

Report on a Weekend with Residents from the Falmouth Beacon Estate, New Cross Gate and Redruth North

This weekend was the 'return visit' following a highly successful weekend earlier in the year when residents from the Falmouth Beacon estate went and spent a weekend with residents from the New Cross Gate estate in London. We were privileged to be invited to share this weekend and make observations. This is an interim report of what was a truly remarkable weekend for our children and us. It became immediately apparent that we could not stand back and observe; rather we, and in particular our children, became part of the weekend. What this report necessarily cannot capture is the warmth and generosity of spirit which flowed between the communities throughout the weekend.

1. Background Pertaining to Three Communities

(i) Falmouth Beacon estate

Two health visitors (Hazel and Phil) identified a 'forgotten estate': the Falmouth Beacon Estate, comprising the areas of Penwerris and Old Hill. Hazel and Phil realised that the estate had reached a point of 'no return'. They identified 20 people from Penwerris whom they felt could 'kick start' a process of renewal by setting up a Residents Association. Of the 20 originally identified, five turned up and formed the Penwerris RA. These five then knocked on everyone's door and tried to get people interested in the residents association and hence to get the estate moving towards renewal. This galvanised the estate and an unstoppable momentum for change began. More or less simultaneously, the Old Hill Community Association had been reconstituted, and again, by knocking on doors and talking with residents, they were seeking to start a process of renewal. In a short time, the two Associations formed the Beacon Partnership, realising that by working together, they could achieve more. The focus was very much on trying to respond to small-scale needs in the community, but through an early success in securing funding for energy action from the Capital Challenge Grant, the Partnership was able to begin a process of modernising the heating systems in houses and flats on the estate which provided a massive boost to the self esteem of the estate.

It should not be underestimated how bad things had got on the estate – the head teacher spoke of 6 year olds having to be taken home because they were drunk. It was known to outsiders in Falmouth as 'Beirut'. Drugs and car crime were particular problems, but there was also very serious mental and social care problems on the estate.

From the outset, it is worth stressing some points regarding the initiation of the process of renewal:

1. Hazel and Phil recognised that the move for renewal had to come from the community; they (Phil and Hazel) did not knock on doors – even in their trusted position as Health visitors, they would not have got the same response as the people living on the estate

2. In speaking with the community, it quickly became evident that environmental issues were most important. The residents planned and installed a series of traffic calming measures. Dog waste was identified as a particularly common issue, and so the RA got the council to install more dog waste bins. Interestingly, distribution of waste bins is calculated on a *per capita* basis of residents, irrespective of the number of dogs on the estate. This constituted a ‘quick win’ for the residents, and provided evidence of what could be achieved; perhaps more importantly, both initiatives showed that successful outcomes were tied to the specificity of local needs and local knowledge, and that this was often in conflict with the objective strategies informing higher level decision making processes.
3. Partnerships between the community and the stake-holder agencies were formed:
 - i) There were always more people from the community than agencies; this was seen as crucial to preserve the community voice, to provide a critical mass of residents
‘There had to be more of us than them- that way we could tell them what we needed’ – Falmouth estate resident
 - ii) Partnerships were made on the basis of what the community wanted to change, *not* around money that was available – grant specifications were frequently ‘tailored’ in bids to dovetail with the specific needs identified by members of the community.
 - iii) Partnerships were not forced – at first the police refused to come onto the estate [*‘too dangerous’*] but a community policeman began to attend, and still attends, all the meetings
 - iv) Project managers were all from within the community
4. This was not a *unique* process. The residents and those leading the Partnership were very clear about this. Indeed, they felt that they had undertaken the renewal process twice over the 7 years, the second time when the energy action funding finished, leaving many houses and flats still awaiting renovation of heating systems. In addition, since no funding for the Resource Centre had been secured, it looked as if it was going to close
‘There was no magic dust- anyone can do what we did.’ – Falmouth estate resident
5. Every win was celebrated – photographs and success stories were widely disseminated. The network formed at the outset by members of the Associations talking to all residents in turn became the network by which evidence of success was circulated, thereby creating positive feedback loops which kept the momentum for renewal going.
6. Many of the people involved in the residents association were unemployed – seven years on, all of those who are able to work, are in work.
7. There were no ‘advocates’ of the community – the community spoke for themselves; even Hazel, who was in a trusted position within the community, did not attempt to speak on behalf of them or to protect them from agencies. This has proved to be tremendously empowering for the community – residents of all three communities meeting over the weekend repeatedly emphasised their basic need not to be pre-judged, but to be judged on the basis of their own actions and achievements.
8. The community retained ownership of the process; they had self-respect and they received respect from others, both on the estate and with the agencies

What is continuing to work:

1. Newsletters are created every two weeks and sent to every house. Supplementing this approach, everyone who pops in to the Resource Centre gets a coffee and is brought up to date with the community news and event – the dissemination of knowledge about the community throughout the whole community has been identified as a key component in the success of the process.
2. The Resource Centre is open 9-5 every day and is an informal drop in centre as well as an office.
3. Photographs of the successful events and community days are all over the office, continuing to celebrate the Beacon estate's successes
4. Learning and knowledge are shared within the community, and outside of the immediate community

(ii) Redruth North

Following an exchange visit to the Falmouth Beacon estate three residents associations within Redruth combined to move the proposed regeneration forward. They have bid for, and look certain to get, a 'Resource centre' for their estates. This will be a portacabin, but will be hugely significant in terms of evidence of a 'quick win'. Once the Resource centre is there the RA anticipate that more people will come on board.

'We need the quick win to show everyone that this time it really is going to be different.' – Member of Redruth RA

Already people are beginning to bid for pieces of equipment and furniture to furnish the centre. The Centre will be accessible to everyone.

Local partnerships are beginning to be formed with the community determining who they need to form an effective partnership for a specific project.

Knowledge is widely shared and key informants from Falmouth Beacon estate are regularly spoken too, in order to accelerate the change process. There have been meetings and many conversations between residents from Redruth North and those from the Falmouth Beacon estate and this would appear to be acting as an accelerator of the change process.

[The process of 'transference' from the Falmouth Beacon estate to Redruth North is an issue which will be more widely explored in the prospective project we will be undertaking, in which we will be studying the renewal process in Redruth North. In turn, the issue of transferability of successful processes of change will be the key theme of the overall research project in which we are engaged. This particular aspect of the project will therefore provide crucial data to inform this overall research.]

(iii) New Cross Gate, London

The New Deal for Communities had targeted £45 million of match funded monies for this estate but, as yet, no quick wins have been achieved. With such large amounts of money it may be difficult to establish real partnerships, partnerships not driven by money but by a bottom up approach with community identified projects. There is the fear from New Cross Gate residents that money is being spent on creating project management teams rather than genuine change processes within the community.

It will be important initially to have more members of the community in LSPs than agencies in order for the community voice to be heard. Ideas, comments and actions taken at meetings need to be widely disseminated and a place for feedback on plans, etc., created.

Projects that have risen up from the community should be celebrated, such as the incredibly impressive Adventure Playground, which has been running for 30 years and which, over 1000 children utilised last summer holidays. The youth of the community are extremely important to New Cross Gate and any plans for rebuilding the estate must have play/youth facilities at the heart of them.

'It's ours, everyone's...' – New Cross Gate teenager speaking about the Adventure Playground

The community have seen their logo 'Aiming High for New Cross Gate' with an aeroplane, replaced by a logo – 'NCG now!' – designed by external media consultants, and over which the community feels no ownership. More crucially still, the community feel that their name has literally been taken away from them in this exercise.

By insisting that each leaflet, tree, project has a 'sponsored by' sign attached, the community is made to feel that they should be grateful; this is perpetuating the dependency/hand out culture and hence lack of empowerment.

'Middle managers' who move between community groups and directorate groups need to feel confident about their role in the renewal process. Angry communities can produce incredible changes – change can almost certainly not occur with an apathetic community. (This claim exemplifies the notion that 'apathy is anger turned in on itself.') However, an analogous group in healthcare are nurses, who have been identified as the group who see themselves as the patient advocate and protectors of the patient [Consumers in NHS R&D 2002] – but this has not led to the service user being empowered or allowed to feel an active participant in their care. A tale was reported to us (Robin and Katrina) from a resident from the Falmouth Beacon Estate about the initial visit to New Cross Gate. Sometime into a presentation by a representative of the Beacon Estate, a small group of people came in and looked at the (untouched) plates of food and helped themselves and then left. The resident asked a resident from New Cross Gate who these people were – they were NDC project leads (as indeed was the Falmouth resident). This story is told with complete incredulity at their behaviour. We believe that people such as these have the potential to become the key agents in actualising change processes – their role in Falmouth has been stressed above – since they are the people who enable networks within the community to form, and who effect communication between the community and 'higher level authorities.' Crucially, however, in order to fulfil this role, these people must establish real relations within the community.

'We'll know we are getting somewhere when someone from the community is a project lead...' – New Cross Gate resident

There have been many changes in personnel associated with the New Deal for Communities in New Cross – there is a widely held perception that 'results' are not

being achieved quickly enough – and it may be that the focus should be on processes rather than personnel.

