Community perceptions of social infrastructure

"Spaces that build on community cohesion, and spaces that empower"

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Cambridge

power to
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About this report

This report was commissioned by Power to Change, the trust that supports community businesses in England. It is part of a larger research programme led by Dame Julia Unwin to better understand how social infrastructure might contribute to the government's levelling up agenda. The report explores community-led definitions of social infrastructure gathered through a process of peer research and collaborative workshops. A second report, commissioned by the British Academy, looks at social infrastructure from an international perspective.

About the Institute for Community Studies

Powered by and part of the not-for-profit organisation, The Young Foundation, we are a research institute with people at our heart. The Institute for Community Studies gives increasing weight to the stories, experience and evidence created in communities, supported through its national network of researchers. Weprovoke direct engagement with business and those influencing change, bridging the gap between communities, evidence, and policymaking.

About the Bennett Institute for Public Policy

The Bennett Institute for Public Policy is committed to interdisciplinary academic and policy research into the major challenges facing the world, and to high-quality teaching of the knowledge and skills required in public service. Our goal is to rethink public policy in an era of turbulence and inequality. Our research connects the world-leading work in technology and science across Cambridge with the economic and political dimensions of policymaking. We are committed to outstanding teaching, policy engagement, and to devising sustainable and long-lasting solutions.

About Power to Change

Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

Contents

Introduction

'Social infrastructure' is a phrase often used by policymakers and academics to refer to those spaces – both physical and digital – that people use to come together. In its 2021 report, Backing our Neighbourhoods, Power to Change, the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business, made the case for a more coherent strategy for developing social infrastructure at the neighbourhood level, and followed this up in 2022 by commissioning the Bennett Institute for Public Policy and the Institute for Community Studies to explore community definitions and understandings of social infrastructure in England.

The central method applied was peer research. Sometimes referred to as community research or user involvement, this is where people use their lived experience and understanding of a social or geographical community to help generate information about their peers for research. In this case, the aim was to solicit the views of people who use social infrastructure. However, rather than asking directly what they thought about social infrastructure, the peer researchers co-developed a set of questions in more everyday language. At the end of the process, participants were asked to define what they thought of as social infrastructure. Some of their responses are set out below.

Social Infrastructure is...

➜ **"...a community-owned space that is available to anyone, taking into account accessibility, affordability, attraction and diversity."**

➜ **"...where you can go and just be, by merging of different walks of life."**

➜ **"...everything a community needs to thrive such as shops and necessities, but also spaces that are for socialising."**

➜ **"...a space where people can meet somebody or attend events."**

➜ **"...places where anyone can utilise to enjoy and feel safe in."**

➜ **"...spaces with the purpose of social facilitation."**

➜ **"...free community spaces that have inclusive activities and have multiple uses."**

About the peer research method

As a method, peer research aims to challenge and disrupt power relations. Peer researchers hold an important role across the research process. Their knowledge and understanding of the community facilitates the development of insightful research questions, and supports contextual and informed analysis. Furthermore, because peer researchers identify with the community being studied, they can often connect with people who might not have taken part in research previously. A central aim of peer research is to challenge and redefine the distinction between 'researcher' and 'subject of research', so that research is a more creative human process, carried out with people, not on people (Durose et al 2017 and Greenhalgh et al 2016). Working with peer researchers involves careful facilitation and training. This needs to come from a position of valuing and actively engaging with different forms of knowledge and expertise (Facer & Enright 2016).

In this project, lived experience refers to a common geography and people's experience of social infrastructure within it. The peer researchers who carried out this research lived in the same geographical communities as respondents. Qualitative research was conducted by peer researchers in four case study locations: Bristol, Barking, Liverpool, and Newcastle. Case study locations were chosen with consideration for a range of factors including scale, local economy, reach into the local communities, and peer researchers' availability. Peer researchers were recruited from The Young Foundation's Peer Research Network (PRN) and with support from local contacts in Bristol and Liverpool. Nine peer researchers worked across the project (three in Newcastle, three in Bristol, two in Barking and one in Liverpool).

