bedrock of American democracy.

There is also a growing body of evidence for the social and economic value of neighbourliness, as a recent report by the Performance & Innovation Unit highlighted in relation to healthcare policy:

Neighbourhoods where people know each other and trust each other and where they have a say in the way that a community is run can be a powerful support in coping with the day-to-day stresses of life which affect health. And having a stake in the local community gives people self-respect and makes them feel better. [51]

51 Performance & Innovation Unit *Social Capital* (Cabinet Office, 2002)

We also know that neighbourliness is important because we can see the decay that sets in when it is not present. When people feel no sense of identity, belonging or ownership towards their immediate surroundings, the moral and physical health of the individual and the wider community suffer. Political apathy, physical and mental ill-health, crime and the fear of crime all breed in the vacuum of isolation and neglect.

Nevertheless, the focus on neighbourliness can seem a little surprising, even rather quaint, in the global village. Through technology, new media and travel we can make new, perhaps more exciting and fulfilling connections with a much wider range of people. The appeal following the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami and the Live 8 anti-poverty campaign concert both inspired millions of people to do something to help people they will never meet, suggesting that we can find new forms of solidarity and connection.

None of these factors, however, takes away from the importance of neighbourliness. Feeling a sense of global citizenship is not incompatible with feeling connected to one's immediate neighbours. Indeed, the sense that we are affected by global changes can reinforce the need to develop a sense of solidarity with the people on whom one is immediately reliant in an emergency.

At such points in our lives, we need to know that we can fall back on networks of support that depend on geographical closeness. New mothers, the less mobile elderly and people recovering from an illness are helped by small - and sometimes large - favours from friends and neighbours. The first thing many people want to know when moving house is what their neighbours are like, and there is evidence to show that neighbourhoods in which people know each other are safer from crime.

Understanding neighbourliness
Despite its current ubiquity and the academic attention that it has enjoyed in recent years, neighbourliness is a profoundly contested and slippery concept. To some extent, this versatility is a virtue. Any attempt to define neighbourliness too tightly forecloses its development and suggests that there is a model than can be rolled out everywhere. Yet the absence of a precise definition also means that the discussion of neighbourliness can fall into several traps.

The first trap is over-conceptualisation. How do we define neighbourliness? How do we assess it? How can we measure whether it has increased or decreased? These are interesting questions, but they do not speak to people's lived experience. The second trap is nostalgia.

Unchecked, neighbourliness can become code for a rose-tinted yearning for the "good old days" when Britain was stable and homogenous, in which people knew their place and the boundary between insiders and outsiders was clear and impermeable. As a corrective to these tendencies, the approach to neighbourliness adopted here is one that is grounded in the day-to-day realities of life in today's mobile, multiracial and diverse Britain.

I define neighbourliness as the practical expression of the universal need to feel a sense of belonging with the people around us. It is marked by a shared attitude of mutuality and concern for the well-being and happiness of one's neighbours. It is rooted in individual interactions, but these everyday contacts underpin a broader sense of active civic engagement and a sense of common purpose, trust and respect. A neighbourly community is one in which people keep an eye out for each other, where people are interested in what is happening, feel empowered to participate and are willing to engage in activities that have reciprocal benefits for the individual and the wider community.

A neighbourly community has the capacity to cope with change and resolve tensions between different groups. This is a crucial yet frequently overlooked strength, particularly in light of the recent terrorist attacks in London and the concerns about the potential for a backlash. The Cantle report into the causes of the disturbances in some Northern towns in 2001 coined the term "parallel lives" to describe the depth of suspicion and resentment that marked community relations - or the lack of them - between different groups.[52] In order to overcome those barriers and work to promote interethnic and interfaith harmony, communities must have the opportunity to come together, discuss problems and issues and establish a mutual regard and respect for their differences. Neighbourliness can therefore have both a moral aspect, an impulse to help and support one another, and a political aspect, an urge to participate in the collective governance of the community.

Neighbourliness can be fostered through formalised and semiformal organisations like neighbourhood watches, parent-and-toddler groups and time banks. These organisations maintain what Edgar S Cahn, the activist and author of *No More Throw-Away People: The Co-Production Imperative*, calls the "non-monetary infrastructure of trust, reciprocity, civic engagement that is just as real as the sewers, water lines and electric lines".[53]

We should also be wary of romanticising neighbourliness. It is not hard to see how neighbourliness can become overweening; bonds can quickly become binds if individuals

52 Home Office *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team* (Home Office, 2001)
53 Cahn, Edgar S *The Non-Monetary Economy* (Time Dollar USA, 2001)

feel pressured into participating. Marilyn Taylor has written of "the dark side of community".[54] Challenging the easy notion of community as an unalloyed good thing, she demonstrates how an emphasis on community involvement can become exclusionary and even oppressive. We should retain a similar level of realism when promoting neighbourliness too.

One example of an effective programme to encourage neighbourliness is the youth wardens scheme in Hull. There, the local wardens scheme recruited local young people to act as junior wardens in their own right. Rather than treat young people as a problem, the wardens engaged them on their own terms. The scheme involved young people from all ethnic backgrounds and there is now a waiting list to join. A simple and effective idea, the programme was inspired by local people and driven by the enthusiasm of the young people themselves, helping to build social cohesion and develop a sense of respect between different generations and communities.

Renewing neighbourhoods

The government is already doing a great deal to renew neighbourhoods and strengthen neighbourliness. The national strategy for neighbourhood renewal was launched in 2001, with the ambitious and long-term goal of narrowing the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest so that nobody is seriously disadvantaged by where they live. Billions of pounds have been invested in the mainstream services, which are so important to people in deprived areas, as well as targeted regeneration initiatives, like the £2 billion New Deal for Communities programme. Increased investment, new policies, support for better local infrastructure and service co-ordination: all of these are crucial.

Yet the neighbourhood renewal strategy also recognises that previous initiatives had limited impact because "government failed to harness the knowledge and energy of local people, or to actively involve them in designing and delivering their own solutions".[55] To sustain change at the local level, we must also harness and invest in neighbourliness. Poverty fuels division and conflict. It breeds apathy and cynicism. Long-term change involves repairing years of neglect and helping people and public services to build solidarity and understanding.

The importance of neighbourliness applies everywhere, however – not just in poorer areas. Local authorities are being encouraged, as part of the government's 10-year vision for

54 Taylor, Marilyn *Public Policy in the Community* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
55 Cabinet Office *A New Commitment to Regeneration: A National Strategy Action Plan* (Cabinet Office, 2001)

local government, to involve local residents in decision making and to devolve more powers, resources and assets to neighbourhood-level bodies. The discussion paper *Citizen Engagement & Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter* sets out a range of options for strengthening neighbourhood democracy and bolstering the role of local councillors, including local service contracts, devolved budgets and community ownership of local assets. The aim is to strengthen the neighbourhood as the nursery of democracy, where citizens can gain their first experience of such shared decision making through parish councils, tenant management organisations and other local forums.

