Welcome to the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment conference 2025

Community Spaces: their role and future in society

12 November 2025

Community spaces - their role and future in society



Welcome and Introductions

Louise Millington-Community Hub Manager

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Aims of workshop

- Look at Orbit's journey and Hub model - Hut to Hub
- Thoughts on the future role of community spaces in our neighbourhoods
- Table discussions – what do you see as the future for community spaces?

Orbit's approach – why community hubs?

- Thriving Communities Strategy – emphasis on place

- Orbit 2030 strategy – Making a positive difference to our customers and society

Our hubs will:

- Be a visible presence in our communities
- Give customers access to Orbit staff and services, particularly those who are unlikely to engage with us through other channels
- Act as a community anchor to bring services, partners and funding into our communities
- Generate social value through our supply chain and volunteer opportunities

Community spaces - their role and future in society

Current Hubs

Gorleston (East)

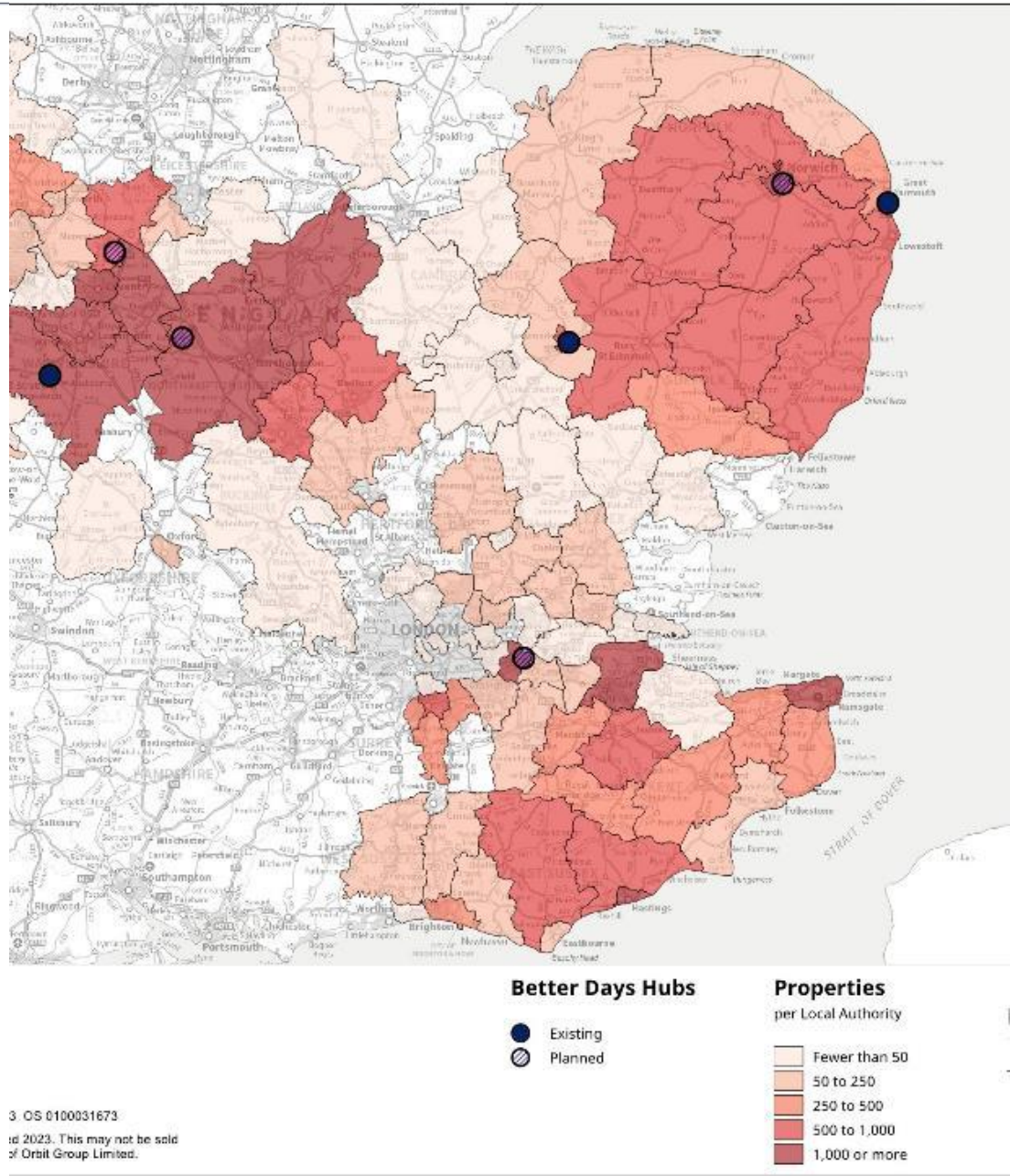
Newmarket (East)

The Orchard (Bexley-South)

Norwich (East)

Micklewell (Midlands)

We work with community partners in areas where we don't have hubs to engage with our customers and support what's already strong in our neighbourhoods.



