

# Fishermead Citizens Alliance

## Evaluation report

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**August 2023**

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# Executive summary

In 2020, the Citizens:mk alliance of diverse community organisations was awarded a grant from Milton Keynes Community Foundation for a project to build 'Fishermead Citizens Alliance' over a three-year period from September 2020 to August 2023. Their mission was to create a new broad-based alliance of faith, education and other community organisations, to tackle together the social issues faced by residents in Fishermead, an estate close to Milton Keynes city centre. This would be done using a Community Organising approach, with a Community Organiser supporting the project for the three-year period. The purpose of the project was to, 'Develop local people as leaders, strengthen their institutions and create systemic change' (Citizens:mk, 2021).

The steering group for the project enlisted the support of the Open University to evaluate the project over the three-year period. The evaluation work was orchestrated through the Applied Systems Thinking in Practice (ASTiP) group at The Open University and is intended for dissemination amongst stakeholders in Milton Keynes and across Citizens UK. Evaluation is conventionally seen as a predominantly summative exercise, assessing performance through an external audit. However, this evaluation builds on two complementary traditions: developmental evaluation and contemporary systems thinking in practice. Both traditions are premised on interventions (e.g., an evaluation) being participatory, iterative, and reflexive on the part of the practitioners. This proactive process develops value in an intervention, rather than simply

assessing or 'capturing value' in an intervention (Reynolds et al., 2017). The evaluator is embedded with the evaluand as an integral member of the project. As much as feasible, the project team have attempted to enable this integration despite constraints on distance of travel, availability of time and other limited project resources. This report puts forward the learning and value generated over the course of the three year project and sets out recommendations or considerations for moving forward.

The project has seen both successes and challenges over its course. A key challenge at the start of the project were the Covid 19 lockdowns, which hindered face to face interactions across Fishermead. Nevertheless, a project group, including the establishment of a number of community leaders was created. By early 2021 significant relationships had started to form and a programme of actions and campaigns were underway. Actions were targeted on road safety, crime, environment and community and they came to an exciting crescendo in August 2023 with a Fishermead 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration carnival. At this point, community leaders, residents and visitors to Fishermead gained a real sense of what stepping into their own agency felt like. Significant social capital was created and relational power across Fishermead leveraged.

A successful campaign was undertaken, gaining Milton Keynes Council approval for implementation of a 20mph speed limit in Fishermead. It demonstrated the power of the training and tools used to equip community leaders to take action for themselves.

Instrumental in the successes of the project was the work of a professional community organiser, who was responsible for supporting leaders to undertake actions, campaigns and research and integrate evaluation into the project.

The project to date has generated significant instrumental and critical value. Instrumental value being expressed as the value of the project to date (and also considering a potential more permanent Alliance). Critical value being expressed as individual and collective value. Institutions who have engaged with the project are in a notably more beneficial position now, having strong reciprocal relationships with others across Fishermead. These were developed through community walks to visit each institution, celebrations awarding community service awards to key member of institutions, stalls at the a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration event and other ongoing actions throughout the project. Critical value was realised through the escalating confidence of the community leaders, the trustful relationships they built up with others, effective reciprocal arrangements and a realisation that each individual's voice is legitimate.

Challenges of the project were around realising the instrumental value of the actions and campaigns in moving the project towards the establishment of a Fishermead Citizens Alliance and realising the intrinsic value of a potential Alliance. To date the Alliance has not yet been established. It is, however, early days after the key 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration event and leaders have not yet had time to consolidate their learning and fully understand the value generated over the last three years. Leaders expressed at the end of the project, in August 2023, that they were only just understanding the possibilities of the work. Leaders

believe that bringing the community together now is beneficial, they are thinking longer term and considering how not to lose the value that has been created to date.

Recommendations are given in high level points for consideration. These are around: reflecting on whether a hybrid interim model is relevant for Fishermead until an Alliance can be formed, not losing the value that the community organiser has brought to date, potentially designing a future model as a viable, learning system to enable ongoing systemic sensibilities to emerge and widening input to introduce greater cultural diversity.

Has the project realised the vision for Fishermead to become renowned as a safe, pleasant, interested and self-supporting community, where residents and workers, fully including those from BAME communities, have pride in themselves and their area? The value created so far is compelling and there are clear signs of relational power and system change. It will be imperative that next steps are carefully considered to maintain momentum and avoid losing the learning and value generated to date.



# Introduction

## The case for community organising and systems change

In September 2020, Citizens:mk, funded by Milton Keynes Community Foundation, set out on a project to build 'Fishermead Citizens Alliance' over a three-year period from September 2020 to August 2023, using a community organising approach. 'Community Organising is about returning power to people' (Citizens UK, 2019). It is about developing leaders who work together with others to make social change happen. Citizens UK has developed tens of thousands of leaders to win change on everything from safer streets to affordable housing (Citizens UK, 2019). It is about strengthening communities and building relationships. Up and down the country, hundreds of organisations work together for the greater good, paying annual dues to be a member. Members are given the tools and training to channel their frustrations about social injustice into effective democratic action.



Tom Bulman, Community Organiser for the Fishermead Community Alliance project shared with us how it felt to start out on this exciting journey,

*'Community Organising is a way of getting to the hearts of people who want to make their community better. By taking the time to meet them, ask them questions about their experiences, concerns and ambitions, and listen carefully, you are gaining information, giving affirmation and unleashing the energy needed to disrupt entrenched forces. Having three or*

*four one-to-one conversations like this each day, which is the main work of a Community Organiser, is enjoyable and increasingly productive as new connections are made with and between those people. No matter what their starting position or experience, when someone says they are driven to make a change in their community, and interested to build a team of others with common interest, we know we're in business.'*

**Tom Bulman, Community Organiser, 2023.**

## **Scope and purpose of the report**

This report is the final evaluation report, presented at the end of year three of the project. It recaps on learning generated in years one and two and includes new learning generated in the third year of the project. Specifically, this report provides:

- A summary of first and second order evidencing, describing progress against the Fishermead Citizens Alliance project expectations and evaluation criteria;
- Key challenges, successes over the three years;
- An overview of the evaluation plan, including the case for developmental evaluation and systems thinking and the key challenges for the evaluation;
- Considerations for a way forward for the project.

## **Mission of the project**

It was the mission of the project to build Fishermead Citizens Alliance (FCA) over a three-year period from September 2020 to August 2023.

‘Using the concepts and tools of Community Organising, developed by national charity, Citizens UK, the project will develop residents as leaders, and strengthen local civil society institutions, to hold state and private power holders to account for community improvements. Born of the existing Citizens:mk alliance, Fishermead Citizens Alliance will use its relational power to connect directly with individuals and institutions which have power over residents’ lives. The campaigns will be driven by the interests of Fishermead residents, not outside experts. The experience of positive actions will increase integration and social cohesions on the estate’  
(Citizens:MK, 2022)

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*‘Working closely with local leaders, a professional Community Organiser, working one day per week, will organise annual cycles of training, research, action and evaluation’*  
(Citizens:mk, 2022)

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## **Fishermead Citizens Alliance project vision**

The vision for Fishermead was to become renowned as a safe, pleasant, interested and self-supporting community, where residents and workers, fully including those from BAME communities, have pride in themselves and their area (FCA Project Plan, 2021). The project plan can be found in **Appendix 1**.

## Key features and complexities in Fishermead



Fishermead, an estate close to the city centre of Milton Keynes in the south-east region of England, is not without its difficulties. It has been deemed one of the most deprived suburbs in the area (Murrer, 2022).

The Woughton and Fishermead census data from 2020 tells us that there is a population of 18,401 in the wider area, a 0.26% population change since 2011. There are roughly the same number of males and females. 60.1% of the population are between the ages of 18–64 years. 29.4% of the population are aged between 0–17 years. The community is diverse, with multiple ethnic groups and religions (Citypopulation, 2022).



There are 32 different languages spoken in The Willows School



**Joanna Orbell. Head teacher, The Willows School**

Early discussions with the evaluand in year one of the project revealed that they had spoken to the pupils of Orchard Academy about what they do not like about living in Fishermead. Around a quarter of the pupils at Orchard Academy live in Fishermead. They said they did not like the graffiti, vandalism, bullying in

schools, graffiti under bridges and the rubbish. They said the houses are unkempt, and there is no colour on the buildings. There were also things that they liked about Fishermead, which were the trees, the Trinity Community Centre, the pirate park and there some pretty homes in Fishermead. It was acknowledged by the evaluand that there are some multi-occupancy housing issues in Fishermead but generally, housing stock is good. There are good green spaces and close proximity to shops and the city centre.

Throughout the evaluation, it has been one of the ambitions of the evaluand to change the narrative about Fishermead. It is thought that people generally have a poor opinion of Fishermead, which is felt to be sometimes built on perception more than reality. Skills and talents of those who live in Fishermead often go unnoticed. However, there is now evidence to suggest that this is starting to change.

Kevin Kallon grew up in Fishermead and is a member of the project steering group. Kevin showcased breakdancing at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. 'This is the first time the Commonwealth Games has showcased break dancing, which will be introduced as a new sport in the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024' (MKFM, 2022).



Kevin is bringing his positivity and energy to the project. His initial hopes to do more with the school children in Fishermead in year two of the project have come to fruition. He now runs a breakdancing club at The Willows School, which currently has 166 pupils (GovUk, 2023).

Having spent my formative years in Fishermead, I want to contribute and better my community through dance and fitness

**Kevin Kallon, 2022**

# Evaluating the project

## Evaluation team

The evaluation has been orchestrated through the Applied Systems Thinking in Practice (ASTiP) group at The Open University and will be disseminated amongst stakeholders in Milton Keynes and across Citizens UK. The evaluation team comprises of:

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Applied Systems Thinking in Practice (ASTiP) Group

The Open University

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Applied Systems Thinking in Practice (ASTiP) Group

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## The case for developmental evaluation and systems thinking

Evaluation is conventionally seen as a predominantly *summative* exercise, assessing performance through an *external* audit. However, this evaluation built on two complementary traditions: developmental evaluation and contemporary systems thinking in practice. Both traditions are premised on interventions (e.g., an evaluation) being participatory, iterative, and reflexive on the part of the practitioners. This proactive process **develops value** in an

intervention, rather than simply assessing or 'capturing value' in an intervention (Reynolds et al., 2016).

Developmental evaluation involves both *summative evaluation* and *formative evaluation*, including developing and revisiting the criteria of evaluation as the evaluation progresses. The two processes are in *continual interplay* rather than as either one or the other. Therefore, in this evaluation there was an emphasis on both *learning* as well as *accountability* (Reynolds et al., 2016).

There are two sets of audiences being addressed thorough the evaluation:

1. The funders of the project (Milton Keynes Community Foundation)
2. Participants involved with, and affected by, the project

The evaluation component is integral to the design and implementation of the Fishermead Citizens Alliance Project.

## Evaluation criteria

Initial measures of *efficacy (what)*, *efficiency (how)* and *effectiveness (why)* were produced in collaboration with project stakeholders at the start of the project. A full list of the initial evaluation criteria can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Iterative review of the measures of success were an integral part of the evaluation, particularly throughout the second year of the project. Measures were updated mid-way through year two in response to learning from year one of the project. The updated evaluation criteria from year two can be seen in **Appendix 3**. If the project were to continue further, evaluation criteria would need to be updated again, to reflect learning from year three of the project.



## Current stage of the evaluation

At the start of the evaluation, two initial phases were set out:

- I. Collaborative prototype modelling of Fishermead Citizens Alliance project using a viable system model to explore *systemic desirability* and *cultural feasibilities* and setting up appropriate criteria for evaluation (c. 2–3 months)
- II. Reflecting on systemic opportunities and challenges of Fishermead Citizens Alliance endeavours as explored through refined modelling base on a viable system model (c. 3–4 months)

The next stage of the project, throughout year two, moved onto reflecting on systemic opportunities and challenges of the endeavours to create a Fishermead Citizens Alliance. This was explored through:

1. Rendering of 3-year project as a viable system in collaboration with project stakeholders. This is presented in **Appendix 4**.
2. Collaborative design of monitoring and evaluation criteria based on VSM along with original terms of reference for the project (including vision and mission)

The final stage of the evaluation in year 3 consisted of:

1. Ongoing data collection
2. Boundary critique and remodelling of the project based on reflections
3. Ongoing review of evaluation criteria

This report consists learning and value generated across the three years of the project.

