The Small Change Forum: Community Action Planning in Stirchley, Birmingham

Event report

A one-day event held at Stirchley in Birmingham, 12 June 2012, hosted by Place Prospectors, Nabeel Hamdi, Multistory and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University.

Summary

This Small Change Forum event brought together 15 people including local residents of Stirchley along with professionals from the public and private sectors. Participants considered the strategic aims and practical next steps for progressing a number of creative community improvement proposals as developed by Place Prospectors – a community interest group directed by Emma Larkinson and Jayne Murray - during their 12 months residency in the neighbourhood during 2011/2012.

This event followed on from the Small Change: Shaping Stirchley event which took place in February 2012. It used community action planning techniques to explore Place Prospectors’s community improvement ideas. Important to this process was uncovering with local residents the existing resources, skills and knowledge which could be mobilised to bring about positive change in the community. The day concluded with practical next steps so as to turn ideas into actions.

Information from this event including the report is available at: www.smallchangeforum.org
For more information, please contact Jeni Burnell, Chair, The Small Change Forum: jburnell@brookes.ac.uk
Introduction: Community Action Planning (CAP)

The Stirchley event used community action planning (CAP) tools and techniques to develop a series of community improvement proposals based on the creative work of Place Prospectors. Used all over the world, CAP is widely recognised as an effective way of working with diverse groups of people to understand what they want for their community. The technique includes a series of sequential steps coupled with participatory techniques including mapping, art activities, design workshops, community profiling, model making, neighbourhood walks and photo surveys; all of which are aimed at gathering information about a place and people so as to make informed and collective decisions for change. Outlined below are the standard CAP steps with comments relating to the work in Stirchley:

Step 1: Identify what has been done so far
This explored in theory and practice the creative interventions Place Prospectors devised and implement in Stirchley.

Step 2: Investigate what we want to do next
This step includes understanding the aspirations and priorities of local people for their neighbourhood. Based on this information one can identify the project purpose, objectives and activities to bring about the change. Table 1 (below) shows the incremental steps needed to achieve an action plan.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Areas</th>
<th>Activities in each step</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
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Step 3: Understand what/who will get in the way of achieving this goals
Table 2 (below) shows a constraints analysis table and is themed into institutional, finance, political, technological, environmental constraints etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Areas</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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Step 4: Identify what resources are required to achieve the goals
In response to the identified constraints (Table 2) one identifies what is need in terms of resources (space, money, skills, etc.), capacities, partners and management.

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<tr>
<th>Project Areas</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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Step 5: Develop next steps
This step creates a series of activities, actions and roles need to achieve the project goals.

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<tr>
<th>Project Areas</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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For further information about Community Planning visit: [www.communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net)
The Event

The Stirchley CAP event brought together a diverse group of people with a vested interest in the area, whether personal and/or professional, to develop actions for a series of proposals based on the creative work of Place Prospectors (PP). This event used small change theory and practice to explore ways of scaling-up and sustaining PP’s creative community improvement proposals. To achieve this, participants worked with academic, development practitioner and author of Small Change1 Nabeel Hamdi to identify ideas, aspirations and practical next steps based on the CAP way of working.

This event is part of The Small Change Forum (The Forum) initiative. The Forum is a research and practice initiative that is developed by CENDEP and Multistory in association with Emeritus Professor (Oxford Brookes) Nabeel Hamdi. Its aim is to promote small change learning and practice in the UK and internationally with events designed to share new ideas, tools, methods, practical wisdoms and principles that inform teaching and practice, and to create a policy environment conducive to change.

Generally speaking, the small change approach starts with a common sense assumption: to achieve something big, start with something small and start where it counts. Projects, as part of this initiative, explore how small, practical and mostly low budget interventions, if carefully targeted, act as catalysts for bigger long-lasting change; change designed to improve people’s opportunities and their living environments.

CAP Step 1: What have we done so far in Stirchley?

PP’s Emma Larkinson and Jayne Murray provided an overview of their creative work in Stirchley including occupying an empty shop on the high street called Stirchley Prospects. PP’s overall aim was to use the arts and creative cultural interventions as a catalyst for identifying opportunities and challenges in the area with the intention of making lasting improvements. During their 9 months residency PP carried out the following:

Conducted a number of public service workshops.