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Emerging themes

Different themes emerged from across the different fieldwork sites and can be grouped under the following four headings.

Inclusivity and diversity

In all four of the study areas, peer researchers noted the importance that participants placed on spaces that promoted inclusivity and diversity. Sometimes, for example, in Barking, this was seen through the lack of communal spaces in the local community and a need for new infrastructure to suit the more diverse community that now lives in the area. In Bristol, peer researchers noted the importance of spaces in the city that acted as "totemic symbol[s]" and enabled or supported different groups of people to come together and use the space in different ways. In Liverpool and Newcastle peer researchers felt that people wanted communal spaces that were 'easy' to engage with and where people could co-exist.

However, peer researchers felt interviews suggested a need for more spaces where people of different ages could come together and identified a need for social infrastructure that "doesn't irritate one generation or another." For the participants it was important to have access to "places that build on community cohesion, respect and spaces that empower. That are diverse and identities and cultures and spaces that are inclusive."

Accessibility

In Barking, respondents talked about the need for practical ways to use public space better and, more generally, the need to value public spaces. In Bristol, respondents talked about accessibility primarily in terms of transport and cost. For example, public transport was described as too expensive and not running at the right times, with buses stopping too early. Free events and things to do were valued highly by people, both for accessibility and for a feeling of inclusion. In Liverpool, participants highlighted the different facilities available in the north of the city compared to the south. The north vs south division was also seen in relation to transport links, as they seemed to be more irregular in certain areas, which was seen as a barrier to accessing social infrastructure.

Ownership and belonging

In Bristol, peer researchers reflected the importance of being able to make a space your 'own'.

"Anything you could do where if you could take someone who doesn't feel like they have ownership, and if you can give the leadership, that's going to be one of the most fundamentally amazing things you could do."

In Liverpool the theme of belonging also related to feeling safe. Faith spaces were important to respondents both as physical places that could be visited, such as churches and mosques, and also as creating a more general sense of community that people could feel part of. Peer researchers felt there seemed to be something important about the ways in which these places provided a sense of continuity. Respondents also noted the role these spaces played during Covid in reaching out to communities and maintaining social connection and contact.

Green spaces

Participants in Barking and Liverpool spoke of how connected they felt to local green areas. There were a few comments regarding how this related to Covid and how people's values had changed during and post lockdowns. Within the discussion of green spaces, people talked about the value of outdoor gyms, football pitches, tennis courts and parks for children as well as places to walk and cycle. Having easy access to parks not only had a positive impact on participants' sense of wellbeing but was also a good way to facilitate social interactions as it was free to use. As there is no cost associated with using outdoor spaces, parks were viewed as a welcoming space for individuals from all communities: "In parks you see all kinds of people go, anyone's welcome and there's never any trouble."

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Peer research training

Peer research training took place online and was designed specifically for the project by the PRN. Sessions were delivered in the evenings as 'refresher training' to the team in Newcastle, and in the daytime to the team in Barking, all of whom were recruited through the PRN and had previous research training. The teams in Bristol and Liverpool were new to peer research and received more extensive online training. All peer research training covered the following topics:

- The project background
- Peer research principles
- Interview skills
- Reflective practice and self-care
- Confidentiality, consent, and ethics
- Developing an interview guide
- Using creative methods
- Pragmatics and getting started

Following online training, peer researchers carried out practice interviews that were reviewed by the PRN team, and feedback was provided. Interview guides and project materials were co-created with the Barking and Newcastle teams, they were the first two groups to complete training. This involved brainstorming what sort of questions might help participants think about social infrastructure without asking "what is social infrastructure?"

This activity was carried out using Miro[1], an online collaboration platform. Through this activity, peer researchers defined key areas to explore: first, they wanted to encourage an open conversation about the respondent's local community; then, they wanted to specifically ask about spaces, places and 'things' that supported social connection; finally, they wanted to ask about accessibility. Once a list of topics was agreed, the peer researchers wrote a longlist of questions. These were collated and shared across the two groups, and a final meeting took place to edit the questions and agree a semi-structured interview guide. The aim was for this first interview to be an open conversation in which the peer researcher and respondent could build trust.