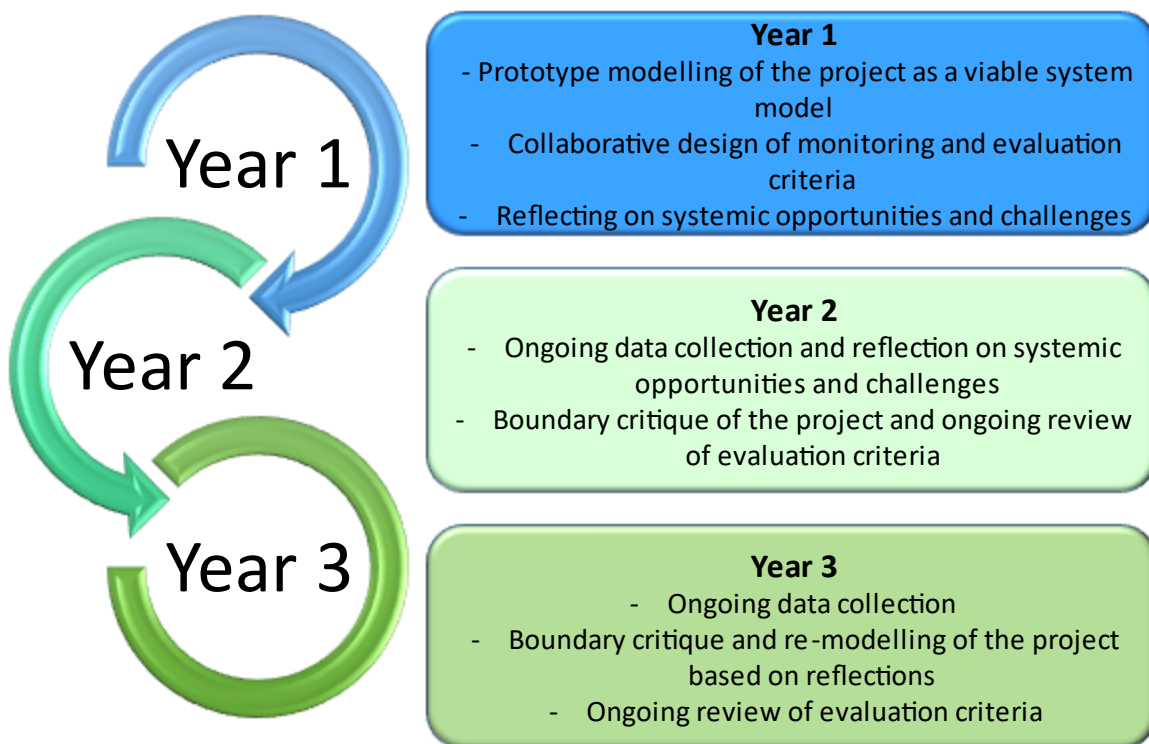




Figure 1: Stages of the evaluation

### **What has the evaluation looked like in practice?**

In practice, the evaluator has been embedded as a member of the project team since the very early stages of the project. This has included attending quarterly project steering group meetings, attending monthly Pre-Founding Committee meetings with community leaders, regular meetings with the community organiser and regular one to one contact with leaders and residents of Fishermead. The evaluator also had contact with another community organiser from Citizens UK, who is mobilising community organising in the neighbouring area of Water Eaton, Bletchley. Critical engagement with

commissioners of the project was facilitated through the project steering group meetings.

 Whilst challenging to engage from a distance, platforms such as Zoom allowed me to connect to the regular Pre-Founding Committee meetings with leaders. This enabled me to get a sense of their enthusiasm for change and the direction in which they wanted to go. 

**Pauline Roberts. Principal Evaluator, Open University**

Embedding as a member of the project team required that the evaluator and evaluand (the FCA) create the right conditions for the evaluation to be successful. It has been important for the evaluator not simply to be a first order, objective, dispassionate observer, but instead an interconnected, embedded empathic member of the project team, assigning and co-developing value (as appropriate in alignment with the type of evaluation). It was important to act as a friendly challenger, someone who reassured the evaluand where appropriate, acted as a critical friend and a builder of trustful relationships between the evaluator and evaluand. It was important to demonstrate as much care and passion for the project as the people living in Fishermead and working to create the Fishermead Citizens Alliance. In year two of the project, the community organiser thanked the evaluator for their flexibility, reflections and demonstrating that they truly care about the project. Members of the evaluand have been happy to engage with the evaluator and have been open and

welcoming. More information about the evaluator's reflections on creating the conditions for a successful evaluation can be seen in **Appendix 5**.

## **Key challenges for the evaluation**

It was noted in year two of the project that a key challenge for the evaluation was that the evaluator was not resident in or near Fishermead. All evaluation activity has been undertaken remotely. On the whole, this worked well, especially in times of the Covid 19 lockdowns at the beginning of the project. However, more creative evaluation data gathering methods have not been as successful. For example, a focus group was attempted early in the project but abandoned due to lack of attendance. Creative exercises, facilitated via an online interactive platform, were also unsuccessful early on in the project.

There were challenges related to the pressures on individuals in Fishermead, particularly around family commitments and work. Therefore, engaging with the evaluand without causing any additional pressures or stress was something the evaluator was particularly mindful of. It was important not to push too hard to get input at times that would be inconvenient or inappropriate for the evaluand. It was also important that the evaluand interact on their terms and in ways that worked for them. During the first stages of the evaluation a member of the evaluand raised an issue about the potential for volunteers to get burnt out. The evaluator considered this seriously and adapted the evaluator-evaluand interactions accordingly. Short one to one interaction, via telephone, email or online platforms such as Zoom have been most successful. These one-to-one discussions were worked around the schedules of the evaluand, ensuring they

were not too taxing or imposing on their day. This approach helped to facilitate regular, little and often, contact, which maintained throughout the project.

The following sections respectively deal with: (i) An outline of value, learning and systems thinking, used to guide the evaluation; (ii) first order evidencing of the project (gathering of data relating to campaigns and actions related to the project); and (iii) second order evidencing of the project overall (reflective consideration and developing value emerging from gathering of evidence and experiences).

# Learning generated

## Learning and value

This evaluation was based on developmental evaluation and systems thinking. It drew upon previous insights and models produced by Hummelbrunner and Reynolds (2013), and Reynolds (2023), and the viable system model produced by Stafford Beer (1979). Three things were considered in creating sustainable learning and systemic practice throughout the project: values, learning and systems thinking.

### Three types of value

Three types of value were considered in the evaluation:

**Instrumental value** – the value of the actions, campaigns and celebration events in helping the evaluand move towards the establishment of a Fishermead Citizens Alliance.

**Intrinsic value** – the value of the project as is and an eventual Alliance and its potential (i.e. value of project regarded as a viable system).

**Critical value** – the value created for individuals involved with and affected by the project, and the emergent value generated through the relationships that were developed. Generating enhanced social and political awareness (political being about relations of power, rather than political doctrines)

(Reynolds, 2023)

### Three types of learning

Three types of learning were considered:

**Single loop learning** – linked to efficacy (getting things done) and efficiency (getting things done right)

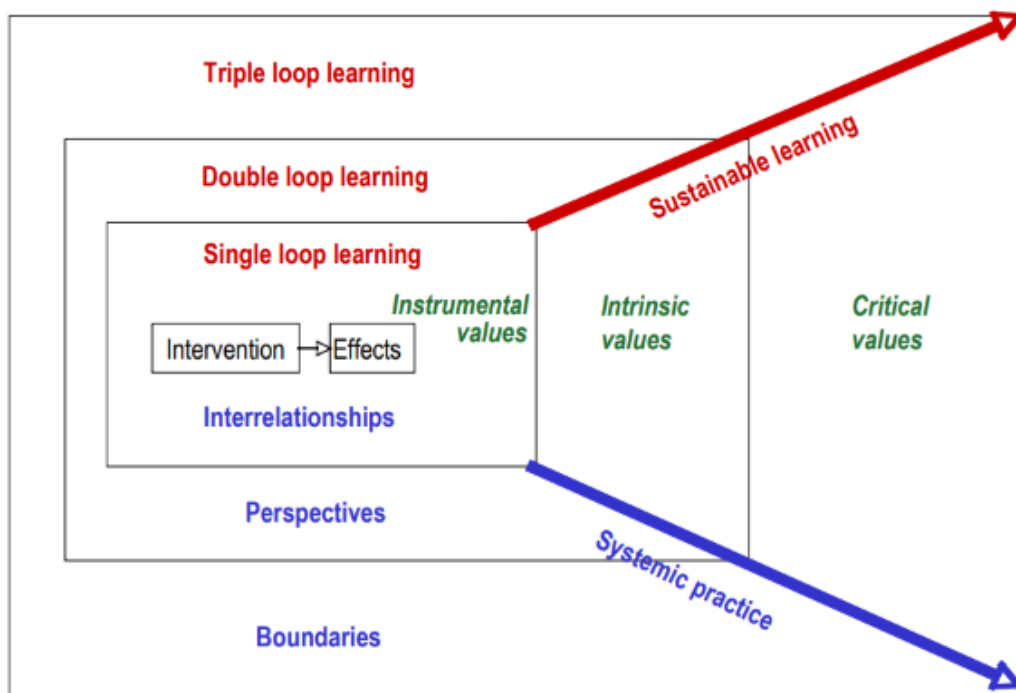
**Double loop learning** – linked to effectiveness (getting the right things done)

**Triple loop learning (learning to learn)** – reflecting on power relationships in shaping the Alliance (considering why some things are deemed right)

(Hummelbrunner, R. and Reynolds, M., 2013)

### Systems thinking

Three core systems concepts were considered: interrelationships, multiple perspectives, and boundaries, which have implications for the type of learning generated (Hummelbrunner, R. and Reynolds, M., 2013). A conceptual framework connecting these three systems concepts with value and learning was also considered.



(Hummelbrunner, R. and Reynolds, M., 2013)

Modelling of the project as a viable system was undertaken and used to support the generation of the project evaluation criteria, shown in **Appendix 2** and **Appendix 3**.

The progression of the evaluation enabled the evaluator to consider the learning generated and whether it was in line with the value base for the project. Whether deeper learning could be generated. Which systems concepts could be appropriately applied and which kind of value was feasible for Fishermead. Also considered were the constraints of generating learning and what opportunities might have been missed had this approach not be taken (Hummelbrunner, R. and Reynolds, M., 2013).



# Learning generated: first order evidencing

In September 2020, the project commenced with a community organiser working closely with local leaders to organise training, research, action and evaluation in relation to the project (Citizens:mk, 2023). By January 2021, the preliminary stage of meeting with leaders and potential leaders had commenced and alliances were already forming across Fishermead. At this early stage it was evident that residents and workers in Fishermead knew this work could be transformative, that the estate could be a beacon for how a community could work together and discussions about how to change people's framing and language about Fishermead were clearly underway. 'For the community, in the community!' became an early mantra. Humble and reflective conversations started to emerge, which were full of empathy and ethical considerations. Community leaders were self-aware and willing to engage honestly and realistically to ensure that local issues could be exposed, discussed and action taken.

Early work focussed on a walking group and links to local school children. The group collaborated with Orchard Academy, which is on the outskirts of Fishermead, to find out what school children liked and did not like about Fishermead, what changes they would like and to identify potential ways forward.



The leaders set out on a prioritisation exercise and decided on four areas of focus for Fishermead: road safety, crime, community and environment. These areas continue to be a key focus at the end of year three of the project.

## **Actions**

### **Digital inclusion initiative**

July 2021 saw Milton Keynes Mayor, Mohammed Khan present the community leaders with thirty five laptops. They were donated by Circular Computing, through Veritas Digital Services Ltd's Laptops4learning scheme. Tackling digital inequality in Fisheremad was underway, despite the challenges of the Covid 19 restrictions, which had seen residents in lockdown and which impacted on engaging local businesses. Lynx networks laid cables for high speed internet to the Trinity Community Centre and the estate moved closer to having an internet café for residents.



(Citizens:mk, 2023)

Conversations were explorative at this stage, investigating potential sustainable funding options for the work and the positive impacts of engaging with an even

wider range of perspectives and collaborators. A sense of pride was emerging. After a citizens accountability assembly in April 2021, Linda Kirk of Milton Keynes Anglican Deanery said of the work across Thames Valley, 'The testimonies were convincing and the children's were amazing...I felt proud to be part of it' (Evaluator meeting notes, 2023).

### **Cleaning up scrubland**

It was important for leaders and residents in Fishermead that talking turned quickly into actions, to demonstrate commitment to moving forward. This was recognised by the community leaders and effective actions continued with listening to residents and cleansing the local environment. Litter picking and shrub cutting saw relationships forming across the estate. Informal reciprocal agreements started to emerge – the Parish Council supplied the litter pickers, the residents supplied the manpower.

### **Developing a leaders forum**

The first leaders forum, bringing together 20 leaders from nine local civil society institutions, was established in December 2021. By this time, leaders were going through the Citizens leadership training and by January 2022, the project was gaining momentum. Covid 19 lockdowns were now abolished and relationships with a wider range of people and institutions were forming. There started to be a turnaround of leaders involved in the project and as we were to discover by the end of year three, the structure of the project, the presence of a community organiser and the strength of the community relationships saw the project able to withstand this flux and continue to flourish.

## **Fishermead leaders talk to BBC TV Look East**

From the beginning of the project a key area of focus for leaders was to change the narrative about Fishermead. It had been recognised that the narrative leaned towards being negative, rarely highlighting the good in Fishermead. In April 2022, leaders took part in a broadcast from the Trinity Community Centre for BBC TV Look East and talked about the issues that affected them most. The training and confidence gained by the community leaders gave them a powerful voice and this was now spreading far and wide beyond the estate.

