

THE
OTHER
PLACE.

THE OTHER PLACE

A Feasibility Study



HM Government

*This project is funded by the UK Government
through the UK Community Renewal Fund*

RENS

Race Equality North Somerset

Race Equality North Somerset (RENS) is a volunteer-run charity promoting the rights, interests, welfare and wellbeing of minoritised ethnic communities in North Somerset. This region has approximately 15% of its population born outside the UK, with over 80 languages being spoken.

RENS is the leading organisation exclusively dedicated to serving the growing demand for the identification, co-ordination and delivery of targeted strategies and services for this region's ethnically diverse communities.

This Feasibility Study has been developed as part of the Weston Community Hubs project that was led by RENS on behalf of North Somerset Council, funded by the UK Government Community Renewal Fund and managed by Redport Ltd.



Introduction

This Feasibility Study outlines the original rationale for a Meanwhile Use community space, the research undertaken and draws a number of conclusions.

- Questions about whether additional Hubs were needed or not have been answered by the scale and variety of activity that has emerged at The Other Place
- Many of the communities that use the space are not visible in other hubs and multiple points of entry to a connected system are needed to build more inclusive communities
- Space for community-led activity is essential if NSC's Empowering Communities Strategy is to succeed
- Rapid societal and systemic changes are in progress and we need to begin to think in terms of Transitional Spaces that provide opportunities to experiment with new ways of working
- A variety of models are needed to support transition and different financial models are emerging. There is no obvious solution at present and we will be continuing to explore ways to sustainably fund ongoing activities in ways that support core values and approach.



Background



POST-PANDEMIC

- The need to address issues of isolation, inclusion and community cohesion was brought into sharp focus
- Severe disruption to informal and largely invisible support systems continued to have significant impact
- There was an urgent need for many groups, particularly smaller and more informal groups to be able to reconnect in properly managed meeting space



Background



VICTORIA CHURCH CLOSES

- A large hall, smaller rooms and associated catering facilities were lost to the community
- Many charities and community groups were impacted
- The need for affordable spaces for community-led activity highlighted
- A community action group formed to try to buy the church for the community
- Although unsuccessful, an informally constituted Community Hub Action Team (CHAT) continued



CRF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

To help continue, RENS (then NS BME Network) submitted an Expression of Interest to NSC for the newly released Community Renewal Fund (CRF) outlining three primary inter-connected activities:

1. **Meanwhile Use:** The creation of a Meanwhile Use Community Space that will provide managed, Covid-safe blended meeting space to help existing and emerging organisations address some of the urgent and immediate community recovery priorities in the town.
2. **Action Research:** The Community Space will act as a base for an action research programme delivered by organisations within the town and appropriate partners, which will in turn provide data for a well-grounded feasibility study tailored to meet the needs and aspirations of the community.
3. **Feasibility Study:** Using the data and evidence from the action research, the feasibility study will be used to develop a business plan for a permanent, sustainable, and aiming to be self-funding Community Hub for the town.



