

THE FINAL REPORT OF

# The Malden Manor Community Project

August, 2014



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# Executive Summary

## Malden Manor Community Project Final Report,

August, 2014

### Introduction

The Malden Manor Community Project is the third participatory needs assessment conducted by the Royal Borough of Kingston.

The purpose of the project was to complete a detailed examination of the quality of life in Malden Manor, and, in particular the Sheephouse Way area of the ward. This included:

- Mapping all community assets, such as schools, places of worship and community spaces.
- Undertaking action focused qualitative research that included training volunteers as community researchers and getting local residents to produce photo-diaries and be interviewed.
- Engaging with local school children and running a workshop about their lives in Malden Manor.
- Distributing ideas cards around the locality encouraging people to have their say about life in the neighbourhood.
- Running a series of research road show events that provided opportunities for a wide range of residents to engage with the research process and help formulate key findings.

This report looks at the findings from Phase 1 of the project – the community research.

The research elements of the project were designed by academic researchers from the Centre for Research on Communities, Identities and Difference, Kingston University, and delivered in partnership with Kingston Council's Equalities and Community Engagement Team.

The research was deliberately designed to be participatory, position community members as 'experts' and encourage the co-production of knowledge. It is hoped that the roots that have been planted by this process will be utilized positively as this project moves into its second phase.

### Key Findings: Community

Having a sense of 'community' or 'community spirit' was very important to local people.

Some participants, especially longer term settled residents, felt that there was a strong sense of community in the area that involved family, friends, neighbours and others. These residents were happy living in Malden Manor and reported having a good quality of life and wellbeing. It was their view that the neighbourhood had improved in recent years as a place to live and would get even better over time.

Other participants had very different experiences and reported that there was little or no community feeling in the local area. This group tended to have experienced high levels of social isolation, and were quite reluctant to venture far from their homes. It was their view that Malden Manor was a risky place to live, and that, if an opportunity arose they would chose to relocate.

A third group of residents, often more affluent, also perceived there was limited or

little sense of community in the neighbourhood, and chose to travel outside of the area for most of their everyday needs. In some cases this was, in part, because Malden Manor was viewed as a neighbourhood in decline that was home to people they did not feel comfortable interacting with. This group were very conscious about the spaces and places they used in the area, and reported avoiding or never using some places and services.

The experiences of different residents in Malden Manor are underpinned by the stark socio-economic divides between the local authority rented flats and private houses, and the majority of participants reported that different social groups in Malden Manor did not seem to mix. Those who lived in local authority housing, either as renters or owner-occupiers, felt they were judged negatively by others, and this had an impact on their quality of life and well-being.

Participants felt that a lack of community space or places to meet exacerbated these divides and made them harder to bridge.

#### Key Findings: Getting By

Many participants reported that they, or people they knew, struggled to make ends meet. The cost of fuel, transport, healthy food and communication (such as telephone and access to the internet) were sometimes beyond the means of people living on low incomes. It was not just people on out of work benefits who spoke about these issues, but also individuals and families in low paid employment.

Not being able to afford basic things, such as keeping your home warm, did have a detrimental impact. Participants reported feeling isolated, unhappy and that financial constraints were a real barrier to improving

their own lives, and the lives and opportunities of their children.

The Better Homes Scheme, the renovation of two large blocks of flats on the Sheephouse Way Estate, had made fuel bills more affordable. Residents were hugely supportive of this scheme and reported that it had made a significant difference to their quality of life and helped them keep their homes warm. This scheme is a fantastic example of how investment in energy efficiency measures can improve the lives of people on low-incomes.

#### Key Findings: Caring for the Environment

Parts of the area around Malden Manor are environmentally very attractive. There are a number of open green spaces, including spaces used for recreation and amenity purposes (Manor Park, Knollmead Playground), spaces managed for nature conservation (the Hogsmill Open Space), spaces that have a specific function (Malden Manor Allotments and Manor Park Nursery), public open spaces (Plough Green, and areas around South Lane and Sheephouse Way Estate) and green verges and spaces along local roads and pavements. Overall these spaces add (or have the potential to add) to the overall sense of place and character of the area. In addition, the Better Homes Scheme was, although incomplete at the time of data collection, making people feel more positive about the look of the neighbourhood.

There were, however, a number of concerns raised about the environment locally that participants felt had a negative impact on quality of life in the community and sense of well-being. Traffic congestion and poor traffic management emerged as a big problem. This was exacerbated by commuters parking around the Malden

Manor station area. It was felt that this was dangerous and compromised people's ability to enjoy the local environment and green spaces.

Uncollected rubbish and fly-tipping were another important local issue. Participants felt that having a clean and tidy neighbourhood would make others judge the area less and that the presence of rubbish only reinforced negative views about the place and the people who lived there. Others felt that litter was a sign that people did not respect the local environment and that this issue needed to be taken more seriously by the local authority.

In addition, some spaces, such as the area around Malden Manor Station, were viewed very negatively. The presence of the pylons, rubbish and lack of proper maintenance was a reoccurring theme.

#### Key Findings: Local Facilities and Services

Participants reported feeling very happy with the quality and accessibility of services in the local area. Local schools and the Children's Centre, shopping facilities, transport links, healthcare and parks and green spaces were all named as some of the best things about living in Malden Manor. There were, however, some gaps in local service provision that, it was felt, did impact on quality of life.

The lack of facilities for young people, like, for example a youth club or sports facilities, was raised consistently as an issue. Not having anything for young people to do locally was viewed as contributing to tensions between this group and adult residents. Similarly, there was a lack of services to support residents who were socially isolated (such as carers, single

parents, the elderly or people with disabilities).

In addition, there was a strong feeling that Malden Manor lacked community spaces and places just to meet. A post office, housing office and no charge cash machine were other things that were identified as necessary but not available in the local area.

#### Key Findings: Safety and Security

Participants who were connected to the local community felt very safe in the local area. Participants who were more isolated or disconnected had a very different view, and felt that the area was a risky place to live and were fearful of crime and 'problem people'. Official police statistics show that Malden Manor is one of the safest places in Greater London and so the perception that the area was dangerous reveals how important the connection between feeling part of a place and fear of crime is.

Others reported feeling generally safe in the area, but expressed concerns about specific places and groups. For example, the area around Malden Manor Station (including the empty pub) was viewed as risky, as were some of the green spaces. Young people were the group who participants most often voiced specific concerns about, and it was viewed by some that young people in public spaces involved in noisy or disorderly behaviour did lead to heightened levels of insecurity amongst some residents.

It was not just crime and disorder that people were worried about, however, busy roads with lots of traffic, particularly at crossings, also caused concern amongst residents.

Recommendations (see pages 46-47 for the full list)

The recommendations made in this report have all been developed from the analysis of the research data. Phase 2 of the Malden Manor Community Project will take these forward over the coming months and years. It is recommended that:

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- Ways to bridge the effects of the socio-economic divide should be explored because of the detrimental impact this had on community relations and the general well-being of the population.
- Interventions and programmes to tackle social isolation should be developed and deployed in Malden Manor.
- Young people and stakeholders should work in partnership to address the issue of the lack of services for this group.
- Existing local authority support to groups on low incomes should be promoted and extended wherever possible. Alternative and innovative strategies to alleviate the burden of living on a low income should be considered.
- A partnership between residents and stakeholders should be developed to tackle and improve the environmental issues raised in this research.
- More effective communication between the police, Safer Kingston Partnership and local residents should be established to keep the local community informed about efforts to tackle local problems.

# Malden Manor Community Project

## Final Report, August 2014

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### 1. Introduction

The Malden Manor Community Project is the third Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA) which has taken place in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. PNA1 took place in York Way, Garrison Lane and the Green Lane Estates in Chessington in 2008, and PNA2 took place in Alpha Road, Alfriston and Vine Close in Surbiton, in 2009. This PNA focuses on Malden Manor and in particular the Sheephouse Way Estate, the fourth most deprived area in the borough according to the 2011 Census. Malden Manor is an area of stark contrasts, with pockets of deprivation sitting within a predominantly affluent place. The Sheephouse Way area within Old Malden is amongst the 2% most deprived areas in the country when looking at Child Poverty, whereas the Mayfair Avenue/Avondale Avenue/Malden Road area is amongst the 2% least deprived. 32% of households in the Sheephouse Way area live in social housing. This is almost three times the borough average.

The purpose of the Malden Manor Community Project was to find out what residents in the Malden Manor area feel about their quality of life. This means all aspects of life including feelings about the community, the environment, health and wellbeing, housing, their experience of local schools, children's centres and educational opportunities, access to transport and perceptions of crime and safety. When all of these aspects are considered together, they paint a credible picture of local life. This

report is an overview of Malden Manor residents' views of their quality of life and includes recommendations to improve it.

Kingston Council's Equalities and Community Engagement Team managed the overall project, while Kingston University were commissioned to conduct and manage the community research elements. From December 2013 to July 2014, residents were invited to share their views and ideas. This research focused on photo-diaries but also included leaflets, paper and electronic questionnaires, door knocking, and consultation road shows. The use of photo-diaries as a consultation technique is new and innovative, providing a rich visual representation of people's day to day lives through qualitative data. Photo diaries provided a different and refreshing approach to consulting in an area where there was initially some disillusionment.

The Malden Manor Community Project was developed by a broad partnership of local organisations, with progress reviews at regular strategic and operational group meetings attended by representatives of Kingston Council, Kingston University, Kingston Voluntary Action, and representatives from community and voluntary sector organisations as well as the police and local councillors.

The experiences and perspectives of residents are fully documented within this report. The recommendations are outlined in section 4 of the report. Following the report launch at the Malden Manor Fun Day in August 2014, a Steering Group will be established to enable residents and partner organisations to prioritise the recommendations and develop an action plan.

The success of the Malden Manor Community Project was dependent on the

active support of many people. We would particularly like to thank all those residents who generously shared their views and ideas with us, and without whom the project would not have been possible. We would also like to thank everyone in the operational and strategic groups, Malden Manor Residents' Association, the local schools, the Children's Centre, the local police team and staff within the Council who have supported the project.

Now, we invite you to join us in a journey through Malden Manor.

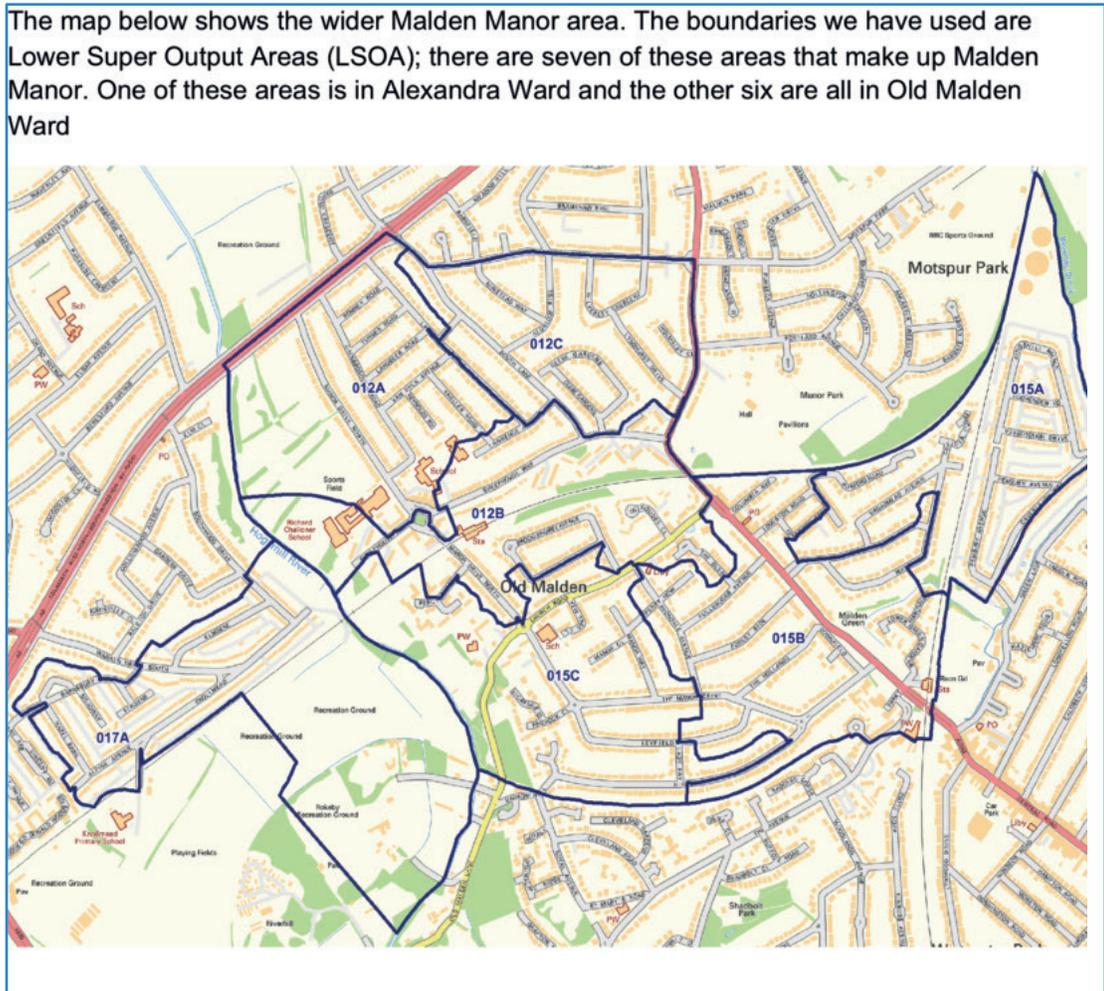
### 1.1 Profile of Malden Manor

A demographic profile of the Malden Manor area was put together by the Kingston Data team. A summary of this information has

been included below. The majority of the demographic data used is from the latest (2011) Census. Where data is not available for the Malden Manor area specifically, Old Malden Ward data has been used.

