Neighbourhood Plan Youth Provision: Young People's Voice

Written by Grace Sykes

"The statue with all the names carved into it... reminds us of good memories."

Who did we talk to?

Access and Sample

Over 130 young people from Ellistown were engaged in consultations about youth provision in the area as part of the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish.

These groups of young people were accessed via several routes including local schools, youth clubs, the local church and the parish councillor. Groups were mixed gender and ethnicity, although predominantly white-British. Almost all were aged between 11 and 19, with exception of younger siblings and those on the cusp of these age boundaries.

How?

Methodology

Considering the initial difficulties with access and the strict timeframe focus groups were the most appropriate method as they allowed for rapid accumulation of data in a short period of time. This was extremely useful in assisting the identification of key themes which we hope can be fleshed out with further detail later in the process (Vaughan et al, 1996 in Alsuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008; 358). The commonality between the young people of being Ellistown residents seemed to enhance discussions as they were able to empathise and share their experiences (Hopkins, 2007; 531).

In addition, approximately 10 questionnaires were filled out by young people living in Ellistown.

Where and when?

Focus group details
- Newbridge High School: Thursday 1st May
- St Christopher's church: Thursday 8th May
- Group of young people (met at Primary school/Community hall) Tuesday 13th May
- Ashby School: Wednesday 14th May
- Elistown Primary School 21st MayWhat did we find out?

What do you like about Ellistown?

"Nothing really, it's just a place I happen to live- where my house is"

Many (approximately 85%) young people sadly struggled to list things they liked about Ellistown beyond their family and their own house.

Some described Ellistown as a calm, peaceful place but this was interrupted by the behaviour of a minority. Many saw a large potential and need for an increased sense of community in Ellistown and had various ideas on how this might be achieved. They also believed that this creation of belonging would encourage better care for the community.

"Not much noise, nice and peaceful."

A large proportion listed places they could be with their friends as their favourite spaces in Ellistown. It was clear that there was a lack of space they thought they could relax with their friends.

"St Christophers because it's the only place I get to see people."

"The park got re-built in August so that's better now."

"New houses are nice."

Many noted also recent developments as major improvements to the village.

What do you dislike about Ellistown?

"The parks always need the grass cutting."

"Teenagers that give us a bad name-graffiti-trash-smoking-beer cans- just ruining the place. It's not just teenagers, it's people too. Dog droppings and they don't pick up their litter and stuff."

> **"Known for being a bit rough. Quite, a few rough people so you get stupid screaming at stupid hours of the morning, sometimes."**

young people saw Ellistown in a fairly negative light. Whilst described Ellistown's quiet nature as positively peaceful others implied it was lifeless.

> **"Not much life. Doesn't real have much of a soul." "Nothing to do."**

There was a general consensus that Ellistown was neglected both by residents and beyond. There was contradiction as young people discussed how everyone knew each other which generated a sense of community but actually in reality there was a loss of community and that feelings of belonging were lacking from the village.

Many mentioned that activities were often short lived and so there was reluctance to get involved in things as assumptions were made that they wouldn't last. They were unsure as to how to generate enthusiasm and maintain interest in community activities.

The quotes below highlight there was a general worry about safety amongst young people and their parents which prevented young people from getting to and from places they wished to go.

> **"Don't get to play because live far away from parks- there's not crossings near me or street lights."**

> **"I live near Sail street- there's too much glass and teenagers smoking and doing not nice things."**

Some young people felt isolated in Ellistown and were aware of pressure on their parents to drive them to see school friends or take part in activities.

> **"Don't do anything in Ellistown- go elsewhere if I go out, so always have to ask mum and dad to drop me off."**

Some students felt that they had been promised things which had not materialised such as a BMX Track on South St and an astro-turf area on St Christopher's. They would like the opportunity to design their own play area.

> A person of any age should be heard if they have a good idea

What spaces/activities currently exist for you as young people?

- Scouts/Cubs
- After school clubs/St Christopher's club- attended mostly by primary age
- The parks – South Street, St Christopher's, Rushby road
- "Community hall"- at the primary school
- Street Space-Chippy, Dog hill, Statue with people's names carved into it, walking and talking on the streets…
- Ellistown working men's club
- Friends' houses

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

- Musical theatre-acting/ dancing /singing
- Skating
- Biking
- Spending time with friends
- Football
- Being out, being active
- Reading in the dark with yankee candles
- Xbox or games with friends
- Arts and crafts- upcycling
- Make up, hair and nails
- Spontaneous trips
- Being on the Internet
- Cooking
- Tea and biscuits
- School work

What spaces/activities would you like to be able to access? Why? How can local provision support this? Where do you feel you belong or don't belong as young people?

Age specific space

Young people expressed a need for age specific spaces. They talked about how they wished to use the park but were restricted for various reasons. Younger groups felt intimated by older teenagers and older teenagers felt restricted by adults who accused them of being "too loud". They felt they were "often getting into trouble for not doing anything wrong but just laughing loudly".

