Aim of the report: to investigate the changing attitudes towards community and community centres, barriers to engagement, methods of breaking down barriers to engagement and to use these to give a foundational proposal for the engagement of Lobley Hill.

<u>**Independent Literature and Local Context Review**</u>

How have attitudes towards and the roles of community centres evolved throughout the past?

The original community centre movement in the early to mid-20th century was designed to provide 'facilities for the development of recreational, cultural and personal welfare of members a community' through acting as a meeting space for 'voluntary organisations providing services required by the neighbourhood' (Mess and King 1947: 73). This concept was founded upon an idea that 'university' men and women would reside in the 'poorer areas' of great cities, as the developers aimed to turn these cities into educational settlements to increase the standard of living. Later social service groups grew out of the miner's strikes of 1926-27, which by 1939 saw '2,300 clubs offering the unemployed an opportunity to work and organize together for the benefit of their local communities' (Speidel, 2017).

By 1960 the number of community centres 'grew to over 900', taking more of an 'educational aspect' and becoming a 'base for groups and clubs' (Speidel, 2017). Despite the exponential growth of community centres, factors such as the oil crisis of 1974, the rise of Thatcherism in the late 1970s and a failure of society to articulate and demonstrate the contribution of community centres to the enhancement of local life resulted in significant cutbacks in state support in during the 1970s (Smith, 2002). Consequently, to cut costs 'an administrator often replaced full-time community or development workers' who were often well-trained and had great levels of experience within the community, leading to a watered-down service that

concentrated upon money-making activities such as wedding receptions, multi gyms and bars, as opposed to educational services that genuinely targeted grievances within a community. Furthermore, cut-backs also resulted in a shrinking of the opening hours and a deterioration of the building itself due to an 'inability to pay for caretaking, cleaning and repairs' (Smith, 2002).

As Mess and King (1947: 76) have proposed, the quality of both the interior and exterior of the building was (and still is) a major determinant of a centre's success, writing that 'a good social life is dependent upon good buildings'. Mess and King's claim implies that a positive environment is extremely important for the development of a community centre and thus the community, when entering a community centre the décor and mood is the initial impression people gain - a centre that has been invested in emits a positive feeling to the community, portraying an investment into the community itself, breeding positivity and confidence.

Marrott (1997) claims that many involved in modern organisations have a 'poorly developed sense of changing needs within their local community' and for what community centres and other organisations can offer' arguing that they're often 'more concerned with the physical management of the building than with the development of the local community'. Therefore, community centres must make attempts to develop the community outside the four walls of the centre itself, whether it be through creating clubs, working with schools or the church, a missionary-like group must be created to galvanise a true community spirit.

Smith (2002) concludes in his article that community centres do continue to 'provide a facility where local people can organise social and family events', adding that 'substantial programmes of work' have been developed in some inner-city community centres through

'tapping into regeneration funds' or making use of funding streams around 'continuing and lifelong learning'. There is consequently still hope for communities and centres around the country that their efforts can indeed help salvage a communal feeling around a village, town or even city.

Are individualism and collectivism true opposites? How do studies into social capital prove the conclusions?

Individualism and Collectivism

The argument between individualism and collectivism has been one lasting over the course of the 20th century, continuing to the present day. Many scholars have claimed that the two philosophies are contrary from one another, that individualism is the root of many negative aspects of our society such as alienation, selfishness and emotional stress. However, it's been found that countries with greater levels of individualism often have higher community sentiment, due to the greater levels of individual responsibility and ability to forge relationships beyond family, kinship and area.

Hofstede (1991, cited by Allik and Anu: 32) defined individualism as pertaining to societies in which autonomy, self-responsibility and uniqueness are vital characteristics of the society's members; 'ties between individuals are loose' and everyone is expected to 'look after themselves and their immediate family'. Alternatively, collectivist societies are founded upon characteristics such as familism, companionship and patriotism, where 'people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups' which throughout lifetimes 'continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty'.