What struck us immediately as common to the three estates and the regeneration was that the children were at the heart of the communities' desire for change. During the health needs assessment – which was carried out in Redruth North where the community identify the issues that are important to them and end up voting on these issues to identify the key issue – the overwhelming majority of votes were for a 'safe play environment for the children'. On speaking with two of the original five from Penwerris estate, who sparked the changes, the immediate response to questions such as '*How did it start? Why did it start then?*' focused on their children and the environment that they were growing up in. A number of residents from each of the estates independently told us that their dream was to create a community in which their children would be happy to grow up, and in which they would then stay and bring up their own children. And, when the three communities came together over the last weekend, the children formed friendships and almost immediately formed groups who went around/played together through out the weekend.

2. *The weekend*

Friday:

The weekend began with a reception in the hotel where people from New Cross Gate were staying. There was very little co-evolution between the 3 groups – the venue was large with individual tables which didn't help – New Cross sat with each other as did Redruth and Falmouth. Hazel brought them together in a large circle and June (from Falmouth Beacon estate) presented Muriel (New Cross Gate) with the artist's impression of the Beacon Resource Centre – the Falmouth Beacon estate talisman for their change. Then a teenager from New Cross sang a rap song, which prompted people from Falmouth to sing a local Cornish song, and in turn, Redruth residents also sang local songs. This constituted an inspiring sharing of cultures. Following this, everyone remained in a circle (although still in their communities) for the rest of the night and played Chinese whispers. Some people from New Cross went for a walk with some of the children/teenagers who commented that the houses were 'different down here, less close together'.

Saturday:

The people from New Cross met up with the people from the Beacon estate at the Beacon estate resource Centre to update each other on what had happened since they last met and to have a tour of the regenerated Beacon estate. The update session began with Grenville talking about the new changes that had happened since they had been up to New Cross. There had been several successful achievements and it felt very uncomfortable when people from the community spoke about the lack of tangible evidence of change in New Cross Gate. A comment was made by a Project manager from New Cross Gate that Falmouth Beacon Estate's success had taken 10 years, and perhaps expectations were too high for New Cross Gate community. In fact, this was inaccurate – as we have stressed, in Falmouth, the fundamental emphasis was always on delivering realistic solutions to identified community needs, within a fixed time-scale. Moreover, although the outcomes of larger scale achievements which were built on the basis of these 'small-scale' deliveries of change didn't happen immediately,

there was nevertheless tangible evidence of outcomes within 2 years. (It is now nearly 3 years since New Cross Gate received their NDC award.)

The tour around the estate clearly had a similar effect on people from New Cross as it had done with those from Redruth. The tangible effects of regeneration are clearly visible, as are the continuing changes that the Beacon estate wishes to make.¹ Again the children mixed in small groups whilst people from New Cross and Falmouth talked. The winning gardens in the recent gardening competition were pointed out- the first thing that myself and other people whilst walking round the estate was how much care virtually all of the residents took over their gardens.²

We were shown the drop-in centre (which provides an informal environment for health issues), the youth club and the skateboard park as well as the plans for more benches to enjoy the marvellous view at the top of the estate, overlooking Falmouth harbour. The youth club is associated with bad memories as well as good. Seven years ago the youth club was where young children were sold alcohol (by a retired policeman's son) and the people with a vested interest were very resistant to any renewal concerning the youth club. The night before a meeting was due to be held in the youth club about the youth club it was burnt down. Again this story serves as a poignant reminder that change takes commitment and energy as change can also imbue risks and the challenge that not everyone will welcome the changes.

There were equal numbers of people from Falmouth as people from New Cross- residents from the estate and other stakeholders are clearly very proud of what they have achieved. The nurse and receptionist who run the drop in health centre were there as was the head teacher from the local school. All the children headed for the youth club and then the skateboard park where scooters, skateboards and bikes were immediately shared.

We returned to the Resource Centre for a pasty and cake lunch at the resource centre, and more informal talking between the two estates. The plan had been to show New Cross Pendennis Castle and then onto the beach but it was felt (by all) that some free time was needed and taxis were ordered to take people wherever they wanted to go. A

¹ We believe this notion of visibility is of the utmost importance. Interviews have revealed that one of the key factors contributing to the fragmentation of a community is fear, and that fear is exacerbated by darkness. Effective lighting goes a long way to assuaging fear, through a process of 'making visible.' This process parallels the process of 'making visible' evidence of success, noted above. Together, these two processes work to ensure that members of the community are not 'left in the dark,' and we believe that this is a major contributor to the establishment of the community network.