Current Hubs - Newmarket



- Former caretaker’s flat
- Some access restrictions which limits use
- Regularly hired by local partners including Alcoholic Anonymous
- Used for staff meetings and training

Current Hubs: Gorleston



- One room building with outdoor space and kitchen area
- Place team deliver weekly drop-ins and wellbeing-focused activities
- Hired by local Police team, church group and used as a polling station

Current Hubs: Norwich



- Previous Orbit Homes sales office
- Place team deliver weekly drop-ins and wellbeing-focused activities
- Health and wellbeing groups
- Hub will expand into the former show home to create additional space





Current Hubs: The Orchard



- Building attached to high rise block and previously used as a nursery
- Place team deliver weekly drop-ins and wellbeing, and arts and crafts focused activities
- Looking to develop a youth offer and a community garden

Current Hubs: Micklewell



- Purpose built community Hub on a new build estate
- Place team deliver weekly drop-ins and wellbeing focused activities
- Lots of potential for hire and bringing in services to a new and growing community



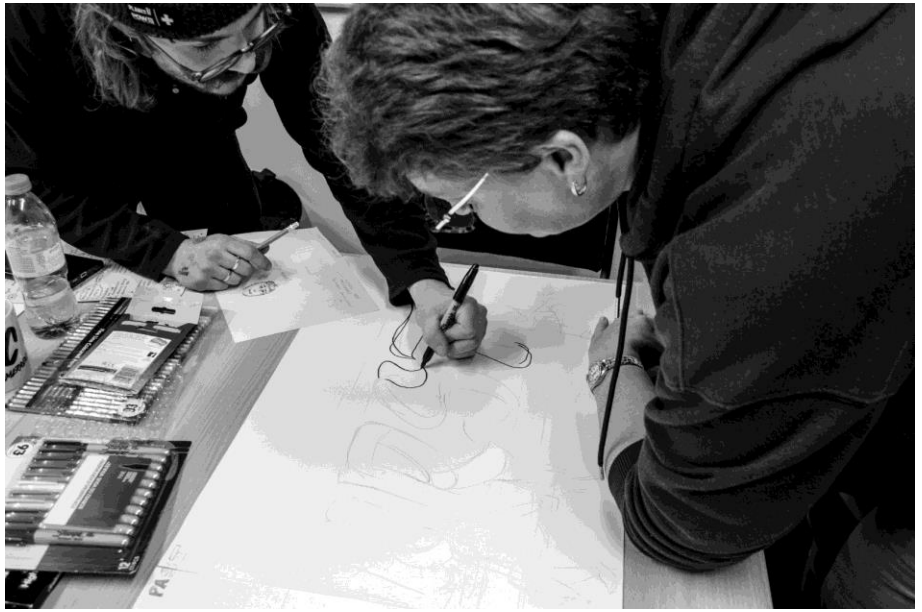


Community Hubs-some activities we have delivered

- Training
- Drop in's
- Preloved sale
- Breast Cancer awareness month/bake sales
- Quiz nights/games night
- Hearing van
- Guest speakers
- Gentle/seated exercise
- Fire and Rescue service visits
- Residents' meetings
- Basic DIY skills-delivered by contractors
- Holiday activities for families
- Grow, Cook, East sessions
- Arts and Crafts
- Wellbeing







What have we learnt along the way?

- We’re consistent in what we offer through our Better Days programme but adapt how we deliver it at each hub
- Be aspirational not just a place for a crisis
- Having organisational buy in makes life a lot easier
- Sell the space internally to increase usage
- Make the most of what you have

Role of community centres

Last year HACT published ‘Community Benefits: A framework to capture the impact of community spaces’

- Looked at the state of the sector
- What impact measures can be used for community space, including outcome measures from the UKSVB
- Made recommendations about how organisations can use the impact framework to measure and understand the impact created through community spaces



“We know it is important, but we don’t know how.”

Some key findings

- 45% of survey respondents feel that their organisation understands how important community spaces are to residents, communities,
- and the business.

- 24% of survey respondents feel that their organisation views community spaces as key tools of engagement with residents, rather than directly
- Contributing to outcomes for residents.

- Most organisations partially fund community spaces through core funds but only 26% indicated that their community spaces are fully funded through funding and grants

- Can be a disconnect between how the organisation views community spaces at a strategic level and how they are supported in practice on a local and operational level

- Collecting the data to measure impact can be a challenge

“These spaces play a key role in supporting efforts to nurture thriving communities and the best outcomes for residents.”

Impact Framework in Action

Using the framework, we were able to capture in Q1 2025/26:

£121,000 in social value generated by our community hubs

This was purely through capturing attendance at residents' meetings, information we were capturing anyway.