Western society's view of the community has evolved greatly throughout the past century; between the end of World War Two and the 1980s, society was based on the notion of the welfare state, which permitted 'a sense of participation in and belonging to the community' (The Royal Commission on Social Security, 1972: 65), where 'there is a sense of community responsibility and collective values that provide an environment of security' (The Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988: 454). From the 1980s onwards however, the West and the UK have come to view community as an arena where 'free individuals pursue their own interests in the marketplace, thus maximising the use of information and resources to the benefit of community as a whole' (Upton, 1987: 21). Hayek was a great proponent of this philosophy of individualism, proposing a 'strict limitation of all coercive and exclusive power' (Hayek, 1949: 16), believing this would create the production of 'spontaneous collaboration creating things beyond what individual minds could every fully comprehend' (Hayek, 1949: 70).

A critique of Individualism

As inequality is the bedrock of a society rooted in the ideas of Hayek, criticism and backlash is inevitable - according to Lasch (cited by Peters, 1994: 68), neoliberalist individualism established a 'culture of narcissism' whereby a 'commodified self leads to blurring of the boundaries between self and the world of objects'. Modern-day western society has been linked to forms of 'social pathology' such as 'emotional stress, physical and mental illness and high crime' (Cobb, 1976, Naroll, 1983; cited by Allik and Realo, 2004: 31) alongside 'alienation and perceived loneliness' (Allik and Realo, 2004: 31). Similar critiques of individualism have been given by proponents of communitarianism such as Etzioni, claiming that individualism promotes selfishness, alienates people and destroys vital institutions such as family and

neighbourhood, whilst being destructive of trust, friendship and the common good' (Etzioni, 1996; cited by Allik and Realo: 31). Communitarians have come to be suspicious of 'universalist and rationalist' assumptions within social sciences such as economics that 'abstract the individual from social and cultural contexts' disregarding the 'role of social relationships in constituting the nature of identity' (Peters, 2006: 74).

Additionally, globalisation has become a vital component of today's western society, with borders becoming increasingly porous. Jeffs and Smith (2008) highlight that today's society as one of 'risk', where it cannot be expected that life will be secure, predictable and determined by family, place and origin; individuals place themselves at the centre of their plans. Although individuals receive great levels of credit for personal successes, it's also the case that 'failure and misfortune is increasingly a direct consequence of personal failings' and that risk never departs from an individual's consciousness, 'failure awaits at every turn' (Jeffs and Smith, 2008: 53). Although a pessimistic view, it is a view with substantial backing - political science heavyweight Robert Putnam (1995; 2000) in his famous 'Bowling Alone' article and book recorded growing levels of disconnection amongst American friends, family and neighbours; where in the 1970s the average American attended one club meeting every month, by 1998 the figure had fallen by 40%.

The growth of individualism has also been said to have a negative affect on community work itself, with policy-makers in England rebranding youth work as a form of individualised case-management, the youth are in need are often assumed to come from 'dysfunctional and debased communities' (Jeffs and Smith, 2008: 55). Whereas in the past communities and the youth shaped the groups they were a part of, it's now the belief that communities are often 'beyond redemption' and those socially excluded individuals should be mentored into the

'model adults they should aspire to be'. Where in the past community workers would find communities to work with and guide, their only option is to create these communities; the community worker has been 'recast as someone who constructs communities, perpetually required to sustain as much as service them' (Jeffs and Smith 2008: 55).

Introduction to the concept of 'social capital'

According to Jeffs, Smith, Etzioni and Putnam, communities seem to have lost an essential of communal society due to individualism, defined as 'social capital' by Putnam (1995; 2000). Although difficult to define due to the varying views surrounding the term, Putnam (2000) claims valuable social networks to be the founding feature of social capital, after all, as Beilmann and Realo (2012: 205) claim, 'collective action strongly depends on social networks and trustworthiness of fellow citizens' thus mutually beneficial action is facilitated by 'reciprocity and trust'. 'Social trust' constitutes the 'core of social capital' (Realo and Allik, 2009: 880) and is in the eyes of Beilmann and Realo (2012) the answer to the question of what force it is within a community that brings people together for common purposes. Social capital is an asset associated with many desirable outcomes such as faster social and economic development, greater effectiveness of political systems and better health (Beilmann & Realo, 2012: 206) which highlight the level of importance social capital can have for a community.

