



University of the
West of England

CLASS, RACE AND COMMUNITY COHESION: A PROFILE OF HILLFIELDS, BRISTOL

Report of research conducted for the
Community Cohesion Unit of Bristol City Council by the
University of the West of England and
Community Resolve

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Hillfields Community Profile

Final report, produced June 2008 for Bristol City Council (BCC) Community Development Team by the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at UWE and Community Resolve. The report is available at on the following websites: Bristol City Council (www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Community-Living/Community-Advice/community-development---community-cohesion-team.en) and the Centre for Psycho Social Studies, UWE (www.uwe.ac.uk/hlss/research/cpss/index.shtml). A short version of the report is also available on the same sites and at www.communityresolve.org.uk.

1. The Nature of the Research

This research was commissioned by the Community Cohesion Unit of Bristol City Council, prompted by two concerns. First, there are many parts of Bristol, like Hillfields, which have not been seen as priority areas for attention by central or local government although they are by no means affluent. Second, the area's small Somali population, particularly Somali women, has been subject to racial harassment largely by local youths for more than two years, culminating in nationally reported attacks, including one on a pregnant Somali woman in July 2007. The aim of this research was to throw more light on the feelings, opinions and experiences of Hillfield's established residents, who had lived in the area for over five years. In addition, we talked to some newer arrivals, to gauge the breadth of experience for those new to the area.

The research has involved several different elements:

1. The collation and integration of statistical data from a variety of sources including housing, police, education and census data.
2. Interviews with approximately 15 local activists and agency workers.
3. Detailed qualitative interviews with just under 50 local residents, selected on a random basis, in the privacy of their own homes.
4. A questionnaire delivered to residents' homes, asking them for their experiences of living in the area and suggestions of what could be improved.
5. Group interviews with young people living in the area, with young men and with parents of young children.
6. Attendance and observation at some local community meetings and events.

The report below aims to present this information in such a way to express the complex and often contradictory experiences and attitudes expressed by residents in the area. The material we have chosen to include has inevitably been coloured by our own interpretations of what we have been given, although we have worked to make it as fully representative as possible. Direct quotes in the report are from one of three sources: interviews (I), questionnaires (Q) or focus groups (FG).

2. National Context

All the indications are that despite various attempts to ameliorate the situation British society has become a more socially polarised one over the last two decades (Institute of Fiscal Studies 2007). This has been particularly manifest in terms of housing tenure, education and skills (Meen et al. 2005) where social divisions between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ have become visibly entrenched.

For many years now, it has been recognised that competition for scarce resources can make ethnicity an important and relevant source of identity, and result in conflict between ethnic groups (Wallman 1986; Olzak 1992). Research lists a number of such key resources – jobs, education, housing and leisure/cultural facilities – the salience of which will vary from time to time and place to place. In the UK over the last decade, employment has been relatively abundant but housing and educational markets have been closely contested, both between different social classes and between different ethnic groups.

The effective end of local authority house building, the right to buy, and the failure of private sector house building to keep up with demand has led to a growing housing crisis in the UK. In a report commissioned by the Treasury in 2004 Kate Barker noted that in the previous decade the number of new homes built was 12.5% lower than in the decade before that. The waiting list for social housing in the UK grew 60% to 1.6 million between 2001 and 2007, this despite the fact that social housing has become *‘more and more unpopular and beset with problems – poor conditions, high levels of unemployment and crime, poor quality environment, amenities and services’* (Shelter 2004). Outside the North of England, social housing has become an increasingly sought-after resource particularly for low-income families with no hope of becoming home-owners.

Competition between the established white working class and recently arrived BME households for social housing has therefore become increasingly intense, with the former accusing government (national and local) of favouring the latter, allowing them to ‘queue jump’ and so on. Such complaints became so widespread that in 2008 research was commissioned by the Local Government Association and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This found that whilst 3.1% of the UK population had arrived within the last five years, less than 2% of these were in social housing, the vast majority being in the privately rented sector.

In the field of education, disadvantage appears to be built in to the system at all ages, from pre-school to university entrance (Hirsch 2007). Indeed the UK has one of the highest correspondences between social class and educational performance in all OECD countries (Blanden, Gregg & Machin 2005). In a city like Bristol, with a substantial private school sector, educational divisions at secondary school level are particularly apparent. For many working class families, with no hope of accessing this sector or moving to an area within the catchment of a good state school, the primary school sector offers the best hope.

We offer this overview as we believe that it can help contextualise the kinds of conflicts that we have seen emerging in Hillfields, where the arrival of a relatively small number of Somali families has fuelled resentment within parts of the established community that these new arrivals are unfairly gaining access to council houses on the estate and are responsible for undermining the educational performance of the local primary school.

3. The Hillfields Ward and Estate: History, Facts and Figures

3 i) History

Hillfields Estate started life as Hillfields Park in 1919 and was further developed toward Fishponds in 1922. Throughout the post-war period, its balanced mixture of socio-economic groups, green suburban setting and high-quality housing ensured that Hillfields was a desirable estate to live on. The area was then expanded to reach the longer standing built-up districts of Lodge Hill to the South, where there was active mining well into the 19th century, and Chester Park and Mayfield Park to the South-West, which were developed in the late 1800s. Together, these areas form Hillfields Ward (population 12,334 at the 2001 Census).

According to this research, the estate's 'decline' begins somewhere in the 1990s, although the loss of local amenities had begun before then, with the closure of Staple Hill railway station to passengers in 1965-66. Since that time, the area has lost major employers such as Robinsons and Tuf Shoes, significant amenities (without replacement) such as the community centre and the swimming pool, as well as experiencing the closure of small shops in Lodge Causeway used by those living on the estate, and numerous other changes. Very recently, in 2008, a patch of land set aside for community development by Fishponds Local Action Group was withdrawn by the City Council for sale to a third party.

3 ii) Hillfields Facts & Figures

There was a brief period during which the ward was earmarked for Neighbourhood Renewal funding (2002-2005) It was the least deprived of the 10 wards identified in Bristol's Neighbourhood Renewal strategy, although it fell (temporarily) into the worst 15-20% of wards nationally according to the specific criteria of the ID2000 multiple deprivation indices.¹ Indeed, according to these criteria it scored 81 out of 100, whereas Lawrence Hill, for example, scored 98. Yet Hillfields is far from being a classic 'deprived' area, if we imagine that the criteria include high levels of unemployment, high mortality rates, and physically unappealing surroundings. In terms of economic activity, the ward lies just above the city's average with 76% of the population economically active, and in the 1996-2000 period had a death rate that lay in the second lowest band used (ie the second fewest deaths per 100,000) in the assessment of deprivation. Overall, in relation to other wards in Bristol, Hillfields ward ranks somewhere in the middle of most socio-economic indicators. There are also indicators of increased affluence. Censuses show that the proportion of owner-occupiers rose from 56% to 69.5% between 1981 and 2001 whilst local authority tenants declined from 39% to 18.5% during the same period. The remaining tenanted households are split between private rented accommodation and housing association properties.

