



Imagining North Shields

Past, Present and Future



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Photograph credits: Ken Grint www.kengrint.com; Jim Irvin photos from the Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future collection and members of the *Imagine North East* project.

Design and printing by Alphagraphics

1. The *Imagine North East* project

This booklet has been produced as part of the *Imagine North East* research project.

Imagine North East is part of a UK-wide project, *Imagine – Connecting communities through research*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The focus of *Imagine* is ‘civic participation’ - how people get involved and influence life in their communities. In the North East, during 2014-15, we examined the historical dimensions of community participation in two areas: Benwell (Newcastle upon Tyne) and North Shields. In the 1970s both areas had government-funded Community Development Projects (CDPs) designed to tackle poverty. The CDPs involved community workers and researchers working alongside local people on issues such as housing, welfare rights and employment. They produced many detailed and critical reports, which located the causes of local social and economic problems in the decline of traditional industries along the Tyne, failures of government policy and international pressure to cut public spending. They stimulated community action and campaigns, to fight for greater community involvement in decision-making, better quality housing, services and welfare rights.

While starting with the past, *Imagine North East* recorded the massive process

of change in the past 40 years and explored the present and future state of communities in Benwell and North Shields. In both areas, researchers from Durham University and 12 community organisations undertook a programme of research and related activities. We looked at the history of community development and regeneration in each area, the extent to which local people were involved in decision-making and the different visions of residents, community workers, policy-makers and politicians (and how these differed). We considered the lessons about how local communities can be engaged in imagining and creating better futures for their areas. About 70 interviews were conducted with a range of people (former and current residents, community activists/workers, politicians/policymakers and others) - seeking their views on the CDP, community participation and changes in North Shields and Benwell. Not surprisingly, there are many versions of the history of the area and visions of the future. The findings of this part of the research will be written up in detail in the *Community Development Journal* in 2016/17.

This booklet is a short overview based on our work in North Shields. Fuller details of the research findings will be available on our website, www.durham.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/imagine

“Connecting communities through research”



2. Brief history of North Shields

North Shields is situated at the mouth of the River Tyne and takes its name from the 'shielings' or 'shiels' (fishermen's huts) that once stood on the banks of the river.

The early monastic settlement at Tynemouth in the 13th century helped to make the area one of importance with brewing, baking, sea coal and fishing becoming principal trades. In the 16th century, the Crown took over the monastic land and North Shields grew in size with the development of the salt and mining industries. Houses were still situated by the river and in the 17th century were described as crowded, unhealthy and subject to plague. In the 18th and 19th centuries, with industrial development based on ship building and repairs, the town expanded away from the river for the first time to house many of the wealthy industrialists - for example, Dockway Square was built in 1763. The development of the port by the Tyne

Improvement Committee was associated with new and transformed industries such as ship repair at Smith's Dock, which was the town's largest employer from the 1890s to the 1960s. A new fish quay was built in 1886 and with the invention of steam trawling, distant fishing was possible. These developments had an impact on the population which doubled in the periods 1801 to 1851 and 1851 to 1921.

In the 1920s, North Shields consisted of Banksides, bank tops, the industrial villages of Percy Main and East Howden and the villages of Chirton and Preston. Council housing, along with subsidised and unsubsidised private houses, was built in the 1920s and after the Greenwood Housing Act of 1930 the Banksides area was cleared. The Banksides comprised 'back-to-back' housing fronting the river Tyne mainly occupied by labourers and poorly paid fishermen. Most residents (about 9,000 people) were moved to



a newly-built estate – The Ridges. The estate was originally constructed between 1932 and 1939 by Tynemouth County Borough Council to rehouse residents of the Banksides in flats built in blocks of four. In the 1930s, an industrial estate was built at Chirton, with an emphasis on women’s employment and diversification of industry. During the Second World War, North Shields was an area where engineering and other industries were relocated – in part because the sites already existed at Chirton.

Between 1950 and 1960, the area experienced primary industry job losses (about 70%) but manufacturing employment increased for both men and women.

Shipbuilding and repair grew and food and clothing manufacturing on the Chirton industrial estate provided mainly women’s employment. A significant newcomer at this time was the De La Rue – Formica plant.

The approach to housing in the post war period was similar to the 1930s – public sector housing associated with slum clearance and private sector suburbanisation. A major slum clearance scheme in the 1960s involved Dockwray Square as the fine terraced houses built for 19th-century industrialists had become slum tenements. By the 1970s, the improvement of existing housing was a major concern and this was an issue faced by the Community Development Project (CDP) team.

