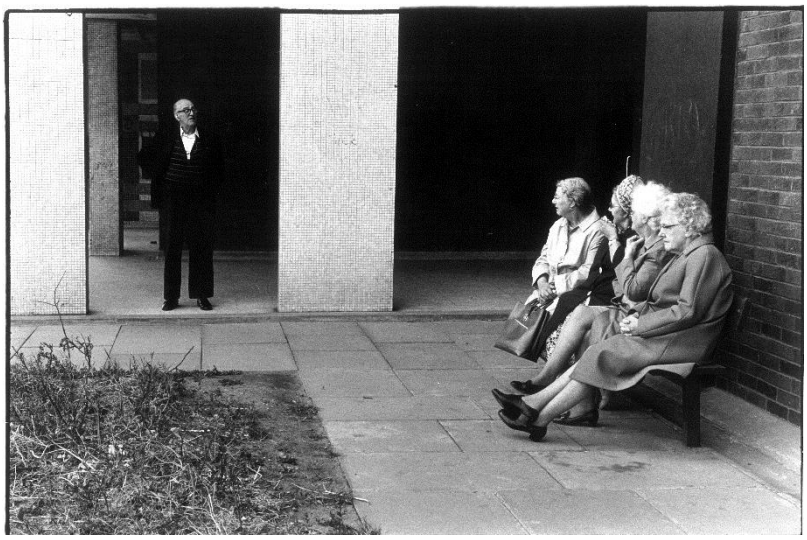
Re-examining Benwell Community Development Project and its legacy

REPORT

Andrea Armstrong, Sarah Banks and Gary Craig



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socialjustice@durham.ac.uk

www.durham.ac.uk/socialjustice

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About the authors: ***Andrea Armstrong*** was Research Associate for *Imagine North East* during 2013-16. She has a PhD in Geography and worked on previous Connected Communities research projects on ethics in community-based participatory research. ***Sarah Banks*** is Professor in the School of Applied Social Sciences and Co-director of the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at Durham University. She coordinated *Imagine North East.* ***Gary Craig*** was a community worker with Benwell CDP and an advisor to *Imagine North East*. He has worked in a variety of community development and University posts and is Emeritus Professor at Hull University.

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CDP reports: some of the reports published by Benwell CDP and other projects can be purchased from St James' Heritage & Environment Group (see website: http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com). Some are available in digital form online at http://ulib.iupui.edu/collections/CDP

Cover photos, copyright Derek Smith. First photo - entrance to Adelaide House multi-storey flats. Second photo - Armstrong Road looking south over the clearance area.

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Introduction

This report offers a relatively descriptive and selective overview of the work of Benwell Community Development Project (CDP) and considers its legacies and lessons for today. Further discussion of aspects of the work of Benwell CDP, along with a critical overview of the national Community Development Project, can be found in a themed issue of the *Community Development Journal* (see Green, 2017; Banks and Carpenter, 2017).

Benwell CDP (1972-78) was part of the national Community Development Project, Britain's first national anti-poverty programme in the 1970s, funded by the Home Office and located in 12 areas in the UK. Local action-research teams were tasked with researching the causes of poverty in their areas and working with local residents to bring about change. The CDPs produced many detailed and critical local and national reports, which located the causes of local social and economic problems in the decline of traditional industries, failures of government policy and international pressure to cut public spending.

This report draws on research undertaken in 2014-16 as part of the *Imagine North East* project. This involved examining documentary evidence, including CDP reports, census data, Home Office and Cabinet Office records, unpublished local CDP papers and other grey literature. The report also draws on 40 interviews with former CDP workers, past and present community activists, residents and policy-makers conducted in 2013-15 for *Imagine North East* and a workshop held in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2016 (Armstrong, Banks and Harman, 2016). *Imagine North East* was part of a larger national research project, *Imagine – connecting communities through research,* a five-year programme of research involving a wide range of universities and community organisations. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under the Connected Communities programme, the aim was to look at the ways people engage with their communities and with wider society through taking an active role in civic life. *Imagine North East* was part of the historical work package, covering Tyneside and Coventry and involved 12 community-based partner organisations in Benwell and North Shields. An overview of the projects conducted by Benwell community organisations as part of *Imagine North East* is in a booklet on the web (Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, 2015)

Benwell[1]

Benwell is located in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne (a city in North East England). It has a long history dating back to Roman times, evidence of which can still be found in some of the street names. To the north of the area, hidden in a small housing estate, are the remains of one of the mile forts built by the Roman army along what became known as Hadrian's Wall. The development of Benwell is closely linked to industrial growth and decline. There was coal mining in Roman times, but it really took off in the 12th century and by the 18th century there were dozens of pits. Despite extensive underground mining, at this time Benwell remained predominantly rural and it was a fashionable place to live, with many wealthy and influential families living there. This started to change towards the end of the 19th century when heavy industry developed along the River Tyne, including the Armstrong engineering works in 1847. Thousands were drawn to the area for work and

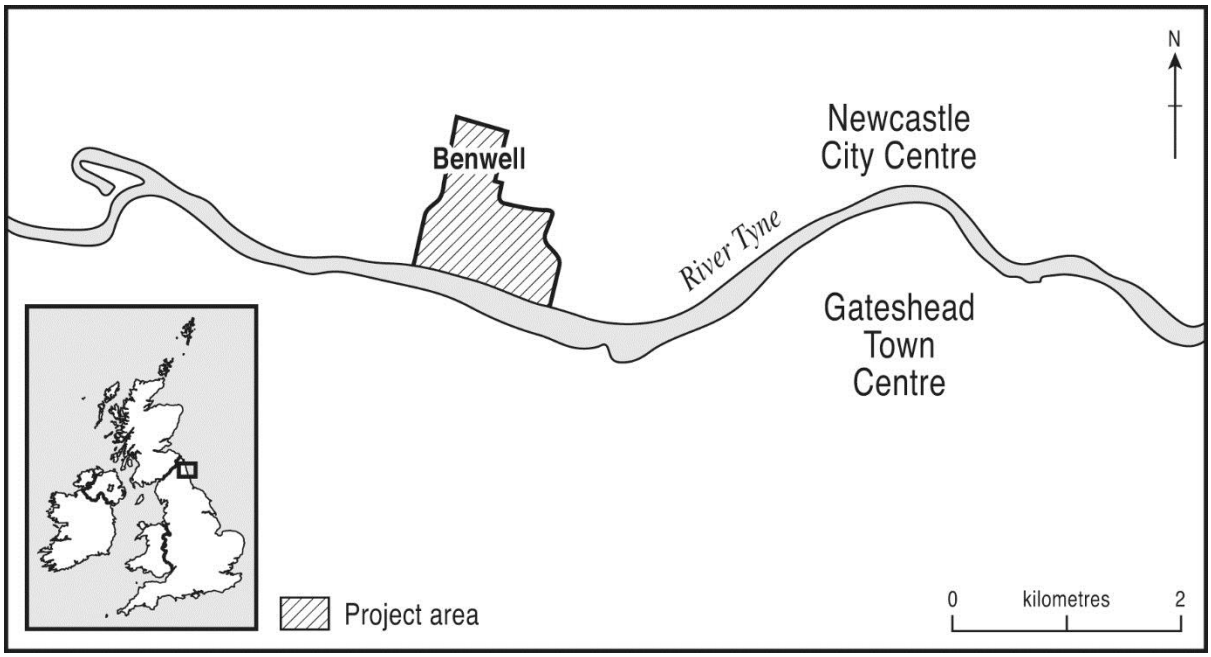
[1] We are grateful to Judith Green for providing information on the history of Benwell. A longer history of the West End of Newcastle, written by Judith Green, along with films can be found on the Archive for Change website: http://archiveforchange.org/ Further publications and resources about the history and heritage of the area can be found at: https://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com/publications-and-resources/