• Developed Stirchley Merchandise which included historic images and facts.
• Created a performance artwork; comprising tributes and a memoriam to a street that is planned for redevelopment.
• Implemented a ‘Love Stirchley’ project using glow sticks to produce an artwork to increase pride and the profile in Stirchley.
• Created a projected artwork at the Rail station entrance highlighting the historical presence of Stirchley's name
• Delivered a 3 stage project in a hidden park
• Created a permanent artwork – Prosperity on one shop front
• Produced a series of magazines called ‘Stirchley Knows’ which highlighted and shared local history along with PP’s activities and research.
• Implemented a ‘Lost Property’ project looking at all the neglected spaces and assets in Stirchley.

Based on these activities PP developed the following community improvement proposals:

• **Stirchley Around the Clock** – extending the life of the high street in Stirchley outside shopping hours. This intervention would provide additional night and morning economy to the area offering more options and activities so as to attract a larger audience to the neighbourhood.

• **Green Spaces** – A number of underused green spaces in Stirchley have been identified. These could be linked and use re-examined.

• **Revitalise the Stirchley Carnival and Festival** – In the 1920’s, 30’s and 80’s Stirchley held an annual carnival.

• **A traffic plan for Stirchley** – a plan for Pershore Road to ease congestion and to improve accessibility, drawn up through public service workshops.

• **Long-term retention of assets** – Due to the Lost Property research into neglected spaces in Stirchley, it was identified that there are opportunities for local people to own and mange local assets.

• **Reclaim the Station** – The local station once shared a name with the neighbouring suburb of Bourneville. Now the station is only called Bourneville Station. This project aims to reclaim an aspect of identity at the station by reviewing the signage and reverting back to the time when Stirchley was acknowledged.

• **Community and Business Action plan** – explores building new structures and working partnerships with a range of stakeholders in Stirchley.

**CAP Step 2: What do we want to do next in Stirchley?**

**Collective Thinking**

With the seven proposals identified, the next step was to explore what binds these projects together. This process helped in developing an overall vision for the project and also understanding what organisational structure and additional stakeholders are needed. Localism and plans for devolving public services in the community were highlighted by the group. A decision was made to explore these further with the local authority.

**Aspirations**

Aspirations for Stirchley were explored with individuals and the group. This was to better understand individual ideas while also identifying a collective aspiration. People were asked: What makes up a good community? The example by Colin Ward was given, that being ‘a great place to grow up’. People were also asked to complete the statement ‘If I could I would…’ This exercise brought out the following ideas:

• A space or place to meet up with people.
• To create a sense of community and pride in the area which currently does not exist.
The group looked at these aspirations and discussed what projects could be developed to support and enable the area to realise these aspirations.

Proposal 1: Reinstate the Stirchley Carnival

PP’s research highlighted reinstating the carnival and building a new festival was an opportunity that had local meaning and complemented emerging activity. The aim is that the carnival will help create a sense of community pride while showcasing the many skills and resources available in the area through activities such as creative workshops and a procession. It was discussed that the carnival could:

- Provide opportunities to highlight the skills, aspirations and knowledge of local people;
- Provide training opportunities for local people such as stewarding and health and safety courses;
- Help to reclaim the streets;
- Restore pride in the area;
- Offer a sense of belonging;
- Strengthen connections between individuals and community organisations;
- Help attract public and private investment into the area;
- Connect green and/or neglected spaces in the community and bring these to life.

Schools were identified as important to include in development of the carnival as children and young people are a great way of connecting people and offer a vested interest to improve lives and livelihoods.

To make the carnival a reality the group considered: what do we need to do setting up a carnival? what are the themes?, who are the groups? And where are the connections? Additionally, gaining a stronger understanding of peoples’ needs and general demand for a carnival were identified as the first next steps.

