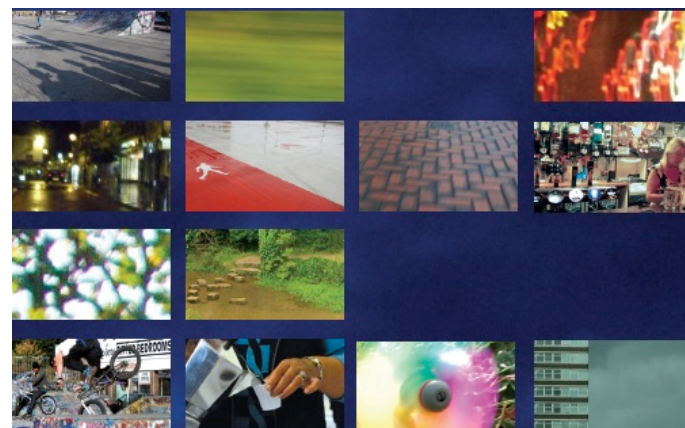


**The Meriden estate was built in the 50s and 60s. A lot of new people came to live here. There was no facility on the estate and the residents decided they needed a centre that could be used for families and kids, so they went around door to door collecting money, 2s 6d a week, and bought their own building.**



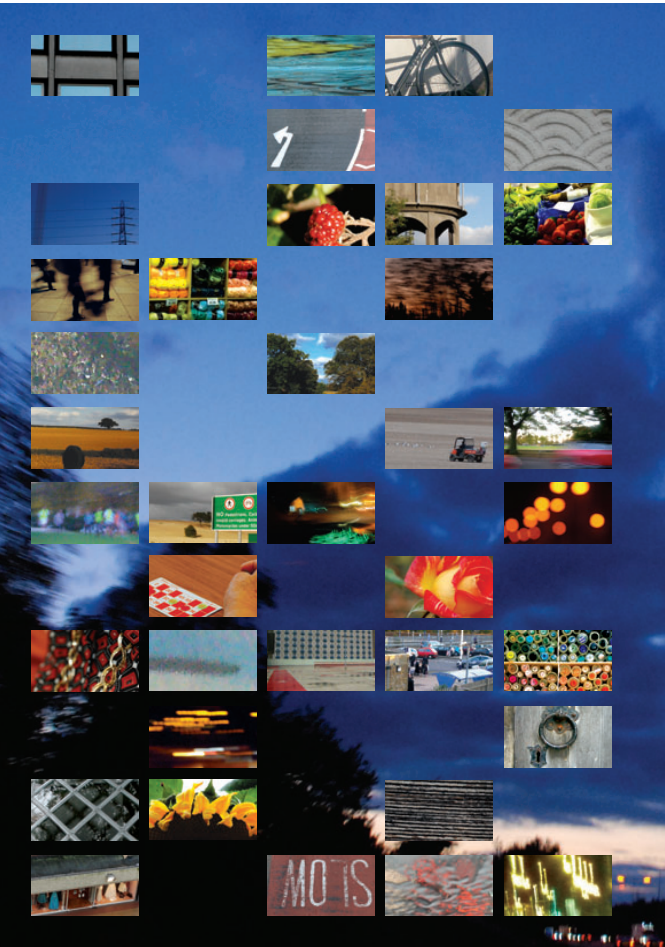
Been in Stevenage two weeks. It's clean. It's green. I grew up in Tottenham so it's great.

I've been at this gypsy site for years, I'm no further forward. I can still get 28 days notice, even after living here for more than 20 years.