The neighbourhood is also increasingly recognised as the most effective place to deliver real and visible improvements in public services, particularly those areas that depend upon them most. A recent study of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's single community programme found that it was at the neighbourhood level that the bureaucratic barriers between public service providers and the individual citizens who used them were overcome. Many public services are trying to invert their traditional top-down structures and build up from neighbourhoods. Sir Ian Blair, chief of the Metropolitan Police, for example, has outlined his desire to establish Safer Neighbourhoods teams in every neighbourhood in London.

These structural improvements cannot be sustained at local level unless they also nurture a sense of local ownership. And without denying the challenges that some people face in their neighbourhoods, there is evidence that neighbourliness is alive and well. Many of the programmes currently operating in deprived areas rely on the full and vigorous involvement of local people – not occasional consultation, but sustained participation in key decisions – and the results are striking. The turnout in elections for community representatives on New Deal for Communities boards is often higher than that in council elections in the same wards.

Strengthening neighbourliness
What, then, can government do to strengthen neighbourliness further? Government can create the basic conditions for neighbourliness to develop by helping to keep our shared public spaces clean, green and safe. There is little chance of neighbourliness developing among residents who are afraid to answer the door or to walk around in the evening. At the most basic level, a clear and determined attempt to tackle antisocial behaviour, to keep our streets clean and well lit and to enforce basic standards of public behaviour is vital.

Government can also support neighbourliness by building the capacity of local residents to get involved locally and by building the capacity of local services to listen to and engage people. Providing resources and putting in place structures that create an interface between communities and public services can help to generate a sense of local buy-in and civic-mindedness. This support can be provided in the form of small grant schemes, community development support and local spaces to hold meetings. These forms of capacity building open out public services to local people and give people the confidence to come forward with ideas and solutions.

Government action is a necessary but in itself insufficient factor. Government can provide the fertiliser and the framework, but neighbourliness can spring only from organic local initiatives. Neighbourliness cannot be engineered or manufactured and any heavy-handed attempt to do so is likely to have the opposite effect, by eroding the resourcefulness and instinct towards self-help that are so vital to vibrant communities. There is no need to look up to those who know best when the solutions to local problems are found next door. There are countless examples from neighbourhood renewal programmes of people taking up an issue themselves, with amazing results. They start by attending one meeting to raise a particular issue and end up changing the way that a service is run and representing the wider community on local bodies.

There are, therefore, some basic principles that should underpin government action to promote neighbourliness. First, it must be as flexible and non-bureaucratic as possible. Some level of monitoring is necessary to ensure accountability for decisions, particularly with public money, but this must be kept to a minimum. Through local area agreements and combined funding streams such as the ODPM/Home Office Safer & Stronger Communities Fund, we can see genuine attempts to simplify the way that money passes from central government to the front line. It is vital that local partners, through the local strategic partnership, invest in simple and easily accessible capacity-building programmes at local level.

Government support must work through and reinforce the existing infrastructure in local communities. The formal and informal communication networks that exist in all communities can strengthen programmes if they are sensitively tuned in. The Lewisham New Deal for Communities programme, for example, is funding a range of supplementary programmes through local schools, tapping into the knowledge and contacts of teachers and parents.

Funding and structures should empower communities to develop in their own ways. Too often people in positions of power have their own vision of what an active community looks like and seek to make people fit their template. This can be a challenge for local councillors, who interpret vibrant local groups as a threat to their own legitimacy, rather than as potential partners. Funding and support must therefore be about giving local people the tools they need to articulate their needs and develop their own solutions. One such example is the Turkshead Community Development Trust in Wapping, which raised money locally to buy a derelict pub from the council. The trust converted the pub into a workspace for local businesses and a community café. It uses the profits to fund activities for the elderly and young children.

Conclusion

I have argued that promoting neighbourliness is as vital as improving public services and maintaining the public spaces in our neighbourhoods. Government cannot manufacture neighbourliness, but it does have a crucial role to play in putting the basics in place and in providing sensitively tailored support. If we can get this balance right, we can unleash the potential of residents to create an active brand of neighbourliness that can accelerate the process of renewing our poorest neighbourhoods and creating sustainable communities.

Chapter 5

Involving the voluntary and community sector

Simon Northmore, Practice Development and Research Manager,
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Involving the voluntary and community sector
Simon Northmore, Ryan Sampson and Stephanie Harland

This monograph explores what we mean by neighbourliness, why it might be important, whether action is required, and, if so, what and by whom. This chapter in particular offers thoughts about the role that voluntary and community organisations might play, and takes a fresh look at some common assumptions.

There is a pervasive and cherished belief that voluntary and community sector organisations make a crucial contribution to our society and communities. This belief is shared by the sector itself and government. It is a simple step from this proposition to the assumption that voluntary and community organisations are in some way uniquely suited to doing something about neighbourliness.

However, as earlier chapters of this monograph have demonstrated, neighbourliness is not a simple concept, and it is thus unsurprising that on closer examination the role of the voluntary and community sector in relation to neighbourliness becomes rather more complex and ambiguous.

Government policy
Recent government policy initiatives, together with statements by ministers, suggest that voluntary and community organisations can improve the delivery of public services, contribute to regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, increase civic engagement and promote "civil renewal", and create or sustain social capital.

A series of reports have been issued by the Social Exclusion Unit, the Treasury, the Home Office and the ODPM. These have been followed by new programmes and by changes to regulations and legislation. The overall message has been given the personal backing of senior ministers in speeches, with, for example, Gordon Brown highlighting:

… Britain – because there is such a thing as society – as a community of communities. Tens of thousands of local volunteers, neighbourhood civic associations, unions, charities, voluntary organisations. Each one unique and each one very special, not inward looking or exclusive. A Britain energised by a million centres of neighbourliness and compassion that together embody that very British idea – civic society.

The potential of voluntary and community organisations to promote associational life, bringing people together for a wide variety of purposes and activities, has been portrayed by government as vital to the renewal of deprived neighbourhoods and a key component of good relations and quality of life for individuals in all communities. In his foreword to the Treasury's cross-cutting review in 2002, Paul Boateng said:

As we begin the 21st century we look again to the voluntary and community sector to help us rekindle the spark of civic services that fires the building of strong civic communities; to reform the operation of public services and build a bridge between the needs of individuals living in those communities and the capacity of the state to improve their lives.