Yet these apparently positive figures may disguise some of the particular characteristics and needs of the area. Indeed, our research indicates that what characterises Hillfields is the contradictory nature of the data. The ward's population appears polarised into groups enjoying better and worse living conditions. For example, figures from 2007 show higher than the Bristol average proportions of people on benefits, and twice the city average in receipt of carers' allowance. Other

¹ Bristol Partnership. (2004) *Improving Neighbourhoods, Changing Lives, Bristol Partnership Renewal Strategy, 2004-2011*, p.8.

interesting statistics to emerge around the makeup of the Hillfields population include a higher than average proportion of teenagers in the area (2001 Census). Moreover, Hillfields Primary, which many of the young people on the estate attend, has seen its share of pupils in receipt of free school meals rise from 26% in 2002, to 36% in 2007. Around 13% of pupils at Speedwell Technical College (now known as Bristol Brunel Academy) get free school meals, a figure that has remained fairly stable.² Prior to its transformation into the Brunel Academy, the proportion of Speedwell's pupils achieving 5 GCSEs at A-C grades (2002) lay in the 12.8%-26.4% band, well below the national average of 40%. There seems to be a considerable divergence between on one hand, the groups still in social housing, and perhaps younger people whose educational prospects are not wholly positive, and on the other side, people in full-time employment and who have bought their homes.

The ward's small BME population is growing, from around 1%³ in 1981, to 5% in 1991, and 8% in 2001 and the proportion of ethnically mixed households (2001) is above the national average. Of those whose ethnic background is known, Housing Services statistics suggest 84% of council tenants on the Hillfields estate are white, 7.7 % black African/Caribbean, 3.3% Asian and 5% mixed heritage. However BCC figures indicate that in 2005 and 2006 a higher-than-usual number of black and minority ethnic tenants were rehoused on the estate (22 altogether out of a total number of 81 re-housings) and of these 16 were of Black African or Somali origin. Anecdotal evidence from Support Against Racial Incidents (SARI) suggests that there were around 30 Somali families living in the area by early 2008, including a number living in privately rented accommodation.

4. Different Experiences, Shared Community

For many of the residents we spoke to, Hillfields is liked because of its quietness, its greenery, its location and the absence of crime – *'it's lovely and quiet; a nice district'*. People spoke of the estate as a nice area, close to amenities and family, with easy accessibility to schools, shops and local transport.

'I think the best thing are the houses, they've got the "right to buy" here, which I think is good and they are very decent houses for... quite cheap, that's it really. And quite low crime rate, we don't get much burglaries around here or down on this road anyway.' (I)

Many talked of the mix of people living there, not necessarily in and out of each other's houses, but on speaking and helping terms who would help in an

Changing times: what longterm residents see as key factors in a change in Hillfields atmosphere

Growing elderly and infirm population, with resultant adult caring responsibilities

Decline of 'community spirit'

Withdrawal of estate management, leading to decline in appearance

Factory closures and changing work patterns

Closure of independent shops on Lodge Causeway

Parenting pressures, especially on single and working mothers

Young people a) no longer playing outside because of safety issues, and b) a lack of 'respect' and rudeness of those young people on the streets

² The English national average is 13.1%. As everywhere, the number eligible for free school meals is higher than those for pupils actually taking them (Hillfields Primary, 43.8%; Speedwell, 21.2%; and English average, 15.9%).

³ It is difficult to gauge this figure because the data available is 'Households headed by person from the New Commonwealth or Pakistan'. In 1981, 1% of the households in Hillfields fitted this category, so we can imagine the overall percentage was slightly higher than 1%, given the minority groups that heading does not cover.

emergency. One remembered how when her husband died suddenly, “*my Jamaican neighbour was the first in, and was absolutely brilliant, absolutely brilliant*”.

People’s experience of the area differs from street to street, however, with one resident speaking of how his street and his neighbours are all excellent, but how the next street along is like “*living in a different city*”. In recognition of the fact that there are so many different groups in Hillfields, with differing experiences of the same area, we outline below some the views we have gathered from those of similar ages or experiences:

Older people were well aware that the estate had been built as flagship for social housing (what might be termed a ‘beacon’ estate nowadays). Initially populated with veterans of the Great War, one of our respondents remembers moving in as a small child in 1921, while another moved there in 1927.

‘If you lived in Hillfields you were lucky they were very particular at the housing office’ (I)

‘This was supposed to be one of the best council estates ever built and it was lovely because the builders put a tree in everybody’s garden, you had an apple tree or a pear tree ... at the time it was lovely. People had hedges, trees in their gardens, the trees up the road.’ (I)

‘I mean Maple Avenue, we thought it was like Bournemouth didn’t we!’ (I)

Many respondents mentioned the change in the area, some with a sense of inevitability. Several interviewees mentioned the selling-off of council houses and factory closures as well as the loss of the local swimming pool, and more recently the community centre. What was often talked of was a lack of connection between those living on the estate:

‘I don’t know what’s changed really, there just doesn’t seem to be that neighbourly way with everybody’ (I)

‘All the atmosphere’s gone out of the area altogether’ (I)

‘People used to say hello to each other on the street or comment on the weather and now people walk past you, and you don’t get the time of day’ (I)

‘I don’t know why that is... being brought up during the war we used to help one another... we never had nothing, we were proper working class people, but now every one tries to get a bit better, and a bit better and a bit better. I’ve seen it in my family [...] and years ago we never had that. We had a two-up, two-down with no bathroom, a tin bath, and at the weekend we’d have our bath. Now in this day and age we got everything.’ (I)

Many older interviewees talked about how other residents kept their gardens, hedges and outsides of their houses, often emphasising how the appearance of the estate had “really gone downhill”.

‘It’s got untidy and dirty’ says Mrs K, speaking for many when she says she now feels “*very sad*” about the way the estate looks.

‘Now you walk round and it’s a tip, an absolute tip, there’s no pride now, and then you’ve got the gangs of teenagers rampaging about on the night.’ (I)

Several older interviewees reported having suffered directly from anti-social behaviour, some prolonged and severe resulting in police and council action. Older people’s attitudes toward

young people varied - several felt vulnerable and intimidated by young people in the street, while others made little reference to them. There was a strong feeling that residents were powerless to do anything about young people's misbehaviour and fearful of the consequences. Several people empathized with the lack of local amenities and activities for young people, even when being critical of them.

'People are just too scared to tell them off' (I)

'Everybody's frightened of them, aren't they?' and "you can't touch them". (I)

'Youth centre's only open one night a week, so there's nothing for teenagers to do round here.' (Q)

There's a feeling that the council haven't maintained standards and that their strategy of creating a mix hasn't worked. For a few older people the negative impact of change in the area is clearly racialised and linked to a general feeling of unease.

Mr. G is "not against coloured people, but there's quite a few living in Hillfields now, y'know like, different races."