Why Individualism has been shown to lead to the growth, rather than destruction of social capital

It seems an obvious conclusion that individualism fosters social atomisation, isolation and dissolution (Lukes, 1971); for many, only small-scale face-to-face communities can develop a universal sense of solidarity. Allik and Realo (2004: 31) have outlined an argument made by

many that solidarity is 'doomed to disappear', replaced by a 'modern, rational and impersonal society' with self-seeking individualism at its core.

Although a convincing theoretical argument, if we return to recognising the importance of social capital on collective activity, Allik and Realo (2004: 42) have conducted cross-cultural and cross-state (USA) psychological analysis regarding the correlations between the extent to which a country is individualistic or collectivist and the levels of social capital; their findings followed that 'across 48 states, the figures indicate that states with higher levels of social capital tend to be more individualistic' and the 'countries with the highest levels of interpersonal trust are the countries most characterized with high levels of individualism'. In the US, states characterized with high levels of 'civic engagement', where people spend 'more time with friends' and believe people are 'honest and can be trusted' are more individualistic. Moreover, many scholars have demonstrated that people in individualistic cultures tend to have more acquaintances and friends (Triandis, 2000); they're more extraverted and open to new experience (McCrae, 2001) and they're more trusting and tolerant toward people of different races (Hofstede, 2001). Paxton (2002) has also shown that countries in which most people can be trusted were also more individualistic; it's thus been revealed that participation in many associations does not threaten but encourages individualism as groups look to foster the self-responsibility, autonomy and uniqueness that individualism can bring (Triandis, 1995).

These findings ultimately come down to the fact that in collectivist cultures, social life is ruled by the sole in-group, whether it be family, kinship or community, whereas in individualist countries, emphasis is placed upon personal responsibility, as the multiple in-groups tend to fragment social control over an individual. Durkheim (1964) believed that individualism and

collectivism were mutually beneficial, that the division of labour could create social solidarity, uniting rather than dividing people through initiating activities necessary for coordinated action and cooperation, with specialised roles for each individual. Allik and Realo (2004: 31) claim that individualistic ideas and values build the foundations on which a 'social order or culture develops where an individual can mature into an autonomous and self-sufficient agent'. Autonomous and largely independent individuals accept responsibility for themselves, and thus realise that their efforts are meaningful, leading them to aim to improve themselves and act in a manner conducive with social capital. A society founded upon self-responsibility leads to people reaching out away from their nearest and most immediate social contacts, th establish a wider radius of trust. Allik and Realo (2009: 882) have demonstrated that this radius of trust is vital, stating that in societies where trust is limited to the nuclear family or kinship 'individuals do not trust each other or feel obligations to neighbours, fellow citizens or nation'; true individualism involves a realisation of the inter-dependent nature of such a society, as opposed to dog-eat-dog, there's a voluntary collectivism, by which people realise 'they will not benefit individually unless they pursue goals collectively' (Putnam, 2000: 124). It's claimed that voluntary cooperation and partnership are only possible when people have autonomy, self-control and a mature sense of responsibility; 'even a convinced individualist must accept that man is not God, and that he lives together with his own kind in one world, thus it is reasonable to claim that only the pursuit of self-interest automatically leads to a sensible and just order of society' (Dreschler, 1995: 458-459).

With reference to both the literature and Lobley Hill statistics, what are some common, vital barriers to engagement?

Barriers to engagement

A primary issue community centres and areas across the British Isles have been found to face is that of cynicism, mistrust and disillusionment with the engagement process (Harden et al, 2015: 14; Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017: 44). A Scottish Government survey with 1600 respondents found a huge gulf between the views of community planning/developing professions and community members, for example where 47% of professionals believed planners and developers to be committed to community engagement, only 9% of community respondents did, whilst in response to the question 'does community engagement influence planning outcomes', only 9% of community respondents replied positively, in contrast with 29% of professionals (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017: 45). Disillusionment with the engagement process is therefore a huge problem, where community members not only feel like those in charge of the process aren't committed, but that when their voiced are heard, it is not influential. If engagement doesn't engage the community and consequently exert a positive influence on the environment, then it is a flawed and redundant process that only serves to derail a community, rather than building the capacity required to facilitate a community's development. This reflects a conclusion outlined by the Scottish Government within their literature review that it's often the case the engagement process is approached as a method of 'securing community consent for a predetermined policy proposal or development scheme' (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017: 47), a point reinforced by the 'common perception of tokenistic engagement practices' (Harden et al, 2015: 14), where there's a tendency to 'manage expectations' as opposed to an ambition to secure community by-in (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017: 44); thus a new approach is required where the community's voice is the creator of community transformation and development.