the once grassy riverside was covered with speculative private rented terraced housing for the new workforce. Benwell became an urban area. A boom time followed but by the early to mid-twentieth century the local industrial base was declining, with intermittent booms, particularly driven by the two World Wars. Alongside industrial change, there were waves of house clearance and new building. The 1960s and 1970s saw the demolition of a large proportion of the older terraced homes built during the rapid expansion of 'New Benwell'. These were partially replaced by new council and housing association homes, some of which were demolished only a decade or so later. Declining industries and growing unemployment was the landscape faced by Benwell CDP workers when they began working in 1972.

Setting up Benwell CDP

Benwell was one of 12 CDP areas and was in the 'second wave' of projects (shortly followed by the 'third wave' which included North Tyneside CDP). Benwell CDP was in operation from 1972 until 1978, based in former shop premises at 85/7 Adelaide Terrace (the central shopping street in the area), initially covering the narrow area defined by the Benwell ward but expanding to include the whole of the West End as work developed and connections were made with similar areas and issues outside the original area. The first person appointed in April 1972 was the Director, Ian Harford, and in contrast to some of the other CDPs, he had a say in choosing the CDP area for Newcastle. Three areas in the West End of Newcastle were considered – Benwell, Scotswood and Cowgate. Scotswood and Cowgate were not selected because they were predominantly council housing. According to Ian Harford (Interview, 2014) it was thought that 'we would be always up against the housing department, trying to press them to make changes in policy', whereas Benwell had a 'mixed economy of housing and a growing warehousing area down by the river on the Armstrong site'. The Benwell CDP area (see Figure 1) was initially defined as: to the north, West Road; to the south, the River Tyne; to the east, Fairholm Road, Northbourne Street and Noble Street; and to the west, Condercum Road, Atkinson Road and South Benwell Road (Benwell CDP, 1973, 3).

Figure 1: Map of the Benwell CDP area



Though in reality, the CDP team did not work strictly within these geographic boundaries as David Gray, the Benwell CDP lawyer explained:

> I must say I never felt constrained by the [geographical] limits and frankly wasn't really aware of them. It was particularly difficult for a lawyer to confine activities and support to such a narrow area given that there were no similar Projects (with a lawyer) in the North East let alone Newcastle. The more success you had with the test case strategy - particularly in housing and benefits - and the more people became aware of the service and aware of their 'legal rights' the more difficult it became to confine oneself to a small geographical area. (David Gray, personal communication, 2016)

As with the other CDPs, Benwell CDP had an action team, sponsored by Newcastle City Council to develop community work on the ground, and a research team, initially employed by the University of Newcastle and then by Durham University.

Benwell CDP, like North Tyneside, Coventry, Newham and Birmingham, was described as 'radical' (Kraushaar, 1982). The radical CDPs strongly challenged the Home Office's social pathology assumptions in local and inter-project reports. Benwell CDP was prolific in producing publications – with numerous locally published reports (including seven local 'final' CDP reports[2]), articles and papers, and involvement in many inter-project reports. The radical CDPs rejected the Home Office hierarchical model of working and separation of research and action (Loney, 1983). Instead, they regarded research as integral to action. The Director of Benwell CDP asserted the integrated way of working early on, which led to conflict with the Home Office:

> My view was that it was essential to have an integrated team of action and research staff with a very different agenda. This was very early on, before any of the others were appointed, it was a fraught time and led to some very nasty meetings. (Ian Harford, Interview, 2014)

At the local level, integrating research and action benefited the CDP team's working relationship with Newcastle City Council. One of the assistant directors (action team) of Benwell CDP explains how this played out in practice:

> We worked as a kind of integrated action research team in practice. However, the action team were required to report to the local authority, and somebody from the research team always attended those meetings, and that was part of our strategy for crudely playing divide and rule; so that they never quite knew who was responsible for what. So if something came up in the committee that the local authority was objecting to violently, then we would just say that that was the research team doing that, it wasn't us! (Gary Craig, Interview, 2014)

This strategy challenged the power relationship between the CDP and the local authority. By being unclear about responsibilities within the CDP team, the aim was:

> To generate as much political space for us to do whatever we wanted to do within as wide a policy and geographical basis as possible, and to avoid getting into direct confrontations with the local authority. (Gary Craig, Interview, 2014)

[2] Benwell CDP Report Number 5 was never published.

Organising for change

In line with the approach typical of serious community development interventions at the time, the team developed four strands of work: local and historical research; information and advice; legal services; and community development/neighbourhood work. We will consider each of these in turn.

Local and historical research

The first strand of work involved research to map the territory, talking to local groups, analyzing data about the area and developing some understanding of its historical, industrial and housing base. Research undertaken by Benwell CDP placed a strong emphasis on understanding the historical processes that led to conditions on the ground in Benwell in the 1970s. As a former CDP worker explained, the research and action complemented each other and local CDP reports had a strong historical strand:

> In a way the CDPs were unique because of that odd mixture of action, research and community development workers. Alongside this, there was a very coherent and well-resourced research capacity which could explore all kinds of things historical - industrial ownership, financial resources, housing development, So quite a lot of these project reports and a lot of our local reports have a very, very strong historical strand to them because that seemed quite important. (Gary Craig, Interview, 2014)

The research was 'very detailed and specific' as described by a former CDP researcher:

> But what we were interested in was the specifics of what was happening in the area. The research that we did was very detailed and specific. We didn't sit there thinking, "Oh, there's a global economic crisis and that's why there's lots of unemployment." We weren't doing *Socialist Worker* headlines, or something. We were actually interested in the detail of what was going on in the area and what was changing and why it was changing, so there was a lot of quantitative analysis. There was a lot of very detailed analysis of companies and their markets and what they were doing. (Judith Green, Interview, 2014)

The project developed radical critiques of central and local government and professionals such as social workers, planners, teachers, to encourage political and social awareness amongst the CDP and beyond. Benwell CDP team was also committed to inter-project work and contributed substantially to several national CDP reports such as *Whatever happened to council housing?*, *Gilding the Ghetto*, *Limits of the law* and *The costs of industrial change* (National CDP with the Information and Intelligence Unit, 1976; National CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c). These reports emerged from early inter-project meetings when it became clear to workers from many projects that the underlying causes contributing to local conditions were essentially the same.