## **Crime and violence**

Sadly, shoplifting was experienced in Fishermead, in the local co-operative convenience store in 2022. A local shopkeeper was hurt but instead of being deterred, the leaders and residents rallied together and discussions commenced about the notion of a supportive retail association for local shops. Again, Leaders and residents stepped into their own agency, drew upon their relational power and turned the situation into something positive. As mentioned further on in this report, in 2023, shopkeepers came together to support a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for Fishermead and the co-operative convenience store won a special award for services to the community.



## **Community walks**

Community walks continued in Fishermead and were seen to generate significant social capital and build relationships across the estate. Short talks were given at the doors of the different institutions in Fishermead, where people shared their experiences with each other.

At this stage of the project, the focus was not on one specific person or power holder, but spread across the community. By June 2022, the development of relationships across Fishermead had snowballed even further and new relationships were emerging on the periphery of the project, demonstrating its infective nature on others in Fishermead.

### **Hong Kong Arrivals Explore Fishermead**

In October 2022, ten parents of children at Jubilee Wood Primary School, all of whom arrived in Milton Keynes in the past year, were shown around the estate by Ruth Legh-Smith of Frank Howe Court and Pastor Pavle Trajkovski of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

 The people are friendly. It was a surprise to find ourselves hearing a talk about Fishermead (from Rev Henry Lu at COCM) and being able to ask questions in our own Cantonese language! 

### **Citizens:mk, 2022**

The leaders were eager to create a good impression of Fishermead, continuing to work hard on changing the narrative about the estate.

## Fishermead citizens appeal to high sheriff for big 50<sup>th</sup>



In November 2022, fifty Fishermead residents met with Debbie Brock, the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in a special assembly to celebrate the estate and make plans for a 50<sup>th</sup> celebration event in July 2023. They presented a petition of 500 signatures asking for a royal visit to Fishermead.

In the assembly, residents continued their theme of community by presenting awards to Fishermead heroes, including Co-op store staff and security guard, the landscaping team of Campbell Park Parish Council and PCS Craig Hawksworth (Citizens:mk, 2022).



(Citizens:mk, 2023)



## 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration

Thoughts then turned firmly to organising a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for Fishermead. On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023, six shopkeepers agreed to work together to organise, with others, a celebration of the estate's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Subsequently, the 50<sup>th</sup> celebration event was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023. Residents took part in dancing, singing, a portrait photo booth, sports competitions and games. Donations from local businesses brought an abundance of food stalls as residents celebrated Fishermead's history, diversity and positivity. (Citizens:mk, 2023)



(Citizens:mk, 2023)



## **Actions – in summary**

In terms of exposing the entanglement of experiences and awareness of social injustice issues in Fishermead being shared, the community leaders and other Fishermead residents and visitors generated significant learning and value. Shared insights and understanding continued to generate value through the diverse individual and institutional alliances that were being formed. These alliances gained traction in year two of the project and continued to generate even more value in year three.

The evaluation have clearly influenced and formed effective relationships with power leaders like the police and parish councillors, who were actively involved in supporting actions and campaigns throughout the three years of the project.

Residents and visitors in Fishermead became particularly interested in the carnival for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration event, which has been a huge hit.



Power leaders continue to be influenced and remain involved and listening to residents. For example, in the year two evaluation report it was stated that candidates for MK Council's Woughton and Fishermead ward agreed to attend a meeting with Fishermead residents prior to local elections to discuss their potential commitment to actions identified by the group in 2022. In November 2022 the mayor of Milton Keynes attended a celebration assembly, along with the high sheriff of Buckinghamshire and relationships with power holders continued to grow (Citizens:mk, 2023).

## Campaigns

### Road safety – 20's plenty!

A '20's plenty!' campaign was started in the second year of the project, to tackle road safety in Fishermead. In August 2022, following training from the Police on safe door-knocking techniques, campaigners visited more than a hundred houses and flats to gather signatures for the campaign to reduce traffic speeds to 20mph in Fishermead (Citizens:MK, 2023). Over 500 signatures were gathered (MKFM, 2023).

The campaign was started by Sophie Richens after she and her family were struck by a car while walking in Fishermead.

 My 12-year-old niece was killed in a car accident and my own kids have had their own near misses. For the climate we need our kids walking to school, but only if it's safe from speeding cars 

#### **Sophie Richens. Community Leader, 2023**

This campaign has continued into year three, with a successful outcome. In August 2023, MKFM, the local radio station reported that implementation of a 20mph zone in Fishermead was underway after gaining support from Milton Keynes City Council (MKFM, 2023).



We have succeeded in organising a campaign to reduce the speed limit on the estate to 20mph. This provided great learnings in terms of how to organise and promote a petition and engage with stakeholders in the local Council and Parish Council to gain support.

**David Hart. Community Leader, 2023**

A boundary critique of the campaign was undertaken in year two of the project, where sources of influence on the campaign were considered. The critique can be seen in **Appendix 6**.

## Training

Training delivered by Citizens UK has generated significant value for Fishermead. One leader who attended a three-day Citizens training course talked about how it changed his perception of leadership and how he was able to re-evaluate his own relationships with others as a result. The same leader noted a difference in other leaders who had undertaken the training. He noticed their, 'Just do it!' attitude and how they had started to rally people together to take action.



They are infecting others with the bug



### **Community Leader, 2023**

Linked to the training has been modelling of the Citizens leadership style, which has been promoted by the community organiser throughout the project.

Modelling the leadership style has influenced others to try it for themselves.

Value has been generated in terms of greater self-reflection, understanding of different perspectives and an enhanced ability to critically reflect on value judgements being made.

### **Quantitative data collection**

Quantitative data against the project plan was collected throughout the project and can be found in **Appendix 4**. It shows the extent of the huge efforts put into developing a shift to community power in Fishermead.

# Learning generated: second order evidencing

## 1: Instrumental value – what the group produced



(Citizens:mk, 2023)

Instrumental value is concerned with the value of the actions, campaigns and celebration events in helping the residents of Fishermead move towards the establishment of a Fishermead Citizens Alliance. The actions and campaigns have clearly created value. However, to date, a membership Alliance has not been formed. Only one institution, the Seventh Day Adventists Church, have committed to financial input to create the Alliance.

Nevertheless, after the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at the end of 2023, it was very clear that leaders, residents and institutions were considering longer-term plans for Fishermead.



The event changed the narrative about Fishermead



**Community Leader, 2023**



The vibe lifted me on the day. Kept me going. Kept me motivated.



**Community Leader, 2023**

A thematic analysis of an evaluation meeting to consider the impact of the 50<sup>th</sup> celebration event showed that 70% of comments made were about how residents could continue with this kind of event in the longer term. This was, however, in relation to repeating the carnival celebration, rather than creating a membership Alliance. Leaders and residents did, however, talk about the event being a wake-up call. Something they did not realise they could make happen. Their mental models of the potential of their own agency are only starting to emerge at the end of the three years. Sometimes, you have to see it, to believe it. Learning and insights are clearly developing about how residents step into their own power on a longer-term basis. Consideration has been around how this might help residents in Fishermead move towards a membership Alliance which is sustainable longer-term.

## **Key challenges and successes**


The challenge now will be time to process current learning to move beyond the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration being just a one off or annual event and move it into the space of determining whether an Alliance is the right thing for Fishermead.

Doing this will take time and this is a challenge for the project as the community organiser's role and the project are now at their end. How might the residents and leaders in Fishermead not lose the value and learning that has been created before they have time to turn it into what they want next? How might this work keep momentum? How might learning continue to be generated? What opportunities might be missed if learning slows down at this point, when it has just started to accelerate?


## **Key learning generated**

Is the project currently doing the right things in relation to generating instrumental value? Whilst an Alliance is not yet formed, interest grew particularly at the point of the 50<sup>th</sup> celebration carnival, which is compelling in itself. Processing time, to allow the full impact of the possibilities for the future to come to fruition, may be required.

Is an Alliance the right thing for Fishermead? Leaders have explored this question frequently throughout the project and there is potential to explore this question even further. There are different perspectives about an effective way forward and therefore, there is scope to further explore what makes an Alliance the right thing to do. Says who? Whilst the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration was a huge success, some larger institutions in Fishermead are not engaged with the project and some leaders deem bringing the community together to be the priority, rather than gaining sign up to a membership Alliance at this time.



I think the event has sparked people's interest in making the celebration an annual event. I don't think it has sparked interest in organising and launching an Alliance.



### **Community Leader, 2023**

A question remains that if the actions and campaigns are detached from the purpose of creating an Alliance, are they just a group of actions and campaigns? Something else seems to be emerging, although what that is, remains unclear at this present time. The actions clearly generated value, but not the value in creating an Alliance that was expected, as of yet. They were valuable in creating relationships, shifting the narrative about Fishermead and giving people pride in the estate and themselves **and** something else, albeit it is unknown what the 'something else' truly is yet. It could be a tipping point into creating an Alliance, once the impact of the recent celebration has been processed across Fishermead. It might be a more hybrid interim model, devised to be systemically desirable and culturally feasible, specifically for Fishermead, until a more permanent Alliance is formed.



## 2: Intrinsic value – of the project and the potential value of a more permanent Alliance

There are two elements to be considered under the heading of intrinsic value. Firstly, the value of the project as it is, and secondly, the potential value of a more permanent Fishermead Citizens Alliance.

### The current project

The project has clearly generated significant intrinsic value for people in Fishermead. Institutions and individuals, whether officially part of the project or not, are in a better place together as a result of the campaigns, actions and celebrations:

- Local actions, such as cutting down overgrown vegetation in 2021 cleared a footway to the Trinity Community Centre, 'giving the centre exterior a new clean look' (Citizens:mk, 2023). Equipment was lent by Campbell Park Parish Council. Undoubtedly, all institutions and individuals involved benefitted from the value of the collaborations and work undertaken



(Citizens:mk, 2023)

- Other new relationships between institutions have emerged as a result of the project. For example, a breakdance club is now up and running in The Willows School and a relationship between the school and the Seventh Day Adventist Church has formed.
- In June 22, 'Nine leaders from Fishermead institutions took part in a Community Walk to find out from one another how they see life and times in Fishermead' (Citizens:mk, 2023). Significant value was created when the walk bonded people and institutions in Fishermead. It brought about significant understanding of the institutions on the estate, some of which the participants had not previously visited.



(Citizens:mk, 2023)

I was really impressed by the strong sense of community support within Fishermead and the range of work being undertaken by the voluntary and other sectors in support of local residents.

**Mike Kelly, Director of Samaritans MK**

- Relationships have been formed with Councillors and Parish Councillors. For example, in May 2022, '23 Fishermead residents and workers representing 12 institutions attended an Accountability Assembly to engage with local Councillor Donna Fuller. Following a live BBC Look East broadcast from the Trinity Centre earlier in the week, they wanted her reaction to their agenda for change developed at a Delegates Assembly in March'. (Citizens:mk, 2023)



(Citizens:mk, 2023)

- In addition, through the Pre-Founding Committee, strong relationships were seen to be forming with the Parish Council.
- Shopkeepers came together to support the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for Fishermead, in 2023. Many won awards on the day. For example, Xtrim Hair & Beauty Salon won Gold in the Fishermead business olympics and the co-operative convenience store won a special award for services to the community
- A special award for services to the community was also presented to the Chair of Campbell Park Parish Council at the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration

- The police have been in attendance at celebration events and supported residents during actions and the 20's plenty campaign. Community relations are growing as a result.
- Local businesses provided food for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, fostering community relations between residents and businesses.



The food was phenomenal



**Community Leader, 2023**

- The children from The Willows School have been integral to actions and celebrations, performing songs on several occasions, drawing institutions and residents together.
- The mosque held a film night for the community, again fostering community relationships.
- Neighbourhood watch commented on the increased community relationships they were able to form during the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration.
- Closer relationships with power holders were formed. For example, the mayor and high sheriff.
- All residents will benefit from the new 20mph speed limit in Fishermead.

The project to date has been both systemically desirable for Fishermead and culturally feasible. The general feeling is that people especially enjoyed the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday carnival celebration in 2023 as it generated significant relational value and helped to give people a sense of purpose and pride in themselves and others in Fishermead.

## **Key learning outcomes**

Key learning suggested that the project generated value when there was deep authentic listening. No-one has the monopoly on ultimate wisdom and therefore, receptivity to multiple perspectives has been important. Engaging with multiple perspectives brought intrinsic value, double loop learning in the form of exploring 'are we doing the right things?' and triple loop learning in the form of, 'why are the things we are doing deemed to be right?' As such, this has been a place where value was generated and there is an opportunity for even greater value to be generated, should the project continue. High quality listening and feedback, self-reflection, potential accommodations with other ways of doing things and moving forward with compassion and understanding has the potential to continue to leverage additional value for individuals and institutions alike.