Sources for this section include: Byrne, D. (1989) *Beyond the inner city*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, UK; Tyne and Wear Historic Towns Survey (2004) *North Shields*, www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/drupalncc.newcastle.gov.uk/files/wwwfileroot/planning-and-buildings/conservation_heritage_and_urban_design/small_towns_report_-_northshields.pdf



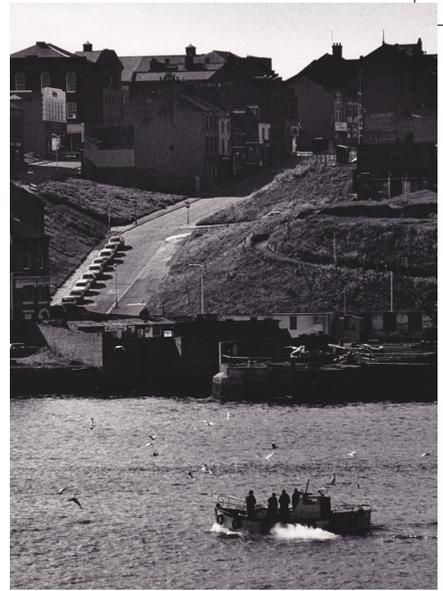
3. The National Community Development Project

Benwell and North Shields were chosen as the sites for *Imagine North East* because they were formerly locations for the National Community Development Project (CDP) in the 1970s.

This was Britain's response to the American 'War on Poverty' and consisted of 12 local community-based projects each with a five-year life. The local teams were tasked with researching the causes of poverty in their areas and working with local residents to bring about change.

This was a period when cracks had begun to appear in the 'never had it so good' political rhetoric of post-war Britain after years of increasing affluence, low unemployment and an expanding welfare state. The National CDP was a response to the realisation that poverty still existed in parts of Britain. It was an experiment designed to find new ways of tackling these so-called 'pockets of deprivation'. The government believed that the causes of poverty were to be found within the poor communities themselves, and could be tackled at a local level.

"The National CDP was a response to the realisation that poverty still existed in parts of Britain."



4. North Tyneside Community Development Project

North Tyneside CDP (located in North Shields) ran from 1972 to 1977.

It comprised a research team employed by Newcastle Polytechnic and an action team employed by the local authority. Describing their approach as 'radical reformism' the CDP team aimed to re-assert political and social awareness among those living within the project area and among professional service providers and political groups of the council.

The CDP area included the old working class riverside district with its port-related activities (South and North Trinity), two villages (Percy Main and East Howdon), and a 1930s council estate (North and South Meadow Well) and nearby Hunters Close and Murrays Close. The North

Tyneside CDP report *Working class politics and housing* (p. 57) said the CDP area was 'the most unstable and dilapidated part of the town'. It was chosen, according to the North Tyneside CDP report *Living with industrial change* (p. 159), because it was characterised by 'higher than average unemployment, lower than average pay, high concentrations of semi and unskilled workers, and by stressful working conditions (shift work, dirty or heavy manual work, repetitive work and lack of control over the work routine). ... In the docks and riverside areas the problems centred on redundancy and unemployment arising from major changes in shipbuilding, heavy engineering, refinery and transport industries'.



Key issues and activities

North Tyneside CDP was strongly committed to a 'politicising' objective and it was decided that the best way to do this was for action groups to work with the local Labour Party.

There were five key issues that the CDP teams worked on:

- **Housing:** Rehousing, modernisation, redevelopment and repairs were the main issues. In 1975, 19% of houses in the CDP area were without the three basic amenities (bathroom, inside toilet, hot water). The research team conducted surveys on community attitudes, housing conditions, tenants' wishes and a fair rents comparative study. The action team worked with existing tenants' associations (or helped form new ones) to bring about change in housing conditions and issues were found around which groups could be organised.
- **Information:** Information Shops were established in three locations (Percy Main, Meadow Well and Trinity) to deal with the problems and rights of individuals and identify and act as a base for collective issues. Most information and advice was required in areas such as housing, welfare rights, benefits and employment-related issues.
- **Play and recreation:** The team worked to establish recreational play provision in the area; employ play workers; and finance an adventure playground on Meadow Well.
- **Industry and employment:** They investigated the loss of traditional industries and the effects of long-term unemployment.
- **Women's issues:** A survey of 107 women in the CDP area was followed up by interviews to explore an ignored sector of the workforce in North Shields. The CDP Final Report Women's work was produced. This was a study, 'which started out as a relatively simple explanation of the work that women do in North Shields' and 'turned into a socialist-feminist analysis of the oppression of women in general' (p. 5). This is a rare work amongst CDP reports. Women's issues did not feature greatly in other CDP publications.

