

With Our Ears to the Ground

In mid 2009 we (arts organisation Proboscis) travelled around Hertfordshire meeting over 280 people from Watford, Stevenage, North Hertfordshire and Broxbourne. We set out on an autumn day to drive up through Cheshunt, Broxbourne and Hoddesdon, over to Ware and Stevenage then Letchworth, up to Ashwell, down to Pilton, Hitchin across to Watford and back to London. It was a journey through old and new; market towns, new towns, agricultural land and urban centres. In the weeks that followed we put our ears to the ground and got to know Hertfordshire and its communities through the stories of its people. We researched urban centres, towns and villages and travelled through the county in cars, trains, by cycle and on foot, on narrow lanes and motorways.

We talked to people in groups, individually, inside, outside, in pubs, cafes, community centres, libraries, at home and at work. We gathered their opinions and experiences of their communities, what it's like living in their neighbourhoods and what gives them a sense of belonging. These experiences, whilst locally specific, are relevant to Hertfordshire as a whole. We met people between the ages of 5 and 94, from many cultures and backgrounds, from small organisations, schools, community groups, urban centres and rural villages. We captured their views through informal conversations on the street, hosting a stall at the local market and visiting community groups. We ran a creative workshop with a youth group and collected stories through other activities and events. From this research emerged the six themes of Transport, Movement, Listening, Community, Getting Involved and Perceptions, which now form the basis for the project publications.

Thanks

The text in this book is quoted or paraphrased from conversations with people in Hertfordshire between August and November 2009. We would like to thank all those who participated in With Our Ears to the Ground especially to the people of Hertfordshire who were so welcoming and gave their time so generously. Thank you to all on this list, to anyone not included here and to the people we spoke to informally along the way.

Peppina Albanese, Age Concern Hertfordshire; Broxbourne Station commuters; Council for Voluntary Service Broxbourne and East Herts; Chells Manor Youth Club; Douglas Drive Day Centre; Great Ashby Community Centre; residents of Halfhide Lane Caravan Park (A Hertfordshire County Council Gypsy site); Kevin Harris; Hertfordshire Music Service; Rickyard Community Bar; North Herts College Supported Learners Group; Hoddesdon Rotary Club; Kimpton Branch Working Party; Leavesden Green Community Group; North Herts Community Development Officers and Wendy Tooker; North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum; people outside Stevenage Job Centre; Pilton Joycar; The Priory School Hitchin; Suzanne Rider; Sophie Ronson; Michael Siewniak and the Polish Community; Stevenage Community Development Officers; Stevenage In-town Training; Kristy Thakur; Watford Market; Watford Muslim Women's Organisation; Watford Skate Park; Bowes Lyon Young Parents To Be Group. We'd also like to thank National Express at Broxbourne Station and Tony Beckwith, Adriana Marques and All Winstanley of Haring Woods Studio for their support.

To find out more or share your thoughts about your community see:
<http://withourearstotheound.wordpress.com>
Tel: Hertfordshire County Council Strategic Partnerships Unit: 01992 556709
For information on volunteering in Hertfordshire see www.volunteeringherts.org

Credits

With Our Ears to the Ground was created and published by Proboscis 2009
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The photographs in this book are of Hertfordshire during 2009.
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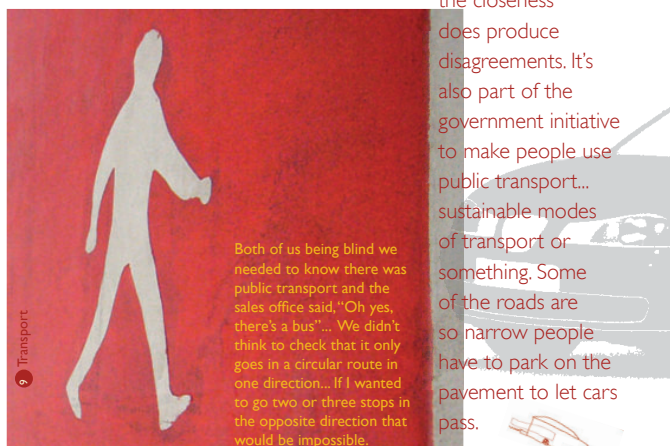
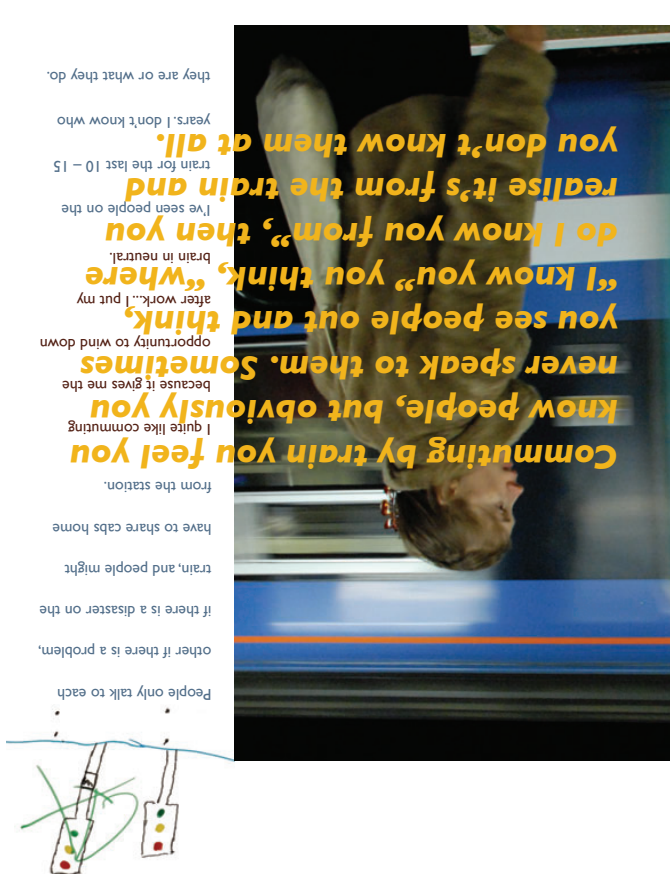
With Our Ears to the Ground is a Perception Area project facilitated by Green Heart Partnership in collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council. With Our Ears to the Ground was supported by a partnership of representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, Watford Borough Council, North Hertfordshire District Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Broxbourne Council. Green Heart Partnership is an Arts Council England, East sponsored Arts Generate project funded by its partners: the eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire and Arts Council England. East. GHP is a strategic partnership project managed by Haring Woods Studio that aims to achieve growth and capacity across the arts and environment sectors to creatively and collaboratively address government priorities. www.greenheartpartnership.org

