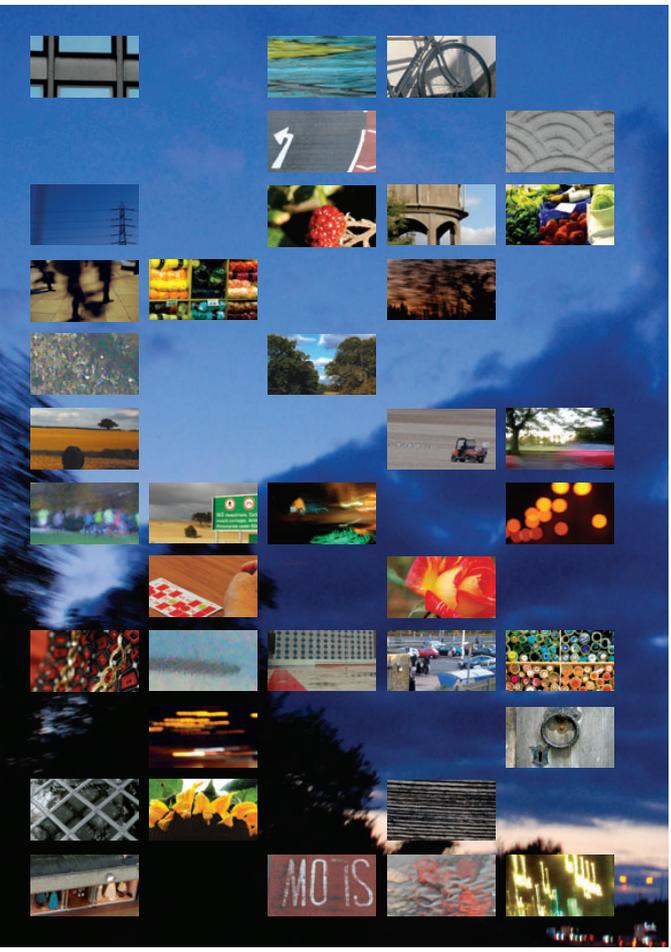


With Our Ears to the Ground

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 Publications.



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 Borough Council. Green Heart Partnership is an Arts Council England, East sponsored Arts Generates project funded by its partners; the eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire and Arts Council England. East. GHT 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



The photographs in this book are of Hertfordshire during 2009. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution, Noncommercial, No Derivative Works Designer: Proboscis with Shanshan Lai Proboscis team: Alice Angus, Giles Lane, Cragh Woods Proboscis are an arts organisation based in London www.probosis.org.uk With Our Ears to the Ground was created and published by Proboscis 2009

Credits

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

Woods Studio for their support.
 Station and Tony Beckwith, Adriana Marques, Nicola Padick and All Winstanley of Haring Young Parents to Be Group. We'd also like to thank National Express at Broxbourne Watford Market; Watford Muslim Women's Organisation; Watford Skate Park; Bowes Lyon Stevage Community Development Officers; Stevenage InTown Training; Kristy Thackur; Hitchin; Suzanne Rider; Sophie Ronsom; Michael Stewiak and the Polish Community; Ethnic Forum; people outside Stevenage Job Centre; Pilton Joycar; The Priory School North Herts Community Development Officers and Wendy Tooke; North Herts Minority Ricky Manning; Hernden Community Bar; North Herts College Supported Learners Group; Hoddesdon Rotary Club; Kimpton Bench Working Party; Leavesden Green Community Cafe; (A Hertfordshire County Council Gypsy site); Kevin Harris; Hertfordshire Music Service; Voluntary Service Broxbourne and East Herts; Chells Manor Youth Club; Douglas Drive Day Centre; Great Ashby Community Centre; residents of Hatfield Lane Caravan Park

Thanks

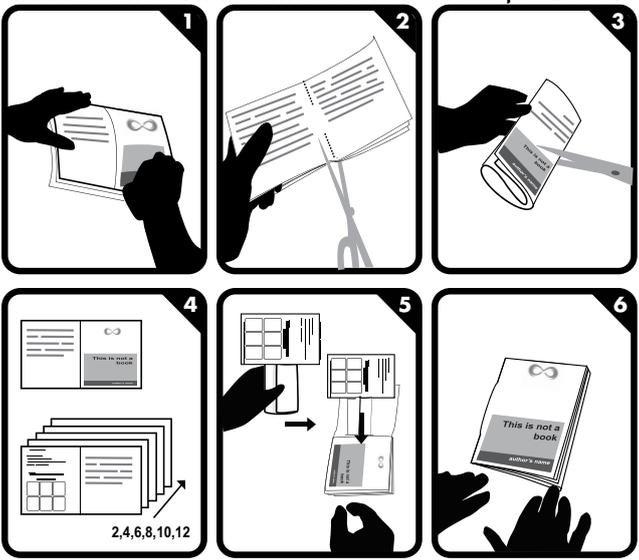
The text in this book is quoted or paraphrased from conversations with people in Hertfordshire between August and November 2009. We would like to thank all those who participated in With Our Ears to the Ground especially to the people of Hertfordshire who were so welcoming and gave their time so generously.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

2010-02-04

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://withourearstotheground.wordpress.com/>

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There are people who live in the village who don't enter into it, that's their choice. People have that right, if they want, to have a quiet life in the country.

Some of the most effective people in fact are the older ones. It's a case of attitude and having the time to do it. We noticed that with community groups, the majority are made up of people that don't work or are retired.

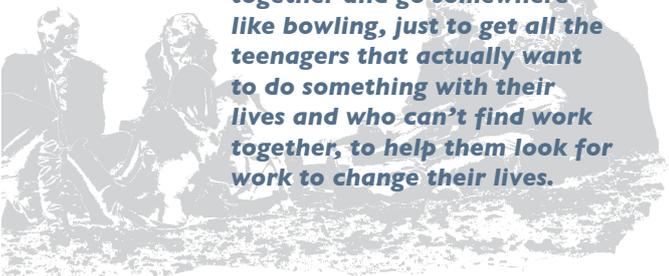
We have elderly neighbours who are very neighbourly, who will knock on the door to give you stuff from their garden, but that is very much I find, a dying tradition.

9 Social Responsibility



People spend more time indoors and not outside, we used to come out and join together in our streets to celebrate things.

I'd bring all the teenagers together and go somewhere like bowling, just to get all the teenagers that actually want to do something with their lives and who can't find work together, to help them look for work to change their lives.



Getting Involved

Hertfordshire is as diverse in people as it is in environments. Despite the differences in the communities we met, there was a shared sense that to develop communities that are safe and welcoming people have to get involved.

There were inspiring stories of people taking the initiative to build their own community centre, set up youth groups and organise BBQs for residents. In some places people had come together around local concerns such as town plans, airport extensions and schools while others had set up groups just to meet and socialise.

People have busy and pressured lives with less time to invest in their communities. Some feel there has been a loss of social responsibility through the generations, possibly as a result of these time pressures, and that it is important for parents and others in the community to set an example to younger people. Many young people do feel a responsibility towards their community. However some people may not be aware of or feel able to access existing support channels to help them to get involved in the wider community. Computers and working families can lack time and finance to be part of community activities and many people are more able to contribute when they retire or are not working.

In all this we've taken Proboscis' anarchoeology 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.