## With Our Ears to the Ground: Movement

Alice Angus and Orlagh Woods



# 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; Hoddesdon Rotary Club; Kimpton Bench Working Party; Leavesden Green Community Cafe; Ricky Manning; Meriden Community Bar; North Herts College Supported Learners 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, Nicola Paddock and Ali 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 Partnerships Unit: 01992 556709  
For information on volunteering in Hertfordshire see [www.volunteeringherts.org](http://www.volunteeringherts.org)

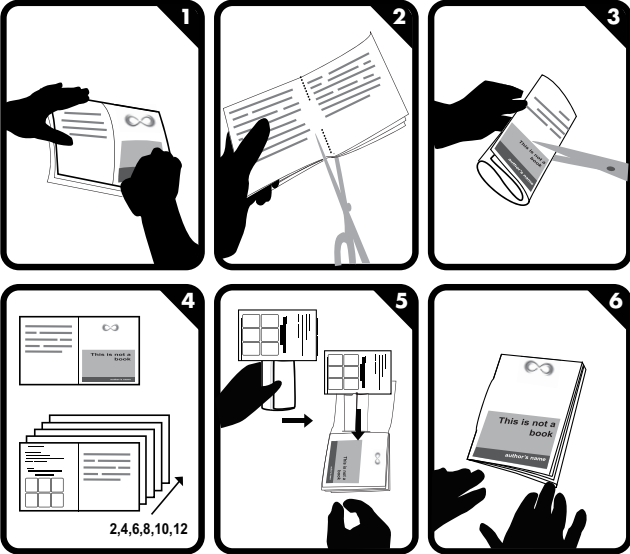
## Credits

With Our Ears to the Ground was created and published by Proboscis 2009  
Proboscis are an arts organisation based in London [www.proboscs.org.uk](http://www.proboscs.org.uk)  
Designers: Proboscis with Shanshan Lai  
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 partner: 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](http://www.greenheartpartnership.org)



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who feel part of it.  
second generation  
fully integrate. It's the  
about 20 years to  
Apparently it takes

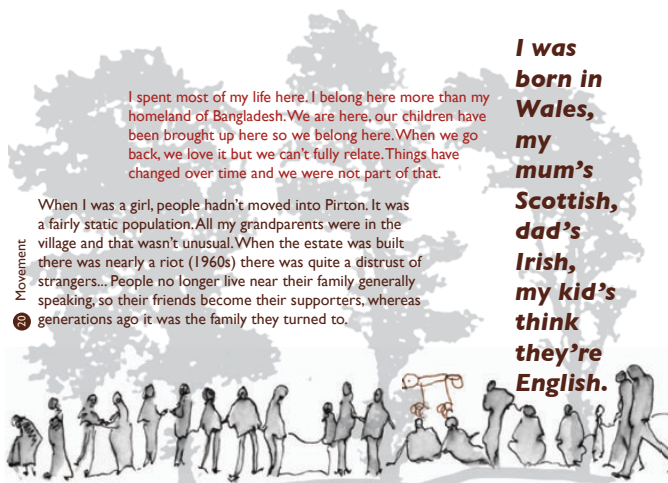
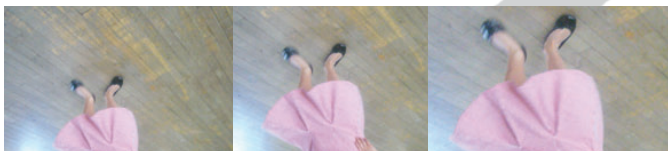


I have lived here about 25 years. My grandfather helped  
set this gypsy site up. There were only 10 pitches originally.  
We're saddened because they want to take it away from  
us... They think they know what's best for us. If they were  
to move this site now, shift it and make it bigger, it would  
be ruined. It would destroy this peaceful community.

We came over here from  
Sicily with a work permit  
to give our family a better  
way of life.  
I speak in Italian, he speaks  
in English, our children had  
to learn both languages.  
I spent most of my life here.  
I belong here more than my  
homeland of Bangladesh.