5. North Tyneside CDP area statistics: 1971 and 2011

	1971	2011
Population	15,950	12,350
Born outside the UK (%)	0.9	5.0
Employment (economically active) (% of working age)	48.8	72.9
Unemployment (% of economically active)	10.3	14.6
Access to a car, households (%)	17.0	49.9
Dwelling with hot water, inside WC and bath (%)	66.4	No data
Social rented housing including from Council (%)	42.1	40.1
Privately owned housing (%)	23.9	37.5
Private rented housing (%)	34.1	20.8

Census statistics show that the North Tyneside CDP area has seen some population decline, but not very much.

The development of the Royal Quays area on former docklands has no doubt been a major factor in maintaining population even though households have become smaller. In 1971, two thirds of houses had all three basic amenities (hot water, inside WC and bath) - a relatively high proportion, reflecting the high levels of social housing. Today, of course, those amenities are taken for granted; very few households are without them, so they are no longer even counted in the Census.

Economically, the area has seen improvement. There has been a substantial increase in economic activity, not least because of rising female employment, although unemployment is relatively high. Access to a car, a useful

indicator of income, has risen from 17% in 1971 to 49.9% in 2011.

The area has seen a small increase in diversity in terms of the birthplaces of the population. In 1971, 0.9% of residents had been born outside the UK, compared with 5% in 2011.



The statistics were gathered from the 1971 and 2011 UK National Census. The area for comparison was the original North Tyneside Community Development Project area, which included the 7 neighbourhoods of: South and North Trinity; Percy Main; East Howdon; Hunters Close and Murrays Close and North and South Meadow Well.



6. Subsequent regeneration programmes in North Shields

The North Tyneside CDP area has seen a great deal of change since the 1970s, as shown on the timeline overleaf.

Regeneration and development schemes have had a significant impact here, and across North Tyneside.

In the southern part of the former CDP area, Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, backed by substantial government funding, promoted the Royal Quays development. At the time of the CDP, this was a declining dockland area. During the 1990s, with further funding from the Enterprise Zones initiative, it transformed into a popular residential development, including retail and leisure facilities and a marina.

Meadow Well and Percy Main were the focus of regeneration through the national City Challenge programme (1992-98) and a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) scheme (1995-2000), which had followed on from an Estate Action initiative. The Meadow Well was partially demolished, rebuilt and refurbished in the 1990s. There was also a North Shields Town Centre SRB programme from 1996-2001. A Master Plan for the regeneration of the North Shields Fish Quay was adopted by the Council in 2001. At the time of writing, a Neighbourhood Plan for