## **What happens to intrinsic value when resources are diminished?**

By September, 2023, the project is near the end of its three year lifecycle. A more permanent Alliance is not yet formed. Could a tipping point be around the next corner? How might community leaders deal with the ongoing flux in the environment of Fishermead without a robust infrastructure in place? How will they plan and co-ordinate their next steps in a timely way, that does not lose the momentum of the learning and value generated to date? If the community organiser is lost at a time when the community leaders need further mentorship, what might happen to the intrinsic value generated? There is a chance that it will fade and a risk that it may not return.

## Key opportunities

There may be value in continuing the role of the community organiser, or a reasonable alternative, until a more stable point in the project has been reached and/ or when community leaders feel confident to move forwards by themselves.

In year two of the evaluation, it was highlighted that there was an opportunity to further explore whether a community organising approach was what the people living and working in Fishermead really wanted, or something else? Is there flexibility in the model to accommodate Fishermead's needs? What are the core conditions for success of the model, specifically in relation to Fishermead?

It was suggested in year two of the project that further work could be done with institution leaders to understand what would be meaningful for them. What would make them form an affinity with the work as part of an Alliance?

It was also suggested that the evaluand could consider whether they want to fund a community organiser for longer than the three-year project. This, and the other opportunities for further exploration outlined in this section of this report, would suggest there is even more additional value to be gained moving forwards, in terms of intrinsic value.

## The potential value of a more permanent Alliance

### Systemic desirability

That brings us to the potential value of a more permanent Alliance. This is where the least value has been generated so far, mainly because a more permanent Alliance has not yet been formed.

It is clear that an Alliance at a hyperlocal level is more susceptible to flux and change. Loss of one leader could be significant in terms of the viability of the Alliance, although the project to date has survived a turnaround of leaders relatively well. This could, of course, be because of the consistent presence of the community organiser. The model could be viable as long as it has the continued support of the Citizens infrastructure.

The Citizens model at a hyperlocal level was examined further by the evaluator and the evaluand during the project. Rendering Fishermead Citizens Alliance as a viable system (able to respond to flux and survive over time) started to be explored. Modelling can be seen in **Appendix 4**.

In rendering a potential Alliance as a viable system, there are opportunities to:

- Create something specific to Fishermead, aligning those involved with a co-created vision, mission and identity;
- Consider any accommodations in the model which might help generate value. For example, if leaders are not ready to sign up to an Alliance, is there an interim hybrid model, specific to Fishermead, that could

accommodate the wants and desires of the leaders and other residents, until a more permanent model is established?

- Ensure that the complexity experienced in Fishermead is absorbed in the right places of the chosen model, so that energy of the leaders is conserved to enable them to concentrate on the right things. Currently, the project is being moved forwards by a small number of leaders and the potential for burn out has been a consideration throughout the project;
- Consider the conditions required for a successful Alliance. Are the conditions such that new relationships can continue to emerge over time?
- Embrace the distributed leadership of the Citizens model;
- Co-ordinate elements of the model appropriately, enabling effective responses to flux and change;
- Create balance in the focus on the here and now and the future;
- Consider and embed sustainable resource arrangements, including sources of finance.

It has been clear throughout the evaluation that the project takes sustained energy. Until the variety of those who are inputting is increased, there remains some vulnerability, particularly if an increased level of flux is experienced. The community organiser was instrumental in getting the project this far and consideration should be given to how not to lose the value generated to date.

### **Cultural feasibility**

Perhaps, the more pressing question at this point in time is whether a more permanent Alliance is culturally feasible for Fishermead. Is it feasible, given the history, culture and politics of the estate? There are still significant challenges in



gaining commitment to a membership Alliance. A number of larger institutions are not yet on board and there have been discussions around whether they will come on board.

Whether being part of an Alliance can be embedded seamlessly into people's lives has also been a key consideration for some of those who are not yet committed to a membership Alliance. It was important to those questioned that an Alliance would bring value to their lives, rather than putting additional pressures on them. When they felt 'sucked into' a model, their desire to engage was weaker. Institutional leaders said they feel more inclined to come on board when they like the way things are being done and it does not feel pressured or expectations of them are not so high as to cause discomfort. There was no doubt that people saw value in forming an Alliance and many thought the time was right to bring the community together in Fishermead. The 'how things are done' was the thing that was key for them. Consolidation time might be required before leaders can decide a way forward. Some leaders did not know what the project was capable of achieving until the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration event,



We are only just understanding now



**Community Leader, 2023**

There is also an opportunity for wider cultural input, both in the project and in further developing the evaluation criteria. The commissioners of the work, the steering group, the core project group and the evaluator are predominantly white. Fishermead is a multi-cultural estate and this is not yet fully reflected in

the core group considering a way forward. This means there are opportunities to embrace even wider perspectives and generate powerful second and third order learning and generate further value when moving towards and Alliance.

### 3: Critical value – expressed as individual and collective value

Critical value is about the enhanced social and political awareness being generated. Political awareness being about relations of power, rather than political doctrines. The value generated for each individual and the value generated through the relationships formed are both important values generated.

It is safe to say that this has been the strongest value generated in the project to date. The project has produced significant social capital. As far back as January 2021, the meetings between community leaders were noted as: warm, positive, supportive and passionate. The focus was on how leaders could help and support each other in moving forwards together.

#### Individual value

For individuals there has been a definite rise in confidence. People have stepped into their own agency, unprompted in some cases. They have found their voices and used their voices. The project created the conditions for those voices to emerge into effective actions.

A community leader spoke of her involvement in arranging the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations:



**Community leader, 2023**

Leaders talked about their voices having legitimacy and taking pride in their involvement in the actions, campaigns and celebrations. They started to deeply listen to each other and peer-to-peer support one another.



Everyone was checking in on each other



### **50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration organiser, 2023**

Leaders are becoming comfortable with having conversations with others. At the start of the project it was said that, 'It is KEY that people learn about each others' culture. Some are scared to even say hello because they don't understand the other culture. The look away or cross the street' (*Community leader, 2021*).

The increased confidence and self-belief generated is starting to enable those in Fishermead to get past this blockage. The community walks in particular were instrumental in gaining other perspectives and engaging with institutions, some of whom they had never met before. Leading on campaigns saw leaders able to confidently gain signatures for the, '20's plenty!' road safety petition to the Council.

Trust is growing, which is key in establishing the healthy relationships required to generate systems change. People have been adaptable to the flux the project has experienced and aligned with the vision and purpose of generating relational power. The new information about leadership, brought to individuals through the Citizens training, is being used as nourishment for the whole, rather than individual power for one person and actions continue to be co-created.

## Collective value

As a collective, emergent reciprocal relationships are a clear sign of a healthy project to date. Relationships have grown between, for example, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and The Willows School. This emerged at a Jubilee celebration event where a reciprocal arrangement was made between leaders. The church provided a place for the party. The school children brought cakes. This was an exciting development as the arrangement had not come about through one of the project's key actions or campaigns but through individual relationships that had emerged during the project and then continued to grow outside of the main project actions. This emergence of relational value should not be overlooked. It is a sign of the conditions being created for those in Fishermead to step into their own agency and leverage their relational power.



The leaders are starting to 'infect' other people and the peer-to-peer support is really growing. The people involved are actively seeking out new communication channels and relationships to bring people together.



### Evaluator note, 2023

The project is clearly facilitating the emergence of the right conditions for community power to be realised, strong social capital is forming and narratives are shifting. It has been very clear that when people had an affinity with both the project and each other that relationships grew stronger. People united in their collective achievements.



The 50th Birthday celebrations will be what is remembered and this was the most successful event. This is because it involved the greatest number of people and a lot of them were from Fishermead.



**Community leader, 2023**

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Conclusions

It can safely be said that the project to date has created significant learning and value for the people living and working in Fishermead. Whilst a more permanent Fishermead Citizens Alliance has not yet been created, the energy and enthusiasm for leveraging community relationships is clear. Freedom from the Covid 19 lockdown saw a snowballing of actions and campaign efforts. Leaders have been equipped with significant training and tools to step into their own agency and leverage relational power to start changing the narrative about Fishermead and make positive changes to people's lives.

The Citizens infrastructure, including the provision of a community organiser, has been significant in getting the project this far. Substantial amounts of organising and co-ordinating have been required and leaders are only just starting to realise the potential of the project at the end of year three.

Most importantly will be the next stages for the project. Instrumental , intrinsic and critical value has been created on this journey so far. It will be paramount not to lose this value due to the non-establishment of a Citizens Alliance. Whilst leaders have not yet signed up to a membership Alliance, value has been generated in raising the confidence of leaders, developing trusting and powerful reciprocal relationships across Fishermead and with power holders, giving a

vision of what can be achieved and generating significant social capital. Relational power is certainly being generated, with some momentum. It may only be a matter of time, whilst leaders consolidate their learning and understanding of value generated to date, before an Alliance or an alternative model, bespoke to Fishermead, is created.



## Recommendations/ considerations

### 1. Don't stop here!

It is clear that nobody involved in the project wants to stop here. Leaders may need to consolidate what they have learnt so far and understand what has generated most value for them. They clearly want another carnival , like the one held for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration and they also realise that this should be a secondary consideration as they move forwards. Establishing something that is sustainable longer-term is important for them. With this in mind, and the fact that institutions are not yet ready to sign up to a membership Alliance:

Is there a model that is unique and specific to Fishermead, that builds on the enthusiasm and needs of the community that can be an interim measure until an Alliance is formed? Or will leaders now, hearing of the value generated, step into an Alliance? There is an opportunity to:

- Explore local constraints and perspectives and the flux of events in Fishermead further to understand what it will take to make an Alliance culturally feasible. What will make those institutions who have not yet signed up, form an affinity with the work to such a degree that they want to come together to enable a sustainable Alliance?
- The Alliance (or any interim hybrid model) must be able to withstand the flux and challenges at a hyperlocal level. Currently, Citizens provides this supporting infrastructure;

- It will also need to be both systemically desirable and culturally feasible;
- Any model decided upon will require a sustainable funding model.

## **2. Hold onto your community organiser or a reasonable alternative**

Leaders may require further guidance and mentoring as they consolidate and understand the value their achievements have generated to date. So far, there has not been sufficient consolidation time and a sense of panic is creeping in. Losing the community organiser at this time may create confusion and further escalate any sense of rising panic. There is a risk of losing the value generated to date and not being able to regain momentum. No-one else is ready to step into the role yet. There is an opportunity to give community leaders time and space to work through their options in a calm, considered way to ensure that their next vital steps are taken diligently.

## **3. Purposefully design any interim model and/ or your longer-term model as a viable and learning system**

The structure of the Citizens Alliance model is robust and is embedded within a sturdy Citizens infrastructure. This certainly helps with viability, in terms of helping a hyper-local project deal with flux. If the leaders do decide to develop an interim, possibly hybrid, model until an Alliance is formed, it would be wise to consider how it could be viable (able to withstand flux and be adaptive over time) and how learning is generated over time. Of course, these conditions are relevant for an Alliance also.

Consideration could be given to:

- How the model learns over time;
- How it adapts to flux and shocks;
- How to undertake a 'health check' of the model, acknowledging that bias will inevitably be built in;
- How might continuous evaluation be done (potentially by leaders, utilising critical reflection);
- Linked to evaluation, an ongoing critique of factual judgements and value judgements being made to keep systemic sensibilities open (to maintain learning);
- The framing and language being used in and about the project to shift the narrative about Fishermead.

#### **4. Engage greater cultural input into the project**

There is an opportunity in the project to be even more culturally responsive. Fishermead is a culturally diverse estate. There was significant engagement with the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration carnival. There is an opportunity to generate even greater value by monopolising on the relationships formed. Currently, the funder, the steering group, the evaluator and the pre-founding committee are predominantly white.

With the evaluation, there is an opportunity to develop further close connections on the ground with residents and leaders who have deep cultural insights about Fishermead. Greater cultural input into the evaluation criteria might broaden the relevance of the evaluation, gaining greater value for Fishermead.

## **5. An abrupt 'end' to the project might be harmful to the value generated so far**

There is the potential to lose the value already generated by the sudden loss of a community organiser, before leaders are ready to go it alone. In the same way, a sudden end to the project could lead to a similar harmful effect. Individuals have built their identities around being involved in the project. Institutions are just gaining traction in their relationships and collaborations. Leaders are not yet ready to step into moving things forward themselves, although they are clearly on their journey. Additional support may be required to support them as they explore a model that is right for Fishermead. To date, the project has given a relatively safe space for experimentation and learning. A sudden end has the potential to erode confidence and hinder a smooth transition into whatever comes next.

There is an opportunity for a more gradual stepping back from 'doing' with the residents of Fishermead to more of a mentoring only kind of support. This, however, will take time. The next steps will be delicate and consideration should be given as to how sufficient support can be given as leaders cross their next bridge to becoming even stronger in their devolved leadership roles.

## **6. Potential additions to leadership training**

The Citizens leadership training has generated significant value to date. Leaders engaged with it and actively implemented the learning into their everyday lives. The sticking point for leaders has been in establishing a model moving forward and evaluating whether the Citizens Alliance model is the right one for them. Might there be any useful additions to the training that could help with this?