'It's a pity, I feel very sad for it really, up there now, I mean it's the people they put in, nothing against the ethnic people 'n' that' (I)

'When the rent collector stopped coming round, they had nobody to keep an eye on things and the council started moving in problem families.' (I)

'You always hope you're gonna bring them up, but that doesn't always happen, they can drag you down, can't they?' (I)

Criticism of the council is offset with a view that adults today are too dependent on the authorities doing things for them. One couple had suffered acutely from their neighbours anti-social behaviour but still felt that people expect far too much from the police and *"want it all done for them"*. According to another resident, Neighbourhood Renewal was a good idea, but after the talking and consultation, there was nobody willing to put it into action:

'They just wanted it handed to them on a plate, they don't want to work for it.' (I)

Young people living in Hillfields also clearly expressed anxieties about safety, stating that they would like the area if they felt more secure. For some, their anxieties meant that they stayed in doors; others socialise outside the area. Because children and young people are the focus of complaints by many adults in Hillfields, it is easy to overlook that many young people in the area themselves feel irritated and fearful as a result of the behaviour of a minority of their peers. These views were expressed at a focus group for teenagers aged 14-15 at Bristol Brunel Academy:

'I live quite far out in Hillfields, I live in Forest Avenue, and it's all at the top – crossroads between Thicket Avenue and Forest Road – and there all used to be muggings and gangs' (FG)

'I normally walk back at about like half ten, I always ring my mum just to let her know I'm walking home, and she normally looks out of the window and she see a group of people walking up she'll ring me just to make sure I'm ok and things' (FG)

The young people we spoke to were clear that drug dealing is a major issue in Hillfields, and were concerned how openly it seemed to go on, and involving such a wide range of ages – from 8 to 40, in their accounts:

‘They say, have you got a lighter or have you got a fag or something like that and you know that they’re selling’ (FG)

‘On my street there’s a 40 year old still selling drugs’ (FG)

Most of the young people we talked to had attended Hillfields Primary School, and some had siblings who had attended until recently, although one spoke of how her sister had been moved because of recent changes in the school.

‘My mum works there – she says lots of troublemakers go there now. She’s been threatened and everything’ (FG)

Asked if they would stay in the area in the future, most of the young men said they would, while the girls had other ideas. However, they were positive about Hillfields if some of the anti-social behaviour could be curbed.

‘When you put it together all like that it sounds like a proper rough place but I think cos we’ve all lived there for quite a while I don’t think we see it.’ (FG)

Local activists working to improve community relations in the area are finding it an uphill task. Unlike some other parts of Bristol, Hillfields does not have a large number of experienced community activists and the experience of Neighbourhood Renewal which came and went in the area about five years ago has left a legacy of distrust towards the council. Overall, residents seem to have a sense of loss, not gain:

‘With Neighbourhood Renewal, Social Workers, Cohesion workers, surveys that have taken place within the last 10 years, very little benefits that local people can see have been forthcoming: Cossam (sic) Hospital lost its A&E; BCC Housing Office has moved from the area; community centre is no longer in existence; youth club open for just 2 nights per week; the nearest doctors (Lodge Causeway) has moved further afield.’ (Q)

Key factors in the decline in community spirit

Not enough people with skills or mind-sets to engage with agencies – time, skills, energy poor

Resentment and disillusionment - ‘the Council’ generally blamed as responsible for implementing unhelpful policy or ignoring local needs.

Potential of Neighbourhood Renewal not realised -

a struggle to keep the momentum and focus in the area eg lunch club; keep fit; walking group; park & environment group

Good opportunities or initiatives wasted and/or limited by red tape, eg the nursery - operational and valued but a heavy responsibility for fragile voluntary organisation.

Withdrawal of facilities - swimming pool closure; demolition of community centre; inadequate & inappropriate park development – limiting opportunities for local people to meet and socialise.

Strong feelings were expressed by local activists about how the area is currently managed. One example came from the Friends of Hillfields Park who had been struggling to improve conditions at the local ‘Rec’ for quite some time but felt that the council’s Parks Department either took very little notice or sought to impose its own

solutions. Criticisms of BCC Housing Department were more frequent. One example given to us was that of the Area Housing Committee, which, until its demise, was seen as ‘quite effective’ and capable of calling officers to account. But the move to the larger area Housing Forum was criticised as it had no teeth and offered limited participation and feedback potential, a change which one resident found frustrating and de-motivating - he is now thinking of “packing it in”, as the council seems to be “cutting away” tenant participation.

The Housing Department was also criticised for its policies for rehousing families with multiple needs who appeared to other residents to be ‘dumped’ on the estate with little or no support. Respondents asked why the council did not consult before moving Somalis in ‘in such large numbers’, and why were they moved to Hillfields but not Hartcliffe? As a result, say some, the area is experiencing ‘white flight’, with people including some long-standing residents taking their children out of Hillfields School and moving out of the area.

Those working with the young people in the area think it’s harsh to blame the young for wanting some excitement: they need things like skate parks (like other areas have) within walking distance. One outlined just how unsafe young people felt, describing gangs in the area north and south of the park, which itself is the scene of assaults. The young people that do cause the trouble also attract troublemakers from outside the area. One activist got involved after his son was threatened, and has tried to improve security around older people’s dwellings, closing areas used for ASB, prostitution, drug taking; and the availability and deployment of mobile CCTV. He suggests that more youth club provision is needed, with improvements in the park for older kids, including a shelter, along with additional safety/surveillance measures.

What happened when Neighbourhood Renewal came and went

Between 2001/2 and 2006, Hillfields was identified as a priority neighbourhood as part of Bristol’s Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) strategy and received assistance from the NR Fund. Under the NR framework, and in pursuit of the goal of ‘*empowering residents and getting public, private and voluntary organisations to work in partnership*’,¹ NR funds had to be channelled through an ‘accountable body’. Given the limited amount of community activism in the area, NR officers elected to work with the Fishponds Locality Action Group (FLAG), a very young local organisation set up in 1998 by a small group of dedicated and relatively energetic local residents who were concerned about community safety and the decline of the estate.¹ To help the organisation become viable, a substantial amount of consultation was conducted in the local area, and efforts were made to increase participation.

In July 2003, FLAG became a company limited by guarantee enabling it to manage NR funded projects and develop links and partnerships. NR provided a paid administrator and other support, and one of the most visible and major achievements was been the building and establishment of the nursery on Thicket Avenue, led by the Young Mothers Group. The nursery was funded by the Big Lottery, facilitated through NR, and managed by FLAG.

However, once NR funds came to an end in 2006, FLAG was left with on-going liabilities and a reliance on volunteers. Many of the community ventures supported through the NR/FLAG route

¹ Social Exclusion Unit, ‘A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal – an national strategic action plan’, foreword by the Prime Minister, 2001

¹ Additional information obtained from FLAG directory entry, VOSCUR website

were left stranded, including the future of the nursery and activities at the Community Centre, itself in a poor state and managed by aging volunteers. The withdrawal of NR funding put in jeopardy a Lunch Club, a keep-fit/health promotion programme and a dog-training club. Since the community centre burnt down and was then demolished over two years ago, The Baptist Church has taken over hosting and helping run the Lunch Club and keep-fit for older people, in addition to its own activities, but was unable to cater for the dog owners. It has plans to upgrade and expand its premises if/when funding is found.

After a dormant period following the withdrawal of NR, FLAG has benefited from the increased support of local activists, including a new treasurer. Efforts at outreach to the Somali community have been made but as FLAG has few resources, these new links have so far been unproductive. The challenge of getting residents actively involved, which had impeded progress on NR, remains unresolved and local activists have been further discouraged by the way they have been treated regarding the Woodlands Way site.