The Information Centre: '*every neighbourhood should have one*'

The Benwell Information and Opinion Centre opened in the Adelaide Terrace premises on the 28 August 1973. At first, all CDP project workers took turns at staffing the centre but in February 1974, Susan Walker (later Sue Pearson) was appointed as a dedicated information worker (Benwell CDP, 1974). The establishment of an information centre was important for two reasons. One was that it provided further evidence of the issues about which local residents were concerned (and thus leading to the formation of a number of action groups), and second, that it demonstrated a commitment to residents in the area who had questioned the project's arrival, given that there had been no consultation with local people about whether it would be welcome or not. According to a

report recording the first six months of operation, there were 1200 enquiries during this period (Benwell CDP, 1974: 9). Recalling this time, Sue Pearson commented on the heavy demand for information and advice, with welfare rights and housing as major concerns:

> The Advice Centre was very popular from day one, and we were inundated with people who had problems with income, and problems with housing. Regeneration was becoming the norm, where people were either being compulsorily purchased or they were part of a housing action area, or one or the other, or general improvement areas. (Sue Pearson, Interview, 2014)

The six month report provides a statistical breakdown of issues presented at the information centre. A paragraph in the conclusion gives a real flavour of the people and issues at the time:

> The 1200 enquiries we have had in the first six months have each had their own, individual differences. But time and again several crucial themes have emerged. The pensioner with a complex form that doesn't make sense; the young family who have heard vague rumours that their flat is to be demolished; the man who comes thinking he is entitled to one benefit and discovers he is entitled to five; the lady who comes to the centre in tears because an organisation lacked sensitivity to her problems. (Benwell CDP, 1974: 9)

The report concludes with some changes that need to be made:

- Greater publicity of people's rights
- People want to know what plans there are for their future, especially their home and neighbourhood
- Simplification of application forms and stressing that people have the right to the benefits they are claiming
- Organisations should remember that individuals see their problems in different ways, and that these ways are rarely those of the organisation. (Benwell CDP, 1974: 9)

Considering these comments were written in 1974, these are lessons still pertinent today. As the title of the report says about information centres 'every neighbourhood should have one' (Benwell CDP, 1974).

Legal services

Benwell CDP was one of only five CDP projects that established a Law Project and these are discussed in detail in the CDP publication *Limits of the Law* (National CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team (1977b). According to Lancaster (2002:26) the CDP and the more general national programme from which it emerged – the Urban Aid Programme – made a significant contribution in establishing Law Centres in the UK, even though neither was designed with this in mind.

During the early 1970s, the Law Centre movement was growing – inspired by neighbourhood law offices in the USA (see Smith, 1997; Stephens, 1993; Zander, 1978) which were taken up by President Johnson's 'War on Poverty' (Houseman and Perle, 2013). A seminal article - 'The War on Poverty: a Civilian Perspective' - inspired the move away from the traditional legal aid model of limited assistance for individual clients, arguing that neighbourhood law offices and neighbourhood lawyers were necessary for an effective anti-poverty programme. This was because they provided a vehicle for poor residents in local communities to influence anti-poverty policies and the agencies responsible for distributing benefits (Cahn and Cahn, 1964). Whilst legal aid expanded during the

1970s and 1980s, there was a corresponding shift away from the traditional legal aid model as described above, towards an approach which viewed the law as a vehicle for social change (Houseman and Perle, 2013). This attracted a 'new breed of lawyers' and a 'sense of mission flowed through the US Legal Services Program, attracting the altruistic, the activist and occasionally the radical' (Shepard, 2007:17).

The social change model of law was taken up by the Law Centre movement in the UK and in 1971, the first UK Law Centre was opened – the North Kensington Neighbourhood Law Centre (see Stephens, 1990). Law Centres focused on areas of law most relevant to disadvantaged communities such as welfare rights, immigration, refugees, housing etc. A radical departure for many law centres was to operate as second tier organisations, providing advice to front line organisations, and secondly, to work on group test cases ('class actions') rather than an endless supply of individual ones. Examining the establishment and subsequent history of law centres in the UK reveals the challenges the movement faced from the legal profession. As Lancaster (2002) argues, it was not simply the power of the profession, but the power of the dominant paradigms of legal practice, legal needs and legal services. The Benwell CDP lawyer explained in an interview about the initial hostility the project faced in Newcastle from the local legal professions:

> … in 1973, 1974, when the Law Centres were just getting going, Newcastle was a bit backwards for most developments, including legal services and there was quite a lot of aggravation, hostility, from the local profession who just didn't understand what we were trying to do and on the one hand were saying, "Well, no, this isn't real lawyer's work, and if it is, you're taking work away from normal private practice." But, in fact, as we were able to, I think, establish and persuade them that if anything it was generating work because the sort of work we were doing - housing, complaints, welfare benefits, planning matters, those sorts of issues - you need someone on the other side, and they often happen to be the State or private landlords who will have representatives of their own. So it actually generated more work. (David Gray, Interview, 2015)

The decision was made to protect the law service in Benwell from interference (from the local authority and the Home Office) by establishing its own independent management committee of primarily local activists, a 'token' councillor and a representative from the Law Society (David Gray, personal communication, 2016).

Locating the Law Project in the community was significant at the time because law firms tended to locate in the city or town centre – not neighbourhoods:

> Well, traditionally, the firms had been in the city centre which meant people had to travel for legal advice. So there are two problems. One is knowing that your problem is actually a legal problem for which you can get some redress, and secondly, getting over almost the social barrier of coming into big offices in town and meeting these professionals. (David Gray, Interview, 2015)

A team work approach, involving the lawyer (David Gray), members of the action and research teams and local groups clearly distinguished the nature of service delivery from normal legal practice. According the David Gray:

> This was particularly the case in matters relating to housing problems where the 'test case' strategy and taking on representative cases was quite a successful and an efficient use of

limited resources - similarly in employment issues. More controversial was when we strayed into other areas such as immigration and travellers rights which the local authority considered were well beyond our remit! (David Gray, personal communication, 2016)

Community development/neighbourhood work

One of the criticisms by some commentators was that the CDPs were less interested in local people or in neighbourhood community development work than in wider political analysis (see Thomas, 1983: 57). However, although the published reports may not reflect this, in reality, according Gary Craig, about 70% of CDP workers' time was spent on neighbourhood work with the aim of helping local people understand why their community was the way it was and how to organise to present their own agendas for change. This community development work was shaped by the aim of empowering local people both by providing knowledge, information, advice and, as far as possible, hard resources. Work on key issues relating to housing and employment, for example, as described in the next section, involved much micro-level work to create and sustain grassroots community groups. One important initiative that contributed towards this was the establishment of the Benwell Ideas Group (BIG), a consortium of local organisations, which was given a generous budget to spend on local initiatives.