### Population

According to the 2011 Census, Malden Manor had a population of 11,189 on Census day. Within that area, Sheephouse Way had 1,673 residents. Anecdotally, the population of Sheephouse Way is considered to be somewhat mobile, primarily because of the numbers of people moving into and out of social housing. Overall, Old Malden's population increased by 4.6% between 2001 and 2011, from 9,017 to 9,431.



Sheephouse Way has a relatively small proportion of working age adults (57.2%) compared with the rest of the borough (63.4%). This means that a correspondingly larger percentage of residents are either children and young people (aged 0-19) or above retirement age (over 65). Old Malden's population is ageing. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of over-65s rose by 17.8%.

### ***Housing and households***

Malden Manor's owner-occupier rate is significantly above average in comparison to Kingston as a whole (77.4% compared with 64.1%). The number is much lower in Sheephouse Way, where 55.8% of households are owner-occupied, but where 32% of households are living in social housing. The borough average is 11.8%.

Malden Manor has a significantly higher proportion of families with children, a somewhat higher proportion of pensioner households, and a much smaller proportion of households without children (such as professionals or student house shares). Sheephouse Way is generally closer to the borough average than Malden Manor as a whole. The most noticeable exception to this is the category of Lone Parent households - the proportion in Sheephouse Way (11.2%) is double the borough average (5.6%).

### ***Health, Unpaid Care and the Labour Market***

A significant proportion of the working age population in the Sheephouse Way area did not work in order to look after their home/family (7% in Sheephouse Way compared to the 4.7% Kingston average). Indeed, 10.1% of residents in Malden Manor residents and 9.3% of those in Sheephouse Way also reported that they regularly

provided unpaid care for adults such as friends, family members or neighbours (8.3% average).

4% of Sheephouse Way residents were not in work because of being long-term sick or disabled. Furthermore, 16.7% of Sheephouse Way residents reported that their day-to-day activities were limited 'a lot' or 'a little' by long-term health problems or disability (compared to 12.9% in Malden Manor and 12.4% Kingston average).

### ***Ethnicity, Language and Religion***

According to the 2001 Census, 31% of residents in Malden Manor and 32% from Sheephouse Way were from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (Kingston 26%). Malden Manor has a larger than average Asian population (23.5% compared to Kingston 16.3%). This includes the 13% of Malden Manor residents that identified themselves as 'Other Asian' (which includes the Korean and Tamil/Sri Lankan populations), 4.5% who identified themselves as Indian and 4.1% as Pakistani. These figures are similar for Sheephouse Way, but with a higher proportion identifying themselves as Black (3.2% in Sheephouse Way compared to 1.9% for Malden Manor).

A similar proportion of residents speak English in all three areas (81.5% in Sheephouse Way, 82.6% in Malden Manor and 83.6% across the borough). A significantly higher proportion of Malden Manor residents speak Asian languages when compared to the borough average.

According to the 2011 Census there were fewer residents in Malden Manor that identified as having no religion than the Kingston average (18.3% and 25.7%

respectively). The majority of residents identified themselves as Christian (56.4%), Muslim (8.5%) or Hindu (7.5%). When comparing this to Sheephouse Way, a larger proportion of residents identified themselves as Muslim (11.5%) and slightly fewer identified themselves as Christian or Hindu.

### **School**

1604 children live in Malden Manor and attend a Kingston school; of these 260 children live in the Sheephouse Way area.

The majority of pupils attend the two local Primary Schools: Malden Manor Primary and Malden Parochial Church of England Primary. The main secondary schools attended are Tolworth Girls', Coombe Boys' and Girls' schools, Holy Cross and Southborough High School.

Only nine children in Malden Manor attend Kingston's Special Schools (none of whom live in the Sheephouse Way area).

41% of pupils from the Sheephouse Way area are from BAME groups, 37% in the wider Malden Manor area and 48% in Kingston as a whole. Urdu, Tamil and Korean are spoken more frequently in Malden Manor compared to the borough average.

### **Poverty and Deprivation**

Several of the areas where children are most deprived contain pockets of social housing. In Sheephouse Way 29.3% of children are living in poverty, which is far higher than both the Malden Manor area average (14.2%) and the Kingston average of (13.7%).

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation measure wider disadvantage, in terms of those

negatively impacted by their standard of living. Old Malden Ward comes out as one of the least deprived wards in the country, but with variation across it. Deprivation is highest in the Sheephouse Way area (where deprivation affecting children is particularly acute), and lowest in the Mayfair Avenue/Avondale Avenue/Malden Road area.

The Sheephouse Way area also has higher income deprivation affecting older people than its surrounding areas, but it is less severe than that affecting children.

Household deprivation looks at employment, education, health and disability, and housing. In Kingston 49% of households are affected by one or more of these dimensions. In the Sheephouse Way area it is far higher (65%). Sheephouse Way has both a high percentage of social housing (32%) and a higher proportion of household deprivation for two or more dimensions than its surrounding areas (28% compared to an average of 15% for the wider Malden Manor area).

### **Benefits and Welfare Reform**

Over the last two years, the Government has made significant reforms to the benefits system to create a fairer system for low-income working families and for the taxpayer, and more changes are to come as Universal Credit is rolled out nationally. Those directly affected are of working age and receive benefits. One of the key groups affected by these changes are families with dependent children, who are prevalent in the Malden Manor area.

## 1.2 Asset Mapping

The Equalities and Community Engagement Team at Kingston Council produced an asset map of the local area through desktop research, visits to the area, and informal meetings with local people and organisations.

The asset map listed local community and voluntary organisations, schools, faith groups, Kingston Council, NHS and other services and facilities, and provided a quantitative study on the area. Maps were produced based on the project area, taking ½ mile radius from the centre of Sheephouse Way and identifying everything local assets. Assets were highlighted on a map (see below) and a wide range of photos were taken.

## 1.3 Joining Forces

The project was designed around partnership working between the Equalities and Community Engagement Team at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and researchers at Kingston University. The project benefitted from the fact that it brought together the resources, expertise and knowledge of these two different institutions and professions.

Inevitably during the course of the research we had to negotiate different organisational practices and cultures. However, collaborating on the research project has fostered positive working relationships and built lines of communication that will form a strong foundation for future collaborations.

- 1 Malden Manor Station
- 2 Richard Challoner RC School
- 3 Manor Drive North Retail
- 4 St John's Church
- 5 Malden Parochial C of E Primary School
- 6 Old Malden Library
- 7 The Plough PH & Harvester
- 8 Malden Road Retail
- 9 St John's Church Hall (The Institute)
- 10 Venner Youth and Community Centre
- 11 Malden Drive GP Surgery
- 12 Worcester Park Station
- 13 Worcester Park Baptist Church
- 14 Manor Park Recreation Ground
- 15 Malden Manor Nursery and Primary School
- 16 Hogsmill Open Space
- 17 Malden Manor Allotments
- 18 Sunray GP Surgery
- 19 New Malden Lawn Tennis Club
- 20 Wilverley Crescent Allotments
- 21 Knollmead Children's Playground
- 22 Woodies Bar
- 23 Coombe Boy's School
- 24 Manor Park Hall
- 25 Leyfield Open Space
- 26 Former Public Convenience
- 27 Malden Green, Malden Road
- 28 Dental Sense, Malden Road
- 29 Malden Dental Care
- 30 The Manor PH (Closed)
- 31 The Worcester Park PH (Closed)
- 32 Malden Manor Roundabout
- 33 Yew Tree House (Closed)
- 34 Plough Green Pond
- 35 1<sup>st</sup> Old Malden Scouts
- 36 Malden Manor Residents Association



## 2. Methodology

Our research was designed around a multi-media methodology. It was aimed at mapping the experiences, views and feelings of local residents, in order to generate a more detailed understanding of the issues affecting different people and communities in and around Malden Manor.

The methodology included the following features:

- Ideas cards, available at different shops and public venues and posted to local residents in Sheephouse Way and South Lane
- School ideas cards
- Training residents and volunteers as community researchers
- Photo-diaries completed by Malden Manor residents
- Interviews with Malden Manor residents
- Walking Interviews with Malden Manor residents
- Community road shows in different locations throughout the area

The different phases of the research and the features are outlined below.

### 2.1 Embedding the Principle of Co-production: the Community as Experts

From the very beginning of the project it was clear that the Equalities and Community Engagement Team were very keen to use innovative methodological approaches that prioritised residents' experiences and views and recognised them as experts. This was a key design of the research, and the principles of inclusion and co-production and that underpinned it. Taking this approach is risky in some respects, but research that does not have a commitment to the

development of a long term and productive dialogue with residents, because it is done very quickly or uses methodologies that cannot capture more than the most superficial, can disempower people by adding to feelings of marginalisation and resentment.

Furthermore, findings from research of this type can be viewed as illegitimate because they do not reflect local lives and concerns and, ultimately, are of little use to any of the parties involved, the researchers, residents or policy makers.

*Against this background the Malden Manor Community Project was designed to be research 'with' rather than 'on' community.*

At each stage of the project residents were invited to take integral roles. Some trained as community researchers and were equipped with new skills that enabled them to act as research buddies to participants and conduct qualitative interviews. Others produced photo-diaries that documented their everyday routines in which they were free to record and explore what was important and significant to them. After the initial analysis of the data was conducted the key findings were displayed in various locations across the ward to check the interpretation of the data, the validity of the interim findings and create opportunities for further discussion and feedback from a wider range of residents. During the final stage of the project resident involvement will be fundamental in enacting the recommendations made in the final report over the short, medium and long term.

### 2.2 Fostering Community Resilience

Research on resilience indicates that neighbourhoods with stronger community ties are more able to cope with adversity. This research aimed to promote community

links between residents in both the actual physical sense – people meeting others at research training or buddying people who they did not know previously but who also lived in the area – and in a more abstract sense, for example when engaging in discussions about the lives of fellow residents at the neighbourhood events.

In addition to this, finding ways to create new ties in Malden Manor, and nurture existing ones, is central to the report recommendations for tackling social isolation, promoting community cohesion and improving wellbeing.

Research highlights those individuals who feel recognised and have opportunities to actively contribute to decisions that impact upon their lives and environment report generally better levels of physical and mental health. The participatory nature of this research sought to promote this by supporting residents in having their say about life in the ward, its positive elements and challenges. Running a broader consultation process in visible spaces further promoted the value of participating in the project as residents who participated, and others, were able to see for themselves and have their say on some of the hard outcomes. Following this up as the research is disseminated, for example, inviting all participants to the launch of the report and to be involved in working with others to implement the recommendations will create new opportunities and spaces for active engagement and participation in local decision-making processes.

A resilience approach also foregrounds the assets within communities and not the deficits. This is significant because many residents who live in challenging neighbourhoods do not themselves consider those spaces, or the people that occupy them, as lacking. On the contrary, many

want to identify the positive attributes of their communities and are critical of approaches that they consider only seek to reinforce or further cement negative views. It was vital, therefore, that mapping the community assets was one of the first actions taken by the project. This underpinned the remainder of the research, and also, will be central to the recommendations in the final report.