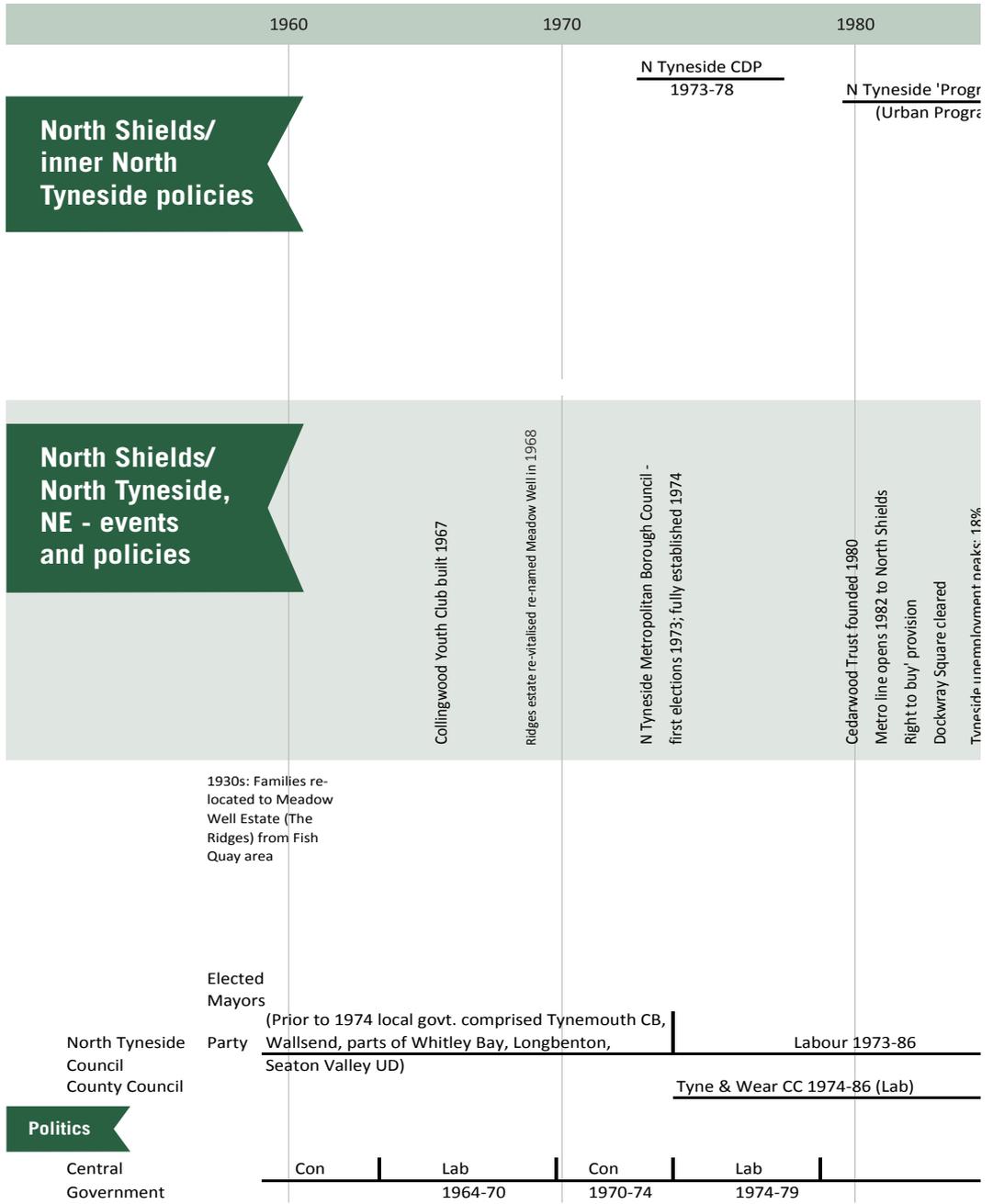
the Fish Quay has been adopted as a supplementary planning document and will be subsumed into the emerging Local Plan in due course.

There was an area-based regeneration initiative from 2005 where North Tyneside was split into four quarters with area-based teams (North Shields in the south east quarter). Forums were created in each area, now replaced with 'ward conversations'.

Subsequently, a three year Neighbourhood Management project was established (2006-2010), which aimed to improve conditions for local residents by securing better public services and supporting community development.