The idea for BIG came from two CDP workers (Gary Craig and Colin Randall) and it was set up through the social action programme in 1973 shortly after the CDP started. The aim of BIG was to generate ideas for social action and fund (through grants) local groups and projects. A budget of £14,500 was made available from the CDP social action budget. After a year it was decided to make BIG independent of the CDP but maintain links with it, so a constitution was drawn up and in four years 44 different people (including representatives from the CDP, churches, councillors, tenants groups, schools and the Trades Council) served on the group and 150 organisations received grants, some receiving more than one grant. Examining the grant recipients (see Appendix) reveals a rich and diverse community and voluntary sector and one which the CDP (in the form of BIG grants) helped to sustain. By the end of the CDP, the budget had increased substantially.

Assessing the achievements of BIG in an internal CDP report, there are some important lessons identified (BIG, 1977: 8-18), which are summarised below:

- BIG enabled or developed local involvement and 'many of the projects might never have got off the ground, or would have been far less effective without the resources provided by BIG'.
- BIG did not compete with or support services that the local authority provided, rather they supported 'innovatory schemes', for some of which the local authority did later supply financial support.
- It provided a unique source of funds for projects that may not have other sources to turn to.
- BIG was in the community (rather than a distant charity or other funding body) and it could see the value of projects and respond quickly.
- Projects supported mostly had a community focus or made people more aware of their community.
- BIG encouraged interest in the character and history of Benwell.
- It encouraged 'ordinary people' to take their place in community affairs: to use appropriate machinery, to express opinions, to point out needs that officials may not know about and to recognise and take action over their neighbourhood's needs.

- BIG funded the Tyneside Free Press, which the secretary of BIG argued, was one of the most important works assisted by BIG because it encouraged people to learn basic printing skills, helped circulate information and opinions vital to community work (p. 12).

It is also interesting to note that the reports mention several times that BIG should continue after the CDP ended and be extended to the East End of Newcastle. BIG did not continue in the same form but some people in interviews have said that the Priority Action Teams (PATs) supported by Jeremy Beecham (Benwell councillor and then leader of the council, now member of the House of Lords), were inspired by BIG.

What becomes apparent through re-examining the work of Benwell CDP is that previous assessments of CDPs have mainly relied on Final Reports and Inter-Project Reports. Whilst these are important, there is also a wealth of unpublished materials (most of which is in former CDP workers' personal archives). Examining these unpublished documents and interviewing former CDP workers reveals the 'absences'. Benwell CDP workers chose to write a particular story supporting their arguments for a structural analysis of local areas. They did not write much about the process or highlight the range of work (especially as part of the social action programme) they undertook.

Examining in detail the work and achievements of BIG, for example, counters a long standing criticism of CDPs in general – that there was a lack of attention given to children and young people and women's issues (Green, 1992; Popple, 2015). We see that through the BIG social action programme, grants were given to a variety of play and youth work activities/organisations and women's issues were supported through Trade Union activities and local action groups (Women in Need and a Women's Advice Centre). It should be noted that women were also supported as mothers involved in play activities/groups and through tenants' and residents' action. We also see in the Appendix that older peoples' activities were supported, as well as people with disabilities (two organisations for the blind), a range of cultural and heritage projects, community transport, a food coop, a campaign against high heating costs, Claimants' Unions and a few newsletters. This goes some way to counter criticisms of CDPs and highlights the importance of re-examining the local projects in detail.

Mobilising action on key issues

From the four strands of work discussed in the 'organising for change' section, a number of issues began to emerge, including the declining nature of the heavy industrial base which once provided many thousands of jobs to the area and more widely and, secondly, the lack of investment in essential services by both public and private bodies. Much of the Benwell old private rented housing was due to be demolished and, as the project started work, there were some appalling housing conditions as well as a high degree of uncertainty and anxiety amongst residents. Many companies providing jobs for local people had been shedding labour for years and an early analysis of these companies showed that many were not necessarily unprofitable (as they often publicly claimed) but were moving investment (and thus jobs) overseas to low wage parts of the world. Other major changes such as the replacement of familiar local shops by a soulless local shopping mall were regarded with hostility by local people. These issues all provided a basis for research and action in the following years and we briefly discuss three key central issues next.

Housing

The early Benwell CDP local campaigns were very much focused on housing issues as residents brought these concerns in huge numbers to the advice centre:

> The nature of the work was shaped by the type of housing. For example, in certain areas it was clear that most of the housing was beyond restoration. As such, campaigns with local residents and tenants focussed on making the move to new housing tolerable and helping tenants organise their demands about being able to return to the area when it was redeveloped. The CDP also worked with residents to provide input to plans for the new housing. (Gary Craig in Armstrong et al, 2016: 6)

An early campaign by the Observer Group (one of the tenants' groups) came to the conclusion that traditional ways of protesting were not working so they dumped rats on the Civic Centre steps in the glare of newspaper publicity (Benwell Community Project, 1981:74). Other housing was in a poor state but considered capable of being modernised. The CDP organised local groups to press for the most effective forms of modernisation available within the time frame. In one particular area, for example, housing issues were about quick and comprehensive modernisation with decent bathrooms and toilets, general maintenance of the housing fabric and rebuilding a sense of community. However, this was made difficult as the area was a popular site for cheap student rented accommodation and new landlords (many of them of Asian origin, buying houses from small property companies anxious to disinvest and realise their assets) were accused, often in a very racist way, of 'bringing the area down'. The CDP had to help develop an understanding that it was the lack of University student housing provision that had led to pressure on the housing in the area. This was typical of the way in which the project, throughout its life, tried to locate what was happening in the area within a wider structural understanding of processes which affected it. In yet another area (Noble Street), five storey blocks of flats built to very poor standards by the council under the 1950s housing regime, with no lifts, communal staircases' (which often were used as dumping grounds for rubbish) and no recreational areas, were being used by the council to house hard-to-place tenants who had little bargaining power to demand better housing. Analysing the origins of these flats, together with concerted efforts to organise the tenants, led eventually to a successful demand that the flats be demolished

Such was the significance of housing for Benwell CDP that two of its final reports were produced on housing - *Private housing and the working class* and *Slums on the drawing board* (Benwell CDP, 1978c, 1978d).