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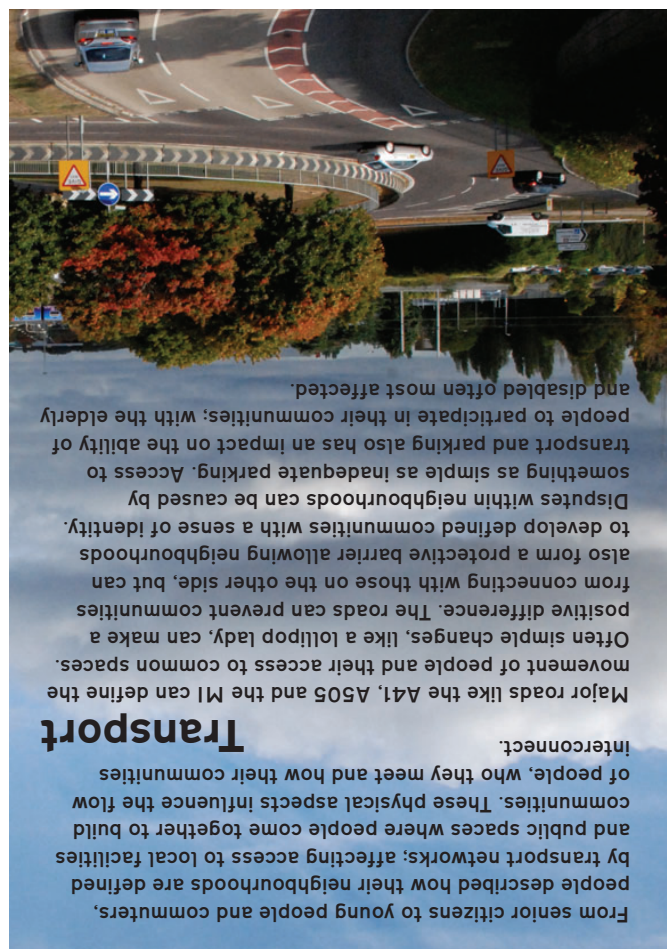
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I had a bad accident several years ago. I was knocked down in London while out with my guide dogs. In Stevenage, it's all pedestrianised, I can take my grand-daughters out which I would never have done in London. It's given me my confidence back.

Sometimes because of the way the houses are built and the lack of car parking, the closeness does produce disagreements. It's also part of the government initiative to make people use public transport... sustainable modes of transport or something. Some of the roads are so narrow people have to park on the pavement to let cars pass.



In all this we've taken Proboscis' anarchaeology approach, to informally and creatively excavate layers of meaning and understanding to get beneath the surface of some of Hertfordshire's communities.

Our enduring experience of this journey has been of the generosity of the people, the ambition of their ideas and the determination and commitment they devote to building their communities.

This book is one of 6 that are based on the limited edition publication printed to accompany the project. It draws together the multiple layers of ideas and experiences we found across different communities and it is designed to reflect those ideas and voices.

Alice Angus and Orlagh Woods, Proboscis 2009

With Our Ears to the Ground is a project by arts organisation Proboscis. It was commissioned by Green Heart Partnership with Hertfordshire County Council. It builds upon previous consultations, by Hertfordshire County Council, that used traditional surveys to find out how well people from different backgrounds get on with each other. This publication and the project research will be presented to the community, Council Members and Project Team to inform the Hertfordshire Forward Community Cohesion Strategy, equalities planning across the county, and to support the partners to build stronger communities where people feel valued, get along well together and feel they belong.



Transport

Especially with winter coming, we've got a couple of older ladies who might not come out to the Leavesden Community Café when it's freezing cold and raining so it'd be nice if we could do something for them to get some sort of transport organised.

We asked for a grant as we needed some money for a bus to collect the older people to come to Watford Muslim Women's Group and we got it. We need more money to continue.

It's all to do with finance, there's a ramp the other end but he struggles walking there.

I'm still waiting to hear about a rail to help us get down the steps.



You go to catch THE bus

The bus from Pilton to Hitchin is very social. I made some new friends on a bus.

I drive most places, which restricts you from meeting people, rather than walking. It had more shops and more life but they put a one way system through and destroyed the centre... Hoddesdon's not been the same since.

It's important for older people to be able to walk to the community centre or they get isolated.

Bus stop

Bus stop