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Fishermead Citizens Alliance Project Plan

Aim	Objective	Activity	Outcome	Data requirement	PROGRESS
Good project governance	Set up Steering Group including 3 FCA members and 3 funders/other strategic partners	Steering Group meets termly to measure, track and report on progress, approves external evaluation reports.	Termly progress report to MKCF	Dates of Steering Group meetings	9
				Dates of progress reports to MKCF	2
				Membership of Steering Group	8
Develop residents as leaders and effective citizens	Engage local leaders and residents	Hold 121 meetings	Fishermead leaders informed and supportive	No. 1:1 meetings held by CO	321
				Who the 1:1 meetings are between	See spreadsheet column I
	Train Fishermead leaders in regular, effective action, with mentoring from members of Citizens:mk Leadership Group where appropriate	Identify 90 community leaders and build their capacity through One-Day Community Leadership Training, regional Citizens UK Three-Day Training and national Six-Day Training.	90 leaders trained and participate in at least one effective action (50% participate)	No. primary community leaders identified	37
				No. secondary community leaders identified	40
				No. tertiary community leaders identified	21

				No. leaders undertaking one-day community leadership training or twilight training sessions	17
				No. leaders undertaking regional Citizens UK 3-day training	7
				No. leaders undertaking national 6-day training	1
				No. leaders participating in at least one effective action	76
	Establish FCA Leadership Group, in charge of membership dues and campaign strategy.	Recruit Fishermead leaders to Leadership Group, meeting quarterly to plan training, listening and campaign actions	A strong Leadership Group (10 leaders) responsible for membership dues (£1,500/£2,500/£5,000) and campaigns strategy	Is the Leadership group established and are they in charge of membership dues and campaign strategy?	Yes
				No. people in the leadership group?	6
				Dates of quarterly meetings	17
				List of listening and campaign actions taken	48

	Run exciting actions which turn out people in scores	Run actions which develop in leaders the habits of Research-Action-Evaluation	Proven ability to turn out people for action (at least one action annually with a turnout of 20 people).	<i>No. participants in internal actions, inc. community walks and planning meetings</i>	47
				<i>No. participations in internal actions, inc. listening campaigns</i>	962
				<i>No. residents participating in external actions</i>	169
				<i>No. participations in external actions</i>	221
Strengthen civic institutions	Enable community institutions to build relationships, develop leaders, and take successful action to make change.	Each member institution holds a number of 1-2-1 meetings equal to one-third the number of its members	Each institution understands the interests of its individual members	Known no. 1:1 meetings between leaders without the CO	100
				Evidence that each institution understands the interests of its individual members	6
	Prove to the leaders of faith and education networks that community organising can honour their traditions and	Recruit at least two faith, two education and two other institutions, increase the membership number of at least one faith institution.	Diverse alliance of community organisations	No. faith, education and other institution leaders recruited to Fishermead Citizens	16 leaders involved inc. 4 faith, 1 education, 11 other

	strengthen local institutions.				
	Innovate in new civic institutions, e.g., health and business, demonstrate organising is effective.	Include on Leadership Group and Project Steering Group representatives of a <b>business</b> and a <b>health organisation</b> .	Inclusion of private and public sector organisations	No. businesses and health organisations recruited to FCA by the leaders	<i>8 local shops involved</i>
Create systemic change	Build a powerful Citizens alliance for Fishermead, with locally developed campaigns	With consent of Assembly Delegates, launch each year at least one FCA-wide campaign	At least one successful campaign with an intended and tangible win	Evidence of FCA wide campaign held and description of the intended and tangible win	3
	Develop reciprocal, non-partisan relationships with Fishermead decision-makers and (where relevant) Council and neighbouring estates.	Meet annually with CPPC Chair and Clerk, and leaders of the 3 political parties with greatest representation on MK Council, share interests & discuss issues	Community-wide awareness of FCA and direct involvement where relevant	Evidence of leaders engaging in annual meetings with Chair and Clerk of CPPC and leaders of 3 political parties (meeting minutes or evidence of meeting)	Ruth and David both presented to CPPC, meetings with MK Councillors, High Sheriff, Lord Lieutenant
				Evidence of outcomes of the meetings	Grants awarded, donations received
	Use organising to create systemic change that	Present at FCA's Annual General Meeting the findings of MKCF's Vital Signs report.	Leaders aware of MK-wide social justice issues including wages, work,	Vital signs report	Discussed with leaders

	enables human flourishing and dignity		housing, health & immigration.		
		Organise listening campaigns through 500+ conversations, identify issues and ideas for improvement (Issues Workshops each Autumn), agree SMART campaign goals (Delegates Assembly in Spring)	Through listening, leaders design and deliver campaigns to 1) improve the physical environment, 2) reduce anti-social behaviour and 3) increase self- and community pride on the estate.	No. 1:1 conversations	361
				Evidence of SMART campaign goals	yes
				Evidence of improvement of physical environment	yes
				Evidence of a reduction in anti-social behaviour	Not known
				Evidence of pride in the estate increasing	yes
		Take actions for pledges from powerholders, e.g., councillors, police, business owners	Tangible wins on social justice issues	Evidence of pledges from power holders	yes
				Any evidence of tangible wins on social justice issues	Yes
		Run Accountability Assembly for 80/100/120 people.	Powerholders take action and are held accountable	Date of Accountability Assembly and evidence of attendance	4

Evaluate & disseminate	Generate data for an external evaluation report to be presented to the Steering Group and to FCA Leadership Group, to strengthen its understanding of evaluation processes and project management.	Create an evaluation partnership with The OU (ASTiP) – <i>using VSM approach, needs contact with 2-3 key contacts on the ground for 121s, also some experience of actions, e.g., assemblies, relationship with the funder. Member of steering group. Attend pre-founding committee meetings</i>	Use project outcomes to inform planning beyond 2023	Evidence of evaluation and reporting partnership between Steering Group and Open University	2 interim reports
				No. 1:1 contacts between evaluator and leaders & organisers	28
				Evidence of interactions between evaluator and other actions (assemblies & commissioner)	3
	Disseminate across Citizens UK chapters and UK community foundations	Conference hosted by The Open University in Summer 2023.	Estate-based community organising projects in other areas informed and inspired.	Steering group meetings	7
				Pre founding committee meetings & other meetings	9
				Date of Summer 2023 conference	Yes
	Recognise achievements of campaign leaders	Publish achievements in local media and through member institutions.	Recognition of Fishermead improvements encourages other residents to bring ideas,	Evidence of dissemination to other Citizens UK areas	Planned for Autumn23
				Date of local media publications and type of publication	14 media stories including BBC TV (see p.7)

			organising skills and faith in Fishermead.		
Sustainability	Raise hard money	Roll-on of current annual membership dues from Jubilee Wood Primary School (£500) and 50% of current annual membership dues of nearby MK Academy and St. Paul's Catholic School (£500 each)	Sustainable hard money	Membership dues from Jubilee Wood rolled on	No
				50% of membership dues from MK Academy and St Paul's Catholic School	No
	Raise soft money	Approach corporate sponsors for a £1,000 contribution in Years 2 and 3.		Evidence of corporate sponsorship for years 2 and 3	No
		For funding in Year 4+, approach Oxford Diocese, TV Police, NHS and CPPC		Evidence of funding for year 4	Not yet



## Appendix 2: Evaluation criteria – iteration 1

The following measures of *efficacy (what)*, *efficiency (how)* and *effectiveness (why)* were produced in collaboration between the evaluator and evaluand in Year 1 of the project.

### ***Developing community leaders***

#### ***Efficacy (what)***

- Number of leaders identified and actively engaged in the project?
- How many members (active and inactive) does the FCA have?

#### ***Efficiency (how)***

##### Training

- What training has been undertaken, when and with whom?

##### Mentoring

- What mentoring has been undertaken, when and with whom?
- Are FCA Leadership team meetings being held regularly? What are the attendance levels like and are actions being done?
- How many 1:1 meetings have been held and when?

##### Campaigns

- Has there been an effective listening campaign?
- What action campaigns have been run and when? How many people were involved?

##### Vision

- Are changes that are happening congruent with the vision of the project?

## **Effectiveness (why)**

### The leaders

- Do the leaders feel confident?
- Are the leaders collaborating with each other?
- Are the leaders peer to peer supporting/ mentoring?
- Are leaders collaborating with others on the estate and bringing their voices into the project? (inc. are marginalised voices being heard?)
- Are leaders developing other leaders/ developing followers to be leaders
- Are leaders actively listening to identify opportunities for action?
- Are the leaders using their new knowledge and connections as nourishment and using them to create action for the greater good of Fishermead, or are they using their knowledge and connections as a source of power?
- How are decisions made about the direction of the alliance?

### Relationships

- Is there a way of hearing voices from the community that don't come from the leaders that will inform about whether the project is working or failing for those across the estate who might not be actively involved in the project?
- Are people taking action/ getting involved with initiatives?
- Are leaders and others in the community reciprocating with each other?
- Are relationships and collaborations growing?
- Is co-production happening as an ongoing process – rather than a 'one off facilitated event' and are people co-creating together?

- Are the different cultures starting to be inquisitive/ accepting/ understanding of each other?

#### Structure of the project

- Is the structure of the project enabling the development of effective leaders or creating barriers?
- Are those involved in the project able to respond to the changing needs of the estate?

#### Attitudes on the estate and about the estate

- Are systemic sensibilities (awareness of interconnections) changing/ improving?
- Is the language being used in relation to Fishermead changing? Both on and off the estate?
- Are behaviours and attitudes on the estate and about the estate changing?
- Is the estate feeling safer for people?
- Are people becoming prouder of the estate?

#### Unintended consequences

- Is the project causing any unintended consequences that are hindering the progression of developing effective leaders and citizens? How has that been reacted to/ dealt with?
- Are there any areas of the project and/ or Fishermead that are suffering? Is this because they lack information about themselves?

### ***Strengthening civic institutions***

#### ***Efficacy (what)***

- Is there a diverse community of institutions involved in the FCA? What institutions are involved and are they actively involved? On an ad hoc or continuous basis?

- Are the institutions taking action to make change together? What actions have been instigated and were they successful?

### ***Efficiency (how)***

- How well do the institutions understand the interests of their individual members?
- How many 1:1 meetings have the institution leaders had with their members?
- Are the institutions engaging in Community Organising?
- Are the institutions actively identifying opportunities where they believe their combined 'power' can help them to take/ encourage others to take action for Fishermead?
- Are the institutions and the wider community of Fishermead co-creating together?

### ***Effectiveness (why)***

- Are the institutions feeling confident in their new collective power?
- Are the institutions peer to peer supporting/ mentoring each other?
- Is there any evidence of a shift of power to a local level?

## ***Creating systemic change***

### ***Efficacy (what)***

- What relationships have been formed with decision makers?
- Have the annual meetings with the Chair and Clerk of CPPC and leaders of the political parties gone ahead? Who was in attendance? And what was the outcome/ action from the meeting?

### ***Efficiency (how)***

- Are leaders being made aware of social injustice issues across Fishermead?
- Is the entanglement of different experiences being exposed and explored with decision makers?
- Is there any evidence of diverse alliances forming or having formed?

### ***Effectiveness (why)***

- Is there any evidence that suggests systemic change?
  - For example, has the project changed/ influenced change in any local policies or services? What has changed? How? Over what period of time? What/ who is being influenced and how?
- Is there any evidence of a shift in power to a local level?

## Appendix 3: Evaluation criteria – iteration 2

Items in red are additions to the first iteration of the evaluation criteria.

### *Developing community leaders*

#### *Efficacy (what)*

- Number of leaders identified and actively engaged in the project?
- How many members (active and inactive) does the FCA have?
- Are the leaders actively sharing good news stories about the outputs of the project?

#### *Efficiency (how)*

##### Training

- What training has been undertaken, when and with whom?
- What has been the impact of the training?

##### Mentoring

- What mentoring has been undertaken, when and with whom?
- Are FCA Leadership team meetings being held regularly? What are the attendance levels like and are actions being done?
- How many one-to-one meetings have been held and when?

##### Campaigns

- Has there been an effective listening campaign?
- What action campaigns have been run and when? How many people were involved?

##### Vision

- Are changes that are happening congruent with the vision of the project?

## **Effectiveness (why)**

### The leaders

- Do the leaders feel confident?
- Are the leaders collaborating with each other?
- Are the leaders peer to peer supporting/ mentoring?
- Are leaders collaborating with others on the estate and bringing their voices into the project? (inc. are marginalised voices being heard?)
- Are leaders developing other leaders/ developing followers to be leaders
- Are leaders actively listening to identify opportunities for action?
- Are the leaders using their new knowledge and connections as nourishment and using them to create action for the greater good of Fishermead, or are they using their knowledge and connections as a source of power?
- How are decisions made about the direction of the alliance?

### Relationships

- Is there a way of hearing voices from the community that do not come from the leaders that will inform about whether the project is working or failing for those across the estate who might not be actively involved in the project?
- Are people taking action/ getting involved with initiatives?
- Are leaders and others in the community reciprocating with each other?
- Are relationships and collaborations growing?
- Is co-production happening as an ongoing process – rather than a 'one off facilitated event' and are people co-creating together?
- Are the different cultures starting to be inquisitive/ accepting/ understanding of each other?