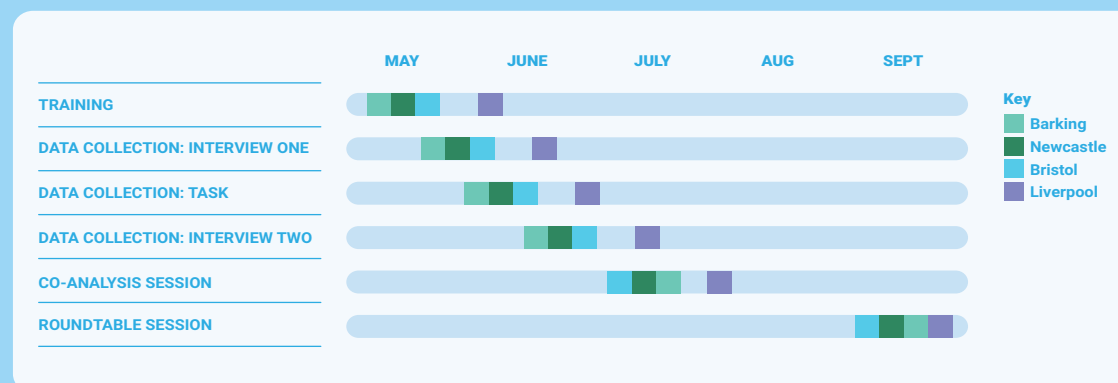[1] *Miro – The Visual Collaboration Platform for Every Team*, miro.com

Part of peer researchers' training involved making recruitment plans and considering who to ask to be a part of the research. Strategies were discussed, as well as the importance of thinking about the diversity of respondents and reaching across the local community. Peer researchers were advised to start by asking friends, family, and people they worked with, as well as posting messages on local social media groups and community WhatsApp chats. A flyer was created, which peer researchers could edit and share, and respondents were offered an incentive for taking part in the research; a £10 voucher.

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Fieldwork

Fieldwork was staggered, starting in Barking in the first week of May 2022, followed by Newcastle, and then Bristol in mid to late May, and in Liverpool in June. Once peer researchers had completed their initial interviews, another planning meeting was held to co-develop a creative task and a second interview guide. The creative task asked respondents to reflect on the places they go to and value locally. Respondents received written information and a paper booklet for taking notes. They were told, *"This task is all about us understanding a bit more about the things and places that are important to communities. We would like to understand what is important to you in your community, including the spaces and facilities you use and value."*

	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT
TRAINING					
DATA COLLECTION: INTERVIEW ONE					
DATA COLLECTION: TASK					
DATA COLLECTION: INTERVIEW TWO					
CO-ANALYSIS SESSION					
ROUNDTABLE SESSION					

Key
- Barking
- Newcastle
- Bristol
- Liverpool

Respondents could engage in the activity by making notes in a paper booklet or on their phone, they could record and share audio notes, or they could take pictures on their phone and send them to a peer researcher. After a week, respondents met with a peer researcher to discuss the task. The second interview guide was developed after reviewing initial interviews and discussing, as a collective, what the initial analysis was starting to reveal about how communities talked about and related to social infrastructure.

The interview process supported peer researchers to capitalise on the trust they had built through a first interview, and to dig deeper with follow-up questions after the homework task. This iterative approach allowed peer researchers to design the second interview guide based on respondents' answers to the first series of questions, and to explore emerging areas of interest in greater detail. The sequence with each respondent followed this format:

- **Week one:** peer researcher builds trust, conducts the first interview, and explains creative task
- **Week two:** respondent completes homework task
- **Week three:** peer researcher returns for second interview, including discussion about task.

During the fieldwork stage, regular check-in meetings were held with the peer researchers, both collectively and one-to-one, to support recruitment activity and project administration. As interviews were arranged, peer researchers completed and shared demographic details and ethical consent forms through an online form and platform so the PRN could monitor who was taking part. All research data, creative task notes, and pictures were uploaded, with respondents' permission, by peer researchers to a secure platform called Recollective[2], and the PRN team reviewed these and provided peer researchers with regular feedback.