However, those working to improve the area did have a number of suggestions about how to improve life in Hillfields. Mentioned most frequently was the need for a Community Centre or Social Club where people can go and socialise, as the community has no heart, no meeting place – a 'smaller Barton Hill Settlement' was suggested. Some doubts were expressed about a plan for the Baptist Church to build a community meeting place, in case this would exclude those who were not committed to this faith, although Baptist church workers stressed to us how much they wish to include everyone living in the area, whatever their faith.

One activist moved to Hillfields in the mid 1990s '*because it was a really nice place to live, no trouble up here, it had a good community ... and it was the most sought-after area in Bristol to live in, at that time*' (I). But although there have been recent positive developments in the area - the setting up of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme that supports and compliments the work of the PCSOs; improvements to Hillfields Park, including new paths and play equipment and a small BMX track; a new Children's Centre due to open in the near future - further improvements in lighting, access and multi-generational facilities have been held up by red tape. The excessive demands on people organising community events is inhibiting initiative; one example given us was two days of bureaucracy thanks to Health and Safety regulations to take a group of Somali

**Woodland Way garden development,
a community initiative – scuppered in Mar 08**

This project grew out of the NR environmental initiatives. In 2002, land identified by BCC Housing as suitable for a community park was leased to FLAG on a 30-year agreement with a short notice clause. FLAG signed the lease and supported the project with a grant of around £3500 left over from NR funding.

Since 2002, around £40–50,000 of volunteer labour and basic preparation has gone into the site. The Probation Service supply community service labour on a variable weekly basis, and community volunteers have signed up via St Stephens and Hillfields schools to contribute to creating a pond and other features. Two local primary schools - Hillfields and Briarwood - were anticipating the use of the planned gardening areas.

In March '08, without any prior notice or consultation, BCC Housing officers informed FLAG that they must vacate the site, leading to considerable anger and frustration in the area:

"I cannot understand anybody getting involved with a project that obviously is long term, when another party can take it off them after one month, unless there's a specific reason for that clause being in there"

The momentum costs of the failure of the Woodland Way project may be critical to the success of future development projects in the area. Volunteers and residents supportive of the project are becoming disillusioned and cynical about the Council's actions.

and longstanding families to the park as an ‘organised event’. An interviewee clearly expressed the feelings of frustration in the area:

‘I’ve been up to several meetings ... and it’s all talk talk talk. And everybody’s like, who’s in charge of this and who’s in charge of that. Forget who’s in charge... get on with it! I just get off with people who just want to talk the talk and when it comes to walking the walk they don’t. You know, let’s sit down and discuss it. You know, who’s in charge of paper? [sarcastic] I mean seriously.... What are we here for?’ (I)

People new to the area were, on the whole, quite positive about the estate, despite the problems caused by young people. Quite a few of the people we interviewed had moved into Hillfields in the last few years. One couple came from Easton 10 years ago, and think Hillfields is great in comparison. However they do refer to Hillfields as ‘forgotten’ and compare the levels of funding it receives to that of some of the inner city areas. Another commented on how strange he thinks it is that there is no pub, suggesting that this represents a wider problem in the area - a lack of a central focus. Other parents agreed, and felt that Hillfields could do with a bit more for young people – one was reluctant to talk too much in case her teenage children were picked on in the street.

‘I got 2 young children and there is nothing here for them at all. And they could do with a youth club; the park they’ve got down the road is horrendous, it’s not much of a park at all... It’s more like a druggy haven, it’s just a big field.’ (I)

‘It is very difficult to find out with what to challenge the kids, because if you challenge them, you have to deal with verbal abuse, or you’re physically hurt or you end up with a match and a brick through your door, so you can’t say anything, so you put up and shut up.’ (I)

Hillfields residents from minority groups generally reported very few experiences of racism, with the exception of Somali families. We spoke to several mixed race couples and single parents with dual heritage children as well as Black African and Somali residents. Like others living on the estate, they had quickly adopted to the pattern of ‘keeping yourself to yourself’. Neighbours may greet each other on the street, but they do not know each other’s name or occupation.

‘It’s nobody’s fault. We go to our work, come back home, they go out to their own place, come back home, then we say ‘Hi’ ‘Hi’ in the street that’s all’ (I)

‘I hear there’s a lot of racism on the estate. Well my children happen to be mixed race and they’ve never really, as far as I know experienced racism in the 17 years that I’ve been here’ (I)

5. Common Themes

5 i) Hillfields: A respectable estate that has gone downhill ...

This theme, about the decline of the area, was a very common one, especially with adults who had lived in the area for more than ten years or so.

'Years ago, people would fall over themselves to get a house on this estate, but now they are moving out as fast as they can.' (I)

Older residents report that Hillfields was a desirable and sought-after estate. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, people were *'proud to live there'* and *'needed letters of recommendation'* to get a property on it. One interviewee told us that she moved there in 1965 and was told that *'she mustn't let the housing officer down'*. Another walked around with her husband, thrilled to be in *'such a pleasant, pretty estate. All the houses were well kept. It was a really nice area to live.'*

The decline that people refer to seems to have started in the 1990s, although some locate it later than that. This decline is manifested in moral decline and rising anti-social behaviour; a disintegration of good and active relationships between residents; and neglect (in terms of funding, services and amenities). As we will see later, our sense is that the Somali families who have recently arrived in the area, are not the cause of this decline (which was well under way before the first of them arrived in Hillfields) but have become its scapegoats or symbols.

The arrival of 'anti-social behaviour' (ASB)

According to police and residents, most ASB is associated with a handful of addresses and particular families.

Most perpetrators of ASB are white young people, with some dual heritage, some excluded from school. Some adults are also involved.

Drug dealing, dominated by cannabis, is widely seen to be linked to ASB activity.

Residents are wary of getting involved/challenging ASB for fear of repercussions.

The wave of ASB in 2007 led to the delineation of an area covered by a dispersal order; subsequently, ASB significantly reduced. ASBOs and evictions have also helped.

5 ii) Moral decline and anti social behaviour

One central factor in many people's explanations of decline is anti-social behaviour (ASB), particularly by young people. Taken as a whole, residents' experiences of the estate seem greatly influenced by their proximity to the nerve centres of anti-social behaviour, more than any other factor such as age or gender: some only read about it in newspapers, while others experience the trouble close at hand. The most extreme behaviour appears to be centred on specific families, addresses, streets and localities, such as the park and the cycle path, *'where druggies congregate'*. The police agree that much of the known drug dealing activity does occur in such places. These examples were given to us by 15 year olds:

'You can't go out that late. You've got a lane out by round us and there are people down there taking drugs all the time (Frampton Crescent)' (FG)

'There's a lane down like by the Rec by where the youth centre is and I walked down there a couple of weeks ago and there were people down there dealing and such' (FG)

It is not only young people but some adults who are seen as engaging in repeated anti-social behaviour and encouraging it in the children. The insecurity and constant nuisance and tension weighs so heavily on some that they consider moving.