- **Carnival name** - PP’s research uncovered ‘Viva Stirchley’ however the group also liked ‘Love Stirchley. PP reasserted that Love Stirchley is a different project and in itself we hoped would be continued. Viva Stirchley is a name considered appropriate to a festival that will contribute to regeneration, broaden horizons and have a wider audience than the local area.
- **Exploring alternatives** - are there different ways for this to be re-enacted.
- **Identifying different communities to engage** - educational, local traders, the market etc.
- **Identifying partners in design and implementation** - It is important to identify partners from the offset who can help provide resources and also to ensure the project is strategically connected.
- **Finance** - ways of paying for the carnival including partners.
- **Creating a pilot project** - rather than going for a big scale event, the group could hold a small pilot project to test these ideas out. A visible intervention is essential in getting local people involved.
- **Understanding the context** - This activity enables the group to better understand who is doing what at present with regards to public events. It also helps with assessing skills and resources while looking for ways to maximise the potential of the project and build an organisation/network consisting of a diverse and well-connected group of people and organisations.

**CAP Step 3: What / who will get in the way of creating the carnival?**
Managing constraints or issues which might stop the carnival developing is an interesting and creative part of the process. To these ends, constraints were themed with the group outlining a variety of issues. Examples include: institutional (health and safety regulations, road closures, policing event etc.), financial (lack of funding, skills not available to write funding bids etc.). Additionally, a lack of public enthusiasm and willingness of people and organisations to take part in the project was identified as a potential risk - this is why it is so vitally important that the priorities and aspirations of the group are met in the preliminary stages of the project, as people will only get involved if their vested interests are being served. This may be because people’s concepts of what a carnival or festival in Stirchley would be are currently limited - PP have recognised the need to widen that perception. (see below)

**Step 4: what resources are required to create the carnival?**

There is an abundance of resources and skills in the community which need to be identified. Required resources need defining and development of a strategy for mobilising these assets. Group and individual aspirations also need to be understood so that they become a useful resource for developing the project.

**CAP Step 5: Next steps**

- **Design** – Outline activities for the carnival along with a management strategy.
- **Consult** – Talk to the wider community and understand the need / aspirations for the project. This will also make the project visible to the general public and engage local people in the process.
- **Sustainability** – Explore ways of making the carnival sustainable in terms of finance, management etc.

The discussion illustrated to PP that the opportunity for a creative led event could be hampered by a rigid view of what ‘carnival’ suggests. As with the programme delivered by PP previously a strong creative proposition that is made in response to a particular context can result in extraordinary results – Love Stirchley a distinct project from the carnival proposition) being a great example. For PP the development of Viva Stirchley as a proposition is a creative process which, had we been further into our development when presented to the group, we feel would have elicited a different and more positive response. As a result PP will be considering how best to develop, structure and ensure participation in the development of the carnival proposition in order to ensure the artistic quality and ambition can be sustained,

**Proposal 2: Urban Resource Centre**

An Urban Resource Centre (URC) is a locally run flexible space providing residents with a place for workshops, local events and meetings while serving as a social hub. In Stirchley, there are currently a number of empty shops on the high street and an old swimming baths facility, owned by Birmingham City Council, which have the potential to be turned, in part, into a URC. Deciding the location for an URC will take time and negotiations, therefore, the group began by exploring ideas of ownership and belonging relating to setting up such a centre in Stirchley. They also examined what the legal, institutional and social constraints might be. Interestingly, it was discussed that the group itself could become the URC rather than a physical place. In this context, a virtual network could be a way of diverse groups and individuals subscribing to a collective identity.

Things to consider with regards to developing the URC:
- **Defining partnerships**
- **Resources**— including know-how, skills etc.
- **Activities** – potential to be home-based e.g. workshops turned into social enterprises over time.
- **Connections** - the carnival could be a key resource to the community as it will mobilise resources.

Initial next steps for realising the project included:

- **Tapping into existing resources** – The popular Stirchley market is a good place for the group to start discussing ideas of the URC with the general public. This process could also identify interested people plus additional local resources.
- **Mapping** – Mapping local assets and resources to better understand the need for the URC and potential partnership opportunities.
- **Understanding the network** – Talking with local community members to define the network in order to be able to clearly articulate what it is, what it does and what it aspires to do. Note: the group wanted the network to bring life back to Stirchley, which would then bring employment and new skills while breathing life into empty and neglected spaces.