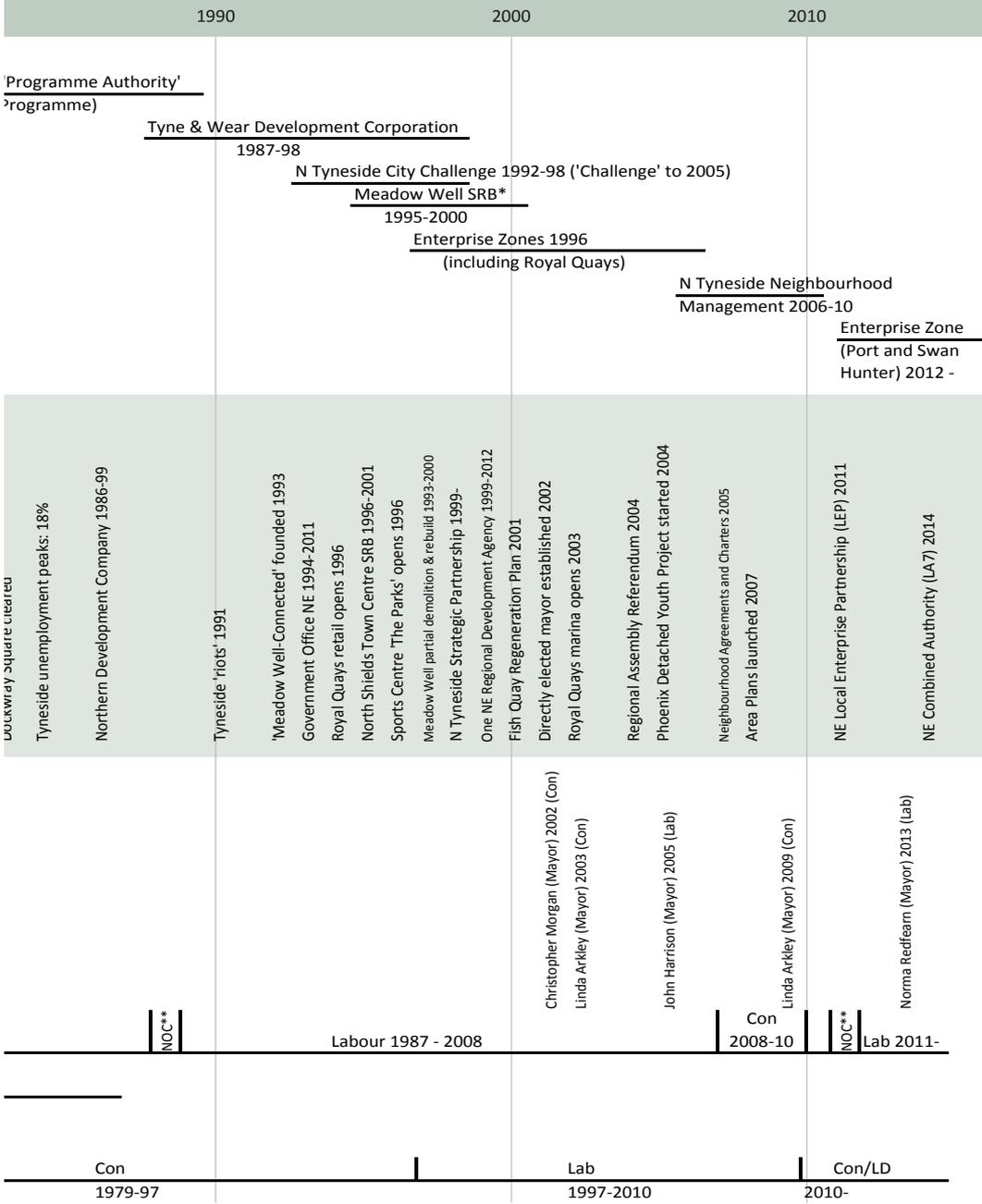
A Retail Centres Strategy for North Shields was approved by Cabinet in 2010 but was quickly overtaken by events with the rapid increase in empty properties, particularly in older town centres. The Council is currently reviewing the best way forward for North Shields town centre as the original Strategy is now out of date. Elsewhere in the Borough, new Enterprise Zones were designated in 2012 to stimulate economic development at the former Swan Hunter shipyard and at the Port of Tyne.

North Shields and North Tyneside policies and politics timeline



* Other SRB programmes in North Tyneside included: Longbenton: Sense of Community; North Ty

(This is a selection of policies and events)



th Tyneside Challenge ; and Pathways to Work

** No overall control



8. *Imagine North East* Community Partner Projects

Four community organisations from North Shields have worked on projects for *Imagine North East*, based on their own interpretations of 'imagining different communities'. Each one has involved local people working together in creative and exciting ways to gather histories and think of the future.

'Imagining Community at Cedarwood' – a family and community history project, by Cedarwood Trust

The impetus for *Imagining Community at Cedarwood* came from residents wanting to understand how and why their community had been affected by regeneration. They wanted to tell their stories and show their perceptions of change.

To do this, a group of local residents came together at the Cedarwood Trust on the Meadow Well Estate to explore the history of the estate and its community through the stories of individual families and their experiences of regeneration and change. Meeting together weekly for several months, they shared memories of their lives through the decades, reflecting on changes in

fashion, leisure and games as well as the impact of housing re-development on local families. Group members collected stories from other residents as well as information about the estate's history from newspapers, maps and other sources. They used family history research to explore the stories of individual families, and video and photography to document the changing neighbourhood.

At the end of the project, the group produced a wealth of material - from photographic displays to poems and life stories - to illustrate how the area has changed over their lifetimes.