Employment and industry

Later campaigns were more industrially-based, with several major multinational companies such as Vickers and Ever Ready planning to make thousands of redundancies, claiming that their factories were unprofitable. It is common today to hear about 'de-industrialisation', but in the 1970s there was very little research on what was happening to the local economies of small areas and little awareness of the major social problems that were looming. One Benwell CDP researcher recalls this time:

> People were starting to compare what was happening in the different local areas and realising that there were common themes, of which de-industrialisation was one, although that wasn't the word that was used at the time. Nor was globalisation, although that was

> also what was going on but we didn't really have a vocabulary for it. (Judith Green, Interview, 2014)

Benwell CDP documented the impact of global corporate restructuring and technological change on the industrial base of the West Newcastle communities in a series of local (Benwell CDP 1978a, 1978b, 1979c) and national reports (for example, National CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c). In one final report - *Permanent unemployment* – Benwell CDP explored how the recession of the 1970s was hitting the North East and Benwell and critically examined industrial policy and the growth of multinationals, and considered the future. The report posed three questions which resonate today (Benwell CDP, 1978b: 4):

- What hopes are there for a change to the miserable story of the past?
- What effect will government policy, at national and local level, have in reversing years of decline?
- How many jobs will there be, who will provide them and what will they be?

The CDP undertook research for trades unions, demonstrating that these multinational companies were deliberately disinvesting in their Newcastle enterprises. This work involved detailed research on the structure and location of the companies, helping to build international trade union connections and responses which provided an alternative narrative to that of the companies. A Benwell CDP researcher explains their approach:

> And another thing that we used to go on about was about audiences. We used to say, "There's no point just writing stuff, we're not just writing academic papers. We need to think who we're trying to influence and why. And we thought a lot about levers of change, so we analysed how decisions were made and how things happened, and how you actually influenced things. So that, for example – this might sound very obvious – but when we were working on industry we actually made links with trade unions. And at that point, there was a very strong shop stewards' movement in the country, and a particularly strong shop stewards' committee down in Vickers, so we had links with them. So that was, as I say, about audiences and levers of change. (Judith Green, Interview, 2014)

One CDP worker ended up as the secretary for the Vickers shop stewards joint committee, covering four workplaces in the area, enabling him to present research findings directly to the shop floor. As with the private housing sector within the area, this work reminded local people and policymakers that conditions in the area were not the result of moral failings of local people, but of decisions taken outside the area. The CDP also helped to inform wider campaigns to defend public services, which were being cut because of International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands.

Shops

The issue of shopping in Benwell appeared early on in the project's life and in the appendix to a report written in May 1973 we see a 'shopping survey' was already underway (Benwell CDP, 1973: 38). The survey involved local shoppers checking food prices fortnightly in local supermarkets and publishing them in the Information Centre. This was one instance of the way the project tried to engage local residents in the research process, shaping questions and being involved in the analysis and presentation of findings. Furthermore, the production of the CDP report (Benwell CDP, 1979b) on shopping in Benwell – *Blacksmiths to White Elephants* – brought local media attention. Interviews were conducted by the BBC for their Look North local news programme and an edited version was

broadcast on the local news (an extract from raw footage of the BBC interviews can be seen at Archive for Change, https://youtu.be/3sYHkBsiPDA).

Such was the importance of the issue, Benwell produced a final report about shops and shopping on Adelaide Terrace in Benwell. Adelaide Terrace has been Benwell's main street since the beginning of the 20th century. Local residents and former residents, many of whom came back to the area to continue supporting Benwell's local shops, had long complained about the decline of independent shops, department stores and cinemas. *From blacksmiths to white elephants: Benwell's changing shops* (Benwell CDP, 1979b) chronicles the history of Benwell's shops and the reasons for the changes. It includes an account of the 1970s Benwell Shopping Centre, an ill-fated concrete monstrosity that replaced a row of popular terraced shops. The reason for focusing on shops was because, despite the retailing industry at the time employing 2.5 million workers, it was an under-researched and under-valued area of activity. The report argues the reason for this is because shopping is usually done by women and the closure of local shops affects women more than men (Benwell Community Project, 1981:4). This CDP report is unusual and important within the wider history of retailing because as Alexander and Akehurst (1998) argue, the history of retail has been something of a poor relation to the history of business and manufacturing. According to the report:

> The disappearance of traditional corner shops in the older urban areas is not some accident of history but the result of wider economic processes which mirror changes in the economy as a whole. (Benwell CDP, 1979b, back cover)

In this sense, the types of shops in a local area like Benwell are a good indication of how the area is being affected by these broader economic processes. Writing about the 1970s, the report noted that larger supermarkets and hypermarkets were not locating in Benwell; storage and distribution and/or cash and carry operations were locating there (as were start-up businesses for the same reasons) because it was close to the City centre and offered cheap rents (West End Resource Centre, 1980). However, Benwell was also attracting 'the sort of cheap operations that depend on poverty and insecurity of incomes' and pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers were on the increase (West End Resource Centre, 1980:5). The report warned that the 'most likely future for Benwell's shoppers and shopkeepers will be more change, greater numbers of empty shops, empty for longer periods' (West End Resource Centre, 1980:12). As we now know, this prediction has materialised in many of Britain's high streets and town centres.

This section has given an overview of the key issues facing Benwell CDP. The next section discusses how the CDP teams struggled to theorise the changes they were witnessing and the differences of opinion within and between CDPs. It starts with a brief introduction about the Political Economy Collective (PEC), the bulletins of which we have re-examined.