At the same time government has put in place measures to enhance the role of voluntary and community organisations in delivering public services on an equal footing with providers from other sectors. These measures have emphasised the potential significance of local organisations that have close links to their community as service providers, alongside larger organisations with national reach. While the government has made careful evaluation of some of the claims made on behalf of the sector as a service provider, it has concluded that there is something special about voluntary and community organisations.

There are, of course, some contradictions between approaches that see voluntary and community organisations primarily as "delivery agents"[56] and those that emphasise their role in giving communities more of a voice; nevertheless, voluntary and community organisations continue to play both roles.

What is the voluntary and community sector?
Attempts to define the sector by the government and academic commentators, and by the sector itself, reveal both the diverse nature and the contested boundaries of the set of organisations and activities covered by the label "voluntary and community sector". Crucially for our discussion on neighbourliness, things become particularly difficult when deciding where the boundaries lie between organised action and purely informal actions.

The Social Exclusion Unit in 1999[57] proposed a hierarchy of levels of "community self-help", starting with mutual support within the extended family, followed immediately by neighbourliness:

56 ODPM *Citizen Engagement & Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter* (ODPM, 2005)
57 Social Exclusion Unit *Policy Action Team Report 09 - Community Self-help* (1999)

For many people the extended family is vital to the provision of care and support, particularly for the very young and the old and frail. In other cases, however, family networks are weak or nonexistent, and informal caring and support must come from neighbours if at all ... Such action is often spontaneous, and builds on the informal contact between residents in a neighbourhood.

Often, what starts as neighbourly support can then take on a more organised collective form. This will still usually be quite informal - for instance, a babysitting circle, a car-sharing scheme, parents walking their children to school in a "crocodile" ... The members of the group agree (sometimes only implicitly) the rules to govern the way the group operates, but it remains unstructured and unofficial.

The Social Exclusion Unit analysis then sets out various intermediate forms of community self-help, characterised by increasing levels of formality and organisation, and places voluntary organisations at the opposite end of the spectrum to support from family and neighbours:

But more formal, sometimes national, voluntary organisations are also active in poor neighbourhoods ... Such organisations generally consist of one group of people (paid or unpaid workers) providing a service to another group (users or beneficiaries), overseen by a third group (trustees). The role of these sorts of voluntary organisations in relation to community self-help activity will normally be to resource, support or facilitate it, rather than to be a part of it themselves ...

The analysis suggests that it is the different roles of staff, beneficiaries and trustees that create the difference between community self-help and formal voluntary organisations. Many voluntary organisations would argue that the three roles are all undertaken by people from the local community, and that they have worked to ensure that staff and trustees are drawn from among the beneficiaries.

There are, however, strong voices from those organisations that term themselves community sector (rather than voluntary sector), arguing that they occupy the space closest to families and neighbourhoods. Hilary Wainwright, chair of the Community Sector Coalition,[58] has said:

58 Community Sector Coalition (www.the_compact.org.uk)

Community groups are commonly small, unstaffed, very local and informal and yet still often deliver vital services to their communities. Their strengths are that they are usually community as well as client centred, are run by people who live in the area served, and retain more of their resources in their community.

The community sector explicitly contrasts itself with the voluntary sector, which it occasionally portrays as detached from neighbourhoods and communities. According to the Community Development Foundation:[59]

Four out of five identifiable groups or organisations in any locality are likely to be small, fairly informal, and low profile - they can be described in aggregate as the community sector.

- *The majority of group activity is much closer to people's daily lives than the visible and well-established organisations with premises and paid staff which many of us may be familiar with. Any sustained citizen group activity on public issues counts as part of the community sector.*
- *An important feature of the community sector is that it consists very largely of unpaid activity. This is crucial to its value, yet it cannot function at its best without a certain basis of investment and appropriate infrastructural support.*

The community sector is part of the overall voluntary and community sector. Civic engagement and autonomous service depend on the community-oriented part of the sector whilst specialist and contracted out services depend primarily on the professional voluntary end of the sector.

The emphasis that some parts of the community sector place on its differences from the voluntary sector, and the characterisation of the voluntary sector as more remote from local people and the life of local neighbourhoods and communities, stem in part from the very real competition for resource and voice at local level. Organisations with paid staff, who may have professional expertise in securing funding and in lobbying policy makers, can seem both detached from the experiences of grass-roots activists and reluctant to create space for self-help organisations run by volunteers.

There is a further suggestion in the Social Exclusion Unit's 1999 report, and in the words

59 Community Development Foundation (www.cdf.org)

of many other commentators on this subject, that the various forms of community self-help and neighbourhood action under discussion are hardly able to coexist with any kind of formal organisation:

Voluntary action is, by its nature, spontaneous, undirected and unprogrammable: it is driven by people's choices and concerns. And this is what makes it socially valuable and distinguishes it from other sectors. Attempts by government to direct such activity for its own purposes would undermine this spontaneity, reducing the space for independent action and participation in community life. It could be counterproductive, weakening people's willingness to engage or volunteer.[60]

These various lines of argument suggest that any action to be taken by the voluntary and community sector to nurture or encourage neighbourliness must be taken very carefully, as this and other forms of community self-help are inherently "organic" and thus delicate. In particular, this leads on to the view expressed by the Social Exclusion Unit in 1999 that the role of voluntary organisations is not "to be part of" community self-help, but to support from a certain necessary distance.

To those not involved in the voluntary and community sector on a day-to-day basis, these concerns can seem arcane. However, the extent of divergence in opinion suggests that what the voluntary and community sector could do to support neighbourliness is a more complex question than might at first appear.

Voluntary and community organisations span a diverse spectrum varying in size, specialisation and degree of formalisation. Collectively, they form a web of support essential for strong communities and civil society. Nevertheless, there may sometimes be a need for voluntary and community organisations to maintain a degree of distance from neighbourliness in order for it to flourish. It is with this "health warning" that we put forward the proposals for action that are contained later in this chapter.

The voluntary and community sector – issues in existing practice

In many cases, neighbourliness will bring both the provider and the receiver of help into contact with voluntary and community organisations. It is often the case that friends and neighbours work side by side with such organisations in helping people with low-level support needs.

60 Jochum, V, Pratten, B and Wilding, K *Civil Renewal & Active Citizenship: A Guide to the Debate* (National Council for Voluntary organisations, 2005)

It is not uncommon for neighbours to be the people who make first contact with voluntary and community organisations to obtain additional support for someone about whom they are concerned, or where they do not feel able themselves to provide the help needed. For example, 11% of calls to a national elder-abuse helpline about instances of suspected abuse are made by friends and neighbours.[61]

This suggests that the voluntary and community sector is in a strong position to understand and influence the dynamics of neighbourliness and its relationship to the delivery of formal support services for older people.