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Data co-analysis

The peer researchers interviewed 79 people in total, with most taking part in two interviews and the creative task. While the sample size can be viewed as a limitation, it is important to note that, unlike traditional quantitative methodologies, the purpose of peer research is not to be representative of population-level views but instead to give insight to the lived experiences of niche communities.

The table below states participants demographics by location.

	BARKING AND DAGENHAM	BRISTOL	LIVERPOOL	NEWCASTLE
AGE				
18-24	9.5%	41.2%	-	27.8%
25-34	19.0%	5.9%	71.4%	11.1%
35-44	23.8%	17.6%	28.6%	-
45-54	28.6%	17.6%	-	16.7%
55-64	9.5%	-	-	-
65-74	-	5.9%	-	-
PREFER NOT TO SAY	9.6%	11.8%	-	44.4%
GENDER				
FEMALE	85.7%	41.2%	28.6%	72.2%
MALE	14.3%	35.3%	57.1%	27.8%
NON-BINARY	- -	23.5%	14.3%	-
ETHNICITY				
ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH	- -	5.9%	-	61.1%
BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH	71.4%	11.8%	-	-
MIXED RACE - WHITE AND BLACK/BLACK BRITISH	4.8%	17.6%	-	-
WHITE - BRITISH, IRISH, OTHER	14.3%	47.1%	28.6%	16.7%
WHITE - EUROPEAN	4.8%	11.8%	57.1%	5.6%
OTHER/PREFER NOT TO SAY	4.8%	5.9%	14.3%	16.7%
(NOTE: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA WERE NOT COLLECTED FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS)				
COHORT SIZE, N = 79	21	28	10	20

All interviews and tasks were reviewed by the PRN team, who carried out a preliminary analysis of the data, noting down emerging themes. Once data collection was complete, four analysis sessions were held in July 2022; one with each geographic team. The PRN has developed a process for training peer researchers to carry out collaborative data analysis that supports them to take a lead in identifying core themes and findings. It was essential to the project aims that all peer researchers played an active role in the analysis of the findings.

First, peer researchers were asked to review their data in advance of a group analysis session. While listening to audios or reading, they were asked to make brief notes of anything that 'glows' within the data, noting down anything they found interesting in relation to the research question. Within this, peer researchers were asked to keep in mind (a) how often things were coming up and (b) how important things seemed. They were also asked to write down any quotes they wanted to share that were illustrative of what they found interesting or struck them as particularly important.

Then during each analysis session, the group worked through a series of stages:

1. **Everyone was reminded of the research question and aims of the project.**

2. **The PRN team chaired a guided conversation about the interviews. Peer researchers were asked to discuss:**

   a. **What three things did you learn from your fieldwork in relation to the research question?**

   b. **What was the most interesting interview?**

   c. **What was the most surprising thing?**

   d. **What was the most challenging interview?**

3. **Using a Miro board, peer researchers were asked to note down everything from the interviews that they felt was important or relevant to our research question. These were discussed and grouped into themes.**

4. **Peer researchers were then asked to complete notes, again on Miro, completing the statement "Social infrastructure is…" drawing on their research activity and the guided conversation.**

5. **The group then discussed the statements and agreed a collective statement and set of themes for each location.**

Themes by location

The themes identified at each location are outlined below.

Bristol

Three key themes were discussed and named by the peer researchers:

'Spaces that have diversity are important'

Across interviews, peer researchers noted that spaces that allowed or supported different groups of people to come together, and that could be used in different ways, were particularly valued. Diversity was discussed widely in terms of ethnicity, ages, interests, and geographies.

"Bristol City Farm [a community business] has a community feel; there's, like, volunteers and parents and children—but then also students, and then you get older people, and then you get them all enjoying the city farm."