### 2.3 Ideas Cards

The Equalities and Community Engagement Team worked with designers to produce posters and leaflets to promote the project. It was decided that to maximise the consultation potential, these leaflets should take the form of ideas cards with a tear-off survey page on the back. This survey page incorporated a blank speech bubble after a project explanation and invitation to be involved. Ideas boxes were also designed and hosted by shops, GP surgeries, schools and the Children's Centre in Malden Manor for local people to easily post comments. A wide range of qualitative data was gained through the ideas cards.

The ideas card stage was then followed up with door knocking in Sheephouse Way, South Lane, and part of Manor Drive North to recruit residents for the photo diaries. These door-to-door visits were a very successful way of engaging local people and promoting the project. 483 properties were visited and from these, 72 residents signed up to take part in the photo diary research. A number of residents were not in at the time of calling but it was decided that the amount of interest in photo diaries was sufficient not to warrant another round of door knocking.

The combination of ideas cards and comments received during the door knocking exercises resulted in additional

feedback from 62 residents.

The comments gathered from the ideas cards were taken into account during the final analysis of interview and road show data (see section 3 below). The comments on the ideas cards and from the door-knocking exercises are associated with and supported by the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews.

#### 2.4 Feedback from Children at Schools

To compliment the ideas cards for adult residents, a similar card was developed for children at Malden Manor Primary School.

Teachers at the school facilitated a lesson in December 2013 and encouraged all the pupils in Year 5 to complete the card.

This resulted in a total of 82 feedback cards returned from the schoolchildren, who were enthusiastic about having their say in the local area.

Results from the childrens' ideas cards are discussed in section 3.7 below (together with the feedback from teenagers who filled in ideas cards for residents).

#### 2.5 Training Community Researchers

Research into the needs of local communities often overlooks the knowledge and expertise of the very communities they set out to explore.

By contrast, in order to avoid such oversight and to benefit more directly from local knowledge, our research project was consciously designed to enable residents to participate as researchers.

To this end Kingston University offered research training to local residents interested in more active involvement. Overall we ran three community-research training sessions with a total of 20

participants.

Sessions focused primarily on qualitative research and interviewing techniques.

Sessions were attended by:

- Kingston and Malden Manor residents
- Kingston Council staff
- Kingston University students volunteering on the project

Following the sessions, a number of participants volunteered to become involved as interviewers and mentors.

#### 2.6 Community Researchers and Mentors

Volunteers were assigned to specific participants. They were asked to mentor participants whilst completing photo diaries and to conduct interviews. Briefing documents and interview schedules were sent to each volunteer in advance of the interviews.

The contribution of community researchers has been invaluable to the project. Without their involvement and commitment it would not have been possible to gather the rich and detailed qualitative data the project was aiming for.

Coordinating community researchers, participants and lead researchers was difficult at times. These difficulties meant that participants were not always as effectively mentored as they could have been. Towards the latter stages of the project we were able to employ a Research Assistant to take over this role. The role of central coordinator is an essential requirement for similar future projects.

#### 2.7 Recruitment and Promotion

A great deal of work was undertaken to promote the project and recruit participants

for the research. In addition to the ideas cards and extensive door-knocking exercises (see section 2.3 above) the following features were included:

- Leaflets were hand-delivered to every property in the Sheephouse Way and South Lane Estates to promote the project.
- Posters were displayed in the windows of local businesses and organisations as well as in the Neighbourhood noticeboard locally.
- An article was printed in the Surrey Comet, Kingston Guardian, and Malden Manor Primary School newsletter, as well as regular updates in the Malden Manor Residents' Association newsletter and Homelife (the Council newsletter) which is distributed to everyone living in Council Housing across the borough.
- The Council website, Twitter account and Maldens & Coombe Neighbourhood Facebook page were also used to regularly promote the project.

## 2.8 Recruitment and Retention of Participants

Originally the research team had hoped to recruit 30 residents to fill in photo-diaries and participate in interviews. However, following initial expressions of interest, the retention of participants proved to be a significant challenge.

Encouraging these residents to become active research participants was very difficult. Following a number of door-knocking events, the Equalities and Community Engagement Team managed to

register expressions of interest from over 100 residents. However, only 20 completed photo diaries, and getting the final interview count to 30 was a long and difficult process.

The reasons for this are in part related to the more general issues affecting communities in the area, including the increasing economic pressures experienced by deprived communities and the social isolation and alienation experienced by a proportion of our participants (see findings under 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 below).

Although not as pronounced, similar problems were experienced with regard to participant retention. There were a small number of participants who completed photo-diaries but then dropped out of the research before an interview could be arranged. In a few instances drop-out may have been related to the length of time between finishing a diary and arranging an interview. However, it also seemed that unexpected life events had an impact on this. Again the different pressures that different communities experience and how these can disrupt engagement processes and communication need to be considered in this context.

Moreover, it is worth considering modes of communication. Given our experience on this project, it is clear that communication via mobile and online technology (phones and email) was difficult. Participants did not always have access to online means of communication. Whilst most had mobile phones, many were on 'pay-as-you-go' schemes and could not afford to keep them topped up with credit. As a result researchers were often unable to contact participants and community researchers for long periods of time.

## 2.9 Photo-Diaries and Interviews

20 participants completed photo-diaries over

a period of seven days. Participants were asked to record their daily activities by taking pictures and writing in a diary, whilst also highlighting particular issues that affected everyday life in Malden Manor. Some participants used their own cameras or phones, while others were provided with a disposable camera.

The diaries were analysed and main themes were identified by the lead-researchers who also put together interview guides for community researchers. Interviews tended to be about one hour long and were kept as informal as possible. Structured around the photo-diaries, the overarching aim was to ask residents to elaborate and reflect on the themes that emerged from their diary. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent.

#### 2.10 Walking Interviews/Interviews

In order to make up for the drop-out rate (see section 2.7 above), we also asked a number of residents to participate in a walking interview, a straightforward interview or a telephone interview as time allowed. As the name suggests, walking interviews involved participant and interviewer walking through the local area. The walk was led by the participant, who was asked to talk about their daily activities and routines, and to reflect on any significant issues that affected their daily lives.

Five participants completed a walking interview, two a straightforward face-to-face interview, and three people completed a telephone interview. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent. Together with the 20 participants who completed photo-diaries this completed our target-sample of 30.

#### 2.11 Analysing the Data

Analysis was carried out by the Kingston

University research team. Ideas cards, diaries and interview data were categorised into themes (coding). First, the interview data was coded independently by the three lead-researchers. Second, emerging themes were then cross-referenced and refined. Third, a research assistant was asked to go through the interview data again to check for validity and reliability of the main themes.

#### 2.12 Developing and Running the Community Road Shows

The themes emerging from the interviews were used as a basis for the community road shows. Following analysis we devised a series of prioritisation exercises, in order to allow a wider section of the community to feedback on the findings from the diaries/interviews. This allowed us to check to what extent other residents agreed with the issues already identified, and to ensure our findings were externally valid.

The road shows encompassed three types of exercises:

1. Themed exercises: participants were asked to agree or disagree with significant themes, by placing green or red stickers on statements made by other participants (see image below). They could also provide further commentary on post-it notes which were stuck to the boards.
2. Mapping exercises: participants were asked to identify the places they use, and where they felt safe in the area, by sticking flags into a map of Malden Manor.
3. Thinking about solutions: participants were presented with case-studies representing the different experiences and issues we encountered in our research. They were then asked to consider: 1) whether they identified with

these particular case-studies and 2) how a particular issue might be resolved.

Road shows took place in a number of locations; A stay and play session at Old Malden Children's Centre, pick-up time at Malden Manor Primary School, outside the Sheephouse Way Estate, at the Scouts' Summer Fair on Plough Green and outside Malden Manor Station during peak commuting-times.

Originally, the community road shows were intended to yield more quantitative data that we would be able to present in a statistical/table format. However, it soon emerged that most participants wanted to provide us with more detailed feed-back. Instead of simply agreeing/disagreeing with statements, many provided us with detailed comments, which were used as supporting evidence when finalising the themes for this report.

### 2.13 Reflections on the Methodology: Doing Things Differently

The research team was committed to devising an innovative methodology, which was committed to embedding principles of participation and co-production, fostering community resilience and which would allow us to capture in some detail the issues faced by Malden Manor residents in their day-to-day lives.

The innovative research design of the project has provided the research team with detailed and in-depth insights into the views and experiences of residents in Malden Manor. One community researcher noted:

*"Speaking to people that had grown up in the area, it was really interesting listening to their memories of its past such as the parks and the local schools they attended etc. I got a sense of their*

*value and legacy to the local parents of the community and the need to keep these features available for their children."*

*Matthew Pyle, KU Student and Volunteer Researcher on the Malden Manor Community Project*

The rich qualitative data we gathered enabled a detailed analysis of issues affecting the area. In addition to this the participatory principle of the project has gone some way to establishing links and creating benefits.

According to the local children's centre manager:

*"The Centre manager and parents who live in that area were actively involved in the research carried out by Kingston University / RBK. The Hub Centre was also used by the 'Project' to facilitate consultations with local families and appropriate trainings / meetings for people who wanted to be involved. [...] [We] found the partnership working with Kingston University and the RBK Community Development Team very beneficial. [...] Thanks to the links with MM Project Old Malden Children's Centre got funding for outdoor equipment. [...] Thanks to the project both New and Old Malden Children's Centres established good links with the Korean Link Worker in RBK and target sessions took place at the Hub/Spoke Centres [...] [it] helped the Centre manager to identify the target groups in the locality and influenced the planning of the provision across both NM and OM Children's Centres [...] Thanks to the information regarding the locality provided by the Project, [...] the Centre engaged with some families from Malden Manor area more effectively and this is reflected in the increasing registration*

*numbers of families who live in Sheep house Way estate.”*

*Aneta Kubiak, Manager of the Malden Manor Children’s Centre, Partner and Volunteer Researcher on the Malden Manor Community Project.*

Here, it is also important to acknowledge that doing things differently can lead to real challenges, and that this was not a perfect process. The research process was at times labour intensive, particular as regards recruitment and the co-ordination of participants, volunteers and partners. Moreover, not all resident groups were included in the research to the fullest extent. More efforts should have been made to further include older residents as well as children and young people.

Sustaining the good work done by the project will be difficult in a rapidly changing policy and political climate. Individuals already struggle to find the time and effort to actively participate in such projects, and further pressure on time will exacerbate this.

### 3. Findings

The findings from our research fall into six different themes. This section discusses these themes under separate headings:

- Community (3.1)
- Accounting for different experiences (3.2)
- Getting By (3.3)
- Perceptions of Safety (3.4)
- Caring for the Environment (3.5)
- Local Services and Facilities (3.6)
- Feed-back from Young People and Children

#### 3.1 Community

A major theme to emerge from our research was the importance our participants attached to community. Feeling connected or disconnected to others also had further implications when considering issues such as social inequality, social division, perceptions of security and safety, social isolation and mental health.

##### 3.1.1 Pockets of Community

Participants reported very different experiences of 'community'. Some respondents felt very connected to, or part of a, community in Malden Manor, while others felt quite the reverse (see section 3.2 for a detailed discussion for these different groups).

The small and disconnected 'pockets of community' we were able to identify clustered around groups of residents on the Sheephouse Way Estate, the budding Residents Association on the estate, the churches, the local scouts group and the Parochial School.

With regard to Malden Manor Primary School, participants were generally very

happy with it, but had different experiences of the school as a 'local connector'. A few had made friendships through the school and felt the school connected them to the local area. Others reported that there was generally no sense of community around the school. Some who had tried to set up parents' networks had found this very difficult.

##### 3.1.2 Finding Community Spirit

Those participants who felt there was no real sense of community in the area, not only felt that residents did not know each other, but that Malden Manor lacked 'life' and 'spirit'.

For some participants the sense of being locally disconnected meant that they sought connections elsewhere, and participated in activities and social groups in the wider Kingston area. These activities were easier to access for more affluent residents. It is notable that the daily routines of those from a more income-deprived background were often much more locally focused (see section 3.2 for a discussion of these different groups).

##### 3.1.3 Social Isolation

In some more extreme cases participants reported feeling socially isolated, recording that they did not talk to or know their neighbours, or anyone else in the wider community. Some even felt scared of talking to their neighbours for fear of confrontation, or felt so isolated they did not like to venture out of their immediate surroundings.

