

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.

With Our Ears to the Ground

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.

Pappina 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 Haildrie 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; Hendon Community Bar; North Herts College Supported Learners Group; North Herts Community Development Officers and Wendy Tooke; North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum; people outside Stevenage Job Centre; Pilton Joycare; The Priory School Hitchin; Suzanne Rider; Sophie Ronsom; Michael Stewiak and the Polish Community; Stevenage Community Development Officers; Stevenage In-town Training; Kristy Thackur; 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 Padick and Ali Winstanley of Harling Woods Studio for their support.

To find out more or share your thoughts about your community see:
<http://withourears-to-the-ground.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 Generation project funded by its partners, the eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire and Arts Council England. East. GHP is a strategic partnership project managed by Harling 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

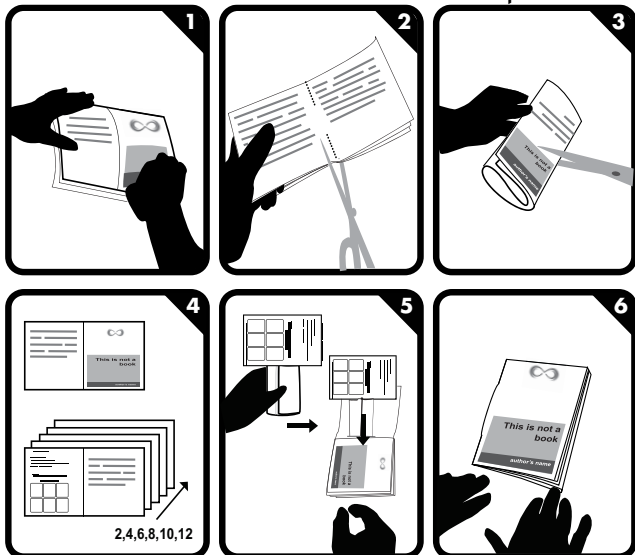
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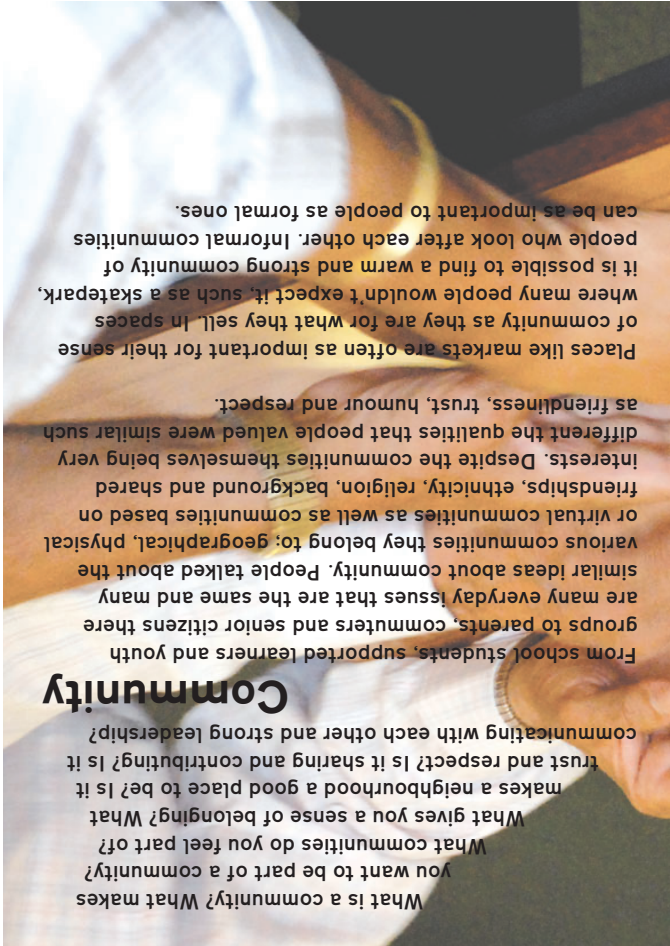
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A Proboscis project commissioned by Green Heart Partnership with Hertfordshire County Council to explore peoples ideas about community.
 Part 1 of 6 eBooks based on the limited edition publication.
<http://withourears-to-the-ground.wordpress.com/>

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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.

Parents now go out to work, you don't have that open door policy you had with neighbours, interaction, walking kids to school. People need to work to give families a better quality of life. A lot of people commute and are not around much. They leave early in the morning and are back late at night. You don't have time to know your neighbours. We're all fragmented now.

Great Ashby is still developing. It's quite nice, it's calm, quiet and green. It's a big change from Morcco.

Watford market is my community.

Getting back to your community. I think that's where young people get it from. They see that their parents have been festival volunteers. A festival they've enjoyed since being a toddler so they feel they can contribute as well. There's a general enabling expectation that they can get involved.

Working in the market, one thing I have realised is how many people need someone to talk to. For a lot of people it's a social experience. It's not just about buying food.

I come to Watford market to get my shopping. This is empty. It used to be you couldn't move in here once upon a time.

Community

I'm living in Hitchin over 50 years, there have been a lot of changes. The community, that's the only thing we can appreciate. Everything else is going down. In town half the shops are shut now.


People make the community but a school and meeting area are important too.

Your community can be focused on a subject and that's the only thing you share or it can be a community of friends where you have some things in common but you are also your own person at the same time.

You might know the neighbours next to you and across from you but you don't know your entire road. I have people down my road that I don't even recognise.

In Pirton, everyone speaks to each other. Everyone is friendly whether you know them or not, people wave, you don't always know them!

Flo next door, she's 70, she's lovely. She talks to me over the garden.



I think people don't consider school as a community, because it's drummed into your head that community is the world around you.