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Future in society – Table discussion

- Why keep your community assets?
- What will be their purpose in the future? How should we keep them
- How can they continue to benefit customers and the wider community? The opportunities of keeping them

15 minutes on your table to discuss

Please be ready to feedback from your table discussion

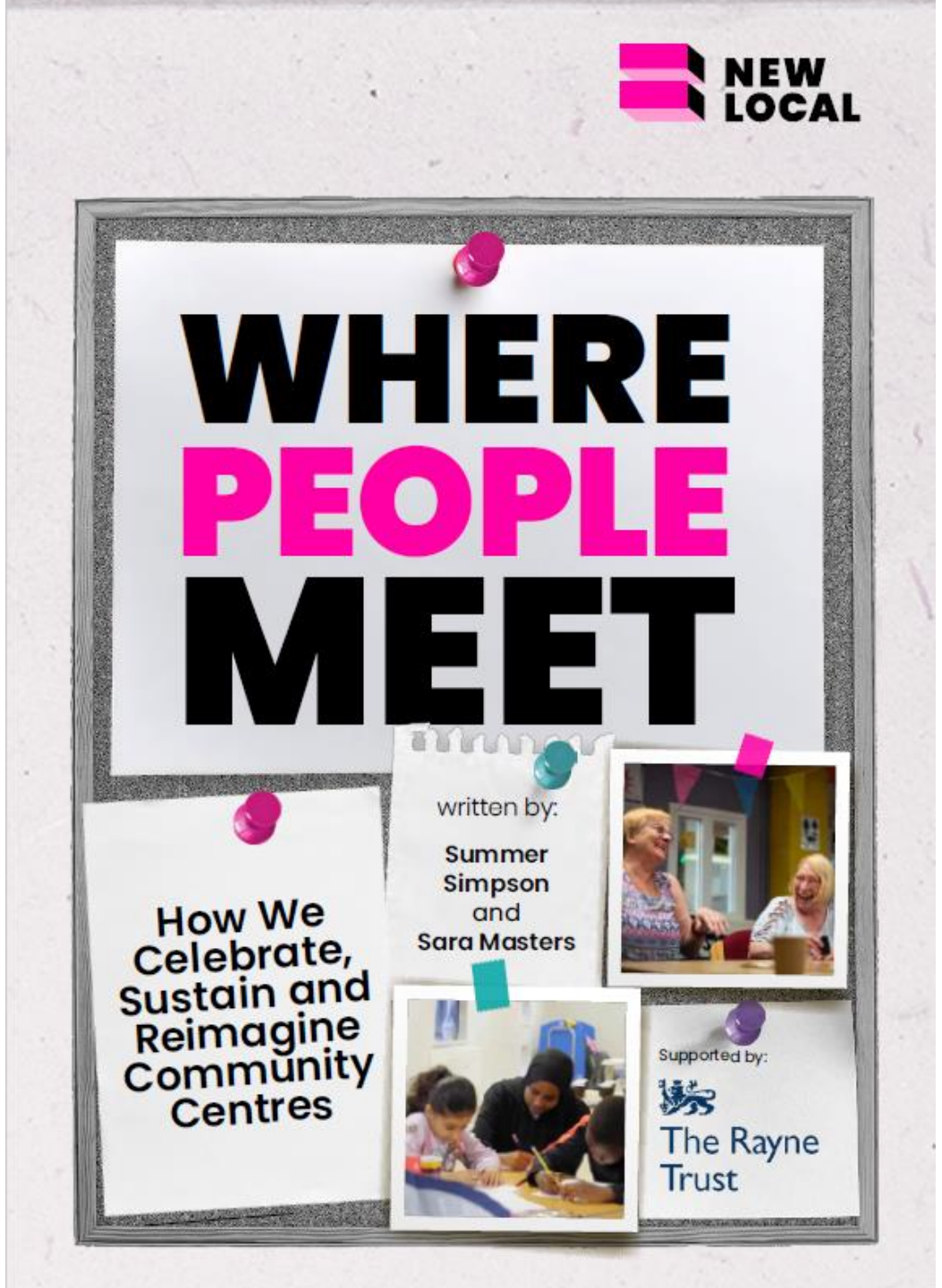
Thoughts on the future

New Local recently published ‘Where People Meet’ which looked at the challenges facing community centres and how they can be overcome.

Sets out a vision for the community centre of 2040:

- Human Connection
- A Place of Pride
- Inherently Preventative
- Relevant and Responsive
- Champions of our Community
- Not a ‘nice to have’

“Community centres should be recognised as key strategic and delivery partners with deep knowledge of their communities”



Thank you!

Please do reach out if you wanted to discuss further or look at potential partnership opportunities, we are very keen on partnership working!

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