Respondents who reported a sense of social isolation often had additional vulnerabilities such as disabilities, caring responsibilities or language barriers.

The fact that a number of participants reported feeling insecure and isolated or excluded (some through choice, but most

not) is significant because of the likely impact this has on physical and mental health and wellbeing. According to one participant:

*“Not knowing other people can really affect how you feel about living in a place. You might get depression or things like that. I think young mums especially find it hard just after they've had their babies because they might not have the confidence to ask for help or have the confidence to walk into a group full of older women that all know each other at a playgroup or something. I know I struggled with that and I was 21 when I had my first baby.”*

#### 3.1.4 Links between Community and Perceptions of Safety

Feelings of local connectedness are also tied up with perceptions of security and safety (also discussed in section 3.2 and 3.4 below). Those who felt more closely connected to the area and who reported feeling part of a local community tended to feel much safer.

#### 3.1.5 Social Divisions

A significant barrier to the development of a strong community spirit was the stark socio-economic divide between those living on the Sheephouse Way and South Lane Estates on the one hand, and the surrounding privately owned housing on the other.

In diaries, interviews and during our road shows, the majority of participants reported that different social groups in Malden Manor did not seem to mix. Many participants said they felt saddened by these social divisions in Malden Manor. However, a few participants also had strong perceptions about Malden Manor's estates and their residents. Some saw the Sheephouse Way

Estate as a sign that the area was going 'downhill'. They did not like using the parade of shops opposite the estate because they did not feel safe and saw the area as being 'too rough'. They also discouraged their children or grandchildren from mixing with children on the estate for fear they would be encouraged to 'participate in anti-social behaviour', or 'get into drugs'.

Our interviews documented very clearly how acutely residents on the Sheephouse Way estate are affected by such perceptions. Residents living in Council accommodation felt they were looked down upon by the more affluent social groups in Malden Manor. According to one participant:

*“I think you get labelled when you live on an estate, and I think that's another reason behind the residents association because you don't want people to go past the place and think 'I wouldn't want to live there', I want them to go past and go 'oh, they care', ... they care about where they live.”*

*“I think you get labelled...when people go past on a bus and think 'oh God, I wouldn't want to live there. You live on a council estate, we live in a house with a garden.”*

*“It's a council estate isn't it, it's been like that since we were kids, people who live in the council houses and people who have houses with gardens. There was a teacher at the school who said 'oh, you've got to give them [children from the estate] a chance because they live in council houses.' But it doesn't matter where you come from, and unless people come and live here, and see what we do, you don't know that actually it's a really nice place to live ... the people are really nice people.”*

Even in those cases where participants did not see socio-economic inequalities as barriers to community, perceptions of local communities and residents were still very much shaped by socio-economic categories. This was clearly reflected in the language participants used to talk about everyday life in Malden Manor. For example one participant commented:

*“I don’t think social inequality is an issue, I know posh mums and council estate mums.”*

Overall, socio-economic divisions and more importantly perceptions associated with these divisions formed barriers to everyday interactions between social groups and to the formation of relationship and strong community. In addition, it is worth noting that there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that feeling stigmatised impacts upon levels of stress and that stress can, over the longer term, contribute to poorer health. Work on chronic stress and its detrimental impact on mental health, as well as its contribution to long-term limiting illness is particularly relevant here (and for the later discussion of ‘getting by’, section 3.3).

### 3.1.6 Social Division and the Environment

The frequently expressed desire for environmental improvements to housing and surrounding green spaces (see section 3.5 below) needs to be considered in the context of Malden Manor’s socio-economic divisions and the perceptions associated with these divisions.

Many participants were acutely aware of the fact that their standing in life was being externally judged from the appearance of the area they lived in. The state of the

council houses, overflowing bins and untidy green space were therefore very much a drain on individuals’ confidence, as well as a barrier to community.

For some participants improving the appearance of the local area would mean that socio-economic divisions would become less visible. This would help overcome the stigmatisation of certain sections of the local community (both real and perceived), resulting in the development of stronger community ties.

### 3.1.7 Inequality and the Social Geography of Malden Manor

Social divisions in Malden Manor are reinforced by its geography. Areas of privately owned and social housing are polarised around two ends of Sheephouse Way. They are also served by a different parade of shops and located around two separate school gates, which again reinforces social division between different income groups in Malden Manor.

#### Photo-Diary Extracts:



*“There are big houses in Malden Manor. It is an affluent area, most people are rich, except me of course. Even though I worked hard and have a degree.”*



*“School has two school gates and there is a divide between who goes to which gate. Generally, people will go to the nearest gate which makes sense but it does have a bit of a ‘them and us’ feeling. At ‘my’ gate there is a gazebo in case of wet weather, it seems wrong to me that at the other gate, the Malden Manor end, there is no such shelter. Two of today’s pictures show this. It is like living in a divided world at times.”*

Feedback from the road show confirms that residents of privately owned housing tend to use the shops at the Malden Road end of Sheephouse Way. This was perceived as ‘nicer’ and ‘safer’ by those groups, with many stating that they avoided the station end if they could.

### 3.1.8 Culture, Ethnicity and Language

In interviews and during road shows a few participants identified cultural differences between national and ethnic groups as an issue that affected the formation of communities in Malden Manor. Overall, however, it was not seen as being as significant an issue as Malden Manor’s

socio-economic divisions.

During the recruitment phase for our research it became clear that a number of residents in Malden Manor with English as an additional language do face significant language barriers, and rely on their children to translate and communicate.

### 3.1.9 A Community Space

For many of our participants the need for the formation of a more vibrant community was exacerbated by the fact that Malden Manor does not have a central hub for residents to come together; a space that is dedicated to community use and could be easily accessed for community-based events.

For community meetings residents can and have used the nearby Richard Challoner School. However, whilst the school can provide rooms for meetings, participants reported that what was missing locally was:

- a) a space in which to hold larger community events, activities or classes
- b) an informal meeting place where they could ‘bump into people’.

### 3.1.10 The Manor Pub

The closure of the pub near Malden Manor Station has had an impact on the experience of local community. A few respondents welcomed the closure of the pub as they ‘never went in there’ or did not like ‘drunks hanging around outside’. At the same time a significant proportion of participants said that the pub had provided an informal meeting point; somewhere they could go ‘just to meet someone’, ‘just for a chat’ or ‘for a friendly ear, when things weren’t going so well’. Presently there is no space in Malden Manor that fills that gap.

### 3.1.11 The Shiraz Mirza Hall

A few participants believed the Shiraz Mirza Hall in Manor Park to be a space that had been available to the community in the past but which was no longer available.

The hall which was officially re-opened by Boris Johnson in 2009 after a renovation project is intended as a *'multi-cultural hub for many of the borough's residents, community and voluntary groups, providing an affordable venue to hire with excellent facilities'* ([shirazm.co.uk/new-malden/index.ph](http://shirazm.co.uk/new-malden/index.ph)).

From our interviews it is clear that very few residents around Sheephouse Way use the hall, are aware of its current use and function or consider it as a space that is available to the community.

Only one participant included the Shiraz Mirza Hall in her photo-diary. This particular participant is very positive about the hall as a community space.

#### **Photo-Diary Extract:**



*"This is the Shiraz Mirza Hall, right next to the park, great for parties and holding other events, we also have the Muslim Friday prayers "*

It is perhaps worth noting that in some instances, the perception of the centre as a space that was closed to them reinforced community divisions and prejudice. In particular a few residents saw the hall as a space that was exclusively open to Asian communities.

Either promoting the Shiraz Mirza Hall more widely or providing a community space for the local area more generally, could help overcome such perceptions.

### 3.1.12 Utilising and Developing Outside Public Space

One of Malden Manor's major assets is its green spaces, including Manor Park, Plough Green and the area around the Hogsmill. These are popular with some groups of residents but are still very much underused by others (see also section 3.5 below).

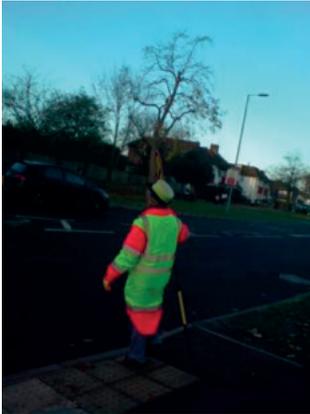
If green spaces were utilised and exploited more, they could potentially constitute the informal meeting places that many participants feel is lacking in Malden Manor.

### 3.1.13 Local Connectors

One of the themes that emerged from our research is the importance of what we term 'local connectors': individuals who build good relationships to others, play an active role in connecting people and contribute to the overall experience of community.

Diaries and interviews identified a series of local residents or local 'public' figures who filled this role, including for example friendly shopkeepers 'who recognise you' and who 'you can have a chat to', the lollipop lady, childrens' centre staff, residents who 'seemed to know everyone' or always 'had a friendly word'.

### Photo-Diary Extract:



*“Did school drop off. Photographed the Lollipop Lady. We love her. She’s always got a smile and hello for us whatever the weather. She’s also good for a chat on the way back on your own if you’re in the mood.”*

The importance of local connectors came out particularly strongly in road shows, where the majority of participants agreed with the importance of local public figures. The experience of community was strongly demonstrated by one particular case, where a local residents’ association collapsed simply because the chair of the association moved away:

*“There used to be a residents’ association here, but the person who organised it had to move away. [...] Having the association really made a difference. [...] We always had hanging flower baskets every year. Now we are not allowed to have them.”*

Local connectors are a significant foundation for the development of community and identifying and supporting potential connectors, is one way in which the community may be strengthened.

#### 3.1.14 Budding Residents’ Association

Associated with a small area of flats in Sheephouse Way is a new, but active residents’ association. Although still in its infancy, the association’s organisers are ambitious in terms of their planned scope and desired outcomes. They are being

supported by the Equalities and Community Engagement Team to organise their first Fun Day in August 2014 in an event which aims to bring the wider community together. Given the general dissatisfaction with the experience of community in the area, support for efforts such as these is important.

#### 3.1.15 Involvement in Shaping Place as a Catalyst for Community

Many of our participants expressed a desire for being involved in environmental improvements (see also section 3.5 below). As already explained, this desire was in part for the removal of the perceived stigma attached to living in council housing and poorly maintained areas more generally. In addition to this, there is also a connection between involvement in environmental improvements and local empowerment.

In interviews participants not only expressed dissatisfaction with the appearance of the area as such, but also with the fact that their lack of influence made them feel powerless.

For example, in one interview a participant expressed anger about the fact that for health and safety reasons their block was no longer allowed to put up hanging flower baskets or flower-pots outside their front doors. Here it was not only the fact that the blocks now ‘didn’t look as nice’ but also that policies such as these took away her sense of ownership of the place and community she lived in.

This could present an opportunity to combine environmental improvements with community-building activities.

#### 3.2 Accounting for Different Experiences

Our data suggests that residents have different experiences of Malden Manor and organise and experience their lives in the community differently. These experiences

are not straightforwardly related to traditional variables (age, income, class, ethnicity etc.), but relate to individual biographies, experiences and perceptions.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify distinct groups of concerns, structured around residents' interaction with and perceptions of the area and its communities. Three different categories of residents were identified, taking into consideration how much of their lives were spent in the area, how frequently they used local services and facilities, subjective feelings of community, security and connectedness and their views on quality of life:

- Connected Local
- Disconnected Local
- Disconnected and Not Local

The key characteristics of each of these groups is discussed in turn below.

### 3.2.1 Connected Local

Participants who:

- Reported spending the majority of their time within the local area and using local facilities and services
- Reported feeling positively connected to other residents and the services and facilities in the area, despite acknowledging gaps
- Are more likely to feel settled, secure and happy in the area
- Feel that Malden Manor has improved over time and is becoming a better place to live

### 3.2.2 Disconnected Local

Participants who:

- Reported spending the majority of their time within the local area and using local facilities and services
- Reported feelings of disconnection including loneliness, isolation and

insecurity

- Felt more likely to express feeling anxious, insecure and unsettled in the area
- Expressed a desire to leave the area

### 3.2.3 Disconnected and Not Local

Participants who:

- Live in Malden Manor but choose to spend the majority of their time in other places.
- Do not use, or actively avoid using, local facilities and services.
- Reported feeling personally happy but think the area is in decline and getting worse.