"We're seen as disruptive when just having innocent fun- feel like we're constantly being moved on."

Sport space

There was agreement that sports clubs needed to be age and ability specific but other clubs could be and should be mixed. Young people agreed that there should be some scheduled clubs but also stressed the importance of space to place sport spontaneously.

Young people's main concern was that grass areas that could be used for sport were not weatherproof. Pitches or parks often flooded or water logged in bad weather and lacked shelter or lighting. Therefore young people thought there was a need for astro-turf which could be shared between sports.

There also suggestions for higher fences so balls were not lost.

Online space

Internet café style space was desired for both work and leisure. This could serve adults and young people.

There was a suggestion of **"Ellistown online"**. A virtual space for young people to agree meet ups and activities. Young people were happy to volunteer to lead this themselves. This way young people could find out what was going on easily and it was also a way to meet young people your own age.

Adults were expected to be involved in this inline community also. Young people hoped adults would consider volunteering for car sharing to transport young people to activities but also that it would provide reassurance as it would be easier to locate their children.

Outdoor space

In addition to sports spaces young people discussed the possibility of creating "play streets" between certain hours. This was seen as important especially for younger children under 16 who may not be able to access parks as they did not live close by and parents did not wish them to be that far away from home unsupervised. **"Channing way or Rushby"** were noted as streets where this may be viable.

Safe space

Safety was an issue raised by all ages and often prevented young people from participating in activities fully. There was contradiction as young people desired a space that was "theirs" away from adults but advocated feelings of insecurity and fear due to the behaviour of a minority. Intimidating behaviour included older teenagers drinking, smoking and drug taking and generally becoming boisterous. CCTV, Park officers, Increased street lighting, Neighbourhood watch, Junior police were listed as possible avenues to combat this problem.

Community "All ages" space

All young people expressed a need in spaces for everyone. They felt these intergenerational spaces would create unity and community as well as skill sharing and learning. Besides sports activities they did not see the need for age restrictions but instead hoped to interact with those of all ages, again placing emphasis on intergenerational experience sharing and learning. This is discussed in more detail later in the report as young people considered the feasibility of various activities.

Work space

Many young people were currently revising for exams, and those that weren't had homework. They expressed a desire for a space where they could all work together.

"You'd feel less isolated- like we were in it together. Could also be helpful in learning revision techniques from each other and stuff. Older helping younger and all that."

Dry space

Almost 100% of young people spoken to said they were likely to "stay home" in bad weather as there was no dry space for them. A dry space was highlighted as an urgent need by all ages.

"Dens that we could use to play games or keep dry and chat."

"Canopys to sit and talk in."

"Simple" versatile space

Young people suggested that all of the above could be provided for in one joined up space. This space would be adaptable to the needs and desires of the community. A space that was warm and dry; indoors, with toilets that could be used to host a whole range of activities including chatting on beanbags, internet surfing, playing badminton, watching films, cooking and so on. Cost was an issue for many young people and so they wanted a space that was free. Young people thought this flexibility would make the space more enjoyable as it would allow for spontaneity they craved. Young people wanted a space where activities were not dictated but they could decide on the night what they wanted to do. A space they were responsible for and could control. They understood that there may need to be an adult key holder but expressed a desire to gather together young people to form a committee which could be responsible for activities in Ellistown. The online space was seen as the first step to make this happen. They thought this online space would encourage inclusivity and allow

Is there anything that no longer exists that was important to you?

Most young people could not recall a space that used to exist but no longer did. However, a minority mentioned the pub and the cinema club.

- "The Ellistown pub"
- "Community cinema"
- Indoor play area

What skills do you have and how might they enable you to become more involved in the community?

> "I think everyone has skills that we could share, like you might think it's nothing but it might be a big thing if someone else can't do it. We can all teach each other something"

Young people thought there were various activities that young people and adults could learn from each other and they hoped to have more competitions and community events involving them. Some of which are listed below.

- Animal care
- Arts and Crafts
- Cooking and Baking
- Charity events - sponsored running or biking, bring and buy sales
- Painting
- Acting
- Babysitting
- Helping older residents
- Camping

Young people were eager to be involved in the setting up of the spaces and helping run the activities themselves.

Summary and Conclusions

> "Anything would be better than what we have now"

Young people were eager to have a versatile safe space that they were responsible for and could control. However, besides sports clubs they did not see a need for age restrictions. Instead, they were keen to engage the whole community in activities, hoping that it might

create a greater sense of belonging and unity in the village. They were hopeful this would generate more respect and care for the environment but also for each other. An online space was seen as important in promoting plans and beginning this process.

Reference List

Hopkins, P.E. (2007) Thinking critically and creatively about focus groups, Area, 39 (4) pp. 528-535.

Vaughan et al (1996) In: Alasuuari, P. and Bickman, L. and Brannen, J. (ed.) (2008) The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods, London and California and New Dehli and Singapore: Sage Publications.