**Event Next Steps**

The Stirchley event enabled the group to develop a clearer understanding of their aspirations for the area and what practical next steps are needed to realise several of the community improvement proposals. Further investigation is required to better understand:

- What are the resources in Stirchley?
- Who are the groups?
- How do we create a network of resources and a stronger identity?
- Leadership? Who is going to make all this happen?
- Discover if there is a need and desire for a URC in Stirchley?
- How do you get people with the skills needed for the group involved? How do you engage new people who otherwise ignore conventional routes into community issues?
- Identify the gaps.

In order to get this going the group needs to:

- **Research** - book a stall at the market and / or produce invitations to attract different people to the network including public and private sector officials.
- **Create a resource analysis** – to understand what people in the community can offer. This will happen at the summit.

**Proposal 3: The Stirchley Summit**

The conventional approach to initiate and implement a project within a community is to arrange a series of planning meetings which tend to be unimaginative and attract the ‘same old crowd’. The group decided it needed to add a new spin on this and provide something, which pronounced its ambition and need to make big changes in Stirchley. The concept of a summit was discussed as this shifts the perception, purpose and intent from a low level
community meeting to an ambitious, bigger-scale event looking to find solutions and make
change happen. The aim of the Summit would be to identify resources and explore the
following plans:

- **Build a network of local groups, businesses and residents; mobilising existing
  resources for the benefit of Stirchley.**
- **Plan the networks first project: Stirchley’s Green and Open Spaces**
- **Spatial plan** – Using maps of Stirchley to understand the assets / resources /
  problems etc. re green spaces.
- **Management and leadership plan** – allocating roles and responsibilities.

By doing this the group will be able to:

- Better define the network
- Pool resources and improve connections
- Understand how the network is placed in the community and positioned strategically
- Develop the green space project

The event concluded with Nabeel Hamdi reiterating the key principles of Small Change
practice.

**Further information:**

Report available at: [www.smallchangeforum.org](http://www.smallchangeforum.org)
CENDEP: [http://oisd.brookes.ac.uk/architecture/cendep/](http://oisd.brookes.ac.uk/architecture/cendep/)
Multistory: [www.multistory.org.uk](http://www.multistory.org.uk)


Place Prospectors visit: [www.prospectors.org.uk](http://www.prospectors.org.uk)

For information about the forum, please contact Jeni Burnell, Chair:
[jburnell@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:jburnell@brookes.ac.uk)
Annex One: Programme

FOREWORD

“I’ve always liked Stirchley.”

“Stirchley”

“St. Ickley” I call it.

The opposite of obvious.

Charming, loved, real.

People talk about it, it’s got a past.

You have to imagine.

The closer you are the better.

Dig a little and you find

Much has been lost, taken or goes by another name.

The station, the baths, the library.

They were all christened “Stirchley”

Meandering, trickling and flooding.

It’s fixed in place, slopes up & down;

a valley where people meet.

It’s the way it feels that people like.

There’s no posing, just ‘real life’.

Passers through are many.

Not knowing all Stirchley has to offer

Regulars stop for their supplies

But few journey east and west

A place in waiting.

Stirchley lived and Stirchley worked.

Co-operation is it’s secret to success.

“Viva Stirchley”

Jayne Murray, Place Prospectors 2012

SMALL CHANGE FORUM EVENT
12 JUNE 2012 / 12-5PM
AT STIRCHLEY PARK, BIRMINGHAM
COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING: TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION

The Small Change Forum is a network of people interested in the small change approach to bringing about community-led change.

The Forum is developed by Mulitiary and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CDEEP) based at Oxford Brookes University.

EVENT SCHEDULE
1200-1245 Lunch
1245-1300 Introduction
1300-1330 What has been done so far?
1330-1430 What do we want to do next?
1430-1500 What will get in the way?
1500-1600 What do we need to do?
1600-1700 Next steps

To RSVP your place for this FREE event please email:
karl.greenwood@multiarity.org.uk
or call on 0121 533 7190

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1200-1245 Lunch
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1330-1430 What do we want to do next?
1430-1500 What will get in the way?
1500-1600 What do we need to do?
1600-1700 Next steps
1700 End

Annex Two: Summary of Work So Far

### Annex Three: Contact list

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emma Beech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jo Jackson</td>
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<td>Salma Stor</td>
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### Organisers/speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
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