### 3.2.4 Reflections on the Groups

The data illustrated that these groups are on a sliding scale, with some people on the margins of one or two groups. It also showed that groups were not fixed, with a number of participants moving between them over time in response to different events; for example, meeting key people or engaging with specific services often facilitated connection whilst neighbours and friends moving on could prompt disconnection.

Interestingly, it was often key individuals, usually other very active residents, who were central to creating connections between people. In addition, whilst not all experiences and perceptions can be linked to traditional variables: participants in the *'Local, but Disconnected'* group tended to struggle economically and also have additional vulnerabilities, whilst those in the *'Disconnected and Not Local'* group tended to be better-off and residents of private houses.

Attempts to reduce health inequalities need to account for, and respond to, the lived experiences of these different groups of residents. This includes:

- Supporting the efforts made by connected local residents to engage others
- Developing engagement strategies for disconnected local residents
- Addressing the - sometimes very strong - perception of disconnected and not local residents that the area was undesirable

Considering these different needs also encourages us to recognise the importance of individuals, and not just more formal interventions or services, in building community. Here one of the groups that should be of concern is the disconnected local group. In order to illustrate the complex needs of individuals in this group, the next section presents a case-study of one of the participants we spoke to.

### 3.2.5 Case-Study: Barbara



Barbara's <sup>1</sup> case is a good example of a number of participants we came across during the research; some of whom felt very isolated and alienated in Malden

Manor. As a result they were also more afraid, and were either affected by or at risk from mental health problems.

Barbara is a carer for her disabled partner, and reportedly receives £60 per week in benefits. She bought a flat in a local authority owned block a few years ago. She now feels trapped as she cannot sell her flat but also does not qualify for the additional benefits and support that she might do if she were not a home-owner.

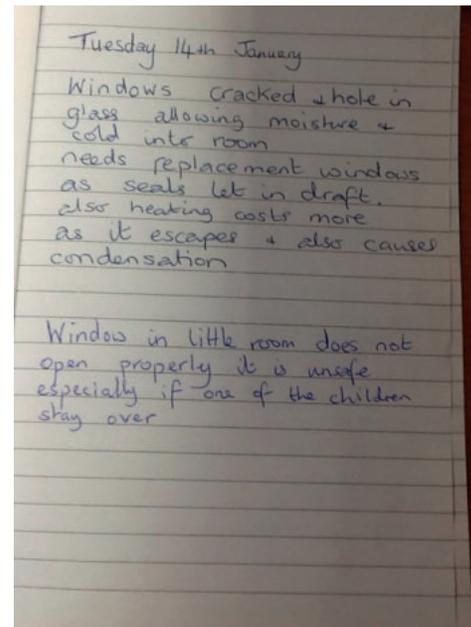
Barbara is very worried about security. In her flat there is a lock on every door, so that she can protect herself should intruders

enter her flat. She also struggles with fuel-poverty, which has been exacerbated by the poor insulation and old windows in her flat.

What emerged very clearly from Barbara's diary is how her circumstances have resulted in her being limited to a very small world. Her diary is very much focused on her flat and contains pictures of windows, cracking paint, and broken stairwells. Indeed, in terms of the outside world it only goes as far as the corner shops opposite the Sheephouse Way Estate and a necessary bus journey into New Malden to visit the GP (which is experienced as a big undertaking).

In her interviews Barbara also reported that she cannot get out much, and she is worried about interaction with others.

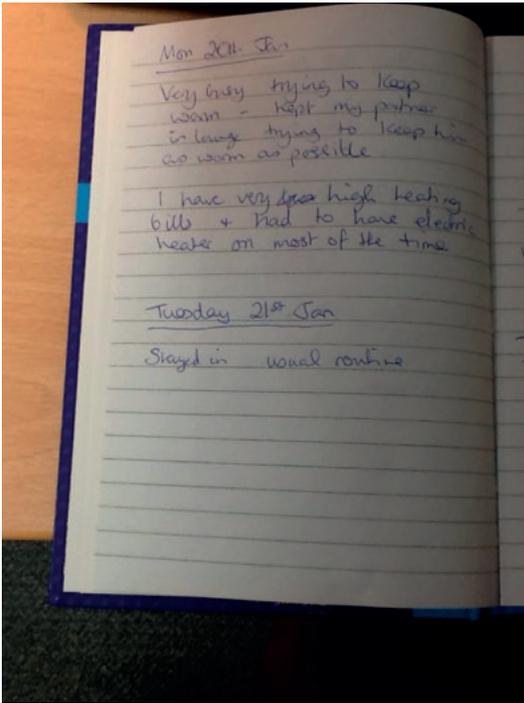
#### *Photo-Diary Extracts:*



<sup>1</sup> Name changed to preserve participant's anonymity



that she struggles to keep herself and her partner warm. However, these issues also affect her life more generally and in particular her ability to interact with or connect to others, and to seek help. Thus Barbara reports, the fact that she cannot heat her flat means she feels unable to receive visitors (including her grandchildren). This is one example of the way in which poverty contributes to social isolation.



It also highlights how important seemingly little things like cracked plaster or an unattractive stairwell are in this context. Barbara reported making a number of attempts to improve her physical surroundings, including painting sections of the flat stairwells herself, but the fact that Barbara is a carer combined with her poverty means that her resources are limited and she cannot leave her immediate environment all that easily. Cracked walls, or peeling paint take on an increased importance because these sites dominate Barbara's everyday lived experience. This is the extent of her world. In her diaries, her old windows are a symbol of her struggle to keep herself and her partner warm, to make ends meet and to carve out a life for herself.

Following our interview with Barbara, we were able to refer her case to the Warmer Homes Team at Kingston Council, and she received a home visit. However, following the visit she was still confused about the purpose of the visit and about what can be done to help her. She does not seem to have the confidence to follow up these calls, or deal with regulations and initiatives.

Barbara is not an isolated case in Malden Manor. We spoke to a number of participants whose world was very locally focused, but who nevertheless were very isolated. Another issue highlighted by Barbara's case is the difficulty in responding to the needs of this group. In particular Barbara seemed unable to engage in formal communication mechanisms. She is also unlikely to be able to join in programmes or organised networks of her own accord, but needs more intensive support.

Barbara's case highlights a number of issues. In the first instance, there is the wider significance of issues such as fuel-poverty and bad insulation. On one level these are very immediate concerns, given

### 3.3 Getting-By

Some participants reported struggling to make ends meet. For those who expressed feelings of social isolation it was clear that the daily challenge of living on an income that barely covered basic costs had a detrimental impact on their mental health and general feelings of well-being. Participants who were in this situation were more likely to disclose feelings of unhappiness, mental distress or having a diagnosed mental health issue such as depression, than other participants. Finding it difficult to get by was not, however, confined to people who self-reported feelings of social isolation, indeed, many of those who articulated strong feelings of connection to their community also recognised and discussed the challenges of living on a low income. One long-term resident in Malden Manor who reported having strong local ties said:

*“Most of us here live in poverty and it’s hard.”*

It was not just people who relied solely on out of work benefits that talked about the difficulties of living on a low income. Other groups, such as full-time carers and people in work but on low wages also discussed this issue:

*“We rely on my husband’s wages. I do work part-time as well but when you’ve got kids and all of the bills there isn’t very much to go round. It [money] never seems to go very far!”*

#### 3.3.1 Heating Homes

One of the biggest financial pressures in the data was the cost of fuel. A lot of participants completed their photo-diaries and were interviewed during the winter months, so it is perhaps unsurprising that for people living on a low income the cost of

gas and electricity was a very real and pressing issue. Many reported that it was a constant battle to heat their homes adequately and cook hot food. People reported managing this situation in a number of ways such as carefully monitoring their fuel use, putting limited and often very small sums on prepayment meters to ration use, only cooking hot food once a day, wearing extra clothes and using blankets when it got particularly cold, turning off radiators in all but the main room(s) and/or using alternative forms of heating such as electric fans or calor gas heaters:

*“The electricity is huge. I kept all of my receipts and added them up for a month; I think they added up to £121 per month! Because I can’t afford to put gas and electricity on all the time, I put £10 on the gas and I try to be careful. Just use it for baths and a bit of cooking so it lasts a bit longer and then I have an electric fan heater but they just use up so much money”.*

Having to be so conscious of fuel bills left some participants feeling exhausted and frustrated. Some also felt inadequate because they were unable to heat their homes. This feeling was particularly acute when individuals felt that the cold was having a detrimental impact on others in the household, particularly those they were responsible for caring for such as children or disabled relatives. Not being able to heat their homes properly or cook hot food added to the sense of isolation some felt because they were unable, or reluctant, to invite family and friends to visit or stay because of not being able to afford the additional heating, lighting and cooking.

A very different perspective on this issue was given by those participants living in the two blocks of flats that have received substantial improvements through the Better

Homes scheme. According to this group one of the most positive and helpful aspects on the improvements, which included the installation of new doors and windows, was greater energy efficiency and a reduction in fuel bills:

*“You know that here the financial strain that everyone had [in the flats] was their heating but the new doors and windows have made a massive difference. Everyone is saying how much better it is.... The heat stays in now, even if you’ve only had your heating on for a little while. Before, ten minutes after you’d turned the heating off it would be freezing again.”*

When talking about this issue participants seemed both upbeat and relieved about this outcome, and this shows how investment in energy efficiency schemes can pay significant dividends for local people trying to cope with fuel bills, and local authorities’ attempts to address fuel poverty.



### 3.3.2 Cost of other essential items

It was not just the cost of fuel that was an issue for participants. Other things that were raised as challenging included the lack of low cost healthy food, the cost of school uniforms and the price of travel:

*“Travelling anywhere is just so expensive, particularly in the morning. I’m trying to do a college course at the moment. You know, to make things*

*better for me and the children, get a job, that sort of thing. But often I just can’t go to morning classes because it’s too expensive. So I just sit at home, and try to catch up on reading, but I feel really down.”*

This quote communicates how not having enough money can prevent people from getting on and improving their lives, but, importantly, it also highlights how this is intimately connected to the way people feel about themselves.

The cost of communication was another significant issue. It is assumed that because there are so many ways to communicate in contemporary society that everyone is contactable all of the time. Throughout the research process it became clear, however, that few people living on a low income had access to a landline telephone at home. Given the way mobile technology has transformed the way we communicate this is perhaps unsurprising, but ‘pay-as-you-go’ packages for mobile phones can be expensive and leave people - when credit has run out - with no way to contact others. Difficulty contacting people who did not have the regular use of a telephone was raised as an issue by those who took their ability to communicate more for granted as this did make social interactions difficult. For example, arranging play dates or other everyday activities when people are in and out of contact is a challenge.

Similarly, participants on low incomes rarely had access to the internet at home, and were therefore, very restricted in their ability to communicate electronically via email or do other things online such as pay bills, purchase discounted goods or services and keep in regular contact with wider circles of friends and family. Residents were aware that the Internet was accessible at the local library, but this was not always convenient

for those who worked or had caring responsibilities. This is particularly important because many essential and everyday activities, such as looking and applying for work, accessing school reports and homework, organising travel arrangements and applying for benefits are now conducted almost exclusively online.

This suggests that not being able to afford to be in regular contact was impacting on people's ability to connect to others more widely in the community, and potentially was an important and often unrecognised form of social exclusion.

Tight budgets were further stretched by a lack of local services such as a cash machine that did not charge for withdrawals or a post office where items could be accurately weighed before posting.

**Photo-Diary Extracts:**



***"There's nowhere I can get money out without being charged. I can only take out small amounts of cash and can't afford to be charged every time."***

### 3.3.3 Coping strategies

Despite being aware that they were not alone in struggling to make ends meet, and that this was also the experience of others locally, participants spoke about this issue as one of individual responsibility. Many were hopeful that this was just a temporary phase that would be alleviated in the future through a change in their personal

circumstances:

***"There are lots of us on the poverty line but as soon as my kids get old enough I'll go back to work and so will a lot of the other mums."***

There was, however, perceived to be a lack of support locally to help people back into work and that this was exacerbated by a lack of community spaces where people could access the Internet or receive help searching and applying for work. Up until recently there were sessions run by JobCentre Plus at the Children's Centre but these were poorly attended and have stopped.