However, the action of the sector needs to be carefully managed in order not to disrupt or cut across informal support networks. Befriending schemes cannot and should not replace the opportunities for isolated older people to develop friendships. Handyperson schemes could make it seem unnecessary for people to offer to help change light bulbs for frail older people. It would not be desirable to encourage neighbours to contact voluntary and community sector organisations about a neighbour who needs help as a replacement for, rather than as part of, neighbourliness.

Similarly, organised voluntary action could become a regulated substitute for neighbourliness in a society that is increasingly concerned to manage risk and limit liability: a Criminal Record Bureau-checked, ID-carrying handyperson might be seen as less of a risk in a vulnerable person's home than a person from down the street. From this perspective, there is a danger that clumsy interventions might damage communities by preventing people from developing relationships that create possibilities for spontaneous acts of goodwill, or add to their fear of doing so.

Equally, it is important to recognise that voluntary and community organisations often flourish where neighbourliness and other forms of informal support have failed, perhaps where a particular group of people (for example, those who have experienced mental health problems, or homeless people) do not have access to local networks and indeed may be actively excluded.

The voluntary and community sector – recommendations for future action
We believe that even though the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and neighbourliness is less simple than some of the more bullish statements would

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61 Action on Elder Abuse *Hidden Voices: Older People's Experience of Abuse* (Action on Elder Abuse, 2004)

seem to suggest, there is an important role for the sector in stimulating and supporting neighbourliness. At times, this will mean adopting fresh thinking about established practices, and it will involve a continuing commitment to empowering the individual.

To play its part in sustaining neighbourliness, voluntary and community organisations should consider how they work with individuals, within their organisations and with other organisations. They should:

- take account of the wide variation in neighbourly networks in terms of size, ethnic composition, gender composition, relationship composition and proximity;[62]
- challenge their own and others' understanding of neighbourliness, thinking about who is included and who is excluded, and recognising the benefits of neighbourliness while not ignoring the negative impact on those who are not included;
- provide opportunities for voluntary work – volunteering is a very popular way for citizens to express their value and contribution to society; 45% of people aged 65-74 years undertake voluntary work;[63]
- help volunteers to step across the boundaries of formal support into informal neighbourliness – this will require rethinking some of the processes of recruiting and managing volunteers in order to manage risk, while ensuring that volunteers are not restricted from doing more or from entering into a more informal relationship with people that they have encountered in their role as volunteer;
- provide training for volunteers - skills that can support neighbourliness can readily be incorporated into voluntary and community sector training programmes, which already include skills for counselling, information-giving, practical help and communications skills;
- champion neighbourliness – voluntary and community organisations have the experience, skills and entrepreneurial drive to raise awareness of neighbourliness, working in partnership to develop and deliver initiatives that promote neighbourly behaviour;
- improve levels of trust between neighbours by taking initiatives to bring different groups together, for example, intergenerational initiatives, and other programmes that break down barriers – in communities where levels of trust are very low, and people are less likely to come together to organise a social event or a campaign, organisations can spark off the kind of project that gets people talking and working together;

62 Fast, J, Keating, N and Otfinowski, P "Characteristics of Family/Friend Care Networks of Frail Seniors" in *Canadian Journal on Ageing* 23 (1) (2004), pp5-20
63 Institute for Volunteering Research *National Survey of Volunteering in the UK* (1997) (www.ivr.org.uk/nationalsurvey.htm)

• take initiatives to bring together providers and receivers of help on an equal footing, and provide opportunities for receivers to reciprocate;

• contribute through research and evaluation to our understanding of neighbourliness.

Conclusions

The voluntary and community sector is complex, far from homogeneous, and comprises a spectrum of organisations ranging from those that operate in an organic, informal manner, to those that have far more formal structures. It is, nevertheless, uniquely placed to develop the interface between the informal networks critical to neighbourliness and the formal structures that can help enhance and champion neighbourly behaviour. Voluntary and community organisations routinely span the boundary between organised, socially beneficial support services, and spontaneous, unregulated acts of social support. We believe the sector can develop and champion initiatives to stimulate and maintain neighbourly behaviour, and have made a number of recommendations as to the actions voluntary and community organisations should take.

Chapter 6

Case studies in neighbourliness

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Case studies in neighbourliness
Penny Thewlis

Any work to strengthen and build the networks of neighbourly support accessible to older people must start with the views and experiences of older people themselves if it is not to be doomed to failure. The six case studies that follow are an attempt to provide just such a starting point. They provide both context and colour and attempt to show a human side to the policy- and research-based arguments of the preceding chapters.

These case studies are drawn from interviews with 14 older people living in very different circumstances and settings, both rural and urban, in Oxfordshire in the summer of 2005. The interviewees range in age from their early 60s to their late 80s and were selected because someone within the local Age Concern network thought that they would have interesting things to say about neighbourliness.

Oxfordshire has a population of just over 600,000, 11% of whom are retired. It is a rural county, with 78% of the population living outside Oxford city, 38% in parishes with a population of less than 5,000. Some 4.8% of the population are from black and minority ethnic groups, and just over 1,000 of these are older people, who live mainly in the urban areas. Although predominantly an affluent county, large areas of rural Oxfordshire are ranked as deprived in a measure of distance from local services and approximately one in 10 older people live in low-income households.

The interviews focused on people's experience and perceptions of neighbourliness and were supplemented with discussions about different aspects of neighbourliness with many more older people. Their views on neighbourliness are, unsurprisingly, rich and diverse, influenced by their individual circumstances and outlook as well as by the nature of the communities in which they live. However, from this diversity many common themes emerge.

The case studies that follow have been chosen because they are illustrative of some of these common themes. All names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Margaret Braine – "I don't know how I would have managed"
Margaret lives in a semidetached house in Woodcote, a village in south Oxfordshire with a population of 2,600, some 300 of whom are over 75. Margaret moved there with her husband 18 years ago, and has lived there alone since his death eight years ago. She is now in her 80s.