With a lack of confidence in the project comes a lack of funding and resources, as many centres run on financial support from participants and public bodies such as *the big lottery.* If there's disillusionment with a community centre expect the confidence that is so essential for financial support. Harden et al (2015: 17) have highlighted a criminal 'lack of investment in dedicated staff and resources' leading to problems regarding sustaining and maintaining partnerships, networks and consensus. With a lack of funding, comes a 'time limited nature', which creates an environment in which it is difficult to build trust and relationships that achieve true 'scope and depth'. Harden et al (2015: 17) highlight that with a history of poor relations and mistrust this factor can prove to be 'doubly critical' in the engagement process, as it could be the case that the disillusionment and disengagement worsen as promises are broken. Harden et al (2017: 14) have proposed methods of engagement which 'develop partnerships and networks' to establish a presence within the area; efforts should slowly 'build sufficient time and resources' to truly engage the community, endeavouring to 'build trust and acceptance' within the community. Centres must create a 'transactional and reciprocal process' by which decision-making is a joint process, where communities are 'co-producers in the community planning process'. This can only be achieved through a combination of dedicated staff and investment of time, effort and resources focused around the goal of developing relationships and trust.

Harden et al (2015: 15) have portrayed many issues with the organisational culture, attitudes and practice within community engagement such as a 'lack of organisational commitment' to the needs of the community members stemming from a lack of dedicated staff and a paternalistic attitude that is slow to change. Within the same report it has been brought to light that there's commonly a resistance to share power and control, resulting in short notice for meetings and putting the priorities of senior organisations before the communities

themselves. This can lead to a lack of thought going into the specific needs of the community such as a simple case of the timing of events and meetings; if the event is aimed at elderly members of the community then an event timetabled for day time would be more successful, whereas for working adults and parents the evening would be more useful so those who are at work during the day are able to attend the sessions.

Another issue is a lack of appropriate training for staff (Harden et all, 2015: 18) mainly due to a lack of skills and funding limitations that have been alluded to; if staff are untrained within the sphere of community engagement or have limited expertise then they will be unable to give appropriate mentoring and forms of support to ensure a process of building and sustaining engagement. Suggested approaches to overcome this problem include developing a network of shared learning of best practice from fellow community centres whilst utilising toolkits and bespoke training opportunities alongside training and capacity building that's ongoing through the engagement process.

Lobley Hill's situation and barriers to community engagement it faces

Lobley Hill faces many challenges as a community, with 29% of it population within the top 10% most deprived areas in England and 43% within the top 20% deprived (IMD, current data: 2015, cited by Gateshead Gov) we can see the challenge at hand for Lobley Hill community centre. Deprivation statistics allow us to see at a glance how an area compares to other areas across the country, and through these statistics we can infer the area-specific deprivation Lobley Hill faces and consequently develop an engagement proposal that looks to fight against these challenges.

As the deprivation statistics are broken down into separate subsets we begin to see a picture of where Lobley Hill finds its greatest levels of deprivation; for example, the area is within the

top 10% most deprived for employment (DCLG), with 5% youth unemployment as opposed to the 4% national average, 5% overall unemployment as opposed to the 4% national average and only 69.9% of the working-age population in employment (ONS Census, current data: 2011, cited by Gateshead Gov). Unemployment is thus a huge problem within Lobley Hill, with a lack of routine, lack of human capital and lost motivation, unemployment can come to be a significant barrier to community engagement.