People reported that they budgeted carefully in response to their limited finances, but there was also evidence that some participants, especially those with robust local connections, had developed more collective responses to the challenges of living on a low income. Descriptions of borrowing basic food items, sharing the transport costs for food shopping trips with others that lived locally and other forms of mutual aid were present in the data. This was considered relatively common practice for some, and for those residents, there was a strong sense that this was customary because being a part of a community meant having a sense of collective responsibility to provide assistance for others when needed:

***"If I run out of sugar, upstairs is likely to have some. If they run out of toilet roll, then I'm likely to have some. But that's the sense of community again, like it used to be."***

Interestingly, despite being a key theme in interviews, 'getting by' was not really discussed at any length in the community events. This, possibly, is a reflection of the research sample, but might also be explained by a perfectly understandable

unwillingness to discuss these issues in public. It was also noted, however, that some people who did comment on this theme did seem genuinely shocked that people in the area might have been having these experiences, and this indicates a lack of knowledge and understanding about such issues amongst the more affluent sections of the population.

*“I just didn’t realise that people around here were having to worry like this. I suppose you just think that everyone is comfortably off.”*

#### 3.4 Safety and Security

Generally, people reported feeling safe in the local area. Long-term residents, and those who felt most connected in the local area, spoke about feeling very safe in their neighbourhood at all times of the day and night during interviews and at the Community road shows (see also section 3.6 below for a discussion of how safety perceptions differed amongst groups of residents). Feelings of safety for this group were intimately connected to feeling like they were able to trust those around them, and that they could confidently rely on others to come to their assistance if needed:

*“I know if I really needed help, if I was in trouble, I could go out there and shout help and someone would come and help me.”*

These participants were aware, however, that not all residents felt as confident about their safety as they did. It was acknowledged that for some the presence of children and young people in public spaces, particularly after dark, was the cause of some alarm. A number of residents living in flats near to Malden Manor Station complained of groups of teenage boys congregating in and sitting on the public stairs in the flats.

*“They eat and drink in the area and leave their litter, spitting, and also urinating.”*

*“I have written to the Council about the problem, they know the problem. I am really concerned because I think the Council is not doing enough.”*

Residents also expressed concerns at older children using Knollmead playground as the equipment there is more suited to young children.

It is important to note that not everyone saw the presence of young people in public space as problematic or a cause for concern. Long-term residents reported knowing many of these young people since they were small children and felt able to approach them and intervene when behaviour got out of hand. It was recognised that not everyone in the area would have the confidence to do this, particularly newer residents without local connections.

Indeed participants with teenage children did understand these tensions as being, at least in part, as a consequence of their being very few facilities for secondary school age children in the area.

*“The perception some people have is that there are ten kids hanging about and it’s like ‘have you seen that lot, there’s a gang up there’, but it’s not. It’s not their fault because there’s nowhere else to go so they all congregate in the warmest and least wet place they can find.”*

It was noted that there used to be a local space dedicated to young people, but that this had been closed in recent years. This has left young residents and their friends with nowhere to go and meet up, and when it rains or the weather is cold they move into the stairwells of the flats out of necessity. Some participants felt that providing more places for older children to play (for example

there are no ball games allowed in the gardens surrounding the flats) or simply 'hang out' was a priority.

The situation suggests that local young people lack a suitable area or place to meet (see also our discussion of young people's feedback in section 3.7 below). Children and young people are quite a large resident group and are, therefore, entitled to appropriate service provision. One solution might be that investment is sought and a suitable meeting place is found for local young people, and, furthermore, that this group are actively involved in the process, thus fostering a sense of connection and ownership to whatever is established.

Unfortunately young people were not asked to complete photo-diaries or be interviewed for this piece of research. The feedback we received from ideas cards (discussed in section 3.7 below), goes some way to make up for this gap. However, going forward, it would be useful to obtain a more detailed picture of their views and perceptions in order to assess their needs.

#### 3.4.1 Safe and Unsafe Spaces

In addition to this, some participants cited feeling generally safe, but unsafe in particular parts of the area. Residents in the private houses reported feeling less safe in the Sheephouse Way part of the area (see 3.5.5 for further discussion). Malden Manor station was viewed by some as rather



desolate and poorly lit.

Others said that the parade of shops by Sheephouse Way were also very quiet in the evening and that a lack of other people made them feel uncertain about using that space at night. This, it was suggested, had been exacerbated by the closure of the local pub:

*“When it was open at least there were people using the area but now its derelict there’s no-one out at night and this can feel a bit intimidating.”*

Additionally, some participants reported that they were reluctant to use open green spaces in the area because they felt quite isolated (see 3.5.8 for further discussion of this).

It was not just concerns about crime or disorderly behaviour that fostered feelings of insecurity. At the community road shows, a significant number of residents reported feeling unsafe when crossing roads, particularly at junctions and/or when traffic was heavy and the roads congested. It is important to recognise that it is not unusual for people living in a place surrounded by busy roads to worry about their personal safety, and that of others, particularly children. Road safety is, however, rarely considered in discussions about local community safety, which often focus on a narrower set of issues.

#### 3.4.2 Feeling Unsafe

A small minority of participants reported that they always felt very unsafe in the area. This group were often new residents who in other ways were socially isolated and had few local connections. This group, although small, did perceive that the area was a routinely risky place to live. Local crime data suggests that the ward has some of the lowest crime figures in Greater London, and

the view that Malden Manor had become a safer place to live in recent years was articulated at community road shows.

*“This used to be quite a bad place really, but it’s got much, much better around here. A lot safer.”*

*“Do you feel better about being in the neighbourhood now?”*

*“Yes, and I am here a lot because I come here every day for work.”*

The disjuncture between the general lived experience and view that Malden Manor was safe, and getting safer, and the group of residents who view the area as very risky needs further attention. This is because social isolation can cause a general fear of crime and lack of trust in others as well as being a barrier to engaging with other local people or services. The general health and well-being of people in this situation can also be deeply affected if steps are not taken to alleviate their concerns and foster community connections.

#### 3.4.3 Safety at Home

As this discussion so far attests issues of safety and security were always raised in the data as being intrinsically connected to the outside – the stairwell, the street, the green space. Safety in the home was not discussed by any of the participants despite the fact that research shows that for some groups, women in particular, victimisation is more likely to occur in private, rather than public, spaces. This observation is not being included to suggest that participants should have raised this as an issue, but more to acknowledge that the design of the research might not have been sensitive enough to capture such experiences, and if more insights into the impact of safety or victimisation on health were required a more

targeted piece of research would be necessary.

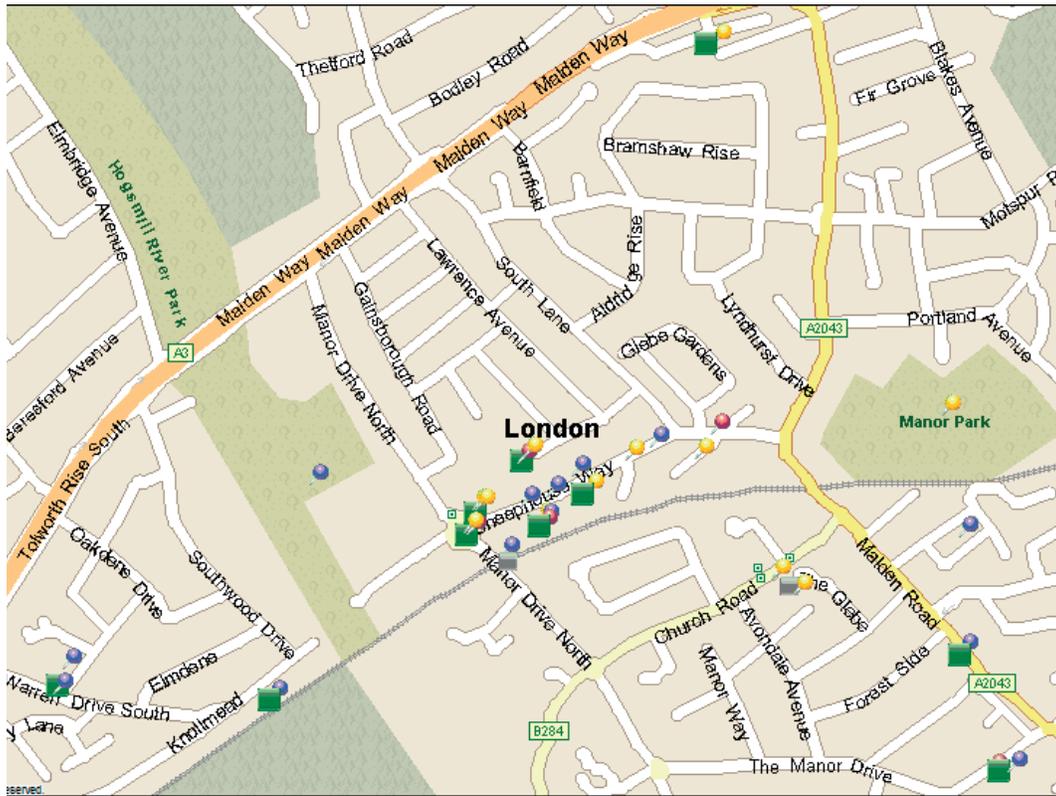
#### 3.4.4 Safety Maps

Issues around safety was explored further at the research road shows.

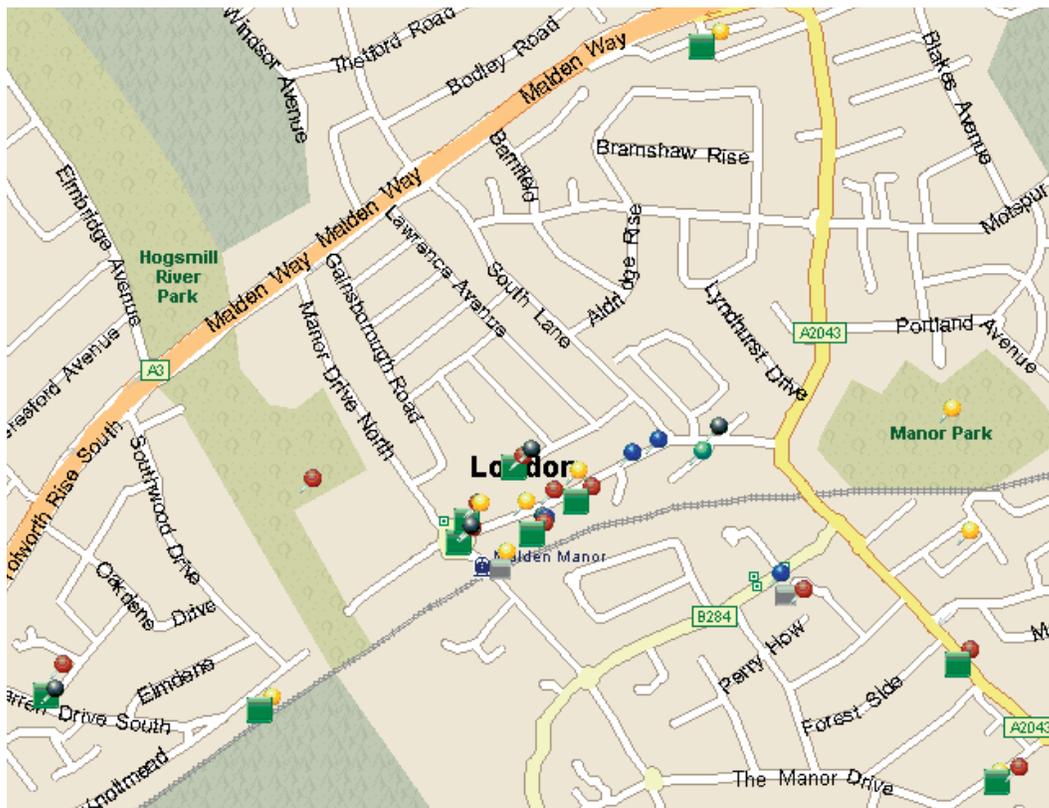
The findings from this are represented in maps on the next pages. These show perceptions of unsafe spaces overall and broken down by ‘place of residence’ and age.



Perceptions of Unsafe Spaces in Malden Manor



Perceptions of Risk by Place of Residence, Yellow: Shepheouse Way estate, Red: South Lane estate, Mauve: wider area



Perceptions of Risk by Age Group, black: 16-24, red: 25-40, yellow: 41-55, blue: 56-64, green: 65-75

### 3.5 Caring for the Environment

Parts of the area around Malden Manor are environmentally very attractive. There are a number of open green spaces, including spaces used for recreation and amenity purposes (Manor Park, Knollmead Playground), spaces managed for nature conservation (the Hogsmill Open Space), spaces that have a specific function (Malden Manor Allotments and Manor Park Nursery), public open spaces (Plough Green, and areas around South Lane and Sheephouse Way Estate) and green verges and spaces along local roads and pavements. Overall these spaces add (or have the potential) to add to the overall sense of place and character of the area.