Margaret thinks of the area as neighbourly: *"People are friendly, but up to now I haven't needed help."* She sees the couple who live next door as her principal neighbours – *"used to be the other side too, but she's not there now".* The couple opposite *"keep to themselves but they're very pleasant"* – and Roger (who also lives opposite) *"is a good neighbour; he does heavy jobs if needed and I could always call on him if the need arose. He's always saying, 'You've only got to ask.' But I wouldn't feel I could ask the couple opposite for help."*

Since Easter this year, when Margaret discovered a sore on her foot, which was diagnosed as a melanoma, she has been in hospital for two separate operations which have left her with difficulty walking and temporarily unable to drive - severely limiting her mobility. She describes herself as a very independent person: *"Not being able to drive has been the worst thing. You can't do too much without being able to jump in a car here. I'm so used to that and I don't like to ask people to do everything."*

Prior to the difficulties of this year, the relationship with the next-door neighbours was a reciprocal one. Margaret particularly emphasises the importance of reciprocity: *"Sally and David have a dog and we have shared dog walking. They have looked after my cats when I've been away and I have looked after theirs. It's nice to pay back. I've always paid back."* Sally and David had also helped Margaret when she was caring for her husband, who had Alzheimer's – *"even when my husband was alive, David did our front garden. And once, when my husband fell in the night, I called on them to come round and help him back into bed. In the winter, with the dark nights, they phone every evening just to see that I am okay."*

Since her illness, Margaret has been very dependent on her neighbours. *"It's turned out that my oldest friends have not been as good as my neighbours when I needed the help."* And she talks enthusiastically about the neighbourly help she has received: *"One couple visited me in hospital and have come once a week since I was home. They also pick me up and take me to church on a Sunday. Sally visited me in hospital every other night and took all my washing home to do. She does a big shop for me every week and has driven me to the library and the hairdressers. Three times Sally has taken me to the vet's with one of the cats. And David has been doing the back garden as well since I've been stuck with this, but I'm not expecting him to continue with that."*

Talking about Sally and David, Margaret says: *"They are not churchgoers, but they do more than a good many, if you know what I mean. I just don't know how I would have managed without them. I feel I could ask either of them to help me out in any way. They*

will do anything I ask them to." Margaret remarks on the fact that although Sally is in her 50s and she is in her 80s, she now thinks of her as a good friend and they enjoy the occasional day out together.

Margaret feels that neighbourliness has changed in her lifetime: *"Perhaps, as a child, there was more of a community. Mother was always making extra puddings and cakes for people at Christmas – that's what you did then. And after the war, people were good neighbours. I remember clearing snow outside the neighbouring five houses – it was just something you did. That sense of community has gone. But I couldn't have had more help when I needed it."*

Margaret feels that some slightly more formal arrangements have replaced the informal neighbourliness of her youth and they are keeping alive the community spirit in a slightly different way. She describes the local Woodcote Volunteers as a good example of this: *"They do a lot of good work, not just driving people to hospital appointments. I shop for an elderly couple and also for a lady who is getting a bit vague – I look round her larder to see what she needs. I change a dosette box* [a monitored dosage system to help with the administration of medication] *for another lady nearby."* The Volunteers are well known locally and people in need of help can contact the office between 9.30am and 11.00am every day. The office is also run by volunteers: *"I've helped out in the office too when they are a bit short."*

"The Volunteers were very helpful when I was looking after my husband, after I had a heart attack. When Reg died, I joined them to give something back. Lots of people who have been helped by the Volunteers end up volunteering – people are very appreciative." Though Margaret adds: *"There are people who don't want to get involved. I know some-one who says: 'I don't believe in doing things like that* [volunteering] *– people put on you.'"*

Just before I left, Margaret read to me the notice of thanks she is putting in the local newsletter for everyone who has helped her. Her voice cracked as she read it - plainly the neighbourliness she has encountered has enabled her to maintain her independence and meant a very great deal to her.

Lester Holman – Reawakening neighbourliness

Lester and his wife have lived for the last six years in a bungalow in Abingdon, a large market town a few miles outside Oxford. Their bungalow is on a small, sheltered estate for older people, with an off-site scheme manager. The couple moved there on their doctor's advice following Lester's heart bypass surgery. They think of around 30 residents of the estate as their neighbours and are the most active people living there. Lester is now 74.

Moving from a smaller market town a few miles away, where they had lived for 20 years and where Lester had been a member of the cricket club and had worked at the local telephone exchange, *"so everybody knew me"*, Lester did not think the estate at all neighbourly when he moved in. Though having been in the UK for 50 years, Lester is originally from the Caribbean, and explains: *"I come from a culture where people are dependent on one another* [largely because things are difficult to access so people share]. *Interdependency is a vital survival tool – people need you so they look after you. It's not how much your neighbour needs you but rather how much you need your neighbour. That's still in me."*

Asked by the scheme manager to help with the organisation of a Christmas party, Lester was glad to get involved – *"I needed something to do"* – and gradually came to see this as an opportunity to reawaken the community spirit he felt was lacking. *"Neighbourliness was just sleeping. It needed to be reawakened. It's there with older people - it just needs unlocking with a smile and a welcoming hand."* The Christmas party in the pub was a success - 50 people enjoyed it. *"We put on another party the next Christmas, but in between people were just saying hello. There was a need to get people together more often – for my survival, really! Without neighbourliness you are an island in a multitude of people."*

The Trendell Area Senior Residents' Group was born, and now flourishes, with Lester at the helm. The group is a formal organisation that exists specifically to foster neighbourliness as its main aim: the strap-line on the group's headed paper describes it as "a non-profit making organisation dedicated to the progression of caring neighbourliness". The group organises regular trips and outings and a monthly get-together in the pub. *"It's quite simple, really. But it has really changed relationships round here – people are much more neighbourly. A bloom has returned to people's faces - a smile – it's very rewarding. I can walk out of here and someone will say, 'Hello, Lester, how are you?' I move on a bit further and meet someone else. It makes you feel better about yourself and the world."*

Lester thinks neighbourliness is *"essential"*. *"If you don't see someone around, you knock on their door to see they are okay. People help each other out with their skills – fixing the TV, learning to use the computer. One man has shared his experience of living with a diabetic wife with someone who's just got diabetes. We've even kept the local post office open by challenging Tesco together."*

"What sent it [neighbourliness] *to sleep?"* muses Lester, and he talks about the effects of inequality and loss of confidence. *"Individualism and materialism – people are made to feel inferior by the mass of advertising and they withdraw if they can't compete. Or they pretend, and then they can't let people in or they'll see it as it really is. Older people don't want people to know they're not coping – they withdraw and cover up by just being blunt. They have committed a sin by living too long. They are not valued – they are throw-away material – past their sell-by date."* He adds an anecdote about his mother-in-law, who grew up in an era and an area where you didn't lock the door, though she now has a door chain. *"Fear of crime leads to suspicion and lack of trust, and that has a part to play in this too."* But Lester feels that the experience with his group shows that it is possible to break all this down. *"Older people have a lot to teach – they have experience of community and interdependence. But they need to feel needed and wanted."*