### Structure of the project

- Is the structure of the project enabling the development of effective leaders or creating barriers?
- Are those involved in the project able to respond to the changing needs of the estate?

## Attitudes on the estate and about the estate

- Are systemic sensibilities (awareness of interconnections) changing/improving?
- Is the language that is being used in relation to Fishermead changing? Both on and off the estate?
- Are behaviours and attitudes on the estate and about the estate changing?
- Is the estate feeling safer for people?
- Are people becoming prouder of the estate?

## Unintended consequences

- Is the project causing any unintended consequences that are hindering the progression of developing effective leaders and citizens? How has that been reacted to/ dealt with?
- Are there any areas of the project and/ or Fishermead that are suffering? Is this because they lack information about themselves?

## ***Strengthening civic institutions***

### ***Efficacy (what)***

- Is there a diverse community of institutions involved in the FCA? What institutions are involved and are they actively involved? On an ad hoc or continuous basis?
- Are the institutions taking action to make change together? What actions have been instigated and were they successful?
- Are the institutions strengthening their understanding of how to continue their collaboration and taking action to enable continued collaboration (i.e., talking to Trustees etc. about funding the Alliance)?



### ***Efficiency (how)***

- How well do the institutions understand the interests of their individual members?
- How many one-to-one meetings have the institution leaders had with their members?
- Are the institutions engaging in Community Organising **and considering the sustainability of the project?**
- Are the institutions actively identifying opportunities where they believe their combined 'power' can help them to take/ encourage others to take action for Fishermead?
- Are the institutions and the wider community of Fishermead co-creating together?

### ***Effectiveness (why)***

- Are the institutions feeling confident in their new collective power?
- Are the institutions peer to peer supporting/ mentoring each other?
- Is there any evidence of a shift of power to a local level?

## ***Creating systemic change***

### ***Efficacy (what)***

- What relationships have been formed with **and between** decision makers?
- Have the annual meetings with the Chair and Clerk of CPPC and leaders of the political parties gone ahead? Who was in attendance? And what was the outcome/ action from the meeting?

### ***Efficiency (how)***

- Are leaders being made aware of social injustice issues across Fishermead?

- Is the entanglement of different experiences being exposed and explored with decision makers?
- Is there any evidence of diverse alliances, **individual and institutional**, forming or having formed?

### ***Effectiveness (why)***

- Is there any evidence that suggests systemic change? For example, has the project changed/ influenced change in any local policies or services? What has changed? How? Over what period of time? What/ who is being influenced and how?
- Is there any evidence of a shift in power to a local level?

## Appendix 4: An Alliance as a viable system

The Viable System Model (VSM) was created during the 1970s by Professor Stafford Beer, a manager, consultant, author and the ‘father of management cybernetics’. He stressed that the thing we should be managing in systems is complexity (Beer, 1979). If we manage complexity effectively then our systems will be more viable. The VSM was put forward as a new way of looking at organisational structure that helps us to understand and manage complexity. It is about organising effectively and has been used for many years to understand and improve organisations, redesign them and manage change. In 1985, in his book, *Diagnosing the Systems for Organisations*, Beer stated that, ‘The laws of viability in complex organisms are not merely, or even primarily, concerned with the energy that propels them, but with the dynamic structure that determines the adaptive connectivity of their parts’. The VSM helps us consider this adaptive connectivity. Beer stated that systems we perceive as viable need to become immune to potentially destructive managerial problems and adaptive to environmental change. The VSM goes beyond reliance on a traditional hierarchy as a means to understand an organisation and gives us a way to look at the structural context that might hinder us and cause problems. The model helps us to examine things like structure and relationships, processes, communication and information flows. It helps us to contemplate how complexity is being managed and whether the means of managing complexity are helping or hindering the situation. It helps us to consider the conditions required for more effective actions. The model consists of five interacting sub-systems. Sub-

systems 1-3 are concerned with the 'inside and now' and managing day to day delivery, sub-system 4 is concerned with the 'outside and future' responses to external demands in the environment and sub-system 5 is concerned with balancing the two, internal governance and the identity of the system. The model is deemed to be recursive, meaning that this configuration of sub systems repeats itself at every scale – at the scale of an individual, a team, a service, an organisation, a place and so on.

### **The viable system model beyond organisations**

Practitioners of contemporary systems thinking have been using the concepts and ideas presented by the viable system model in areas outside of one singular organisation for many years. In this project, the viable system model and the concepts and ideas surrounding it, (for example, the concepts of recursion and requisite variety) are used to consider the learning and value that can be created when rendering Fishermead Citizens Alliance as a viable system. Modelling was developed according to the time constraints of the evaluation input into the project

### **Identifying the primary operations**

The primary operations of the model are dictated by the Citizens UK model and are outlined in the diagram below:

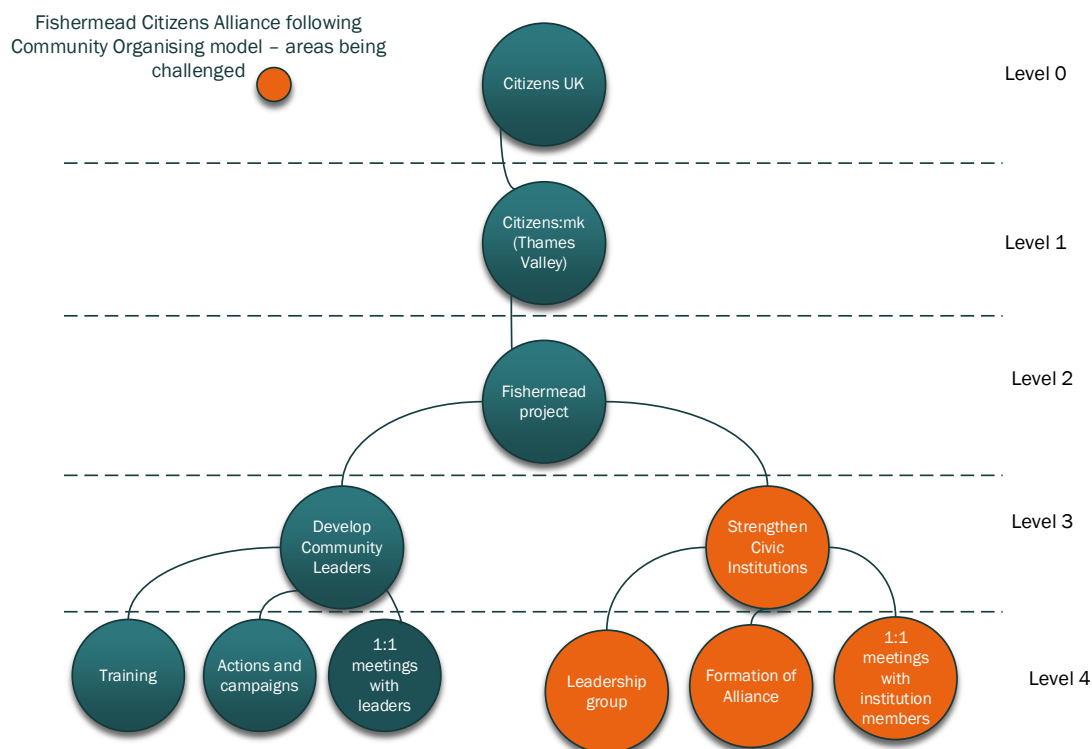


Figure 1: Viable system model primary operations – Fishermead Citizens Alliance

The elements in orange were the most challenged element of the model throughout the three years. There were, however, potential areas for accommodations to be made:

Fishermead Citizens Alliance following  
Community Organising model – potential area  
of accommodation for a more hybrid model

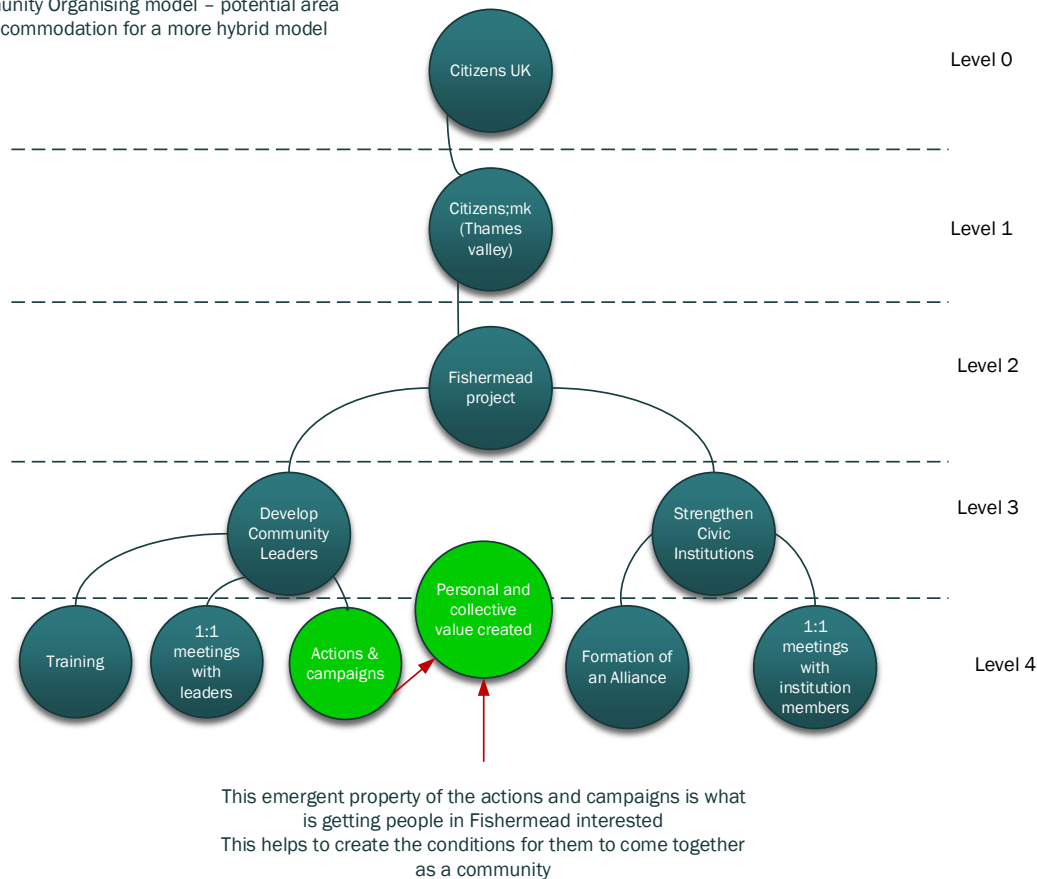


Figure 2: Areas of potential accommodations within the primary operations

The emergent properties of the actions and campaigns are generating significant relational value in the project. Social capital is growing and people are becoming infected with curiosity about the project. The actions and campaigns have created the conditions for people in Fishermead to come together as a community. There is still work to be done. The project to date has been largely focussed on the here and now. A focus on what comes next has now become a priority.

## Modelling Fishermead Citizens Alliance

A model for Fishermead Citizens Alliance project is expected to emerge from the project structure and the development of the Pre-founding Committee structure:

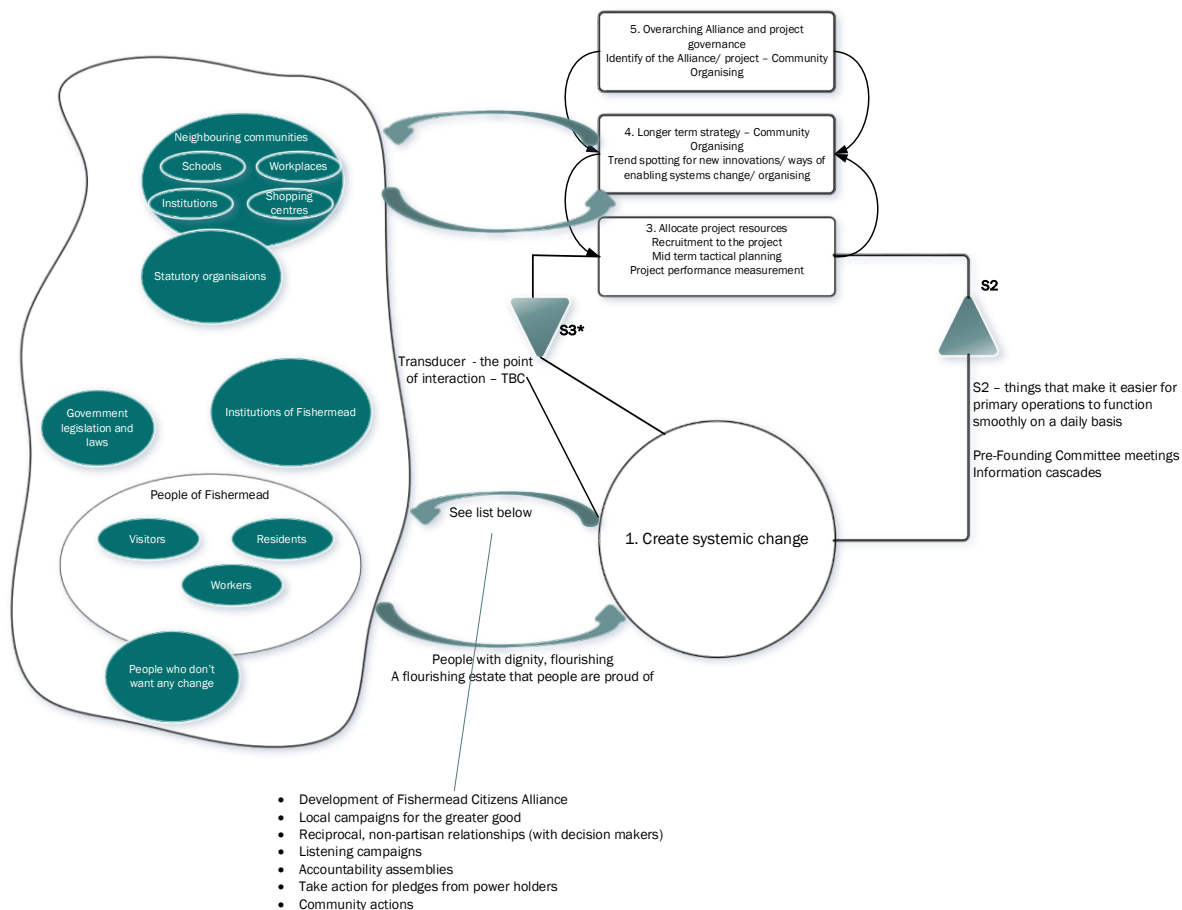


Figure 3: Fishermead Citizens Alliance as a viable system

Drawing attention to the monitoring sub-system of the model is pertinent as this is something that would require designing, through input with leaders, once an Alliance or any interim model is formed:

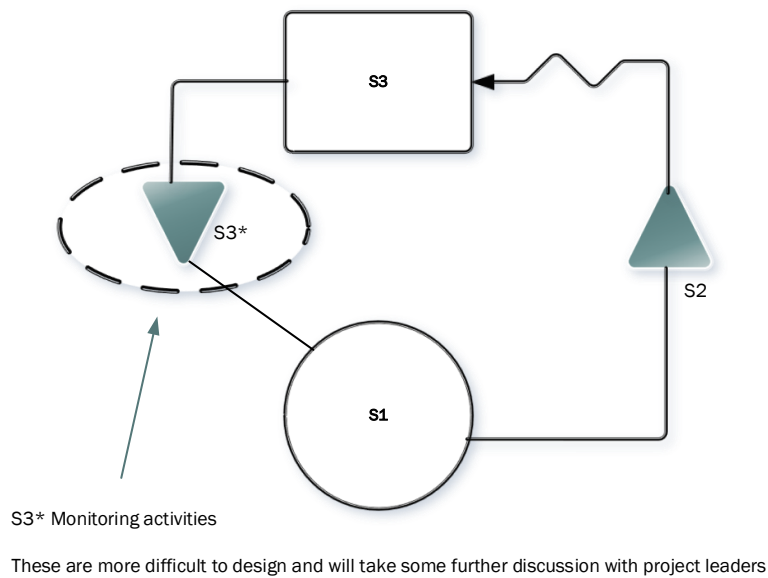


Figure 4: The monitoring element of Fishermead Citizens Alliance as a viable system

Another key area to be developed for a more permanent Alliance moving forward would be the resource allocation and performance management sub-system. Particularly, the finance model.

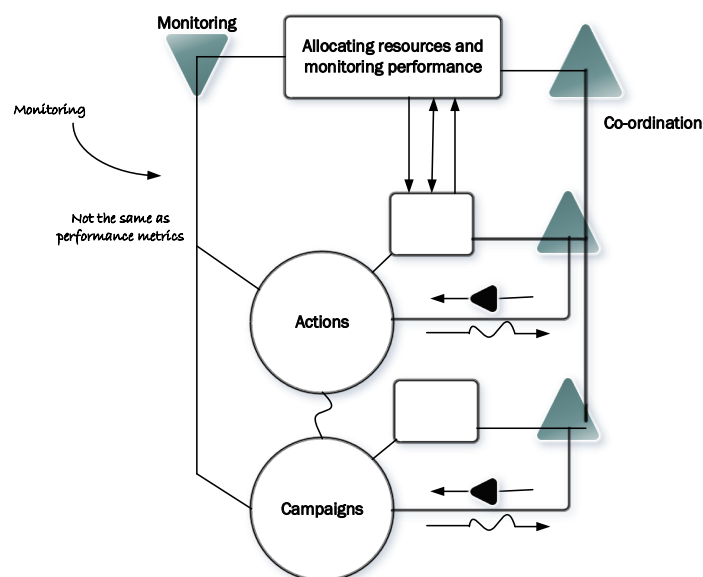


Figure 5: Considering resources and performance



Considering the concept of requisite variety, would bring about scrutiny of variety imbalances between the actions and campaigns, the management of the actions and campaigns, the more permanent Alliance overall and the community environment of Fishermead:

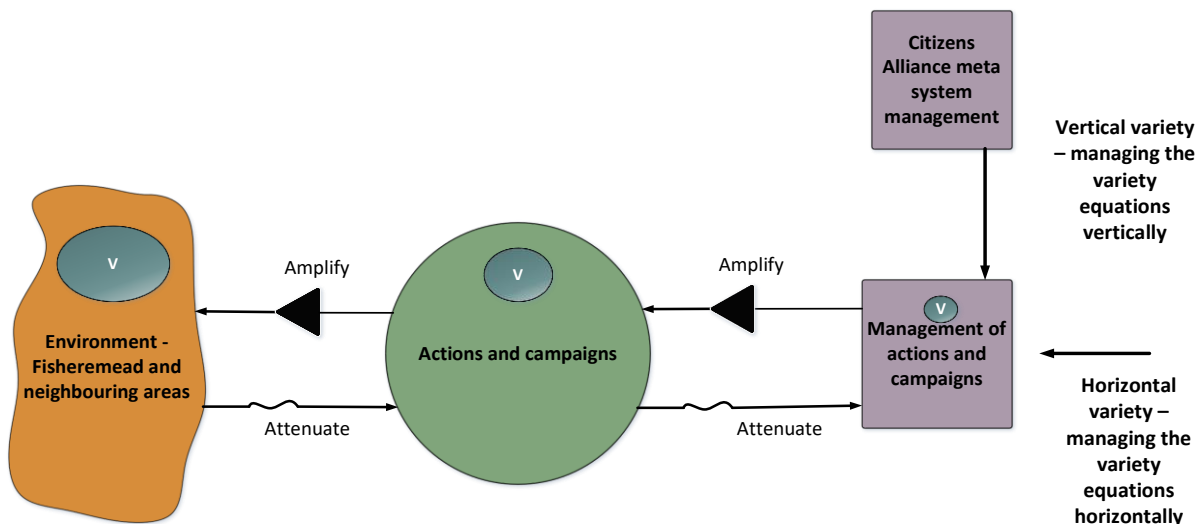


Figure 6: Considering requisite variety

### **Fishermead Citizens Alliance project (and eventual more permanent model) as a viable system generating learning and value**

As the project stands currently, some institutional leaders are not signed up to the concept of a membership Alliance. As such, from those institutions, there is no alignment with exploring a vision and mission for the work going forward. There is, however, significant alignment with the vision and purpose of the project, for those who have been involved. Whether it is an actual Alliance the people of Fishermead want or something else, leaders and residents have stepped into their personal and relational power, gained a sense of their own autonomy and been accountable for stepping into their own agency to make something different and new happen. They have embraced the concept of

devolved leadership and sought to empower themselves through their new found confidence, trust in others and effective collaborations. They have taken risks, supported others to take risks and had the supportive experimental conditions to allow them to do so. Meaning has been created jointly between leaders about what the project is and what it could be. The structure of the project so far has meant that selfish goals have not been able to predominate, making space for 'new shoots' to emerge. An effective network of influence is clearly forming and an identity developing. Insights have been gained through the engagement with multiple perspectives and through critical reflection, systemic sensibilities are growing. An awareness is developing that people in Fishermead can respond to their current position in different ways, as their curiosity grows. Through active questioning, supportive conditions for reciprocation have started to appear. There have been instances of flux and disruption along the way but the project has proven that it has been adaptive to that flux and able to move forwards effectively (Roberts, 2019).

Considering the future beyond the three years of the project has been perhaps the least explored and where least learning and value has been generated. The development of community relationships was deemed most important by the leaders. The viable system model, however, warns us of this imbalance and that sight of the future can enable effective pivoting in response to the needs of the environment. It would be pertinent for the community organiser and/ or leaders to undertake future work to bring into balance the 'here and now' and 'the needs of tomorrow'. Structures and practices that are fit for the future will be imperative to further second and third order learning and value generation going forward.

Monitoring for effective system characteristic already happens somewhat implicitly in the project. The pre-founding committee do enter into critical reflection and there is even greater value to be generated in harnessing this practice moving forwards. As with anything, bias is and will continue exist in the project and it will be imperative to find a robust way of continuing to generate multiple perspectives of the work. There is value to be gained in the leaders opening up their own receptivity to those perspectives and then being able to lean into them with curiosity (Roberts, 2019). It will also be important for value creation that early signs of 'sickness' in the project are able to be exposed so that structures, processes and actions can be tailored to facilitate emergence of the new, rather than sticking with something that may not be working. Reciprocation strategies, either formal or informal are important to use here also (Roberts, 2019). Reciprocation started to emerge in the project in 2022 and got stronger in 2023. There is, however, value to be gained in understanding the power of reciprocation to a greater degree and how it might be a concept that helps leaders leverage even greater relational power.

As far as allocating resources to the project, the financial element for the three year project has been through funding from Milton Keynes Community Foundation. At the end of the three year project, no further funding has been secured and as such, there is an element of vulnerability for the project, until an more permanent Alliance is formed. Whilst leaders have been trained in an appropriate leadership style for community organising, how confident do they feel about holding exploratory funding conversations? The Citizens infrastructure, providing a community organiser, is currently providing value in terms of a valuable human resource. How might this work longer-term?

In terms of co-ordinating the project to date, it has taken significant input from a community organiser to hold the reins. Is this sustainable over the longer term? It is certainly something to be explored. Where can further value be generated in exploring the concept of co-ordination? How can the leaders create and share information that is capable of bringing new life to the work in the longer term? This is an area where the community organiser and the Citizens infrastructure generate significant value for the project. The Citizens platforms and branding give life to the project by communicating about it in arenas outside of Fishermead. Do leaders want to leverage this value further, or create value in other ways? How do they become the storytellers, the recorders of learning, the information sharers, the meeting facilitators, the relationship builders, the networkers and the enablers (Roberts, 2019)? How much energy and effort might it take to leverage this value over time? How do they develop effective loops of communication, which is vital in engaging people, and how do they keep them going? Collaborative ways of working take significant co-ordination. Without it, the complexity is absorbed by the people themselves and the risk of burn out escalates. This is an area of vulnerability in the current project and requires consideration in any model going forward. Wrapped up in this is the notion of positive challenge to enable ongoing learning opportunities. There is significant value to be leveraged here and also significant value that can be lost, if the element of co-ordination is not fully considered.

When it comes to the actual actions, campaigns and celebrations, keeping systemic sensibilities open is vital. Value is generated in understanding and working with interconnections and interdependencies. It is something that can often be thought of as implicit and happening automatically. It generally does

not. It takes effort and critical thinking and there is value to be both lost and gained here. Value can be gained in acknowledging the importance of and ability to work with and within interconnections and interdependencies. There is value to be lost, particularly with the loss of the community organiser, who is currently making the interconnectivity explicit for leaders.

Creating the conditions for an effective project has been critical so far. Leaders have stepped in with honesty and trust. People have been allowed to be vulnerable and have been supported in their learning journey. This has enabled a capacity to create. How might this value not be lost as the project moves beyond the end of year three into whatever it becomes next? How might the full extent of this learning be captured? Authentic relationships that can leverage community power do not often come quickly. As we have seen, leaders are only now understanding what the project can achieve. It has taken three years to get to this point and it may take more years to realise an enhanced level of value and systems change. How does the value generated so far, not get lost? Vulnerability in the project exists. There is an opportunity for a way forward to be identified and executed in a way that continues to and further leverages the value generated to date (Creating the Conditions for Change, 2019).

# Appendix 5: Evaluator reflections

## Creating the conditions for effective evaluation

### Rendering the evaluation as 'simple system'

In the same way that the overall project and the workstreams of the project were developed into '*simple systems*' based on the formula: 'a system to do **what** (purpose) by **how** (operations) and **why** (rationale)', the evaluation can also be developed into a '*simple system*'.

**What (purpose)** – A system to create the conditions for an effective evaluation of the Fishermead Citizens Alliance project

**How (operations)** – by embedding the evaluator into the Fishermead Citizens Alliance project team to undertake developmental evaluation using contemporary systems thinking in practice

**Why (rationale)** – to enable a participatory, iterative, and reflexive evaluation which 'develops value' in the project, rather than simply assessing or 'capturing value' of the project

As with the project, three sets of measures for this simple system were considered

- Measures of (what?) **Efficacy** – have the conditions for effective evaluation been created?