It's been widely documented that the unemployed have lower levels of social participation (Brand & Burgard, 2008; Gallie et al, 1984; Paugem & Russell, 2000, cited by Diekhoff & Gash, 2015:) as it has been said to cause not only economic distress but psychological distress, often 'compounded by negative attitudes surrounding unemployment' (Gallie et al: 2003, cited by Diekhoff & Gash, 2015: 68). Moreover, Dieckhoff and Gash (2015) have found that the difference between participation in voluntary groups between the employed and unemployed to be huge, with 18% of the unemployed involving themselves in voluntary groups and 35% of the employed. It's also been claimed that 'being unemployed significantly and substantially reduces social participation' (Diekhoff and Gash, 2015: 81). Involuntary job loss is a hugely stressful event, which can 'negatively influence an individual's physical and mental health, family dynamics, and the well-being of children' and long periods of joblessness 'can compound these problems' (Nichols et al, 2013: 2). Furthermore, 'human or social capital decays as people are out of work longer' (Nichols et al, 2013: 7), with unemployment often becoming concentrated within one area; as this becomes the norm, 'the neighbourhood becomes a source of persistent poverty' (Nichols et al, 2013: 12) and thus unemployment can be seen to 'devastate local communities' (Nichols et al, 2013: 11). With such negative consequences due to unemployment we can infer that the greater than average levels within Lobley Hill will be acting as a barrier to engagement with the community centre.

Furthermore, 27% of the children in Lobley Hill are living in poverty (HMRC, current data: 2014, cited by Gateshead gov) with the area also in the top 10% most deprived for income deprivation affecting older people (DCLG), whilst in the top 25% most income deprived overall. Many of the issues highlighted under unemployment apply to low income as low income is of course positively correlated with unemployment levels and as Ferragina et al (2013) point out, 'the higher the household income, the greater a person's participation in society'.

Lobley Hill is also in the top 10% most deprived percentile for health, wellbeing and disability; with 18% of Lobley Hill classed as obese and 23% as regular smokers (NHS STW, lifestyle survey, current data: 2012, cited by Gateshead Gov), whilst 23% of the population have a long term limiting illness (ONS Census, current data: 2011, cited by Gateshead Gov). Ill health is a huge problem within Lobley Hill, leading to lack of mobility and consequently lack of confidence which can easily manifest into barriers to engagement. Harden et al (2015: 14) discuss how if people do not have high levels of wellbeing then there is often a fear of 'discrimination and exclusion' or a 'fear of exposure to authorities' where there may be drug use or a stigmatising illness. It can often be the case that a disability or illness can lead to a loss of motivation and confidence levels, thus developing into a barrier to engagement.

Investigation into community engagement approaches

What is community engagement?

Community Engagement is essentially a range of interactions which benefit the whole of a community of people who share a common place, interest or identity (Herefordshire Council, 2013). More specifically, the Scottish Community Development Centre describes community engagement as 'developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public

bodies and one or more community to help understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences'. Lobley Hill community centre finds itself in a position in which it requires first and foremost a sustainable and concrete relationship with the members of the community; the community must feel as though they are developing a reciprocal relationship with the centre, it is upon these foundations that Lobley Hill Community Centre can begin aiming to become the hub of the community, working towards a situation by which they have provided the foundations on which a community can develop. Moreover, the centre requires a sustaining working relationship with supporting parent organisations such as Groundwork, and a development of networks and connections with other community centres.

Aims of community engagement

In a wider sense, community engagement should enable a building of trust through a removal of engagement barriers, tapping into local knowledge and expertise, handing members of the community an opportunity to directly influence those decisions benefiting them, consequently creating a sense of ownership (Herefordshire Council, 2013: 3). Community centre activities and consultations should have the overarching aim of creating an environment in which active participation leads to 'decisions, delivery and evaluation of services being shaped by, informed by and built by relevant people and communities'. Shared decision-making ensures the goal that services meet the needs of neighbourhoods, a concept mirroring the crucial sentiment of Andersson and Shakrokh's work that relationships should be developed, and dialogue maintained indefinitely throughout the process of community engagement (Andersson and Shakrokh: 11). The Health Council of Canada (2006) reinforces this point, stating that 'citizen engagement is far more active than traditionally passive public

consultation in its recognition of the capacity of citizens to discuss and generate policy options independently'.

Formal and traditional methods of community engagement

- Door to door and online surveys/questionnaire

Herefordshire council claim that these methods can be positive if gauging reaction to proposals, progrmmes or understanding opinions regarding the services in areas with large numbers of people; however, they can prove to be time-consuming and ineffective if not done properly or clearly (Herefordshire Council, 2013: 5). Moreover, Newcastle City Council state that surveys can gather information from those who are not directly involved with the centre, and statistical results collated from surveys often have far more credibility, leading to a more evidence-based engagement plan. However, for the survey to be useful, statistical and research expertise are required which can prove to be resource-intensive, whilst many communities can suffer from survey-fatigue, feeling overly surveyed whilst seeing minimal results; likewise, they can be unsuitable for complex issues, deep-rooted within a community, guilty of trivialising and simplifying down to digestible questions (Newcastle City Council, 2013-2018).