'I don't want to leave, because I was born and bred here and lived all my life, but I would not like to bring grandchildren up in this area' (I)

A feeling of insecurity emerges from the accounts, with more generalised nuisance reported, such as damage to parked cars, excessive noise from motorised bikes, stealing, loitering, aggression and involvement in drugs. One couple described living very near to a 'problem' family – described by one interviewee as people who *'generally have no social graces and no air of social responsibility'* - that was finally moved on, but caused extensive damage to the council's and the neighbour's property before leaving:

'A little gang of teenagers were hanging around. Cars drew up at all hours and there was an especially regular visit at 3.30pm each day'. (I)

'One of our cars is parked out on the road and the amount of times that it's been kicked or something's been thrown at it and the number of times my dad's had to go out and tell them to get away from the car' (FG)

Many of those who see anti-social behaviour as the worst characteristic of the estate say that the problems are caused by bad parenting: *'today's yobs being raised by yesterday's yobs,'* as one resident put it. Another told us:

'You want to hit the kids, but really you should be hitting him [the father] because he hasn't got a clue how to raise kids.' (I)

Indeed stories of kids 'running wild' permeate some people's whole interviews, with young children *'allowed to stay out in the middle of the night'*.

'Night time is horrible,' says one woman. *'I never go out at night.'* *'Yes, it is terrifying,'* agrees her 20-year old daughter.

'I wouldn't say I was afraid,' says one elderly lady, but she is *'worried about the little children, they seem so vicious and nasty.'*

The reports include a range of behaviour in which young people engage. One end is clearly criminal, but the other involves congregating in streets and is interpreted as either threatening, or the first step toward threatening behaviour. Some adults are not threatened by this at all, while others are frustrated by the police's incapacity to act: there is nothing to prosecute in these circumstances. Other young people not involved also find this behaviour hard to deal with:

Where are the police?

Whilst residents valued the increase in neighbourhood policing and progress on ASB, many also commented on their lack of confidence in the police, which has a big impact on people's sense of safety in the area:

'Years ago, when we moved in this house, we used to have a policeman, and he used to walk around and he talked to people and found out what the problem was... and do something about it. If we ever see a police car now, it just goes around the corner, never see the police on foot, never.' (I)

'I didn't even bother ringing coz I knew that would be in vain. A few years back I had a brick through my car and I phoned the police, but they didn't even record it.' (I)

'It's a pick up place for drugs... I told the police a thousand times, I told them to put up a camera, and the police didn't wanna know. So what do you do?' (I)

'I've had gangs of boys like shout at me and it's intimidating to have them shout' (FG)

It should be made clear, however, that not all adults we talked to agree about local young people. Some think the young people are no worse than previous generations, and/or that bad behaviour is the result of a lack of facilities into which youthful energy can be channelled. The youth club is perceived ambivalently. It is not open enough, but some adults are wary of sending their children there in any case – which may be linked to the number of young people educated outside the area, who also socialise outside Hillfields.

Overall, the consensus is that things have got *'quieter'* recently on the streets (Jan-Mar 08), but many are waiting for the summer (when the young people get *'restless'*) to see whether progress has really been achieved.

5 iii) Hillfields is in danger of becoming a community of strangers

'An influx of many different people without any family support structures or connections with anyone else'. (I)

Former generations living on the estate are seen as having had a higher degree of community spirit, with *'good traditions and good relationships'* in those days. In some reports, this is linked to the issue of class, such as one resident recalling the mixture of people rehoused in Hillfields after the wartime bombing of Bristol city centre: *'bankers, businessmen, even a doctor'*.

The data collected for this report suggests that two trends have weakened this tradition. Firstly, the population of the estate has become increasingly mixed, with owner-occupiers, 'problem families' and ethnic minorities being just some of the new arrivals. And secondly, and simultaneously, convivial public spaces (the Community Centre, Lodge Causeway shops, the Rec, etc.) have disappeared or become unsafe, leaving very few places for people to mix and socialise.

'No community spirit any more. When I first came to Hillfields there was a club house at Hillfields Park and lots of things going on – it was built by the locals (1925) but 3-4 years ago was taken down. Since then, nothing' (Q)

'So with that gone now, well we do nothing... and this isn't right for older people... its not right. Once they stay at home... it's gone [referring to older people with a fragile mental state]. We used to go on outings; we used to do all different things. There was always a crowd of us.' (I)

As a result, the estate has increasingly become a community of strangers, people who are at best civil but *'don't mix'*. The majority, but not all, seem to feel that there is a *'lack of social involvement'* - *'now people walk past you and you don't get the time of day'*. A 66-year resident and his wife note that *'everybody stays indoors'* and they have never been invited into a neighbour's home, or invited neighbours into their home. Asked for suggestions to improve the situation, one respondent addressed this issue directly:

'Places where local people would meet as a matter of course: a pub, community centre, use Youth Club for joint age activities. Open up Youth Club building for activities for non-youth. In 1960s coffee bars were places of interest for youths along with YMCA, Boys Club, Church

youth clubs. There were more places for children to go where they were away from adults. Maximise present amenities – schools, open space (park & woodland way), garage site, youth club, football club.’ (Q)

Not everyone thinks that the community is entirely comprised of strangers, however. One young man in the focus groups spoke confidently about knowing ‘all of them’ when talking about groups of young people on the streets, and another resident spoke of a core group on the estate who:

‘Have always been in Hillfields, and I mean you don’t want to get on the wrong side of them’. (I)

‘It’s very white working class, as long as you don’t upset them or interfere with them, you’re fine. I mean, it’s very family around here, all families that have been here over generations. And the council houses get passed on from one generation to the next. So, I’d describe it like that. But as I said, lately it’s become more diverse.’ (I)

Certain new arrivals are widely seen as being at the root of the estate’s decline. These fall into two main groupings: ‘problem families’ and ‘immigrants’. The belief that ‘problem families’ are at the root of much that is now wrong with the estate is widespread. Particular houses are moved into and out of frequently by families that fit this profile, although other residents are aware that this only results in *‘deferring the problem to someone else’*. The phrase ‘problem families’ is used primarily to refer to white families that are seen as out of control:

‘The idea was that these families would be pulled up by living here’ but they actually ‘just pulled the rest of the district down’. (I)

The Council is often cited as not taking enough *‘responsibility for who they put in the houses’*, and residents’ experiences of other agencies are also frustrating. Attempts to report incidents are sometimes passed backward and forward between agencies, for example, and it can take what seems like too long to deal with persistently badly behaving people.

The relationship between established households and new Somali arrivals is also linked to council housing policy:

‘Council policy to move ethnic minorities into the area has caused problems which should have been foreseen.’ (Q)

The idea of ‘not mixing’ appears particularly in narratives about non-white residents, and in particular about the newest Somali arrivals, who seem to have come to represent this new mood of retaining distance:

Man: *‘There’s more coloured people around’.*

Woman: *‘but then again, you can’t say nothing or you’ll be prejudiced’. (I)*

Stories are told of schools suffering from non-English speakers bringing the level down, of a grandson in a class where there were *‘four white kids in his class of thirty’*, and of the resultant flight to other schools in whiter Staple Hill and Chester Park.

‘More parents [are] reluctant to send their children to the local school and in quite a few cases people [are] moving to avoid sending them to the local school.’ (Q)

'My sister used to go [to Hillfields Primary], but she left cos she didn't like it anymore. She wasn't learning, too many kids were messing around over there.' (FG)

Hillfields Primary School

Hillfields Primary School is situated in the heart of the neighbourhood and, as our interviews with older residents revealed, generations of Hillfields' children have attended this school.