**9 times out of 10 you'll get a smile back – you  
get out what you put in.**

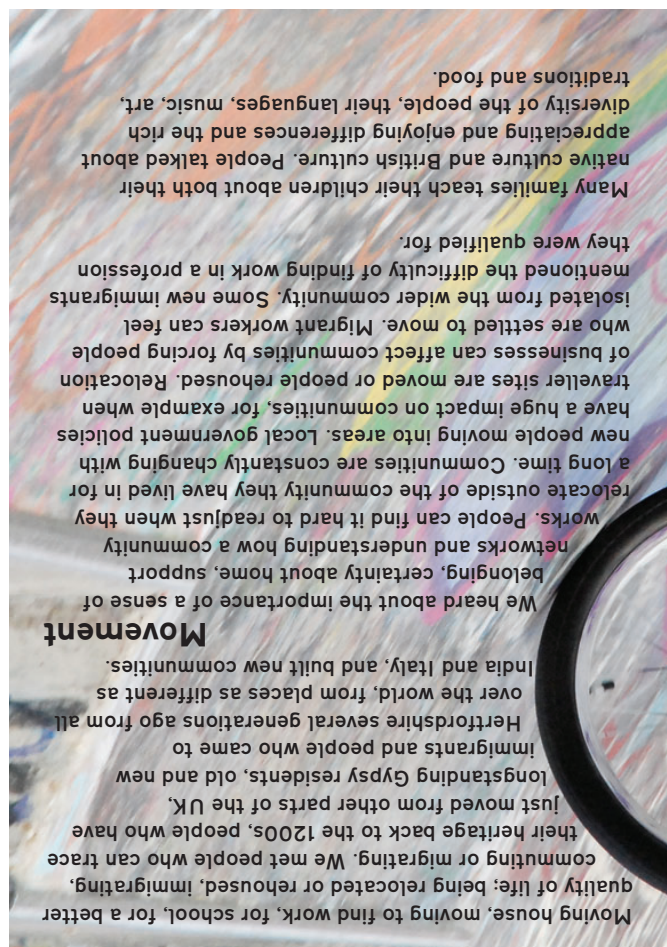
I've been here 46 years. I married into Pilton from Letchworth.  
When I first came to the village I did pottering and pea picking.  
my neighbour used to say, "Lovely, isn't it, out there in the fields"  
and I'd be thinking, "I'd rather be behind a desk!"



I spent most of my life here. I belong here more than my  
homeland of Bangladesh. We are here, our children have  
been brought up here so we belong here. When we go  
back, we love it but we can't fully relate. Things have  
changed over time and we were not part of that.

When I was a girl, people hadn't moved into Pilton. It was  
a fairly static population. All my grandparents were in the  
village and that wasn't unusual. When the estate was built  
there was nearly a riot (1960s) there was quite a distrust of  
strangers... People no longer live near their family generally  
speaking, so their friends become their supporters, whereas  
generations ago it was the family they turned to.

**I was  
born in  
Wales,  
my  
mum's  
Scottish,  
dad's  
Irish,  
my kid's  
think  
they're  
English.**



## Movement

Moving house, moving to find work, for school, for a better  
quality of life; being relocated or rehoused, immigrating,  
commuting or migrating. We met people who can trace  
their heritage back to the 1200s, people who have  
just moved from other parts of the UK.  
longstanding Gypsy residents, old and new  
immigrants and people who came to  
Hertfordshire several generations ago from all  
over the world, from places as different as  
India and Italy, and built new communities.

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.





Something's got to be done to help the youngsters that live in Stevenage get further up that ladder to have a place of their own. Some of them can't afford a mortgage or private rent.

**Initially it was really difficult moving to Great Ashby because they were still building the road that I lived in. There were only two houses that were lived in so there was nobody around apart from builders.**

I moved out of my mum's, then went to a hostel and then they put me into St Nicholas. I don't belong there, I'm a loud person, I like going out clubbing but it's for old people, you can't play your music loud. The old people think I'm too loud but they forget I'm a teenager.



The community is changing; there's a different aspect of the community now, there are other languages being taught and when you walk up the high road you hear mostly Eastern European languages, Polish in particular.

**If you smile at someone...**



We're Geordies, we're Scots, we're Londoners, we're Irish, we're poor, we're rich.



I enjoy living here but my employer has moved to Milton Keynes. My wife doesn't want to move, she doesn't want to move the kids from schools, they're settled here.