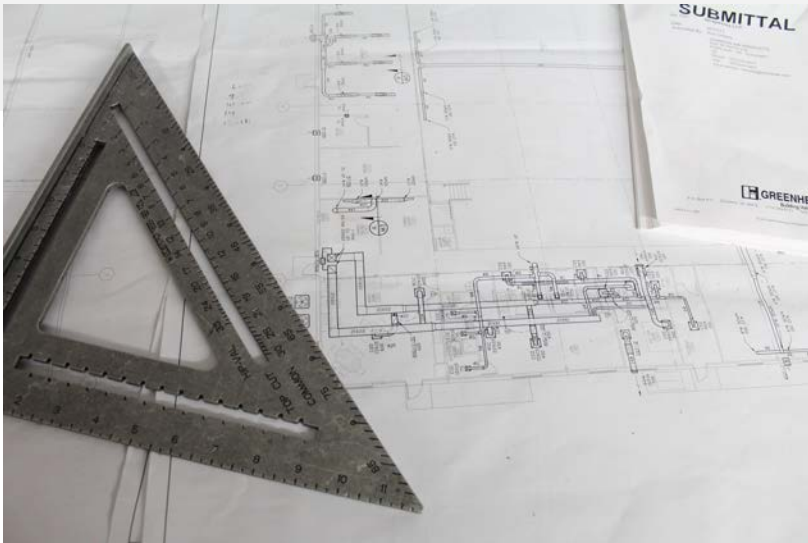
INITIAL AIMS

- To counteract the disaggregation of activity by providing a central reference and community anchor point
- To publicise and promote community activities across the town
- To help re-energise the community sector as it recovers from the impact of the pandemic
- To build connections across and within all sectors of the community
- To support new, visionary and innovative place-making activities

The project was to be developed collaboratively to facilitate a sense of community ownership, agency and inclusion from the outset.



Background



CRF APPLICATION

- The Initial Expression of Interest was developed with NSC to integrate the Weston proposal into a Community Hubs Network bid for North Somerset
- Co-design, with community-led experimentation and a programme of Participatory Action Research remained a central element
- Inclusion and equity were recognised as key issues throughout
- The CRF application submitted on 28 May 2021



Background



THE CHAT ROOM OPENS

- Based on ideas developed for the CRF bid, members of CHAT work with NS BME Network to transform their office in Orchard Place into an experimental community space
- The CHAT Room opens 01 October 2021 with a Black History Month Exhibition and provides a space for BHM activities throughout the month
- CHAT & NS BME Network also use the space to support the development of a range of new peer-led community activities and initiatives



CRF BID SUCCESSFUL

- 03 November 2021: The UK Government announces successful bids
- 10 December 2021: RENS signs a Memorandum of Understanding with NSC, to act as Lead Delivery Partner for the Weston element of the Community Hubs Project
- The search for Meanwhile Use Community Space to use as a base for PAR projects begins
- 03 February 2022: RENS signs the lease for 81-83 Meadow Street, BS23 1QL



The Other Place



GETTING STARTED

- The Community Hub Action Team begin to explore possibilities, rename themselves the Meadow Collective and grow to include new members
- Following discussion and a group vote, the space is branded as The Other Place
- Initial activities begin as the hub prepares for launch, with meetings, Refugee Welcome Community Café and Bangla classes
- New groups start to form, including Ago Ame (for the African and Caribbean community)
- An exhibition hanging system is installed

The Other Place

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

- **Art and informational exhibitions:** These provide a changing backdrop to all activities and change the feel of the space. Their variety signals diversity and provides opportunities for local artists
- **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Proposals are invited from individuals and organisations within the wider network. These result in many new initiatives.
- **Local events:** These emerge from discussions and opportunities identified by the communities involved, rather than being delivered as a pre-conceived programme
- **Response to national initiatives:** These provide central themes that generate collaborative local action
- **Service delivery:** While not a primary focus, The Other Place provides opportunities for service deliverers to engage with clients in a supportive and inclusive environment.



The Other Place



The Other Place



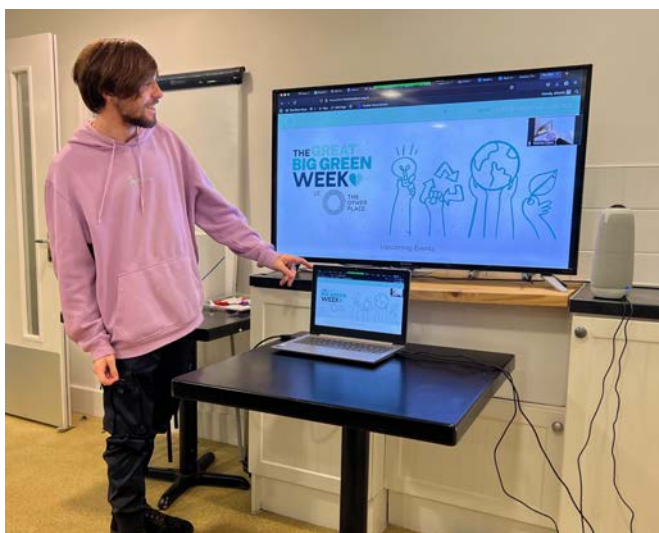
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EMERGENCE