Ofsted reports in 2002 and 2006 mention that both the proportion of children eligible for free school meals and the proportion with special educational needs are significantly above the national average. The 2002 report also notes that children's attainment levels on entering the school are 'well below average'. All of this indicates the pockets of considerable poverty and deprivation which had already become a characteristic of Hillfields by the end of the 20th century, no doubt as a result of the rehousing of largely white, multiple problem families in the previous decade as council housing became increasingly residualised.

What changed dramatically after 2002 is the ethnic composition of the school. The 2002 report speaks of just 34 out of 353 pupils with English as an additional language, while by February 2008, the school in a statement about itself speaks of *"the change from a school with a predominantly white intake to a school with 50% of children who have English as a second language"*. This is a remarkable change, all the more remarkable because it does not reflect the much smaller changes (outlined in section 2 of this report) to the actual population of Hillfields during the same time. The Headteacher at Hillfields traces the major change to the start of 2006 when the school were surprised by a sudden influx of Somali parents, about one a week for several weeks during the Spring term, seeking places for their children in the school. This eventually led to visible tensions in and around the school, and approximately 60 largely white families removed their children to other local primaries. By the time of the Ofsted Report in late 2006 the school's roll had fallen to 276.

Because it was the white parents with the higher aspirations for their children who removed their children from the school the loss was at first considerable. But they have been replaced by a growing number of high achieving black and ethnic minority children. Hillfields is now a multi-cultural school and proud of it. The 2006 Ofsted report noted *"parents and staff comment on how much the school had changed for the better in the last year"*. With a smaller school roll the school is better able to cater for the greater diversity of needs that it now faces, including for children with very little English. It seems that the school has responded very effectively despite the lack of forewarning from other agencies, particularly regarding the influx of Somali children in early 2006.

5 iv) Hillfields the 'forgotten estate'

'I think it is a bit of a 'Cinderella' estate in that we are, we are sort of at the edge of Bristol (...) it is not particularly deprived, so we don't get all the money and so on that they give to the poorer areas'. (I)

A number of respondents argued that the estate was neglected by the council and other authorities (such as the police), and that these authorities' perceived unresponsiveness to residents' complaints breeds apathy. Thus crime is under-reported, and community activism is minimal. People report increasing amounts of rubbish on the roads, and failure of the council to respond when this is reported. An often-noted feature of older Hillfields life was the presentation of gardens and hedges, contrasted with the current air of neglect:

‘The Council would give out letters if the hedges were too high. Now, it looks really scruffy and run down, some of the hedges looks like forests, and outside of the houses it looks horrible – you can’t imagine what they look like inside’. (I)

The Council’s role emerges as central to the experience of those living in Hillfields. The time when there was an Estates Office is looked back on as a guarantor of quality in work and responses. When responses do come, they are often seen as damaging: one family who live next to the piece of land recently withdrawn from FLAG now fear social housing and problem families being placed on both sides of them. FLAG also report less than helpful relationships with some council officers and tensions over the plans for park and cycle paths, etc. For local activists, this makes it *‘difficult to carry people with you’*.

Not only is the Council seen as withdrawing services, but as redirecting funding away from the estate:

‘All the money goes in town, St Pauls or Easton, anywhere, anywhere but here’. (I)

‘...the only thing we seem to get on this estate from the council, in my opinion, is the lighting and the dustbin and that’. (I)

This attitude is very much echoed by Councillor Daniels, who has represented the ward for more than a quarter of a century. She argues that Hillfields has not seen its fair share of funding over that period, and that money paid to the Council for development of land, for example, does not find its way back into Hillfields (entirely or quickly). In this insider’s view, the estate is marginal to Bristol’s plans for renewal: other areas, which are also deserving causes, see a lot of money while Hillfields sees very little.

The marginal position of the estate on the very edge of Bristol is seen both as an advantage (see below) and a disadvantage: even council workers don’t necessarily know where the boundary is, according to one story about uncollected rubbish. In terms of amenities, the story of the neglect of Hillfields has two prongs. Firstly, the authorities; Hillfields Primary needs more multi-agency support; amenities that were valued and well used by locals have been removed and not replaced such as the swimming pool and the community centre. One resident links the slow disappearance of amenities with anti-social behaviour:

‘There was a tennis club on the recreation area, and in those days, everyone belonged to churches and chapels and they had their own social things, and that was our social life. But there is nothing like that for kids today, but kids have to go somewhere’. (I)

Moreover, the changes in the retail trade over the last decades have caused the concentration of business into large units: the small close local shops (Co-Op, Gateway, etc.) particularly on Lodge Causeway, where people used to meet, have given way to Tesco and Morrisons: still close enough for many, but not the same. Overall, the spaces available for convivial interaction for Hillfielders have shrunk over the last decades: it is referred to on a number of occasions as having *‘no centre’*, or *‘no heart’*, and this may well explain some of the factors spoken of in no. 3 (above).

6. Somalis in Hillfields

6 i) Harassment and attacks on Somalis living in the area

As we have seen, figures suggest that in 2005/6 upwards of 15 Somali families moved into council properties on the Hillfields estate. In early 2006 this resulted in a sudden increase in the number of Somali parents seeking places for their children in Hillfields school and, as a consequence, the ‘flight’ of some 60 white families to other local primary schools. As the school became more multi-cultural it attracted some BME children from outside the immediate area so that, by 2006, as we have seen, the ethnic composition of the school was quite different to the ethnic composition of the surrounding, still overwhelmingly white, Hillfields estate. Our hypothesis is that this encouraged the erroneous perception that the area was becoming ‘swamped’ by new BME residents. By the early summer the local police noted a significant increase in the incident of hate crimes, mostly of a racial nature, peaking first in June 2006 (12 reported incidents) and then again in October 2007 (18 reported incidents). Overall the number of reported incidents increased from 43 in 2006 to 78 in 2007 and the location of incidents also shifted from outside the victims’ homes to on the streets. The nature of the crimes also changed, with Actual Bodily Harm and Common Assault (rather than lower level forms of harassment) becoming more frequent by 2007. As we noted, in June 2007 a pregnant Somali woman was stabbed in the leg outside her home. Prior to this SARI were dealing with four cases of racial victimisation in the area, none of them involving Somalis. After the stabbing SARI acquired 17 new cases, all involving Somalis living on the estate – not all of this concerned contemporary incidents as some Somali families had more confidence to report previous incidents now that it seemed some action was being taken.

The police report that the majority of the perpetrators of the race crimes were under 25, with most of these aged 15 or under. Both residents and agency workers were clear that up to 30 young people were responsible, organised around two or three ‘territories’ mostly at the junction of local streets, and that these were the same young people responsible for the anti-social behaviour which was already a feature of the estate long before the Somali families arrived. By 2007 Somali mothers taking their children to and from Hillfields school became a particular target of this group.

The police also noted that the road junctions (such as Summerleaze and Thicket Ave) where the gangs congregated tended to be located near homes which were allowed to be ‘open houses’ for troublemakers by the parents who lived there. We were struck by how many people on the estate and local agency workers knew key troublemakers and their families.