About Cedarwood Trust

The Cedarwood Trust is a community-based pastoral care and community development charity offering support, inspiration and guidance to residents of the Meadow Well Estate, together with opportunities which recognise, realise and celebrate people's potential. The Trust runs a range of activities and services for people of all ages from its premises on Avon Avenue.

Website: www.cedarwoodtrust.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/cedarwoodtrust

Twitter: @CedarwoodTrust

“When people who were relocated off the estate for various regeneration projects were moved back, they were often on different streets with new neighbours, thereby breaking up some of the long-standing social ties in the community.”

“The impetus for *Imagining Community at Cedarwood* came from residents wanting to understand how and why their community had been affected by regeneration.”



'Bridging the History' – a community-led oral history project, by Meadow Well Connected

***Bridging the History* was sparked by a TV programme 'Queen of North Shields' in which a local resident appeared and was highly derogatory about the area.**

As a project group member said:

'There was a lot of anger in the community, a lot was expressed on Facebook, so we were determined to diminish the stigma attached to the area. For example, if you google 'Meadow Well' the riots come up, but nothing about the positive projects going on now.'

The group decided on a community-led oral history project to collect memories and information about life on Meadow Well, focusing particularly on the past 20 years. The aim was to reclaim the history of their own community in response to negative images perpetuated by the media.

A group of residents met weekly at The Meadows (a community hub) to explore their history and they named their project

Bridging the History. They created a display tracing the history of the estate by means of a timeline of photographs, press cuttings and other material. This display was used to encourage other residents (and former residents) of the Meadow Well to share their own memories and get involved in discussions about the area's past, present and future. The group also took a video camera out onto the estate and filmed the present-day streetscape as a way of stimulating memories. One legacy of the project is a facebook page dedicated to The Ridges – the former name of the estate, still used by many people.

At the launch of the timeline in May 2014, a local resident said:

'I think the timeline is a really cool thing, and I think it's a going forward thing, and it's moving away from this, as I said before, the riots, and having a more positive spin on the place. It has a better



history than that really. If you look at the maps, and it goes from mid 1800s until now, Meadow Well riots were just one bit of the long history of the Meadow Well. It's got a long history and it's just one little bit. When you think, when it was first built, it was probably a forward thinking place, you know the council were doing marvellous things or local people, it was probably like a show place.'

About Meadow Well Connected

Meadow Well Connected works with local residents to identify needs and develop programmes of support. Its community hub, The Meadows, is located on Waterville Road at the heart of the Meadow Well Estate, and offers a range of services including employability, digital development, debt and money management support and education and learning programmes.

Website: www.meadowwellconnected.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/meadowwellconnected

Twitter: @MWCNE29

“They created a display tracing the history of the estate by means of a timeline of photographs, press cuttings and other material.”



'A Journey through Time' – a graffiti art project, by Phoenix Detached Youth Project

Phoenix's intergenerational urban art project was designed to be a way of exploring themes of change and resilience.

Local graffiti artists from different generations created an outdoor artwork at the Parks Sports Centre in North Shields. Graffiti art is important to the local area as a way of creating community spirit, brightening up the area, and representing the skills and abilities of the local people.

There is a strong local tradition of using graffiti art as a means of self-expression. Participants in the *Imagine* project included several older artists with an international reputation as serious graffiti artists, having started in the 1980s as a group of young men from the Meadow Well who were supported by local youth workers to develop and use their skills. Also taking part were young people linked with Phoenix and other local residents with an interest in graffiti art. Together they created a large art

work depicting the history of urban art in the area and how its culture has changed. Whilst working, the artists discussed change in the area:

'It's that whole thing of the Meadow Well's changed in so many ways, but it's still got the same underlying problems. So the housing's improved, the living conditions to a certain extent have improved, but at the same time the poverty that happened in the '80s is still here, the unemployment is still here, the social unrest and injustice they feel is heaped upon them is still here – it's just manifested in different aspects. So instead of it being 'there's no work in the shipyards', now there's no work because all the call centres have been outsourced and this, that and the other.'

Phoenix also made a film based on interviews with the graffiti artists and a video of the process of creating the *Imagine* artwork.



About Phoenix Detached Youth Project

Based in Front Street, North Shields, its aim is to help young people's personal and social development through leisure time activities, informal education and support. The project contacts and builds relationships with young people through detached youth work on the local estates.