The struggle to theorise urban change and development: The CDP Political Economy Collective (PEC)

The CDP Political Economy Collective (PEC) produced a short series of PEC Bulletins, the first in December 1974 and four others in 1975 (PEC Bulletin, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1975d). The idea for a Political Economy Collective came about after an Employment Collective meeting in July 1974 where a paper written by Robin Jenkins – *Towards a political economy of working class communities* – was discussed. According to the Editorial in the PEC Bulletin of May 1975 recalling the establishment of PEC, to take the perspectives in the paper further, 'would entail a greater

understanding of the basic principles of Marxist economics' therefore, 'it was agreed to set up an "idiots' guide to Marxism" – which turned into the Durham Conference, held on the 9th to 11th September 1974' (PEC Bulletin, 1975c: 1). About 30 people attended the Durham Conference and it was agreed that a political economy group was needed to aim for a greater understanding of what a political economy perspective could mean and develop strategies to reach wider audiences. Following the Durham Conference, 'political economy had taken on some of the characteristics of a political movement' in that it had:

- A generalised ideology, different from others in, or bearing on, CDP;
- Had some of the abler figures associated with CDP associated with it;
- Had some clear "enemies", notably government poverty ideologies, ivory-tower empirical researchers and local authority orientated projects and/or project directors;
- Attracted a groundswell of support – a constituency – with some commitment to work to further its aims at the political level. (PEC Bulletin, 1975c: 2)

It was agreed that PEC would take the form of a 'Marxist inspired ginger-group whose basic form of organisation was around the Bulletin, backed up by PEC weekends and "collaborative" work' (PEC Bulletin, 1975c: 2). Despite some support for PEC, it is apparent by the Editorial in the May 1975 PEC Bulletin that it is struggling to meets its aims:

> By dint of a lot of cajoling and hard work the first editorial group managed to fill the bulletin. Nevertheless, we think it has failed in its original purpose, and that PEC itself is also failing. The Bulletin has failed to act as a rallying point around which a creative body of thought and action could develop. (PEC Bulletin, 1975c: 3)

At the time of writing the editorial for the May 1975 PEC Bulletin, there were further rumours about the early closure of CDP, which must have been unsettling. This was happening alongside the everyday local CDP work and commitments to inter-project work which meant 'seemingly most workers interested in PEC regarded it as a marginal activity in the context of their work in CDP' (Gary Craig in PEC Bulletin, 1975d: 3).

Nevertheless, the content of this short series of PEC Bulletins is worth re-examining because they provide insights into the theoretical debates within the CDP at the time and importantly the struggles to theorise what they were witnessing in communities regarding urban change and development. The CDP Final Reports do not provide insights into these theoretical debates but instead present a coherent and damning structural analysis of socio-economic changes that was important in countering the social pathology perspective of the Home Office.

The paper by Robin Jenkins, *Towards a political economy of working class communities*, was influential in instigating discussions around political economy theory and Marxism in general, which in turn revealed different levels of engagement amongst CDP workers around such theories. The Employment Collective, members of which included Judith Green (Benwell CDP) and Bob Davis (North Tyneside CDP) published working papers in the May 1975 edition of the PEC Bulletin noting some of the theoretical debates of the time. For example, the working paper by Judith Green explored theories of under development and a paper by Bob Davis on the role of the state 'points to' theoretical exchanges between Ralph Miliband and Nicol Poulantzas (PEC Bulletin, 1975b). As John Herson notes:

> The recent moves in CDP towards a political economy approach stemmed in large measure from the difficulties some projects were (and are) facing in getting to grips with the employment issue. (John Herson in PEC Bulletin, 1975a: 3)

The paper by John Herson – *Benwell some current work on housing* – is revealing in that the struggles to theorise what they were witnessing is apparent, especially in relation to housing:

> … in Benwell at least, we have lacked a clear way to re-examine our work in housing and help codify the most important issues affecting the residential side of a working class community. (John Herson in PEC Bulletin, 1975a: 3)

The paper ends with some afterthoughts:

> As Robin Jenkins' paper "Towards a political economy of working class communities" emphasises there are no clear Marxist guidelines which can be picked up and applied to the particular small area situations in which we find ourselves. This paper has outlined briefly some of our present perspectives of Benwell and the ways in which these might be used to help generate a more sophisticated political economy of the area. It is, however, very apparent that, in the absence of a clear theoretical base, we face three very real dangers – drowning in a flood of data, laughable generalisations, as well as the danger of being "seduced in various odd directions". A key problem facing us is the diffuseness of change in the community as opposed to the workplace. (John Herson in PEC Bulletin, 1975a: 7)

The struggle to theorise at the time is understandable. Nowadays, many people (particularly those involved in urban studies, urban policy and planning, community development, social and community work) are most familiar with and impressed by the CDP Final Reports but it is worth reflecting upon what the CDP teams faced at the time of the projects. A massive amount of detailed data was collected from 12 projects, each running for about five years. Credit is due to the individuals and teams involved in the CDP for producing coherent, theoretically-based reports – it was obviously a mammoth task as the debates in the PEC Bulletins demonstrate. Furthermore, whilst acknowledging the theoretical and data difficulties, there was also clearly an awareness of their work being 'cutting edge':

> … it has become rapidly apparent that we are working in some of the frontier zones of urban history and geography. (John Herson in PEC Bulletin, 1975a: 4)

Nevertheless, despite a core group of CDP workers wanting to use the PEC Bulletins to inform and engage with theoretical issues, others were not so keen (as demonstrated earlier in the section). Gary Craig, in response to the editorial in the PEC Bulletin of May 1975 asking 'should PEC continue?' argued that it should and that its 'major objective should be self-education' adding that:

> There are a not inconsiderable number of workers in CDP who led sheltered lives before joining CDP and were not fully exposed to the various political and economic analyses informed by Marxism. There are a significant number of people on the Benwell project in that position. (Gary Craig in PEC Bulletin, 1975d: 3)

Similarly, David Corkey from North Tyneside CDP states:

> One of the reasons perhaps for the failure of PEC to maintain itself as a disciplined political force within CDP … is that we have not concentrated on the first of its main functions, that

> of self-education. There are widely different levels of understanding of Marxist economic theory within PEC varying from that of the so called "abler" and "heavy weight" political figures in CDP (who are they anyway?) to relatively new recruits to left politics. (David Corkey in PEC Bulletin, 1975d: 4)

Corkey and Craig (1978) later collaborated on a book chapter which positioned community development as needing to be informed by a class-based analysis of politics.

In the event, the demise of local projects (encouraged by the Home Office, which had indicated to local authorities that it was not enthusiastic about them continuing) meant that there was a slow exodus of key members of PEC. By 1978, it had become simply a publishing operation managed by Gary Craig, and funded from the sales of the high profile inter-project reports, which collected a series of reports which had either not fitted with the national and local final reports of individual projects or raised further issues for discussion such as the growth of small sweat shop industries or the nature of housing action areas[3].

Legacies and enduring effects

It is widely agreed that the most influential legacy left by the CDP experiment was the national and local project reports (Armstrong and Banks, 2017; Popple, 2015). The combined legacy of all 12 original CDP projects is also considered by Gary Craig (in Shaw et al. 2016: 11-17) whereas the legacies of a local project - Benwell CDP - are discussed in this section. Benwell CDP left tangible legacies in the form of organisational structures that were established by the CDP and continued after it ended in 1978.