"Turbo Island's just like one of them places where everyone knows what it is. It's untouched. Like, it holds so much power from people that it's such, like, a epicentre of Bristolian community that, like, it just is so untouched."
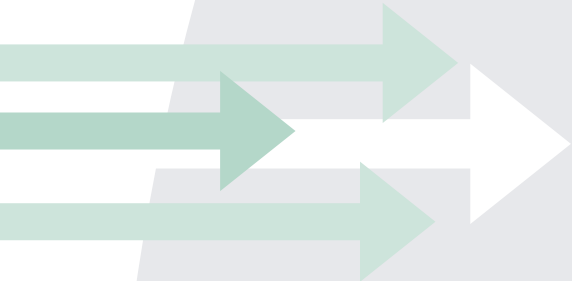
Cultura Creative / Adobe Stock

'Genuine accessibility'

Respondents talked about accessibility primarily in terms of transport and money. Cost was important in being able to access different forms of social infrastructure, and transport was described as too expensive and not running at the right times (eg buses stopping too early). There were lots of free events and things to do that people valued highly, but a key theme for two peer researchers was that arts spaces in the city were too expensive and felt exclusionary.

"I use the bus services in Bristol actually every single day, they're really helpful to get to and from because obviously I live so far out... I wish that they'd come a bit later because they've stopped now after 12."

"The big thing about Bishopston it's got Gloucester Road. Okay. But that's what I need. And that - in terms of what you're saying about, like, spaces and infrastructure - that is the spine of it for me, certainly locally. I've got easy access to spaces where I can meet other people."

"I think that things that are very, very low cost or parks are a great space... I think affordability is the thing - and not profiting off, like, wellbeing."

'Ownership of space'

Peer researchers reflected on adapting and subverting social infrastructure. This discussion arose from interviews with skaters. Also, more broadly, the importance of being able to make a space 'your own' was important to respondents. Peer researchers reflected that it was interesting how much ownership respondents felt they had of green spaces in the city.

"But problem is, now, the whole skate community is lost. If we are being squeezed out of the places that we belong, we have to divert somewhere else."

"Anything you could do where if you could take someone who doesn't feel like they have ownership, and if you can give the leadership, that's going to be one of the most fundamentally amazing things you could do."

Across these themes, peer researchers noted that word of mouth seemed to be the most important way people heard about events and things to do. Social media was not always seen as very important, although this differed across interviews. Peer researchers also highlighted the importance of work as an anchor to the city, and reflected that many respondents found 'community' hard to describe, noting that they were part of many communities.

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Newcastle

Two key themes were discussed and named by the peer researchers:

'People want more areas where they can co-exist'

Peer researchers felt this theme related to people wanting communal spaces that were 'easy' to engage with. There were some key spaces that held this role; workplaces and schools in particular. Additionally, the peer researchers felt respondents were most likely to feel they could co-exist in nature and green spaces. However, peer researchers also felt interviews pointed to a need for more spaces where people could come together, and suggested a need to build social infrastructure that 'doesn't irritate one generation or another'. It was important, to both peer researchers and respondents, to meet different needs and avoid being exclusive.

"Places that build on community cohesion, respect and spaces that empower. That are diverse, and identities and cultures and spaces that are inclusive."

"We'll have some sort of social facility, but that is really overrun with, like, older people who have lived here for years. And there isn't really anything for me as a young person because I'm 23."

"Parks and the local outdoor space, simply because there is no one there to tell you that you can't be there, or you can be there. There isn't sort of that policing element."

Kara / Adobe Stock

'Places you feel you belong to and make you feel "like yourself"'

This theme initially arose from comments made by a respondent about graffiti defining areas and in relation to feeling safe and belonging. Faith spaces were important to respondents, both as physical places that could be visited (ie the church or mosque), and also as a more general community they felt part of. Peer researchers felt there was something important about these places providing a sense of continuity, and respondents noted that during Covid these are the spaces that helped people to maintain connection and contact.

"[Graffiti] allowing people to a certain extent to use the walls as art. I like that as well... I like it when people express whatever it is they want to share."

"What would make me feel more connected? Seeing people who look like me. Seeing people who have shared experiences and shared views. But also, being seen by local authorities, by local art museum facilities. And having my sort of identity, or the identity of people of colour or ethnic minorities, reflected in the city would be something that would make me feel like I belong."

"I think churches and other houses of worship, I think are great places for people to gather together."