However, whilst many of these spaces are well maintained, Malden Manor also contains pockets that are less well

maintained. As a result we often received very different feedback from participants about their environment. What is clear is that the physical environment - how people interact with it and with their local community is clearly very significant to local residents. The physical environment provided a backdrop to participants' daily lives and played a strong role in shaping how residents and visitors felt in their neighbourhood. It also sometimes provided a lens through which the condition of the area and its community were judged (or perceived to be judged). With regard to the latter, visual cues such as the type, quality and condition of housing, the prevalence of green spaces and flowers, litter, graffiti and signs of vandalism were often interpreted as signals about the condition of the community.

### 3.5.1 Housing: Socio-Geographical Characteristics

There are large differences in the type and quality of housing in Malden Manor and a striking feature drawn out from interviews is that the Malden Manor community and its physical landscape is punctuated and divided into two distinct areas by geographical concentrations of different housing types.

At the station end, there is a concentration of blocks of flats, with up to six stories. These are predominantly social housing, and rented, usually referred to as Council flats or Council estate. As one moves eastwards, away from the station the housing more typically consists of terraced and semi-detached houses with private gardens, providing accommodation to owner-occupiers. The Eastern end of Malden Manor was described by residents as being more affluent (see also section 3.1.7 above).

### 3.5.2 Housing: Condition of Social Housing

Many of the council flats near Malden Manor station have recently been renovated and many residents (living both within and outside of the actual flats) expressed their relief at the recent maintenance of these flats when windows were replaced and the exteriors renovated.



*"These council flats are being repaired. At last with*

*years of living in awful conditions"*



Nevertheless, although these renovation works were very much appreciated and some participants reported how *"just a bit of maintenance can make all the difference to the environment"*, many participants still expressed dissatisfaction over the fact that:

- The houses had been in a bad state of repair for a very long time, before the current renovations were initiated
- Not all flats have been done-up and many flats are still in a bad state of repair. Participants were unclear over 'if and when' other flats were going to be renovated.
- There are still many disadvantages of living in these flats, which still lack some modern amenities. Some residents identified the absence of a lift as a particular problem for older residents who often have to walk up several flights of stairs - up six flights - to reach their flat.



### 3.5.3 Housing Maintenance and Social Stigma

Some participants expressed concern over the stigma associated with social housing, which they felt had been amplified in Malden Manor as a result of its dilapidated appearance. Here participants felt environmental improvements and housing maintenance might go a long way to alleviating existing social divisions (see also discussion of social division in section 3.1.5 above).

### 3.5.4 Malden Manor Pub

Many residents expressed anxiety over the future of the now empty building, and frustration at the lack of communication about planning applications received by the local authority. As the following diary extract shows, some hoped that it would be developed into something that would provide services to the community:

*Extracts from Photo-Diaries:*

***“Walked to the local shops – pub still for sale. Area looking derelict. Wouldn’t it be great if future development could be used to give young people some kind of club, meeting place etc.”***



***“This is a pub that has been closed down, so glad no more drunks hanging about. I think it needs to be made into a youth club or something for children to go to during the holidays, kids get really bored around here.”***



***“On the way home I noticed washing hanging out on the roof of the closed down pub!”***

Others hoped for a retail development but most expected that it would be sold to a developer and would be turned into flats.

### 3.5.5 The Area around Malden Manor Station

A number of participants pointed out that the area around Malden Manor Station was particularly uninviting. It was frequently described as a “No-man’s Land” and as a magnet for fly-tipping and littering. A number of participants pointed out the station building itself and that the pylon in the station forecourt was to a large extent responsible for the uninviting look and feel of the place.



### 3.5.6 Parking and Traffic

Many residents reported that the area surrounding the local retail parade near to Malden Manor Station becomes very congested with traffic and it can be very difficult to find a parking space.

Congestion is exacerbated by parked cars. As there are currently no parking restrictions in place, the area around the station and shops is used regularly by commuters catching trains from the station.

There were also some suggestions that parents with children attending a local school take the parking spaces. A consequence of the lack of parking spaces is that potential customers of the local retailers are reduced. Residents felt traffic and parked cars made walking anywhere very unpleasant.

#### *Extracts from Photo-Diary:*

*“As shown in the attached photos we have continuous parking on both sides of the road throughout the day causing traffic flow problems which are at their worst during both morning and evening rush hour periods and, to a certain extent, during the rest of the day. This also causes problems to pedestrians trying to cross the road and to cyclists using the road.”*



### 3.5.7 Green Spaces

As already noted (see section 3.1 above), the abundance of open green spaces is very much an asset to the area. However, these green spaces are also not used as much as they could be. The following sections look at some of the more significant green spaces in more detail.

### 3.5.8 Manor Park

For some of our participants, Manor Park appears to provide a very important social space, particular in the summer when the weather is fine. Some respondents described areas of the park that get very busy on sunny days.

#### *Photo-Diary Extract:*



*“This is part of the play area in the Manor Park, really lovely to be in the summer, atmosphere is great.”*

For others Malden Manor’s green spaces featured rarely in their daily routines and were not included in these participants’ diaries. In interviews participants reported that they hardly used these spaces, mainly

because they did not always feel safe. Very few participants cited perceived threats as reasons for their reluctance to use the park. Rather it was perceptions of being alone and the fact that at certain times, certain sections of the park were rather quiet that made residents feel insecure:

*“I wouldn’t go to the Park on my own, like for a jog or anything. ...I don’t know if anything has ever happened to anyone in the park, in that particular park, but it worries me”*



*“For me the best part of Manor Park. Would love to use it all the time but sometimes I get worried to be alone in the park so don’t go on my own.”*

### 3.5.9 Plough Green

Plough Green was pointed out as an important outside space for the community. It provides a location for community events such as the summer scout fair, but most of the time is unused.

### 3.5.10 The Hogsmill

The Hogsmill was described as a beautiful green open space, which is popular with dog-walkers.

**Photo-Diary Extract:**

*“Hogsmill Valley: The most attractive part of living in this area of Old Malden is the ease of access to the Hogsmill Valley. This is a great place for dog walking and other outdoor leisure activities. It has changed little over the last 40 years and provide*

*opportunity for peace and quiet away from the general disruption caused by traffic in the area.”*



However, this space is still very much under-used by many residents. In interviews many participants reported that they did not always feel safe using the Hogsmill. Again, for the most part this was not the result of any specific dangers or visible threats. Rather it was a feeling of ‘being alone’ that made participants weary of using the space.

### 3.5.11 Outdoor Facilities for Young Children

Knollmead Playground and Manor Park provide open outdoor play-space, but for young children (supervised by an adult). For those parents living at the station end this is some distance to walk. Participants mentioned the need for a play area within the garden spaces between the flats on the Sheephouse Way estate.

### 3.5.12 Outdoor Facilities for Older Children

Manor Park does provide some activities for older children. In particular it seems some older children do sometimes use the exercise equipment (see image section 3.5.8 above).

Unfortunately, however, residents living in the semi-detached houses nearer to the Park also felt intimidated by young people occupying the Park.

### 3.5.13 Green Space and Socio-Geographic Divisions

A number of residents commented on a perceived division (between East and West) in the area. One resident commented on the visible differences between the two places. For example, the environment in what was perceived to be the more up-market end was characterised by an abundance of green space and flowers and by its proximity to Manor Park.

Another resident described how green verges get wider and are planted with flowers as one approaches the park.

Usage data gathered at the road shows, does not suggest a social division in who uses the park, so such perceptions are more about the symbolic and aesthetic value of locations.

### 3.5.14 Litter and Fly-Tipping

*“... the area is nice and then you come to this part..”*

Many areas around Malden Manor are well-kept and tidy. Nevertheless for many participants, litter, fly-tipping and rubbish collections were a source of dissatisfaction. The issue of litter was continually raised on ideas cards, during interviews, in road shows and is well documented in the photo diaries.

For many participants, litter and rubbish lying in public spaces again constituted a symbol that influenced wider perceptions about the character of the area, the people who live in it and the attitude of the Council. An abundance of litter (together with unkempt verges and hedges as well poor visibility and lighting) sent the signal to some people that certain areas of Malden Manor were ‘rough’ or even dangerous.

Several residents identified the area immediately surrounding Malden Manor Station and in particular a rough track leading between Sheeppouse Way and the station as especially problematic in terms of litter.

#### Photo-Diary Extracts:



*“This is the ugly side of Malden Manor, near the station, it’s like a dump yard and the Council is doing nothing about it.”*

Several residents felt that the presence of litter suggests that people who live in the area do not care about their environment or about others. It may also be interpreted that the Council is uncaring or is in some way not carrying out its responsibilities.

A possible preventative measure might be to provide more public bins, and consider a design that better contains rubbish, preventing the wind from blowing it away and animals from removing it. One interviewee suggested that residents should be provided with large dustbins:

*“I don’t think the Council actually provide them with large enough bins. I mean there are a lot of people living in those flats... The bins outside those flats are always overflowing’.*

### 3.6 Local Facilities and Services

Generally participants were very satisfied with local services and considered this to be a positive aspect of life in the area. Residents felt that local health services were of a good quality and accessible. For example, getting an appointment with a GP was considered a straightforward process. It was also noted that there was a wide range of supermarkets and other shops within a reasonable distance, although some residents found the cost of transport did limit their ability to take full advantage of this (see 3.3). Services for specific groups were also considered to be very good, for example, it was felt that older residents were generally well catered for, and because many had lived in the area for a long time - some since the flats were first built - were well aware of the local services available to them.

#### 3.6.1 Transport

Overall participants were very happy with public transport in Malden Manor. This connects residents to Central London and to larger shopping facilities in New Malden.

It was noticeable, however, that routines were very much determined by available public transport links (thus for example very few residents travelled into Kingston Town Centre which requires a long bus-journey).

Issues that were reported included:

- No lift at the train-station. This was a problem for wheelchair users, parents with buggies or people with heavy bags and shopping.
- No members of staff to provide help at

the train station (with a ticket office that is frequently closed).

- No toilet at the train station.
- Crowded buses during peak hours. It was suggested that a more frequent service could alleviate this problem. Residents were also keen on having a faster service that ran direct into Kingston Town Centre.

#### 3.6.2 Old Malden Library

There are various activities that take place within the library (including rhyme-time for young children and a knitting circle). Participants were generally positive about the library as a local asset. However, only a few of our participants mentioned the library as a place that they used regularly or frequently.

#### 3.6.3 Schools

Interviews with local residents suggest that the schools in Malden Manor are perceived to be good.

**Malden Manor Primary School**) - The majority of participants use Malden Manor Primary School. For some the school also provides a considerable focus and/or resource for the community. Others expressed dissatisfaction with the sense of community at Malden Manor School (see also section 3.1 above).

**Malden Parochial School** (Church of England Primary School) – Very few of our participants used Malden Parochial School. There was a notable perception amongst some groups of residents that this school catered to a more middle-class demographic group and was less engaged in the area.

**Richard Challoner School** (Catholic Secondary School) – This is considered to be a good school, and at least one group of

residents benefits from using the school for its monthly meetings. Nevertheless there is an endemic perception that whilst Richard Challoner is in Malden Manor, it is not part of it. This perception is particularly linked to the fact that the school is dedicated to educating children from catholic families, and rarely offers places to local children. Several of our participants had tried to send their children to the school, but ended up having to travel to secondary schools that are much further afield.

#### 3.6.4 Old Malden Children's Centre

*"It was fabulous, it was an absolute godsend ... a lifesaver."*

The children's centre is very well used and was seen as a very valuable resource by parents of young children.

It is worth mentioning, however, that a few residents expressed a desire for a children's playgroup that they could run themselves. They felt that something 'organised by local mums' might provide a more sociable setting in which to meet other parents and carers.

#### 3.6.5 Shops

Malden Manor encompasses two distinct parades of shops; one at the Malden Road end and one near Malden Manor Station.

Again, some participants reported a perceived social divide between these two parades. Plough Parade at Malden Road was often described as providing a better range of goods, but it was also often described as 'nicer'. The range of shops at the station end was sometimes described as relatively restricted, particularly with regard to the availability of healthy food.