6 ii) Understanding the racial incidents: Somali residents as a scapegoat for and symbol of the area’s decline

‘I’m not racist. I’m not racist... but I’m prejudiced. I am prejudiced, but I’m not only prejudiced against people that are black, I’m prejudiced against people who are on the dole who don’t do nothing, and still get it all. And there’s like me and my husband, who work hard... who keep our house nice... I mean we’re only council tenants... but we don’t get nothing. And that’s prejudice, very prejudiced.’ (I)

A few of our respondents who thought Hillfields had gone downhill attributed this to the increasing number of Black and minority ethnic residents on the estate who, like problem families, were regarded as undeserving and who exploited the system. For others, the evident ‘difference’ of some ethnic minority groups symbolised the way that nowadays people kept themselves to themselves and no longer mixed:

‘People move into the area who have no thoughts of an English way of life, eg tolerance of others: Should I move to another country where they have a different culture, I would expect to embrace their culture, otherwise, why would I move there?’ (Q)

But a larger number of those we spoke to who connected Hillfield’s decline to changes in the local population appeared to attribute this more specifically to the arrival of Somali residents - “Everyone’s sick of ‘Mali’s””. Another common comment, that ‘they don’t mix’, appears to be a coded way to talk about the integration of Somalis in particular, since relationships with other minority groups emerge in people’s stories of who they do and don’t get on with. For example, the groups of young people causing trouble include dual heritage and young people of other backgrounds, which is used to suggest that the issue with Somalis is therefore ‘*cultural rather than racial*’.

It seems that other problems on the estate were loaded onto incoming Somali families by established white and some other ethnic minority residents. In the minds of many locals, the arrival of Somali families seemed to be linked to all three reasons for Hillfields going downhill: moral decline, Hillfields as a community of strangers, and their sense of a ‘forgotten’ estate and a forgotten people.

Somalis and moral decline - a ‘something for nothing’ approach

It is young Somali families who are mostly being rehoused on in Hillfields, which tends to reinforce beliefs that they are living off the state in a parasitical way:

‘When we was growing up, when I was growing up it was bash the Pakis. But they worked bloody hard. They worked hard. The Chinese come over and worked hard, the Poles back in the day worked hard. But all of a sudden these people are coming over, and they want stuff for nothing.’ (I)

‘The Somalians, they’re having everything ... the lady across the road [Somali], now I know she’s got grown up children and she’s got young children. Now I know they’re mucking about with the social. You know they’re claiming they don’t get this and don’t get that... and they’re all working. And the two things I ask for, they got. [...] And I think hang on a minute, is it right that you look after your house, go to work, pay your council tax, pay your rent, pay your taxes and you’re not rewarded? Yet those that do nothing... one they get it because they show you the racist card... you’re not givin it to me cos I’m black... and you’re not giving it to me cos I’m on benefits. So that’s why I’m a bit like that.’ (I)

Intercultural communication – talking about race, ethnicity and cultural diversity

There is evidence in these accounts of myths and misinformation about other cultural groups.

Like most people in the UK many local people find it difficult to talk about race/ ethnicity. There’s a mix of ambivalence towards strangers, awareness of it as a ‘hot’ issue and anxieties about political correctness (is racial banter with someone you know well an example of being prejudiced or of not being prejudiced?).

This is also some evidence (anecdotal and statistical) that schools are facing challenges around issues of faith, diverse ethnicities and socio-economic status.

A community of strangers – Somalis don't mix

Although the 'difference' of Somali residents is highlighted by dress, especially for women, it was the Somalis 'attitude' which was more significant for many of our respondents:

'I mean I work with all races. I mean some of the nicest people I know are Indians, or actually Jamaicans. But I don't like Somalians. Because they've got this aggressive way. I know they come from a terrible place. But if they come here they've got to learn from our rules. And they don't.' (I)

'Say I walked past anybody, black, white whatever... excuse me... oh sorry. Do that to a Somalian and they'll just push straight past you.' (I)

'I mean, we've got Bangladeshis here, and they don't have a problem, I don't think it's an Islamic thing, I think Somalians do have a problem assimilating, I think they really do, and I think that's possibly why they take it out on them. And I've got people that I consider like good colleagues that are Somalians but sometimes I think "why did you say that? Or why did you do that?" cos they're just rude, and I don't know whether it's their culture or ... I mean, my partner is Jamaican, and there is Polish people around here, and Africans in general I find them as the most cultured, well-mannered, polite race on the earth, but Somalians are just rude.' (I)

'I give you an example, you know at the shop counter, and there is a queue and you're waiting to be served and it is as if there could be always a Somalian that shuffle you out of the way, and expect to be served first and they always work with the pushchairs, they bash against your legs and you're like 'excuse me' and they just walk along.' (I)

Forgotten estate, forgotten people

Some local people feel Somalis in particular get special treatment whereas white people are overlooked:

'The Somalis have access to a Police response team, through SARI, that will be on site in minutes if there is any problems. This is racist because other members of the community do not have access to such a service.' (I)

'Well I think a lot of it is, they come over here, right, and they just have so many kids, they got the council houses, and you've got the other people who are born in this country and try to get a council house and they can't get one. And they just walk in and...' (I)

'Somalis are playing the victims whereby it's everyone that gets intimidated.' (I)

5 iii) The other side of the coin: Somalis as good neighbours

Some people in Hillfields are honest about their prejudice, particularly regarding Somalis, but insist that it is not racist because they do not have these feelings about other minority

The experience of one Somali family

One interviewer reports back a conversation: 'Mrs J, a Somali woman, came to Hillfields four years ago from Holland. She rented a house privately in the area. It was her 'worst experience ever ... People asked us to leave, with white hoods...you don't belong here you have to leave'. They were subject to sustained harassment by young people between ages of 12 and 18. 'I knew some of them, they were neighbours'. Her front window was broken but the police didn't come until the next day. She spent many months sleeping downstairs in case their house was attacked during the night. Her children were terrified and kept having nightmares, they never left the house except to go to school. The two youngest went to Hillfields Primary – they were 'nice' and 'kind'. She told me all this with little anger but more a sense of incredulity.'

groups. But some of this prejudice towards Somalis seems to be based upon hearsay and rumour. We wonder if changes at Hillfields school have encouraged this. As we have seen, the composition of the school has changed far more dramatically than the composition of the surrounding area, which has perhaps led to exaggerated fears of a ‘Somali invasion’ of Hillfields – and these fears provided a spurious legitimacy for attacks on Somali women, often on their way to and from the school.

‘You know, I’m a witness for the trouble that was back here? [Referring to the attack on Gorse Hill] But ... I did go out to stop it... but I can understand where they’re coming from [the attackers].’ (I)

In contrast, where people have direct, face-to-face experience of minority group neighbours, including Somali families, their experiences appear to be very positive. One woman with a ‘coloured family’ next door stated that *‘if you treat them properly, they will treat you properly, but if you got that uppity attitude ‘oh my daughter’s been on the list so long and they’ve walked straight in to a house’ – it gets people’s backs up’*.

Another interviewee in Beechen Rd recalled a time when he witnessed a fight among girls in the field behind his house. He saw many people walking past and the only person to step in and try and stop it was a Somali woman. Another interviewee, also in Beechen Rd, added,

‘I’ve got Somalians next door and they are lovely. They are absolutely lovely, I talk to him, my neighbour and I talked to him, because he didn’t know about the rubbish and stuff, so he did leave more rubbish out front and they didn’t pick it up, so obviously he got irritated about it, so we talked to him.’ (I)

Other respondents noted that the whole community have benefited now that the authorities have responded to the plight of Somali residents by clamping down on the anti-social behaviour of some of Hillfield’s young people. One described how she had written and complained to the Council many times but nothing was done. Once the ‘Somali-thing’ came up, however, there was a new Community Beat officer and a new council officer who seemed to take the issue of anti-social behaviour more seriously.