In contrast to North Tyneside CDP (and most other CDPs), Benwell CDP left more than a resource centre. To achieve this, they approached the local authority before the CDP ended with a proposal to continue two 'new' projects in the West End of Newcastle – a resource centre and a legal services centre. This was in fact, a proposal to *continue* two organisations established during the CDP period – the Information and Advice Centre and Benwell Community Law Project. A third organisation – Search – is also a legacy because it was set up with very substantial help from Benwell CDP and input from one researcher, John Darwin. Benwell CDP was also involved in a joint initiative with North Tyneside CDP to set up the Trade Union Studies Information Unit (see Armstrong and Banks, 2016; Hodgson, 2016).

The West End Resource Centre

When the CDP ended the local council continued to fund the 'advice' aspect and the Information and Advice Shop became the West End Resource Centre (WERC):

> The strongest card we had to play was the card about 'advice'. We knew that because there was an endless demand for information and advice about welfare benefits and housing and all the rest of it, and we knew the councillors would buy that because it was always taking work off their shoulders. (Gary Craig, Interview, 2014)

Most of the Benwell CDP team and the director left at the end of the project but two Benwell CDP workers continued and other people were recruited, including a former North Tyneside CDP worker:

[3] The publications stock remained on Tyneside, in the care of former members of Benwell and North Tyneside CDPs, and later transferred to St James' Heritage and Environment Group from which copies of most publications can still be purchased (see website: http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com).

> because once the initial funding had run out, we then started to be supported by the Council and we convinced them that we needed more input into the advice system service, and because the Council were relatively sophisticated, they could see that it was a good thing. They understood the argument that if you improve people's income, you get them somewhere decent to live, they spend that money in the local community so the local economy benefits. Those ideas were quite revolutionary at the time. (Sue Pearson, Interview, 2015)

The idea of resource and research centres came about during the 1970s and they have a variety of origins – some grew out of the CDPs, but others, for example, were from local labour movements or pilot projects funded by national voluntary organisations or charitable trusts. Examples of these are more generalist resource centres funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation, Rowntree and the Community Projects Foundation (Craig, Derricourt and Loney, 1982). Despite different origins, funding and local circumstances there were shared aims and perspectives, issues tackled and methods of work, for example most resource centre work was located in older industrial communities so housing and employment were key issues – and as we discussed earlier, this was the case for Benwell CDP (and other CDPs). The WERC continued for about 10 years before being closed due to spending cuts.

From Benwell Community Law Project to Newcastle Law Centre

> Depending on your point of view, law centres are either a source of free informal advice for people who wouldn't normally go near the law, or a source of trouble the local community (and local government) could do without. (Benwell Community Law Project, 1982: 3)

The Benwell Community Law Project continued in the same location as the West End Resource Centre after the CDP ended – a former shop on Adelaide Terrace. David Gray (Benwell CDP lawyer) left to establish his own practice in Newcastle and new workers were recruited[4]. By 1982, there were five project workers - Joyce Kane and Margaret Mound (both lawyers), Linda Hinton, Tony Whittle and Judith Green (a former Benwell CDP researcher) (Benwell Community Law Project, 1982). Like other Law Centres, the Benwell Community Law Project challenged the legal professions' dominant paradigm in that they offered a multi-faceted approach to the resolution of the legal and socio-economic problems of the poor and did so in a not-for-profit, community-controlled and often collectivist context (Lancaster, 2002). According to the report written in 1982, the key issues for the law project were housing, employment and benefits. Other work included what the workers called 'educationals' e.g. workshops, group sessions, compiling materials for groups and preparing speakers notes alongside research, information and free legal advice sessions (Benwell Community Law Project, 1982). One of the lawyers from this time recalled a pamphlet they produced on how the law affects women called 'Laws with Claws' (Joyce Kane, Interview, 2015).

The mid to late-1980s was a challenging time for the Law Project and the Resource Centre. Racism was not a 'new' issue for the local authority, local community and voluntary groups or indeed residents of the West End of Newcastle. Before the CDP was established, a Commonwealth Immigrants Working Group was set up by the local authority and councillors argued in April 1968

[4] According to Judith Green (personal communication), the initial staffing of the Benwell Community Law Project comprised Linda Hinton, Margaret Mound and Judith Green, with David Gray continuing as legal adviser for a period. The first experienced lawyer to join was Roger Berwick. He was replaced after a time by Joyce Kane.

that there were no racial problems in Newcastle (Vickers, 2010). Local black residents felt differently and organised a protest march against racial discrimination in May 1968. Shortly after, in 1968, the Newcastle Community Relations Councils (CRC) was established but as Vickers (2010: 162) argues, 'during the period of the CRC's existence racism persisted, in Newcastle and elsewhere, taking a myriad of forms'. Although racism did not feature as a key issue during the time of Benwell CDP, by the 1980s the two successor organisations (Law Project and Resource Centre) did have to face the issue head on, when, according to one of the lawyers, Joyce Kane (Interview, 2015), they found themselves in the midst of bitter local conflicts.

In the early 1990s, the Benwell Community Law Project moved to central Newcastle and became the Newcastle Law Centre. This meant it shifted away from being a 'community' law project and instead became a 'city-wide' organisation (albeit still with a strong community focus). It still exists today[5].

Search

Search is a community-based, voluntary project for older people in West Newcastle also located on Adelaide Terrace in Benwell (see Green, 1995 for an evaluation of Search). It was set up in the mid-1970s and was a joint initiative between Benwell CDP and a group of local pensioners:

> … it was mainly these guys who'd been trade unionists and they retired and discovered to their shock that there was nobody there representing the interests of pensioners.[6] (Judith Green, Interview, 2015)

Initially, the project had one worker and it was located in a local church. It was called 'Search' because it was about searching for benefits:

> The aim of the project was to search out benefits [for people] that weren't getting their full entitlement and making sure that they did, so that's how it got called Search. (Maggy Crane, Interview, 2015)

Welfare rights for older people was the main focus at the start of the project and at the time in the 1970s there were various reasons why people didn't apply for benefits: 'partly illiteracy - not able to fill in the forms and the stigma attached to claiming benefit like Supplementary Benefit' (Maggie Crane, Interview, 2015). There was also 'resentment between older people who had a tiny works pension and therefore couldn't claim what was called Supplementary Benefit in those days and the ones that didn't have a works pension who could' (Maggy Crane, Interview, 2015).

From this narrow welfare rights base of advice and 'service' to older people, the project wanted to move towards campaigning and community organising work. In the late 1970s, the wider context provided the influence of radical ideas and social movements such as feminism, Marxism, environmentalism and in the USA the idea of Grey Power was gaining momentum (see Ginn, 1993). In the UK, the Transport and General Workers' Union was trying to establish a national pensioners' organisation and Search linked with this. In the North East, Search supported the development and

[5] A potted history of the Newcastle Law Centre is available in: Unison (2012) *The heart of the city: the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle*, a report commissioned by Newcastle City branch, Unison, Newcastle City branch, pp 46 – 47 http://www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/assets/files/representinginfluencing/our_research/Unison_Final_Report.pdf

[6] This mirrors the growth of the National Pensioners' Convention (see below) which campaigned for pensioners' rights and was generally led by prominent trade unionists, such as Jack Jones (former TGWU national secretary) and Rodney Bickerstaffe (former NUPE general secretary).

running of the Tyne and Wear and District Pensioners' Association (TWDPA) which was set up in 1977. TWDPA later became the North East Pensioners' Association.