Lester talks about the importance of *"work to integrate new people into the community"*. He had to work hard on his own integration, and talks about his race in relation to this: *"It was very important for me. For that generation, I'm an alien. I'm the only black face around. They have been brainwashed without knowing it. But in a way, my face might have been an advantage. People could see I was different – and they could see that I'd not been well and needed help. I approached getting things started by saying 'I need your help.'"*

Based on his experience of neighbourliness in the Caribbean, Lester has become a champion of neighbourliness in his community. I was left with a strong sense that without his commitment and drive, the community would be less neighbourly. Unsurprisingly, he is optimistic about fostering neighbourliness through community activity to build a sense of community, but he has a final warning for anyone travelling a similar road: *"It's important not to become pompous about what you are doing."*

Alice Gordon – "there if you are wanted"

Alice moved to Kingham 60 years ago. Kingham is a small village in west Oxfordshire, with a population of just over 600, of whom 130 are aged over 65. *"Within a couple of weeks I was making 12 cakes and helping with the tea for the football fete (my husband played). I've helped with teas ever since: I'm even known as 'tealeaf Liz', and I still get asked how many teabags to put in the pot."* Alice lives in a modern bungalow on a small estate on the very edge of the village: *"They knocked our old houses down and replaced them with these."* Alice's next-door neighbour, with whom she has been friends for 50 years, now lives in a different part of the estate, but they maintain contact. She knows most people in the immediate vicinity and considers them *"more friends than neighbours".*

At the age of 83, Alice was this year made an MBE for 60 years' service to the community and being a good neighbour. *"I was really shocked and pleased that just ordinary people can get the MBE."*

Kingham recently won the *Country Life* magazine award as "favourite village". *"It's a very neighbourly place - a lovely place to live. I wouldn't want to go anywhere else."* However, Alice thinks that neighbourliness and community in Kingham have changed in her lifetime: *"When we first came, everyone knew one another: not nosy, we just knew! Now there are lots more houses and people come and go – it's a much more mobile population – and I don't know half the people here. There are a lot of weekenders, so you don't get to know them. And young people are so busy with their lives. I'm not saying they wouldn't help – you just don't know people in the same way."*

Alice sees neighbourliness as *"helping one another. Not in and out of each other's houses, but there if you are wanted!"* It's worth commenting that Alice sees neighbourliness almost entirely in terms of what she can do to help others, not the other way around. Of the *"youngsters"* who live next door, she says brightly: *"They know they can come to me for anything."* Though when she had pneumonia last winter *"two people were very good. I didn't need to ask."* She says there are certain neighbours that you can ask for help: *"Some say you only have to ask – but you don't!"*

The neighbourly help *"can be anything - collecting prescriptions, cooking, shopping, washing (I do the 'big stuff' for seven old ladies round here - they do their own personal bits). I've sat with people through the night – whatever they need."*

Two former neighbours now live further away but Alice maintains contact with them.

"Every day I pop in or phone my old friend up the hill who has Parkinson's and I wash and set her hair when it needs doing." The other is now living in the next village, and Alice's comments hint at feeling trapped in a carer role, a possible negative side-effect of neighbourliness: *"I pay her bills, tidy her up, keep her straight. I could do without going, to be honest, but she is getting very forgetful and wouldn't like anyone else going in. She is frightened of meeting people. She has carers night and morning and a good neighbour who takes in Sunday lunch – or she goes round for it. The carers say 'Do you want a wash?' and she says 'No' but she hasn't washed. It quite upsets me. She was always so prim and proper, but she doesn't worry now so I don't know why it bothers me so."*

Alice says, *"I can't think that I'm old,"* but admits that age imposes some limits on neighbourliness: *"As you get older you can't do so much. Where I thought nothing of making eight Victoria sponges at a time, I couldn't do it now – I could perhaps make two. I can't strain the big vegetable pans for the lunch club. It does annoy me!"* Until two years ago Alice rode her bike, but has now had to give that up. *"I fell off a couple of times and I was frightened by that corner. But I could pop anywhere - by golly, have I missed it."* This seems to be less because it prevents her from getting about than because it slows her down: *"I can't get there nearly as quickly."*

In common with the other case studies, Alice believes that it is necessary to have some organised community activities to stimulate a sense of community: *"You do need to bring people together."* She talks about the lunch club, which meets monthly and offers friendship. *"When I'm serving the food, looking round and seeing people chatting away – it's just lovely! People love to sit with their friends. We try to move them round a bit but they like to sit together."* The club is very much of the community for the community, an offshoot of neighbourliness: *"It started 20 years ago with 12 members and six helpers and has gradually built up. Two people in their late 50s came in as helpers and now they've got to know older people. New people coming in get involved – it's a good way to make friends. And people meet up again with people they haven't seen since school! People say 'You wouldn't catch me there' or 'I'm not old enough to go yet' but when they see the fun and laughter, they don't want to miss it. It's quite a bit of work but I love it. I hope I can keep going till – well – till the day I die."*

Although Alice appears to give a great deal more neighbourly support than she receives, this by no means indicates that she does not benefit from neighbourliness. On the contrary, as someone whose main motivation seems to be helping others, neighbourliness contributes enormously to her sense of self worth.

Grace Thomas – "I don't know who'd help me"
Grace moved to Banbury, a large town in the north of Oxfordshire, in 1999 to be near her son following the death of her husband. She lives in a bungalow on a small sheltered-housing estate, part of a much larger estate of social housing. *"It was a very difficult move. I had to get rid of nearly everything. I just had the furniture when I moved in here."* Grace is now in her 70s.

Grace moved from a larger house, outside a small village in North Wales where families and communities were very supportive. *"This neighbourhood in Banbury felt very different. I didn't find it at all friendly or welcoming to move in here. There's lots of coming and going here compared to Wales, where families could trace their occupancy back 600 years. That means you have continuity and a kind of circle of support."*

Grace thinks of neighbourliness as *"having someone at hand that you see fairly regularly and have a little chat to and who will help if you are ill – do little things, just little things. It's a two-way thing."* However, this is not her experience where she now lives. *"Nobody helps me. I don't know who'd help me if I was old and frail. The warden is not much help, visiting once a week."*

Looking back to the time she moved in, she says: *"I was very reliant on the dog to keep me going when I first arrived. Then I thought to myself, 'I'll be a cabbage if I just sit here.' But what do you do? As a woman on my own, I don't feel comfortable going to the pub, or a restaurant. I joined a local voluntary organisation and a political party and filled my life with things to do. This was the start of the way back: thankfully, I was on the way when the dog died."*