The Newcastle peer researchers felt that connection and contact maintained a sense of community, and while some of their respondents struggled to define community, many were focused on work, school and faith.

dazb75 / Adobe Stock

Barking

Three key themes were discussed and named by the peer researchers:

'Inclusivity'

Respondents discussed socialising outside their local area. In part, this seemed to be about maintaining contact with family and friends who lived further away in different areas of London. However, it also related to there being few communal spaces in the local community. Respondents talked a great deal about the lack of local cafes and restaurants. Local pubs seemed divisive, as they were traditional working men's clubs that many felt were not inclusive spaces. In interviews, some people valued these pubs, while others questioned why they were still there. Peer researchers identified a need for new infrastructure to suit the more diverse community that now lives in the area.

> *"There's absolutely nowhere I would go around here...there's so much scope for nice things but we don't have them... there's no restaurants...there's a lot lacking."*

> *"There's a big pub but it's a Muslim population and they wouldn't go."*

> *"My observation is it's really segregated, community-wise. The only place they mix is school."*

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'Green spaces'

Green spaces were important across interviews. Respondents talked about how connected they felt to local green areas. There were a few comments relating this to Covid, reflecting on values changing during and post lockdowns. Within discussion of green spaces, people talked about the value of outdoor gyms, football pitches, tennis courts, and parks for children, as well as places to walk and cycle. Respondents had very different levels of knowledge of where things were and what was happening. While some listed all the different amenities locally (within green spaces and sport), others said there were no outdoor gyms or tennis courts locally.

"The canal and boat house cafe became important during Covid."

"The outdoor gyms because I like being outside and I like being fit...

I like going for walks."

'Lack of free social spaces'

Peer researchers suggested that there are few spaces where people can come together in groups in the local area. Across interviews, respondents talked about the need for practical ways to use public space better and, more generally, the need to value public spaces. There was an area by the shops that was mentioned many times as a place that could become a 'public square' if it received some attention and 'sprucing up'. People felt there were spaces that had potential, but something needed to happen to make a change. Being able to use spaces socially was also linked to seating and benches. A lack of seating meant respondents did not feel they had permission to stay, and physically couldn't stay. The few free places that had seating were reportedly well-used.

"There's a pond area and a seating area and people just sit there for a long time."

"There is a big unused shopping space which isn't used."

Across these themes, difficulties finding out about events and what was happening locally was discussed as a barrier to engagement. Respondents reported that a lot was advertised on social media. They also noted there was no clear place (digitally or physically) to find out about things. Peer researchers wanted to highlight that developing social infrastructure needs to be done with communities and from a position of really understanding their needs.

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Liverpool

Three key themes were discussed and named by the peer researchers:

'Green spaces'

Outdoor and green spaces were mentioned throughout the project. Green spaces, in particular, were mentioned both in having a positive impact on people's wellbeing, but also in facilitating social interactions as they are free to use. Additionally, parks were viewed as welcoming spaces for individuals from all communities. Sefton Park was mentioned across transcripts as a park that was often used by the local community, and was valuable to residents as it hosts festivals and other events that facilitate social interaction.

"In parks, you see all kinds of people go, anyone's welcome and there's never any trouble."

"Social aspect of being in park and access to nature. It's the biggest if not one of the main aspects to be able to be able to use it for that."

abdulrasheed yusuf/EyeEm / Adobe Stock

'Inclusivity'

Inclusivity of spaces was another theme that repeatedly emerged in the co-analysis session. In particular, economic inclusion was discussed by the peer researcher as a lack of free spaces for people to make use of was seen as a barrier to not only meeting with people in their networks, but also to connecting with new people. Inclusivity was also discussed in relation to the type of activities available in local communities. Participants acknowledged a range of sport-related facilities available in their local area, ranging from gyms to sport clubs. These were vital in creating and maintaining social connections in and around their communities. However, this led to a discussion on a lack of creative spaces in the area, as those with artistic or other creative interests said they had no space to connect with others with similar interests.