Search at this time was helping to organise the older people's community and worked with community activists and bigger networks. There were many clubs (for example, working men's clubs, cooperative guilds) at the time in the West End and many members were former manual workers in the local works and had been involved in the trade union. A Search worker explained what it was like at that time:

> I think at that time there was a bit more of a sense of political awareness within the group. It was seen as, well, one of the first things that we did after I arrived, a report for 'Against Ageism' was produced which we all had a hand in, and it was looking at how older people are discriminated against. Ageism was a very new concept in 1980. (Maggy Crane, Interview, 2015)

In the 1970s, Search moved into its own premises on Adelaide Terrace. The organisation had identified the importance of networking and was involved in several inter-agency groups. Search also responded to the new needs of local pensioners, including developing a West End Carers' Support Scheme, a Community Wardens' project and a major initiative on health promotion funded by the Millfield Trust. Health became an important part of Search's work and it still is.

During the 1980s, and indeed by 1991, the demography of Benwell (and the West End) was changing from what had been predominantly white working class area to include BME communities. Search responded to this with a feasibility study on how to make their services accessible and leaflets and publications were produced in the major South Asian languages (Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi). Research and evaluation were important for Search and they had links with the Social Welfare Research Unit at Northumbria University (now closed). During the 1980s and 1990s, there was funding for research and evaluation:

> We developed quite strong links with them [Social Welfare Research Unit] and they became our evaluators, because there also was funding for evaluation which is unusual, and funding for research, so with this little pot of money, we engaged the unit to be our evaluators and researchers. (Maggy Crane, Interview, 2015)

The research and evaluation helped Search gain funding but fundraising became a constant struggle as time went on and by the 2000's the main focus was providing services for older people rather than research and organising:

> Generally what I was doing then was more setting up walking groups, gardening groups, a whole range of complementary therapies, we used to provide very low cost at the project. So there were lots of different things going on. But it became more of providing services that older people wanted, rather than working with tenants' associations and doing research into the needs of older people, which is what it had been in, I would say, the eighties, nineties. (Maggy Crane, Interview, 2015)

The service focus continued and in 2015 volunteers were taking on more responsibility for this role - for example, offering a range of services and activities such as leading walking groups, running craft sessions and helping with the day-to-day running of Search (e.g. reception duties). Search is the longest established project in the area.

Conclusion: Considering the lessons

There are many aspects of the work of Benwell CDP that have not been touched upon here, and some features of this account that participants in the CDP may question or contest. What became clear to us as we undertook the interviews and literature-based research was that each person or organisation had their own version of what happened and what was significant. Since the national CDP was high profile and controversial, and remains an iconic presence in UK community development literature and folk memory, it is continually being re-visited in the light of changing social and economic circumstances and urban policy. Many of the CDP areas, including this part of the west end of Newcastle, have been subject to a series of area-based regeneration programmes following the CDP. These initiatives are charted for Benwell by Robinson and Townsend (2016), ranging from the Inner City Partnership, through City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget, to Housing Market Renewal. Yet Benwell and many other former CDP locations remain amongst the most 'deprived' in their local authority areas.

It is testament to the solid foundations built by Benwell CDP (and to the persistence of social inequality) that some of the organisational infrastructures created in the 1970s still exist today – the two most notable examples being the Search project for older people in Benwell and Newcastle Law Centre (which developed from Benwell Community Law Project). Our research also shows that many of the skills and ways of working developed during the CDP period were used to good effect in the region and nationally, as former CDP workers moved into other jobs in the community, policy and academic sectors. One of the key lessons of the CDP experiment was that neighbourhood work on its own could achieve little, in the face of wider structural problems created by industrial decline and globalisation. While some lessons were taken on board in subsequent regeneration programmes, which attempted to tackle the declining economy, these initiatives still struggled meaningfully to engage local residents and community organisations in big decisions about continuing demolition and redevelopment that carried on over the subsequent 40 years.

Now, in a period of public sector austerity following the financial crisis of 2008, Benwell community organisations are struggling to meet ever-growing needs of individual residents and families, as well as doing community development and group work, as they deal with severe problems of indebtedness, racism and social exclusion faced by a much more diverse population that was present in the 1970s (see Armstrong, Banks and Harman, 2016; Robinson and Townsend, 2016). While housing conditions are much improved, and living conditions of the majority of residents are better, the local authority has disbanded its community development team and is reducing its support for community-based services, leaving third sector organisations to pick up the pieces.

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Appendix

Table1: Summary of Benwell Ideas Group (BIG) grants recipients[7] (adapted from BIG, 1977:6-7)

Category	Sub-Categories (and number of grants in brackets)
Play and Nursery Provision	Playgroups (7), Playschemes (8), Summer camps (1), Playgrounds (1), Mother and toddler clubs (1), Swimming groups (1), Play committee (1), Nursery action group (1), Adventure playground exhibition (1)
Tenants and Residents Action	Residents associations (3), Tenants associations (7), Action groups (6), Newsheets (2), Tenants rally against cuts (1), Council tenants charter groups (1), Summer trips (1), Community fund (1), Area action committees (1), House improvement groups (1), Community centres (1)
Youth Work	Youth club (8), Football team (3), Youth project (2), Social action group (1), Scouts (1), Gymnasium (1), Model-making (1), Boys club (1), Adventure weekends for children (1)
Older People	Over 60s (5), Senior Citizens Thursday Club (1), Friendship Club (1), Veterans Associations (3), Dinner and luncheon clubs (2), Search – welfare rights (1), Clubs/Associations associated with older people housing (3)
Trade Union Activities	Shop Stewards (1), Women's Charter work (3), Trades Council conference (1), Workers Chronicle (1), Health services working group (1), Vickers NE Working party (1)
Cultural	Festivals (7), Theatre workshop (1), Jazz bands (2), Film club (1), Other cultural groups (e.g. South Benwell Crusaders, Tye Hill Victorians etc) (13)
Miscellaneous	23 grants including Tyneside Recreation Club for the Blind, Royal Victoria School for the Blind, Campaign against high heating costs, Observer Food Coop, Community transport, Claimants Unions, Tyneside Free Press, Women's Advice Centre, Women in Need

[7] Some had more than one grant from BIG over the 4 year period