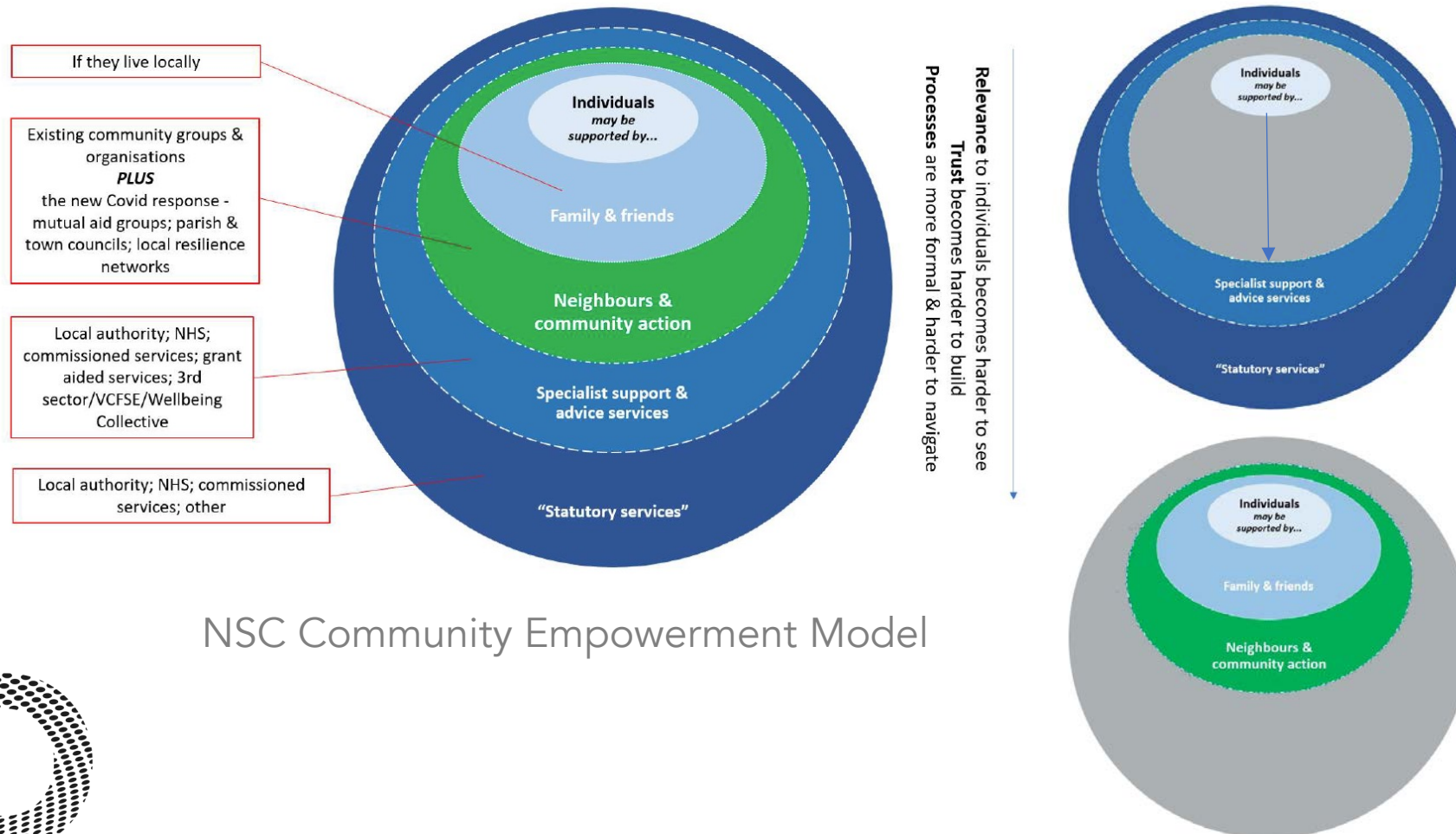
The initial proposal was based on a traditional community centre model. What emerged was different. To help provide the conditions for community empowerment and community-led action based on lived experience:

- Power relationships between management and users were deliberately disrupted and a 'friends and family' model adopted
- The implications of 'how' things were done were continually considered, including small acts signalling power dynamics like notices directing behaviour or job titles in meetings
- Organisation was decentralised through actions based on shared goals and aligned interests.
- Boundaries were dismantled through daily, active, informal collaboration with other local organisations



Conclusions

THE NEED FOR A 'FRIENDS AND FAMILY' MODEL



If family and friends support is lacking, or if community trust in existing systems is absent then the gaps that need to be bridged become much greater and patterns of exclusion are reinforced



MANAGING BOUNDARIES

A community based 'friends and family' model changes boundary relationships

- The core network grew from shared beliefs in the importance of community-led action to build inclusion, equity, and a sense of 'belonging'
- Over time this core network has strengthened, grown, and become increasingly capable of accommodating different belief systems and handling challenges both to and from family members
- The 'leave your hat at the door' approach has supported shared problem solving between individuals with different levels of authority and different types of knowledge and experience on an equal basis
- As strength grows within the community, there is greater confidence in the possibility of working with service providers to equalise unhelpful power dynamics to the benefit of all



THE CHALLENGES

With a deliberately different approach, there are inevitably challenges:

- An absence of certainty and a continual pull towards accepted norms
- The need to work slowly and with care through continual observation, reflection, and readjustment to address unanticipated points of tension
- The need (perceived or otherwise) to overcompensate for working differently to defend an experimental approach where things sometimes don't work out
- The need to give ideas time to find their own way, even when failure seems likely
- The need to develop different support systems when working outside established institutional systems and institutional protections



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

We began with a Meanwhile Use model to explore need.

We are concluding the experiment with a Transitional Use model.

- Major systems are currently in transformation, with the need for rapid change growing daily.
- As cuts bite deeper and demand grows, there is increasing focus on community empowerment, community action, and community resilience
- Mutual aid, social prescribing, lived experience, community researchers are all notions that begin to formalise new ways of working

There is no likelihood of a return to traditional models. Stability is unlikely in the foreseeable future. New ways of working need to be found to facilitate transition.



THE OPPORTUNITY

The Other Place provides an experimental space that facilitates inclusive and equitable community-led action:

- Service providers are already and increasingly using The Other Place to build positive connections with communities often deemed 'hard to reach'
- University researchers are working with The Other Place to help address issue of diversity and inclusion
- Connections between communities are growing building cross-cultural understanding intersectional approaches to problem solving



THE OPPORTUNITY (cont.)

- There are opportunities for new initiatives, such as community-based reverse mentoring to support the development of new ways of working together
- There are opportunities to address the tendency for well-intentioned community engagement initiatives to become extractive and counter-productive through open discussion of power-relationships
- There are opportunities to support more positive dialogue across divides and increase civic engagement



ASPIRATIONS

Current ways of working in transition and they have not worked well to include frequently marginalised communities.

To continue to explore possibilities and build a more inclusive entry points to initiatives delivering strategic change across North Somerset, we need to be able to:

- Offer space that is free to use at the point of delivery
- Be ideas not funding driven, and continue to support innovation
- Be able to grow organically with a focus on process rather than outcomes
- Support informal community-led activities and experiments
- Continue to develop initiatives in dialogue with both Councils and key local organisations



FINANCIAL MODEL

New ways of working emerge in response to changing circumstances and there is evidence of significant shifts in thinking across multiple sectors. For example:

- The publication of UK Government Guidance in May 2022 promoting systems thinking for civil servants
- The growth of transformation capital, a new investment logic to support whole system change
- The emergence of the fourth sector, breaking down traditional boundaries between public, private and non-profit sectors

Moving forward, The Other Place is exploring a variety of financial models and time is now needed for detailed dialogue with potential partners to explore possibilities. This is the next phase.



www.theotherplace.org.uk
www.rens.org.uk

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