Finally, for other white residents Hillfield’s growing multiculturalism is seen as a positive development:

‘When I first came I found it oppressively white, but it’s getting better now – I like the multicultural input in the area’ (I)

One individual we talked to expressed feelings of despair at racist sentiments generally in Bristol, and not just in Hillfields:

‘There is an awful lot of Bristolian people who complain about immigration. [...] There’s an awful lot of people who at heart are Nazis, that don’t like other nationalities. They don’t like people moving in. They don’t like people taking their jobs, etc, etc, etc. And because of the latest wave of Polish immigration that has moved to Whitehall, it has caused a lot of friction between the people that have been there their entire life, the last 50 years or what ever.’ (I)

7. Summary – implications for policy and practice

Hillfields is typical of a large number of small to medium sized housing estates in Bristol which exist largely ‘off the radar’ until incidents occur that suddenly place them in the spotlight. So our lessons for policy and practice have implications for the council as a whole, they are not specific to this single area.

We recognize that the evidence we collected from over 200 people living and working on the Hillfields estate is contradictory, and this expresses the increasing social diversity of the area’s population. However, a number of key themes did emerge, with various implications for policy and practice – or at least questions to consider. They included issues around safety, consultation, transparency and sustainability, with many of those who had lived in the area over a long period wondering how their estate had declined so far and so fast.

The need to think systematically

Some council departments have not yet grasped that their actions always have consequences beyond their original intention. These include consequences for those that use their service, for the wider community and for other public agencies. In the case of Hillfields, the way in which Neighbourhood Renewal was handled (arousing and then dashing expectations – *see page 8*), the ‘management’ of Hillfields Rec by the Parks Department and the sudden withdrawal of the lease on the Woodland Way site (*see page 9*) are all examples of actions, or inactions, which have much broader consequences.

- Is there a way for local council/other agencies to work in a more ‘joined-up’ way?
- Could criteria for a ‘minimal amenities threshold’ be developed, with a register held by BCC that units/agencies feed into? Once there are too few amenities in a ward or neighbourhood, an alarm procedure is triggered.

Planning for population change

The clearest example of the failure to think systemically involves Neighbourhood and Housing Services. Council rehousing policies have played a significant role in altering the shape and character of an area like Hillfields and yet it seems that this has occurred in an ad hoc and unthought-through way. This first applied to the growing number of multiple-problem white families rehoused on the estate, something which nearly all of the long-standing residents we interviewed commented on. More recently it has applied to the arrival of Somali families in the area. It seems clear that:

- i) forms of tenancy support for new tenants with multiple needs are ineffective
- ii) the department has adopted a purely departmental approach to its rehousing policies, failing to involve other Council departments and outside agencies in thinking through the likely impacts.

A significant number (15-20) of African and Somali families were rehoused in Hillfields in 2006/7, yet there was no anticipation of this and no forewarning of other agencies. Thus Hillfields Primary School suddenly found that a new Somali family was turning up at the school every week at the start of 2006 (*see page 15*), and this eventually had a major impact with up to 60 white families leaving by the end of the school year.

- How can the Neighbourhood and Housing Services develop a more consultative and transparent practice?

Providing key amenities and support services

Two key themes in the report – lack of amenities and local residents feeling unsafe – are directly linked. With such limited opportunities for residents to meet in pleasant and safe public places in the area, barriers and stereotypes are created and reinforced between age groups, between those of different backgrounds, and between longterm and newer residents.

- How can a communal ‘heart’ to the estate be developed, eg with a welcoming public park and a new Community centre rebuilt according to what residents want and with participation in the process?
- Are local youth provisions providing relevant youth sessions for all local young people? Do they feel confident to attend? Are staff trained to deal with conflicts among and with young people?
- Is the lack of police presence an issue in the area?
- What is the impact of widespread drug dealing on the estate?

Challenging hearsay and rumour - the need for transparency and accountability

Our research reveals the important role that hearsay and rumour play in spreading tensions on an estate. This has been compounded by the absence of available data which can provide the actual facts and figures about

- i) the actual ethnic composition of the estate
- ii) the actual number of rehouseings of different groups on the estate in a given period

Without these facts and figures rumours escalate about the estate suddenly being swamped by new arrivals who are unfairly accessing council accommodation. One example of how communities can be worked with prior to demographic change comes from Munk and D'Onofrio's action research (2003) for the Information Centre about Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ICAR)¹. They initially talked to local communities and asylum-seekers separately about the anxieties they held regarding the changes occurring or about to occur, and then used their findings to start a dialogue between the two groups.

- How can areas such as Hillfields be prepared for demographic change?
- Is there a role that local primary schools can play in promoting clear information around demographic changes in the school, etc?

Supporting, not undermining, local capacity

In many areas like Hillfields community action is fragile and undertaken by a small number of dedicated activists. Local activists are seen as key and yet, often in unintended ways, it seems they feel as if they are constantly undermined (*see page 7*). The result is a drop off in engagement from the few committed individuals living on the estate.

¹ D'Onofrio, L. and Munk, K. (2003) *Understanding the Stranger* London: ICAR; executive summary attached as appendix - full report at www.icar.org.uk/content/proj/uts.html

- Are projects being funded over a long enough timescale? – see experiences of FLAG
- Is there a way of council departments working together to identify joint longterm funding for an area such as this – eg housing, parks, community development, community safety, etc?

8. Postscript: From understanding to action

There is a great danger that when a report such as this is commissioned and completed officers and members of the council assume the job has been done and, after a brief hurrah, the report sits on the shelf somewhere. The people of Hillfields deserve more than this. Via Neighbourhood Renewal they have already had the experience of briefly being in the spotlight only to be forgotten again. Tensions and difficulties in an area like Hillfields (and there are many other areas similar to Hillfields in Bristol) will not go away unless the council adopts a more strategic approach to it. We have identified some of the problems:

- the need to transform the Rec into a safe and welcoming place with attractive facilities for all ages;
- the need for a community centre and a youth centre which can offer more than the limited number of sessions (a couple of nights a week) presently available;
- consistent and responsive support for FLAG and its initiatives (nursery, community garden, joint activities with Somali residents, etc);
- more 'joined up' working, especially between housing and education;
- maintenance and development of neighbourhood policing;
- greater support for new social housing tenants with multiple needs moving into the area;
- continued monitoring of anti social behaviour and racial attacks.

We could add to this list. The point is that little of it will happen unless the council adopts a strategic approach to the area's development. Local activists lack the clout and the knowledge of how the system operates and as a consequence are repeatedly frustrated. Our recommendation is that the council thinks seriously about the need to create **a Neighbourhood Coordinator for Hillfields**. This would be a senior officer who has the authority to get things done and for whom this 'neighbourhood brief' is a key element of their portfolio of responsibilities, initially for a three year period (a similar approach was adopted by Birmingham in the 1990s).



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