Grace has thought quite a lot about some of the barriers to neighbourliness. *"Most people move here in their 70s when they are finding it difficult to cope – they move away from their roots, and leave it too late to put down new ones and make new relationships."* Feeling safe is a major issue: *"Most people here are anxious or scared about their personal safety: people need to know they are safe in their homes."* One very frail, vulnerable neighbour had experienced *"so many distraction burglaries, it's not true."* And in this situation where people do not get to know and trust each other, *"people who look as though they might need a bit of help seem to think you are imposing on them and can react with hostility. You have to approach things very carefully. It's not so easy to be a good neighbour."*

Grace feels these barriers keenly, as she has tried hard to be neighbourly but thinks that the lack of trust has always got in the way. Through her voluntary activities she has been able to channel her energies in a different direction, and ensures that her neighbours benefit from this by passing on information leaflets to the warden for distribution. She also helped to ensure that the neighbour who suffered the distraction burglaries received advice from community safety officers

Grace has numerous ideas about how things might be changed for the better, which include addressing the community safety issues first and foremost. *"People no longer feel their age will protect them – quite the reverse. And there is much that could be done with good preventive advice, lights, alarms and better planning – including fencing."* Trying to foster a sense of community would also help: *"Home visiting and befriending schemes may spread some more neighbourly feelings and help to support people who are trying to be good neighbours. There are no social gatherings round here to give people a sense of community – and it's difficult to get people out because of transport. The local community centre seems to be for young people, so the opportunity to develop a local network for older people is just not there. We need those kinds of opportunities. And the warden could make a difference (but doesn't)."*

Marian Finlayson – "You can't force it, but you can make it more likely!"
Marian and her husband, both in their 60s, have lived in their house in Iffley Fields, Oxford, for 24 years. Iffley Fields is a mixed community covering five streets and Marian is amused by the idea that the community was in effect invented by an estate agent who was trying to market the area and make the properties more desirable. She says: *"It is a neighbourly area, and people want to move in because of that. It's probably more neighbourly now than when we moved in. In a sense the estate agent created expectations and sowed the seeds for community involvement and activity."*

Marian considers that they have eight close neighbours and 20 people *"who we acknowledge in the street – smile and say hello to. We could ask any of them for practical help* [car won't start, etc] *but not emotional help."* Marian describes neighbourliness as *"being aware when someone is in distress"*, and quotes as examples *"lost keys, lost cats! When Jane lost her cat there was lots of activity and it was eventually found by another neighbour. My husband has a ladder which has become something of a community resource for people when they have locked themselves out."*

Marian describes the response of the community to the recent death of one of its older residents, Laura. *"She had lots of support. She would ring up and ask for help – she was a strong personality. She also gave an awful lot to the community. At her funeral, people agreed to look out for other older people. There was general agreement that they might feel less able to ask for help than Laura. They may feel more intimidated by younger people, cars, the pace of life and mobility of the population."*

Marian explains that there are five or six older couples in the street, who tend to be the original inhabitants. Otherwise the community has become *"rather gentrified"*. She says: *"People try to look out for the older people who might feel a bit lost or stranded – for them the neighbourhood will have changed dramatically."* The community needs to address some particular issues that affect older people disproportionately: *"For example, overhanging trees need to be cut back so that older people are able to walk safely and comfortably to the shop. We all get involved in that from time to time."*

Marian sees lack of time as a barrier to neighbourliness, *"though that's rather a cliché"*. She adds: *"Fear and social embarrassment come into it too – some people don't know how to 'do neighbourliness'. And for older people, sensory impairment and mobility problems play a part. Also, they are not sure if they will be liked or respected, or have anything in common with neighbours."*

However, Marian is very positive about the many ways that the local community has found to overcome the barriers. *"People would like to be neighbourly but they need things to facilitate neighbourliness – community activity. You can't force it, but you can make it more likely! Some people are always trying to find ways of gluing the community together."* She talks about the Iffley Fields Community, which was set up primarily to plan a millennium party. *"As part of this project, every door was knocked on, and everyone got involved - young and old alike. It really brought the community together."* The community also organises an annual bonfire, a community newsletter and a community notice board, *"which works very well and makes sure people know what's going on. We raised funds to put the notice board up."*

Marian's warmest enthusiasm is reserved for the allotments. *"You need places for the community to flourish and facilitate opportunities for neighbourliness. The allotments are a great example – lots of people meet there and chat. The older gardeners are very good at passing on their experience, and they can have half an allotment as they get less able. It really cuts across the classes – it was very white, working class when we first came, but now everyone is involved."*

Flora Kesson – "You can build bridges in lots of ways"

Flora has lived for the last 50 years in a detached family house on the edge of a large estate of social housing in Oxford. She and her husband moved into the house as a new police house, which they subsequently bought. This has coloured her perception of neighbourliness considerably: *"Neighbours view the police with suspicion, but they will also bang on the door at any hour if help is wanted. You don't get rid of the police image."* Flora, now on her own and in her late 70s, feels that *"there is not much residue of it now"*, but most of her very active social life remains outside the neighbourhood. *"The children even went to school out of the area, so they weren't affected by being 'the copper's children'. That meant we didn't meet neighbours at the school gate, which can be a good place for cementing relationships."*

Nevertheless, Flora sees the area as being quite neighbourly. *"A lot of old families have been here since the post-war prefabs, with second and third generation who didn't want to move away from mum. And the city has held on to a lot of social housing and is building flats for older people with the aim of freeing up family houses. Where and how they do this has a significant impact on neighbourliness."*

Flora sees neighbourliness as *"sharing a word when doing the garden or the hedge, which creates a sense of being part of the community, and being around to offer help or to be called on for help. It's a mutual thing."* She cites a number of examples, which include keeping an eye on the property, bringing in the washing if it starts raining, having a key for emergencies, sharing garden produce and keeping an eye out for people. Flora herself is involved in giving and receiving neighbourly support of this kind.

She has concerns about the difficulties some older people experience in maintaining their neighbourly links. *"If older people have family living nearby, it's easier to remain part of the community. Otherwise, as they become less mobile, they're at risk of it breaking down."* And she is emphatic about *"the vital importance of neighbourliness not being viewed as a substitute for care: it is not!"*.

Like all the interviewees, Flora sees some of the changes in society affecting neighbourliness, especially people's increased mobility, which means they are *"less likely to put down roots"*, and *"people being out all day makes it more difficult"*. She feels there is a fine line to tread between good neighbourliness and being intrusive. And she has particular worries in relation to older people: *"What do you do about an irascible or difficult old person who is refusing help? This worries people and can detract from neighbourliness,*

just as the symptoms of dementia – anxiety, confusion and wandering - can be very worrying for neighbours with no experience of mental health problems. People don't know how to be neighbourly in these circumstances."