Website: <http://www.pdyp.org/>



“Graffiti art is important to the local area as a way of creating community spirit, brightening up the area, and representing the skills and abilities of the local people.”



Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future

The role of Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future (RPRF) has been to give ongoing practical support to the North Shields projects throughout the lifetime of *Imagine North East*.

The organisation has provided advice and expertise in areas such as interview techniques, data storage, use of technical equipment, and mounting exhibitions.

The aim has been to build the skills and knowledge of local workers and volunteers in order to equip them better to carry out oral history research and share findings with others.

In conjunction with Living History North East, a Sunderland-based organisation, specialising in regional oral history, RPRF gave training to volunteers involved in *Imagine North East* projects in interviewing

and reminiscence facilitation skills. This enabled participants to meet and learn from other community members, interview them and translate the material collected into exhibitions, booklets and other resources. These resources have added significantly to the local history archive collections available in North Tyneside.

RPRF has also supported the North Shields groups to produce innovative local displays and exhibitions to a high standard and disseminate these widely. In May 2015 material from *Imagine North East* formed a significant part of North Tyneside's first Local History Fair, held in North Shields Customer First Centre. There was also an exhibition at the Old Low Lights Heritage Centre (Fish Quay, North Shields) in May 2015.



About Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future

RPRF is a volunteer-led organisation based in North Tyneside, which works with local communities to create a 20th-century history of the area based on personal memories. It specialises in promoting good practice in oral history and reminiscence collection and dissemination.

Website: www.memoriesnorthtyne.org.uk

“This enabled participants to meet and learn from other community members, interview them and translate the material collected into exhibitions, booklets and other resources.”



9. North Tyneside CDP reports

Final reports

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *North Shields: working class politics and housing, 1900-1977*, Final Report Series No 1, North Tyneside CDP.

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *North Shields: living with industrial change*, Final Report Series No 2, North Tyneside CDP.

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *North Shields: organising for change in a working class area*, Final Report Series No 3, North Tyneside CDP.

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *Organising for change in a working class area: the action groups*, Final Report Series No 4, North Tyneside CDP.

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *North Shields: women's work*, Final Report Series No 5, North Tyneside CDP.

North Tyneside CDP (1978) *In and out of work: a study of unemployment, low pay and income maintenance services*, North Tyneside CDP.

A selection of CDP inter-project reports

National CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team (1977) *Gilding the ghetto: the state and the poverty experiments*, London.

National CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team (1977) *Limits of the law*, London.

National CDP Report, (1981) *The costs of industrial change*, CDP Publications, Benwell.

Some of these reports are available electronically through a collection established by Sue Hyatt at the University Library, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, called *War on Poverty in Britain: Documents from the Community Development Projects*.

www.ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/CDP

Hard copies of most of the original CDP reports are still available.

Contact: stjamesbenwell@gmail.com

10. Websites and contact details

Imagine North East website: www.durham.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/imagine

Timeline and blog for *Imagine North East*: www.imaginenortheast.org

Contact for *Imagine North East*: s.j.banks@durham.ac.uk | Tel: **0191 3341497**

More details of the *Imagine* project as a whole can be found on the project website: www.imaginecommunity.org.uk | Follow the *Imagine* project on **Twitter @imagine_connect**

Members of *Imagine North East* project team:

Durham University, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action:

Sarah Banks (coordinator), Andrea Armstrong (researcher), Emma Renno (secretary), Alan Townsend and David Byrne (statistics), Fred Robinson (policy), Gary Craig and Lena Dominelli (advisors).

Community partners: Judith Green (North East community projects coordinator), Clare Levi (Search), Anne Bonner and Bren Riley (Riverside Community Health Project), Michael Bell, Dean McMahon and Andi Kewley (Patchwork Youth Project), Judith Green (St James' Centre for Heritage and Culture and St James' Heritage and Environment Group), Ruth Taylor (Pendower Good Neighbour Project), Michael Young and Ian Farrier (West Newcastle Picture History Collection); Philippa Southall and Paula McCormack (Meadow Well Connected), Phil McGrath and Yvonne Hall (Cedarwood Trust), Luke Johnston and Mike Burgess (Phoenix Detached Youth Project), Kath Smith (Remembering the Past, Resourcing the Future), Michael McHugh (Tyne and Wear Museums and Archives - Discovery Museum), Janette Hilton (Living History North East).

International advisors: Sue Hyatt (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis) and Harvinder Bedi (Development Support Team, Pune, India).