- Printed materials such as newsletters, fact sheets, brochures etc.

Although a large target audience can be reached, and there can be the development of a mailing list and written comments, materials often go unread, and these materials often have an inability to convey complicated concepts, being used for solely advertising and publication of future activities and events (Newcastle city council, 2013-2018).

- Consultation/Focus Groups/Interviews

Often focus groups and traditional consultations can provide an opportunity to test material, verify previous assumptions or find out current issues regarding the area; however, participants may feel restricted by the approach and these exercises can often only invite those members of society who are already engaged with the centre, thus leading to a perception of exclusivity (Newcastle City Council, Community Engagement Framework, 2013-2018). Moreover, ideas can often become lost in translation, with engagement professionals and centre volunteers driving their own vested interests, whilst community members treat such consultations as an opportunity to vent frustrations, leading to a situation where 'traditional public consultation elicits raw, emotional opinions from the public that are often uninformed and irrational' (Yankelovich, 1991, cited by Mirza et al, 2012).

Innovative, informal and creative methods of community engagement

- Participatory Appraisal

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is essentially a method by which community centres and organisations are able to 'avoid imposing change based on flawed research or assumptions' (North East Social Enterprise Partnership, 2014: 2) in their attempt to determine what stakeholders require. PA was developed as a response to limited and inappropriate methods of consultation where external actors worked on personal perceptions of problems that were often distorted by systemic bias and prejudice. Members of communities are empowered to take control of their community's development through visual techniques aimed at fostering discussion within groups leading to practical, effective action. (North East Social Enterprise Partnership, 2014: 3). Principles of PA include a community-led approach, with 'people at the heart of the planning process' (North East Social Partnership, 2014: 2); an aim to include the majority of a community to give a sense of ownership to the community, and an assurance

that it's a continual process that is both flexible and adaptable with an 'emphasis on process, relationship building, sharing of knowledge and conciliation between stakeholders'. The process ideally serves to act as a 'role reversal of the researcher identifying community priorities, leaning towards one of community empowerment' (Tock, 2001) where the destiny and potential of a centre and the community is driven by the community members themselves, leading to a more fulfilling process. A great example of PA techniques is that of community mapping; this includes participants to draw the locality as they see it, showing how different types of people prioritise different aspects of the community, what people value and what is missing (North East Enterprise Partnership, 2014: 10).

- Asset-Based Community Development/Appreciative Inquiry

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a 'technique aimed at identifying individual and community assets as opposed to focusing on the problems, needs or deficits' (Frost, 2011: 1). The classic 'deficit' approach focuses on the problems and deficiencies in a community, for example deprivation, illness and health-damaging behaviours; services are designed to fill gaps and fix problems; consequently, a community can come to feel disempowered and dependent, becoming 'passive recipients of services rather than active agents' (Foot and Hopkins, 2010: 7, cited by Frost, 2011: 1). ABCD has very similar values and principles as PA, putting faith in citizens and communities as the co-producers of health and well-being, identifying what has the potential to improve health and well-being thus empowering communities to take control of their futures, creating tangible resources from what is already available (Foot and Hopkins, 2010. Cited by Frost, 2011: 1). Health assets are defined as 'any factor or resource which enhances the ability of individuals, communities and populations to maintain and sustain health and well-being' (Foot and Hopkins 2010, Cited by Frost, 2011: 2);

these assets can range from practical skills, capabilities and passions of community members to the networks and connections previously referred to as 'social capital' to the effectiveness of community and voluntary associations (Foot and Hopkins, 2010: 7, cited by Frost, 2011: 2).