Although Flora feels that *"neighbourliness needs to come from the bottom up – you can't engineer it"*, she does believe that *"you can help"*. She thinks that churches and voluntary visiting schemes have an important role to play, as do sheltered housing wardens, *"although current policies seem to be working against that".*

She thinks that architecture and planning have an important role to play in fostering neighbourliness. *"Communities need to have a focal point or hub. Too many developments have no point for social interaction. Bus stops, post offices and the like all help. And the school gate is important, but it's very short-lived. You need places where people come together because they have to. It must be possible to design an area for neighbourliness – get people out and talking."*

Flora also believes that *"communities should be mixed – older people have a role to play if it's done in the right way. Older people can pass on all sorts of skills to younger people, which is satisfactory for everyone – cooking, craft (knitting, sewing, embroidery), reading."*

"You can build bridges in lots of ways," she concludes.

Overview
Neighbourliness in practice
All the older people with whom I spoke are engaged in giving and, with one exception, receiving neighbourly support and all see it, to a greater or lesser degree, as an important aspect of their lives: *"Neighbourliness is essential; where would we be without it?"* asks one interviewee. This is not unexpected from a group selected on the basis that they might have something interesting to say about neighbourliness, but all feel that neighbourliness is quite widespread. Although changing as society changes, most think that neighbourliness is alive and well, and even increasing: *"It has improved in the last few years."*

The interviewees hold remarkably consistent views on what neighbourliness is, stressing its reciprocal nature: *"People being friendly to me. If I need help they are there; if I can do anything to help them I will."* However, the phrase *"not in and out of each other's houses"* recurs in several discussions.

Neighbourliness is experienced in a variety of forms – from the friendly face to smile, wave and say hello to, through looking out for people, doing little errands and helping out in a crisis, to providing extensive regular help.

I am struck by the highly individual nature of much of the neighbourliness described, particularly compared with statutory support: *"It's a very personal thing. What I'd welcome, others would not,"* says one interviewee. Another recounts: *"I give my lottery numbers and money for several weeks to one neighbour, who gets my tickets. That's my Saturday night enjoyment taken care of!"*

I am also struck by the fluidity of the boundary between community-led, small-scale voluntary activity and informal neighbourliness in the experience of almost everyone I spoke with. Lester and Flora both talk about organisations springing from neighbourliness rather than the other way round, and this must hold lessons for those of us engaged in any kind of work to support neighbourliness.

Barriers to neighbourliness

The increasing mobility or transience of populations is seen as having an effect on neighbourliness, as is the amount of time people have available, *"because they are busy working".* *"The moderns think they are under pressure all the time. Bit of a trap. Pressure is a bit of a myth – self-made. But it does get in the way of neighbourliness, it pulls people in on themselves."*

Age factors and attitudes to older people can exclude people from neighbourliness: *"People think that older people are just boring and that they've nothing in common."* *"Older people can be too 'moany' for some people – it puts people off."* There may be fear or uncertainty about how to help people who are confused or irritable. (Flora talks about this.) Fear of commitment, or simply of getting involved, is a further impediment to neighbourliness: *"There might be a fear of getting landed – especially if the person is not very agreeable; and if they are in pain, bereaved, frightened, lonely, they might not be very agreeable."*

Mobility, frailty and loss issues can all present barriers: *"If older people lose friends, relatives, have mobility problems or have moved, their networks of neighbours may be sadly depleted."* *"When you're younger, fitter, you're able to give more. As you get older you need to receive more. The balance changes and it can upset things."*

Several people mention that for people who move house in later life and leave behind their community networks, some effort (either on their part or on the part of others) is needed to enable them to feel integrated into a new neighbourhood. Fear of crime and lack of trust in communities presents another significant barrier.

Strengthening communities to strengthen neighbourliness

Without exception, all the people I talked with think that it is possible to overcome the barriers outlined above and strengthen neighbourliness - not overtly, but through a range of policy and practice measures that strengthen communities.

Local, community-based activities and groups reinforce informal neighbouring networks and support people's efforts to be neighbourly. Many examples are given, which don't have to be grand but are probably glorious in their way: *"We always have a winter project – last year we made miles of bunting for the fete on a Friday evening and made an effort to involve people who might feel a little excluded."*

Formal good neighbour schemes and volunteering both nourish and supplement more informal neighbourliness. They offer a way of supporting people who are trying to be good neighbours and legitimise their efforts: *"It's easier for people to help if they have support - advice and information, help with expenses and so on."* Through the provision of information, they can help to overcome what Flora described as *"people not knowing how to be neighbourly".*

Most people emphasised the importance of intergenerational projects in breaking down barriers and supporting improved understanding and communication across and between generations, helping to break down misconceptions about the characteristics of different generations. Flora and Marian both cite excellent examples of the type of activity that can help.

Planning has a very important part to play: places and events where people have the opportunity to meet and mix are important, and these may be many and various. In one village, a community shop in the local village hall, with a coffee shop attached, has at long last replaced the post office which closed some years ago: *"The new shop has increased neighbourliness incredibly. It provides a meeting place and brings people together. The village hall had sunk into the doldrums but the shop and the coffee shop have revitalised it and there's now lots more going on."* The shop is supported by a team of more than 50 volunteers, showing yet again the important link between volunteering and neighbourliness.

Defined neighbourhoods are helpful too – *"The Grove is a dead end, which helps to create a sense of community"* – and most people feel that mixed communities foster and sustain neighbourliness most effectively. Grace, however, whose housing scheme is surrounded on all sides by family housing, expressed concerns about being *"fenced in by screaming kids, balls coming over and constant noise. It doesn't work!"* Her worries are closely linked to her concerns about community safety, which need to be addressed if trust, which is a prerequisite for neighbourliness, is to be developed.

Limits to neighbourliness

Most people emphasise that neighbourliness should not be used as a substitute for supportive services, and expressed some wariness that policies which lay emphasis on neighbourliness might be moving in that direction. *"Neighbourliness is not enough in the face of on-going needs. There are people in the community who need a lot of help - the sheer amount of help needed might scare people off giving any neighbourly help at all, and sustaining commitment is an issue for a lot of people. Communities cannot provide all the support that is needed, nor should they be expected to."*

In summary it might be said that the older people I spoke with consider that neighbourliness has a very important contribution to make to enabling older people to maintain their independence – both as recipients and, equally importantly, as givers of neighbourly support. Although they see several barriers impeding neighbourliness, there is a strong feeling that activities, events and formal volunteering opportunities can all strengthen communities and in turn strengthen neighbourliness.