- Measures of (how?) **Efficiency** – has the evaluator successfully embedded into the Fishermead Citizens Alliance project?
- Measures of (why?) **Effectiveness** – Is there evidence of the evaluator developing value in the project?

## **Evaluator reflections**

The following reflections on the evaluation and personal reflections on the evaluator's own practice were captured as the project progressed.

### **The evaluator's role in the project**

I have not taken the evaluation approach of first order, objective, dispassionate observer. I have been an interconnected, embedded empathic member of the project team. I have acted as the friendly challenger and critical friend. I have been keen to demonstrate that I have as much care and passion for the project as the people living in Fishermead and working to establish the Fishermead Citizens Alliance. In year two, the community organiser thanked me for my flexibility, my reflections and demonstrating that I care about the project. Members of the evaluand have been happy to engage with me and are open and welcoming.

### **Being embedded within the evaluand**

I have embedded into the project as a member of the team. Being remote from the estate has meant that there have been some challenges in this respect. I cannot physically feel the atmosphere or walk around talking to people for

myself. I have not been able to reach the wider community. However, despite the constraints of the Covid 19 lockdown and being remote from Fishermead, I have maintained contact with the evaluand via telephone, email and computer platforms such as Zoom. I attend all meetings remotely and am accepted by the evaluand as a member of the team. Meetings attended by Zoom are particularly useful, as I can observe the dynamics in the room as well as the conversations.

Some of the remote ways of connecting with the evaluand have not been successful. For example, I tried to run a focus group but only had one attendee. I also set up some creative and interactive exercises to draw out different perspective from the group on a Miro electronic whiteboard. I was not, however, able to get any input into this.

I have been acutely aware of the pressures on individuals, especially around family commitments and work, so engaging without causing any additional stress is something I was particularly mindful of. What I found worked quite well were very short one-to-one phone calls or Zoom meetings. I can work these around the schedules of the evaluand and they are not too taxing or imposing on their day. It also helps to maintain regular contact – little and often.

A comment from the Chair, in one of the Project Steering Group meetings, was that they liked how I engaged with them. They did not feel like they were being evaluated at the time and yet my reflections back to the group clearly demonstrated the things I had observed about the project.



## **Providing reassurance to the evaluand**

There was a role to be enacted in giving reassurance about the positive elements of the project at times, particularly around how relationships were forming, how the evaluand were effectively working at multiple levels of recursion and how the evaluand were building their systemic sensibilities. I have been able to reflect back scenes demonstrative of trust developing between members of the evaluand during meetings as feelings and stories have been shared. I have also been able to reflect back evidence of inner confidence growing as community leaders have diligently led campaigns.

I have also been able to provide reassurances in times when there have been moments of disagreement or accidental upset. I have been able to reflect from a different perspective and offer a different framing to the situation, bringing another dynamic into consciousness for consideration.

I have been able to give reassurance when things were going well but the evaluand have been somewhat doubtful. For example, traditional project metrics might show that the project is not on track with its expectation but significant value has been created.

## **Building trust with the evaluand**

As an evaluator, a condition for effective evaluation is trust. Trust between different members of the evaluand and trust between myself and the evaluand. The one-to-one discussions that I have with individual members are confidential and I only disclose that which they are happy for me to share. The

evaluand talk freely and openly to me and in some cases, contact me directly. I feel that these conversations demonstrate a level of trust that has developed since the start of the project.

I also seek to adapt a coaching style in my evaluation practices, when appropriate. I keep this very low key and my aim is to contribute to the development of the inner confidence of each member of the evaluand, where appropriate.

### **Encouraging reflective conversations that enable learning**

The nature of my reflective conversations is that they are done with respect, rather than hard challenge. For example, I probed gently with members of the evaluand about the impact that the Covid 19 lockdown might have had and whether they felt like they had been able to engage fully with Community Organising during that time. If they had not, did they feel like the project might be six months behind, in reality? This brought about several reflective conversations with individual members who were then able to discuss their thoughts with the community organiser. These discussions were able to help bring focus to how critical it might be for the group to secure another community organiser for beyond the three-year timescale of the project. The learning was about a potentially critical element of the project and to help the members consider the future.

### **Bolstering the inner confidence of the evaluand**

Inner development work brings value when it happens at the same time as the external work. They are like two twines bound together to make a rope. There is

greater strength when inner conditions (your inner self) and outer conditions (in the situation) are developed together.

### **What does the project need to make it work? Does it need an evaluator? Why?**

We tried to encourage a leader to be the 'evaluator on the ground' and be a key person working with the evaluator to learn the craft of evaluation as we moved through the three years. However, this has not been successful. The project does need evaluation to encourage critical reflections. How that is done to being most value is something to be explored.

### **Challenging the evaluator's evaluation practices – personal frames of reference and traditions of understanding**

As an evaluator, I bring several personal frames of reference into the evaluation that I am mindful of. They are that of a systems practitioner, a system changer and of my own experiences of creating the conditions for change and witnessing what I feel works and what does not. I also bring the frame of reference of a project and programme manager, a public service manager and a member of the Open University. All of these frames are involved in my perceptions of the project. I purposefully reflect on these and their potential impacts as I try to create value in the project. I am also conscious that my thinking is impacted by the wider contextual focus on systems change in the UK, in which I am currently deeply embedded. I am mindful of staying true to my own values and ethics whilst bringing value to the project.

## **Projection, perception and bias**

With the above in mind, I am being careful not to project my feelings from other work I am involved in onto this project, although as with most people, this is difficult to achieve. I remain consciously aware of my traditions of understanding and my frames of reference. I am trying hard not to be falsely positively biased. However, I acknowledge that I will have unconscious biases and areas of unknown that will impact on my evaluation practices. I gather as many different perspectives as possible to shine light into these unconscious areas.

## **Self-reflection**

Throughout the evaluation, I continue to consciously consider how I am being, engaging, contextualising and managing my input and actively creating the conditions for effective evaluation by engaging with and critically questioning the evaluand. I periodically and when appropriate question the systems thinking tools I am using and consider which others might bring additional value.

## **Being**

There have been many times when a 'gently as we go' approach was appropriate due to emerging relationships and general pressures of everyday life that everyone is experiencing. I am mindful that those involved are volunteers and are giving free time and effort to support Fishermead. I am being careful not to use technical systems or evaluation language and instead I am focussing on trust, encouragement, support and reflection. I remain aware of my conscious decision to match my language to the group's language to

initiate a relational bond with the group. I am also aware of not coming across as a member of the Open University but as a member of the project team. This worked best in the first two years of the project and less so in the third year of the project where the resource related to evaluator input was more restricted.

### **Engaging**

I remain mindful that the project is not yet fully representative of the cultures in Fishermead. There may be people in the community who see this project completely differently to me and the members of the project. I believe the situation is potentially far messier than I am hearing about. This is difficult due to my physical distance from the project. There are significant interrelationships and different perspectives, even in the cohort of people I engage with. I can see people are making different boundary judgements and have different perspectives of what the project could be.

There is no contact with those who are involved in gangs (or have been in the past) or with crime to encompass their perspectives. I cannot assume they would have a positive attitude towards this project and have to accept that the perspectives we are encompassing are partial and we will have blind spots leading to some potential lack of insight about what it is like to live and/ or work in Fishermead.

### **Contextualising**

I have been undertaking an iterative process of zooming in and out of the situation. At the very start it was necessary to zoom out to set the project in context of systems change in the UK and to explore where the project sits within

Citizens UK. As the project started to develop, I spent time zooming in to explore the relational elements of the project. Towards the end, I zoomed back out again.

## **Managing**

My practice is supportive, matching language and behaviours to the evaluand to build trust and provide reassurance, whilst critically questioning the evaluand.

It has been important to demonstrate empathy, be critical but friendly, challenge boundaries and ensure that there is humanity in the engagement between myself and the evaluand. This became more difficult in the third year of the project, when there was less time to engage.

## **Developing the bricolage skills of the evaluator**

Throughout the evaluation, I have iteratively questioned myself about whether I am using the appropriate systems thinking ideas, methods and frameworks. I believe the viable system model and critical system heuristics together have provided a robust evaluation so far. Additionally, the values and learning frameworks of Martin Reynolds et al have been a welcome and important addition, bringing significant value to the evaluation.

## **Embodying STiP**

It is imperative that as an evaluator, I work with authenticity and integrity. I intend the evaluand to experience me as a person, not as a label as an evaluator. I have put in significant effort to communicate in a way that works for

the people involved. I rarely, if ever, mention that I work for the Open University. At times it has been important to let the evaluand know that I do not work for Citizens UK, but I work on behalf of them, to help enable their project.

**Are the evaluand helping to shape the evaluation and has this emerged throughout the project?**

This has been difficult due to the distance between us and there was potential for more creative interaction. The evaluand are, however, shaping the evaluation because they are people and changeable and therefore, I need to flex and bend with how they are moving and changing. They change, I change. I change, they change.

**What has the impact of the evaluator being in the project achieved.**

As the evaluator, I felt like the evaluation was more useful in the first two years of the project. Towards the end, it became more difficult to be kept up to date with relevant meetings or to get a slot on the pre-founding committee agenda. The evaluation was intentionally waiting for the outcome of the learning generated through the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. The evaluand, however, did not invite the evaluator to the evaluation meeting of the event.

## Appendix 6: Boundary critique – 20's plenty campaign

Sources of influence	Who are the stakeholders?	What are the stakes?	What are the issues of stakeholding?
<b>Motivation</b>	<p><b>Beneficiary:</b> Who does/ought to benefit from the campaign?</p> <p>Residents and visitors to Fishermead benefit from this campaign and that is appropriate.</p> <p>Victims of this campaign may be those who wish to drive over 20mph.</p> <p>For the safety of the residents, the campaign has appropriate beneficiaries.</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> what is/ought to be the purpose of the campaign?</p> <p>The purpose of this campaign is to get the speed limit reduced to 20mph in Fishermead.</p> <p>As over 500 signatures on a petition to support the campaign were gathered in just over a week, the purpose appears to be appropriate for the residents in Fishermead.</p>	<p><b>Measure of improvement:</b></p> <p>What are/ought to be relevant measures of success for this campaign?</p> <p>The measure of improvement is the successful implementation of a 20mph limit. However, the relationships being built during the campaign and the peer-to-peer community support should also be recognised as successes.</p>



<p><b>Control</b></p>	<p><b>Decision maker:</b> Who is/ought to be in control of the campaign?</p> <p>A Community Leader is moving this initiative forward and has liaised with local Councillors throughout the process. Milton Keynes Council and highways have ultimate control over the decision.</p> <p>Critique: This campaign is an attempt by local residents to influence those in power and the decisions made about the speed limit. Residents do not always have power in this process, but this campaign aimed and succeeded in changing that.</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b> What resources/conditions of success are/ought to be available for this campaign?</p> <p>Current resources are the Community Organiser, the Community Leaders and the residents and visitors in Fishermead. Local Councillors have been informed about the campaign and police have supported the safe door knocking training.</p> <p>Critique: Residents' concerns were to be considered if a petition with a substantial number of signatures was presented to MK Council. A petition of over 500 signatures was presented. The campaign gained approval and the 20mph limit is being implemented.</p>	<p><b>Decision environment:</b> What conditions of success are/ought to be outside of the control of this campaign?</p> <p>The decision to change the speed limit is out of the control of the residents and sits with MK Council. This is appropriate, although residents should be able to influence decisions, where appropriate, which they did.</p>
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<b>Knowledge</b>	<p><b>Expert:</b> Who are/ought to be the relevant experts providing knowledge, expertise &amp; skills?</p> <p>Residents are experts. MK Council and Highways are experts in road safety. Police are experts in safe door knocking.</p>	<p><b>8. Expertise:</b> What is/ought to be the relevant knowledge, expertise &amp; skills for the campaign?</p> <p>The appropriate expertise is being drafted into this campaign – MK Council and Highways around road safety, Police and residents together.</p>	<p><b>Guarantor:</b> What are / ought to be the assurances for successful implementation?</p> <p>Successful implementation happen with agreement by MK Council and Highways.</p>
<b>Legitimacy</b>	<p><b>Witness:</b> Who are/ought to be the victims or their representatives?</p> <p>The people in Fishermead are receivers of this campaign, which acts in the best interests of all residents.</p>	<p><b>Emancipation:</b> What relevant perspectives highlight potential coercive/malignant aspects? What freedom do they have from the project?</p> <p>There may be people in Fishermead who will feel hindered by a slower speed limit. They do not have any freedom from it. However, it is a substantial safety measure that seeks to act in the best interests of the safety of those in Fishermead.</p>	<p><b>Worldview:</b> What opportunities /mechanisms are/should be available for reconciling opposing worldviews?</p> <p>The petition is in place. Those who do not agree, have the opportunity to not sign the petition.</p>

<b>Those involved</b>	<b>Those affected but not involved</b>
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