<u>Case studies</u>

Hollybrush association conducted several community meetings in 2011 highlighting issues such as community cohesion and anti-social behaviour; a consultation process followed within each estate to identify local needs in which they found various causes for concern with issues such as isolation of older people, anti-social behaviour and insufficient opportunities to have a say in local issues, believing that local statutory services and organisations weren't listening to them and doing enough to assist with concerns. Thus, Hollybrush Association helped to develop capacity-building work with one to one support for 25 community members, helping residents set up 5 social groups in each estate. This led to community arts and social events to set a casual atmosphere by which the association could gauge the opinion of the local people; this was followed up by focus groups to create an overall strategy map. The outcomes of this process included lower levels of isolation, greater ownership of the local community and a better understanding of local needs that will help plan and deliver more appropriate services. (Community Places, 2014)

Imaginary Journeys in Cornwall saw seven Cornish locations provide access to arts across Cornwall, new audiences were reached, and open spaces were animated to support town-centre regeneration. Here the power of taking a project into the community as opposed to waiting for the community to come to the hub is proven, with great success the imaginary

journeys shows how important it can be to open the minds of communities to unseen (WILDWORKS, 2007)

An interview with Pat Javanaud from Gamesley Community Centre in the outskirts of Manchester enlightened me to the fact that people don't enjoy when a community centre feels either as though it is outsiders running the centre, or that there is a lack of continuity. This interview reinforced the idea that trust is the most important factor in a community's success; Pat is a bastion of the community in Gamesley, working with the local authorities to help them save money during periods of cuts through cleaning, opening and closing the centres themselves where local authorities would have to hire a caretaker to do this. She spoke about developing a mutually beneficial relationship with authorities, developing a positive network within the area.

Community Engagement Proposal

Vision, objectives and target audience

The engagement proposal aims to develop a strategy to tackle the primary barriers facing community engagement outlined within the literature review, such as broader barriers including mistrust, cynicism and disillusionment with the engagement process, and more specific barriers such as unemployment, low income and poor health and wellbeing, identified by the indicators of multiple deprivation. I will look to introduce specific ideas relevant directly to Lobley Hill but also a more methodical overview of a path Lobley Hill may want to take in the future. The primary point to make is that the engagement proposal should act as a foundation on which an engagement process will evolve and develop; it's purpose is to set open the minds of both Lobley Hill officials, future officials and volunteers and Groundwork to engagement methods previously unthought of.

Key Messages

From the preceding literature review, we can see that it's vital community centres of today look to continue and further develop the tradition of the early community centre movement, treating the centre as a place where the educated and uneducated can learn from each other, organise and work together, thus improving the quality of relationships within the community and the quality of the building itself.

Reciprocity and trust are essential to the development of social capital, and vital to this trust is self-responsibility of individual community members. It should be a key message of Lobley Hill that community members take responsibility for the direction of the area, developing

specialised personal skills that can add to the advancement of division of labour within the neighbourhood where each individual's specific skillset is identified and utilised productively. Continuity within the area will be pivotal, members must see that people working within the community centre and the community are people they can trust and know well, this means developing deeper relationships with the few already active volunteers who could very well act as a gateway to the hard-to-reach groups Lobley Hill must tap into.

As the community centre looks to develop a sense of responsibility within the community's members, the lack of ownership that communities often feel can be slowly broken down, giving rise to an empowerment and ownership that is so vital. The end goal of engagement is ultimately empowerment, where the leaders of the centre are the members themselves, the organisers should act as facilitators for this transformation to develop; Lobley Hill will have the tools to develop a process that meets the evolving needs of the community.

Foundational steps Lobley Hill could take to increase community centre participation

<u>Organising sessions for during the evening as well as during the day</u>

At the moment, the centre closes at 5pm, however a crucial barrier to engagement highlighted within the report was that of poor organisation and attitude towards communities; through providing a more flexible service not only will groups such as working adults can engage with the centre, but members of the community will feel as though the centre cares far more about them and their needs, leading to increased trust and decreased levels of disillusionment and cynicism.

<u>Continuous questionnaires/surveys</u>

During some well-attended events at the centre, the activity or centre leaders could take note of new people taking part, asking them a couple of questions upon leaving regarding what made them come to take part and what was stopping them before. If it's the case that there are no new participants, then the regular attendees could be asked why they feel new participants are so hard to come by.

Enhancement of participants' involvement

The regular attendees and enthusiastic members of the community that Lobley Hill currently possesses could be encouraged to manifest their specific skillsets and enthusiasm for volunteering into a greater contribution to the centre. This may include running an activity which is close to their heart or taking a leading role in an activity so that it can run at a time that was previously not possible. This would consequently give community members a sense of ownership as they see their own people running the centre, it may be somebody's parent or grandparent, thus developing a communal feeling where people are encouraged to be proactive.