² This is a further example of the way in which the successful regeneration of the community is 'made visible.' Equally importantly, it reveals the extent to which residents' concern for the environment lies at the heart of the regeneration process, further confirming the significance of the prioritisation of environmental issues in the health needs assessment exercise, as noted above. Again, it must be stressed that this concern for environmental issues stems directly from the community, rather than being imposed by a higher authority. In relation to this observation, it should be noted that a major benefit accruing from the renovation of heating systems in the houses and flats on the Beacon Estate has been a year on year energy saving of just under £200 000. Moreover, the health visitors have demonstrated that the extraordinary 100% improvement in boys' SATs results at the local primary school, and the remarkable success in reducing the occurrences of post-natal depression, can be traced back to the renovation of heating systems. The evidence points very strongly, therefore, to the fundamental interweaving of environmental improvement with health and social improvement in the regeneration process.

group of teenagers from Falmouth and New Cross headed off together and ended up walking to the beach and paddling in the sea.

Sunday:

A coach left Falmouth with people from the Beacon estate and New Cross and picked up people from Redruth and took them all to the Eden Project. On the coach journey to Eden, Hazel was presented with a photograph of the children from New Cross at the Adventure Playground, again emphasizing the importance of this play area to the community and the exchanging of images over which the residents have ownership. A guided tour of the biomes had been arranged and then, over lunch, some of the people from the communities talked with two of the management staff from Eden. The commonality between the projects – the enormous task of regenerating Eden from a disused china clay pit and the wonderful project which has emerged, the wonderful success in regenerating the Beacon Estate – and the task ahead for Redruth and New Cross were apparent.

The Eden Project was clearly fun but also a positive message of hope and creation for Redruth and New Cross was there. Fascinatingly, the children responded independently to the plants, discussing what turned out to be their wide-ranging knowledge with the accompanying adults (often when they were alone, or thought they weren't going to be noticed!). In turn, some of the adults from New Cross Gate, a number of whom were first generation immigrants from the West Indies, told of how many of the fruits and vegetables in the sub-tropical biome were familiar from their childhood. This inspiring process of sharing culture and knowledge seemed once again to be instrumental in establishing real links between the different communities, but also between people of different ages within the same community. This last point is significant, since evidence from interviews suggests that another major factor in the fragmenting of communities is the failure of people from different age groups to communicate with one another, with a lack of tolerance being the inevitable consequence.

In further confirmation of the establishment of genuine relationships between the communities, the people from Falmouth Beacon Estate had organised a raffle (with items donated by the community), and with the proceeds from this, they had bought the New Cross community the video of the creation of the Eden Project. They gave them the video on the coach at what was already a very emotional time. Phone numbers were exchanged between the communities and promises to meet again soon were made. As the coach pulled out of Eden a near perfect rainbow formed over the biomes, which was interpreted by everyone as a symbol of hope for the future.

3. *Positive outcomes from the weekend*

- New Cross community spoke of being re-energised and committed to regeneration of their estate. The renewed sense of motivation came from being with, and witnessing at first hand, the successful Beacon Estate.
- Shared learning: A lot of shared learning went on, particularly between Falmouth and New Cross. Falmouth Beacon estate insisted several times that what had

happened there was not unique but driven by local partnerships where the community were driving the changes.³

- The head teacher from the Beacon estate school suggested a school exchange, where 20 children come down from New Cross and spend a week with 20 children from his school at a local outward bound/farm. New Cross would like a return visit to be centred around their Adventure playground.
- A great number of photographs were taken by the communities of each other and of groups of people – a group photo was called for at Eden and each community took several pictures of the whole group. These photographs provide rich evidence of the successful visit and, possibly, of the potential for transference of knowledge and empowerment between the estates
- It was fascinating that both New Cross and Falmouth independently of each other gave (what appeared to us to be) their symbol (of which they had ownership) from their estates as a gift to the other estate – the painting of the resource centre (Falmouth) and the photograph of the Adventure Playground (New Cross Gate)
- Beautiful drawings of the flowers and plants seen at the Eden Project were done by a young resident from the New Cross Estate.
- One of the teenagers from New Cross Gate sang a wonderful song on the Friday evening which brought the three communities together for the rest of the night.

We have stressed throughout the importance of clear evidence of successful delivery of outcomes, of ‘quick wins.’ If we were to highlight just one these outcomes, it would be that of shared learning, and specifically, of the importance of the photographic records. For various reasons, the New Cross community had not been able to post photographs of their activities in their community centre. Prior to leaving, it was clear that this would be a priority for them when they returned home.

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³ One of the reasons that we believe this is significant is that there are clearly major differences in the specific contexts of the two estates. If this shared learning process carries on successfully, then we will have important evidence to undermine the common observation that the success at Falmouth could be wholly attributed to the unique combination of people and circumstances that obtained there. Equally, it will provide us with significant data to inform further our research into the process of transference of successful change between different communities.