There was also some concern about what some local shops on the parade were being used for. It was reported that despite looking like shops, some units were rarely open

during business hours or were places where it was suspected that criminal activity was taking place.

#### Photo-Diary Extract:

*"It's now clear that the 'Karaoke Club' has ceased trading but there is a new 'shop' labelled 'Health and Beauty'. My suspicions are that this is a similar business to that of the Karaoke and am surprised that this has been allowed."*



Nevertheless, residents living near Malden Manor station very much appreciated the local shops and cafes in their parade; particularly as they provided a community focus. Shopkeepers were described as friendly. And although the shops might not provide a hub of activity or engagement, they nevertheless appear to add to a feeling of a warm and friendly community:

*"They might not have a great selection, but it's really good to have something close. I'm down there a lot and I sometimes have a chat with the chap in the Londis."*

*"I don't use them all that much but I do use them and I kind of feel they do recognise me".*

#### 3.6.6 Post-Office

A few years ago the local Malden Manor post office closed. This means that many residents now have to travel to New Malden or Worcester Park to access a post office.

### Photo-Diary Extract:



*"I took a picture of a small parcel with a large letter stamp on it. In reality I have no idea how much this costs to post. It might not be a large letter but there is no local post office. It's 20 mins there and back from the nearest one (Worcester Park or New Malden High Streets) so I just put on possibly a more expensive stamp that needed because of the faff of actually going to the post office."*

During the community road shows, we received different feedback with regard to the perceived need for a post-office branch.

It became clear that many residents with cars felt it was no problem driving to Worcester Park/New Malden branches, whereas residents who relied on public transport found the absence of a local post-office branch had a big impact on their quality of life.

### 3.6.7 The Recent Loss of Services

It was noted by a number of participants that that the area had lost some services recently that were viewed as essential to maintain and enhance quality of life. Top of that list was the closure of the local housing office. This was considered a backward step by some participants as the office, and the staff who worked there, were viewed as providing an important link between residents and the local authority. Participants also felt strongly that the absence of the housing office would lead to problems in the future as issues went

unaddressed.

### 3.6.8 Gaps in Services: Facilities for Young People

One of the biggest issues participants in road shows and interviews spoke about is the lack of facilities for young people, including older school-age children and teenagers.

As we have pointed out throughout the report, participants consistently worried about the fact that young people were 'hanging around' in parks, stairwells and other public spaces. They also felt that there were not many spaces for them to go to, or much else for them to do. Whilst provision for younger children was good, older children and teenagers were clearly missing out.

It is worth noting that Malden Manor's social divisions might present barriers to young people accessing those limited activities or services that are available to them. At our road show on Plough Green during the Scouts Summer Fair, several participants pointed to the Scouts and to the youth provision offered by local churches. These facilities/activities clearly do not appeal to a significant proportion of Malden Manor's young people. In particular, it seems hardly any young people from the Sheephouse Way Estate participate in the Scouts (based at the Malden Road end).

The need for more facilities for young people also emerges from the ideas cards filled in by teenagers attending Malden Manor School, which we discuss in section 3.7 below.

### 3.6.9 Gaps in Services: Reaching out to Vulnerable Residents and those experiencing Social Isolation

In section 3.1 and 3.2 we provide a detailed discussion of the social isolation faced by a proportion of residents in Malden Manor. It is also clear that these residents had additional vulnerabilities that exacerbated their isolation (being a carer, having a disability or language barrier).

One response to this issue would be to work with local partners to identify individuals that are socially isolated and target specific programmes or interventions at this group, for example a befriending or mentoring service. Research has shown that befriending is a very cost effective way to tackle loneliness and social isolation, and might prove a key component of a response to this issue in Malden Manor.

One of the downsides to taking an individualised approach, however, is that people who are socially isolated are not always known to the authorities, indeed, they are one of the groups least likely to be on the radar. Taking such a targeted approach might, therefore, not tackle the most isolated or vulnerable people.

Another way of approaching this issue is to provide more opportunities for group interaction (both informal and formal) or increase the number of volunteering opportunities. Taking a more general approach that focuses on increasing the level of connectedness in a place could provide another additional way to tackle this issue.

Whatever approach is taken it is important to consider:

Additional barriers will exist for this group, for example, mobility issues or the demands

of caring responsibilities that need to be acknowledged whatever response is taken.

Any additional services or opportunities need to be carefully communicated to attract this group.

When services are being reduced or scaled back due to budgetary constraints the impact on people who are socially isolated should be taken into consideration.

### 3.7 Feedback from Children and Young People

Comments from the ideas cards filled in by teenagers on the Sheephouse Way estate and by local children attending Malden Manor Primary School provided us with some insight into the needs and desires of young people living in the area.

Significantly, the comments made by the young people participating in this exercise back up the themes and observations made by adult participants in the course of road shows, photo-diaries and interviews.

#### 3.7.1 Improving the appearance of Malden Manor

Many young people also felt that Malden Manor could be tidier, cleaner and more attractive. Young people and children were just as concerned about the build up of rubbish in certain areas as adult participants had been:

*“I think there should be more recycling because rubbish is sometimes on the floor. There should be more recycling bins too. Thank you.”*

*“Stop the littering. Have a sort of box where all the people who smoke can go in there and smoke so none of the smoke can affect us.”*

Many mentioned improving green spaces in particular. There was also a noticeable focus on improving the appearance of the roundabout near Malden Manor Station (through planting flowers etc.)

*“...near the roundabout there could be more flowers and trees. Near Londis and the pharmacy we could have it a bit cleaner. NO MORE GRAFFITI. ...We could also have a bouquet of flowers and a pond full of creatures and colourful fish, where we could have our science lessons.”*

*“On the roundabout we could have lots of flowers! ...and you could clear all the graffiti. ...We could have a place to visit where butterflies are inside. I love nature.”*

### 3.7.2 Young People on Community

Most also stressed that people in Malden Manor were friendly and that they like the community they lived in. They also emphasised the importance of ‘local connectors’ in their community:

*“I like the thing that people are friendly. My favourite person in Maldone is X because she is very nice, nice to talk to, friendly and she is like family.”*

*“I like the area I live in because everyone’s polite, they are friendly. I like Malden Manor because people are like family in Maldone they help each other out. My favourite person in Maldone is x because she’s like a 2nd mum to everyone. I would like to see a youth centre because there is nothing for us to do round Malden Manor. I would like the block to be a bit cleaner.”*

### 3.7.3 Activities for Young People

Like adults that participated in the photo-diary-phase, the young people that filled in ideas cards or participated in the exercise at school stressed that there was not enough to do in Malden Manor.

*“I think we should have more to do on manor”,* said one girl. Others specifically pointed out the absence of a youth club and the lack of play equipment for older children and young people:

*“I would like a youth club at Malden Manor because there is nothing to do for teenagers around here.”*

*“It is not as we want it, we need more equipment round the area as we have Knollmead park local, but it is for younger kids. I was thinking along the lines of a youth club or just some chairs / sofa with shelter above and maybe a set of gym equipment like they have in Manor Park at the top of Sheephouse Way or a park similar to Blagdon Park as that is for more older kids. Equipment such as basketball / football court, gym equipment mostly just a lounge to hang in.”*

*“I would like: a skateboard park, better pavement, toy shops, paintball, bonfire area and basketball.”*

*“Turn the pub with lots of graffiti on it into a youth club. ...The park is ok for 5-7 year olds but it should have more grown up games. Make a youth club for children to make new friends and just be themselves.”*

Young people were also aware of other children ‘hanging around’ because of the lack of activities. *“I think it would be better if the boys didn’t hang on the block”* said

one girl. They were also keen not be perceived as 'disrespectful' or disruptive:

*“We don’t cause trouble we don’t hate anyone or are disrespectful to them either, the case is one resident in particular that complains a lot for silly reasons that are uncalled for because we dress different people look at us different and we may put across a picture that isn’t very nice but we are respectful to everybody in the estate as what happened last year at no. 20 was not to do with us but we stayed to help get rid of them! Hope you take this into consideration.”*

The feedback from young people confirms the observation we discussed before that Malden Manor is in need of more facilities and activities for young people.

#### 4. Developing Recommendations

Following the analysis the final report seeks to make recommendations in the following areas:

##### 4.1 Community

###### Short Term:

Explore and develop joint activities that bring different groups in Malden Manor together, and in which residents can use and develop existing interests/skills.

Identify key community contacts, individuals, groups or organisations.

Explore the potential options for a community space (both a dedicated space for activities and an informal meeting space/hub).

Begin producing a plan that is focused on responding to social isolation.

Consider the needs of children and young people in services for this group.

Explore ways Richard Challoner School could become more accessible to local children.

###### Medium Term:

Develop a package of strategies to counter social divisions, bringing the community together and dispelling fear.

Provide support for key community contacts and development opportunities.

Take steps towards the provision of a community space for residents.

Work with partners to finalise the plan to address social isolation.

Promote children and young people as residents of Malden Manor and work with them to develop services/youth provision in the area.

###### Long Term:

Evaluate the impact of strategies that address social division, taking particular account of feelings of connectedness.

Work with partners to begin delivering on plan to tackle social isolation and evaluate its impact.

##### 4.2 Getting By

###### Short Term:

Produce a map that highlights critical points of expenditure for individuals and families living on a low-income (for example, fuel in the winter, communication, cost of small repairs, school uniforms and trips etc.) Consider needs of those living in privately rented accommodation and owner-occupiers as well as people who rent their homes from the local authority.

###### Medium Term:

Use maps to work with partners and the local community to develop social initiatives that alleviate poverty, for example, establishing a low cost repairs service, a local food growing project or offering travel subsidies to adult learners.

Expand fuel poverty initiatives to include other groups such as families with small children, private renters and carers.

Explore ways to increase the communication capacity of low income groups, for example, through the provision of community wifi.

**Long Term:**

Deliver and evaluate social initiatives.

Evaluate impact of increasing connectedness through communication.

additional services that were highlighted as lacking in the local area in consultation with relevant residents and stakeholders – post office, no charge cash machine, housing office, youth provision, community space.

### 5.3 Safety and Security

**Short Term:**

Develop a communications strategy between the Police, Safer Kingston Partnership and residents about the relative safety of the area and partnership work being conducted to tackle crime.

**Medium Term:**

Develop strategies that seek to support those who experience social isolation to help support them being better connected locally.

Support group activities in local parks and green spaces to encourage use and promote feelings of safety.

Explore how environmental improvements around Malden Manor station could improve feelings of safety and security.

### 4.5 Environment

**Short Term:**

Work with relevant stakeholders and local residents to see what can be done about the appearance of the environment including rubbish and recycling and traffic management.

**Medium Term:**

Encourage the use of Green Spaces and examine how play facilities might be upgraded or improved.

Continue to facilitate methods of resident involvement and resident led accountability in the Better Homes scheme.

### 4.4 Local Services and Facilities

**Short Term:**

Explore how existing children and youth services, such as the Scouts, can be opened up to young people from Sheephouse Way.

Improve communication with/information from the local authority to residents on local planning issues, e.g. the pub, and other relevant matters. Take into account the communication issues highlighted in this report.

**Medium Term:**

Explore opportunities for the provision of

## 5. The Way Forward

The next step following publication of this report will be to formally close Phase 1 - the research stage of the project, and to open Phase 2 - the implementation stage. This will see the establishment of a steering group to drive forward the recommendations of this report. The steering group will comprise of residents, local Councillors, Council staff and partners working together side by side to agree the recommendations and prioritise them into short (6 months), medium (1 year) and long-term (2 years +). The group will have an essential role in monitoring the action plan and ensuring that recommendations are taken forward appropriately.

any relevant policies and initiatives to the Steering Group– both strategically and on a Neighbourhood level.

### 5.1 Neighbourhood Community Plan

There is a clear fit with some of the priorities identified in the recommendations of this report and those already identified in the Maldens & Coombe Neighbourhood Community Plan, which contains priorities identified by local people across the Neighbourhood, and links to the overarching Kingston Plan.

Importantly, the Neighbourhood Community Planning framework has already established links with partners on a Neighbourhood level, and these networks can be utilised here to achieve the recommendations set out above.

The Malden Manor action plan will also form part of the overarching Neighbourhood Community Plan and will therefore be accountable to local community leaders as well as providing the facility for regular updates to be reported back at Neighbourhood Committees.

As part of this linking mechanism, the Neighbourhood Manager will feed back on