Makeover of the centre

If funds are low, then local school children could be encouraged to come in to draw paintings and decorate a wall. As claimed within the literature review, the quality of both the interior and exterior of the building is a huge determinant of a building's success. The current centre can come across as lifeless and plain, but with a small investment of time and money redecoration could prove to be the regeneration required.

Participatory Appraisal Training Program

Some organisations offer a training program for participatory appraisal, if there were 3 or 4 people who were willing to be trained in this process it could be of great use to Lobley Hill, helping the community members feel empowered and to receive some semi-professional mentoring would be of great use to the community. Participatory Appraisal is a new and difficult approach, and thus requires further research as a detailed plan is beyond this the scope of this report.

A methodical overview of a possible future engagement plan

Inform

At this stage Lobley Hill will need to inform community members of the problems highlighted within this body of work, looking to raise awareness first and foremost. It's important to provide information to enable an understanding of problems not only within the community but within the centre itself; this should act as a reflective process on the part of both the centre and the community's members and the information provided should be balanced and objective, as is proposed within the report. Informing events or methods could include public exhibitions on the streets of Lobley Hill where representatives will hand out brochures, aiming to speak to people about the centre and its plans, developing an initial relationship with members of the community.

Consult

Followed by this, the community centre should look to consult with the community through informal engagement events, where views will be listened to carefully. This stage will look to combine a casual informal activity with methods such as participatory appraisal and asset-based community development, where the day will begin with activities such as cooking

classes to promote healthy eating and fight against obesity, as outlined in the shepherd's bush project; art classes to improve creativity and education levels amongst young children, whilst including the older generation to help tackle the problem of loneliness within the generation. Followed by this will be a group discussion, where the centre looks to take the community on a walk through the area, taking in all they can see; upon returning to the centre, they will ask the participants to map the area, including communal facilities, personal and family buildings, assets and liabilities. Mapping of the area helps to show what is valued within the community and what the community members feel is missing from the area, developing a feeling of ownership, with members coming to the realisation that the community is theirs and how it develops is their choice.

Collaborate

Following the consulting stage, the centre will have considered all the needs of the community members, collating all the evidence and data, utilising this to develop a more concrete plan of action. Here ideas such as healthy eating classes or art workshops could develop into common classes enjoyed by multiple members of the community; other ideas include skills workshops to improve employability for those long-term unemployed, sports events for children and their parents or music lessons for all to take part in. The founding aspect of this stage in the engagement process is to consolidate a sense of continuity and trust; community members need to know that there are people within the community with their interests at heart. Collaboration is vital in the continuing process of learning about what people want and need, there must be continuous encouragement for every individual to self-improve. However, the process must be natural, nothing should be forced upon participants and although the centre will facilitate community-development, people require ownership of

their area, words should not be put in their mouths and round pegs should not be placed into square holes.

<u>Empower</u>

Empowering comes down to the community itself becoming the driving force behind the centre, whether this means volunteers becoming committee members or holding their own events, at this stage the needs and wants of community members should have been considered throughout the process. There will be an energetic feeling around the centre, whereby centre managers are solely facilitators of activities and no longer organisers, trust and self-responsibility have given rise to a1 community centre in the hands of community members upon which a thriving community can develop.

<u>Summary</u>

To fight against the disengagement Lobley Hill Community Centre faces, numerous changes must be made. A concerted effort to develop an empowered community where the community centre is the hub should be pursued, focusing upon the development of trust, self-responsibility and reciprocity. It's essential for the personality of Lobley Hill to shine through in the actions of the community and the centre, however long it takes to find such a personality, the leaders at Lobley Hill should look to continually look outwards and engage, taking a proactive approach where the limit of the centre's reach doesn't stop at the doorway but is felt throughout the area. The only way for engagement to succeed and sustained is 'in an environment of mutual, trust, respect and confidence… what is required is culture change' (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017: 44). Lobley Hill must aim to shape itself around the needs of the community, its character must reflect that of the people and

hopefully some of the information brought to the surface within this report can be of importance to the future process.

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