"I've seen people from a lot of different age brackets and different genders and backgrounds as well. Everybody gets to get involved. It has given me the chance to get to know people from my local area, and also to sort of catch up with people who may not [be] seen as much."

"As a kid, I think it's important too, if you have free or cheap things to do. Places where people who have kids can go and be safe."

"They can probably do, like, even the classes, activities and stuff for people who may be a bit more creative or people who are openly interested in the school, people with like hobbies, or want to build new skills, possibly people can go to for some volunteer activity."

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'Disparities between north and south'

Participants highlighted a difference in facilities available in the north of Liverpool in comparison to the south. The south of Liverpool was described as having more facilities, such as parks (including Sefton Park), pubs, and other hospitality businesses. By contrast, in the north of Liverpool, there was a lack of spaces to interact with others. The north and south division was also discussed in relation to transport links, as they seemed to be more irregular in certain areas, which was seen as a barrier to accessing infrastructure.

> *"[In the south of Liverpool] it feels like there's a lot more sort of like hospitality and stuff - like, bars and places where you could go and meet people and interact and stuff. And also, you've got places - like obviously Sefton Park and stuff - where there's a lot of activities and it's a great place to get outside and see people and things like that for the festivals."*

> *"In my opinion, I would say that there's probably more opportunities in the south of the city than there is in the north of the city I'm quite fortunate to live in this area."*

Participants also said going to supermarkets was a part of their daily routine, and there was a sense of community associated with them. In particular, the role of supermarkets in lockdown was discussed as, for those living alone, it was an opportunity to briefly socialise with those outside their 'bubble', which reduced feelings of loneliness.

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Synthesis and regional workshops

The themes identified for each location, along with the underlying data and the output of the peer researchers' co-analysis session, were then re-analysed by the wider project team. This revealed a regional breakdown of key quotes and the four overarching themes listed in the introduction to this report. The final stage of the project, which took place across September 2022, was a series of roundtables in each of the four peer research locations to showcase the findings.

These roundtable events, which were held in community venues, brought together a range of different stakeholders including peer researchers, civil servants, local government officials, academics and representatives of local civil society organisations. The purpose of the roundtables was to assess the peer research findings, to develop a shared understanding of the value of evidence gathering approaches such as peer research to bring together different perspectives, and to understand the barriers that may exist to their adoption.

Roundtable attendees took part in a card-sorting exercise based on the 1-2-4-all technique[3] where they were each presented with a 'deck' of comments from the peer research process and asked to identify any emerging themes. The exercise was then repeated with increasingly larger groups until the whole room came together to discuss the shared collective findings. A discussion followed, focusing on the content of the conversations as well as the peer research process.

A common issue for all attendees was their concern about the wave of social and economic challenges that were expected to hit communities. There were comments from civil society groups about the need for them to be involved in any responses—given their detailed knowledge of the communities they represent and understanding of what does and does not work with them. There were also concerns over whether lessons had been learnt from the initial responses to the Covid pandemic.

[3] *Liberating Structures: Including and Unleashing Everyone*
www.liberatingstructures.com/1-1-2-4-all/

On the issue of social infrastructure and the outputs from the peer research process, attendees agreed that the broader definition of social infrastructure that had emerged was of value. This was because it set community spaces where people come together into the wider context of the places where people live. This approach was felt to more accurately identify how people actually use space. Social infrastructure is not limited to public assets designed for that purpose; it can be any public, private or community-owned space that is of value to local people.

There was specific reference in all the roundtables to the importance of green and open space. Often this was in conjunction with comments on accessibility, with questions raised about how access to green spaces could be improved for communities where there was not a great deal available. Conversations also focused on the importance of safety, with participants highlighting particular sections of the community, such as women or the elderly, who might not feel safe in using green spaces on their own.

Finally, in relation to the peer research process itself, there was an acknowledgment that – while this approach had shown the value of rigorously collected hyper-local knowledge – the views of research participants should not be seen as representative of the views of the wider community. Peer research is about depth not breadth, and roundtable attendees agreed that their conversations had demonstrated the importance of bringing to bear a range of perspectives on the evidence base and creating a safe environment for review and relationship-building.

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