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1 **Building infrastructures for inclusive regeneration**

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4

5 Abstract

6 This paper explores the foundational role of physical infrastructure in making inclusive,  
7 community-led regeneration possible. It does this through documenting three years of  
8 engaged research on participatory planning, conducted in Westfield, a community in  
9 Sheffield, UK, which experiences ‘multiple deprivation’. The research looked to support  
10 community-led planning efforts taking place under the auspices of the Big Local  
11 regeneration programme, and afforded significant insight into the combined impacts of  
12 austerity and ideologically driven community development initiatives for people trying to  
13 make positive change in their communities. Our principal contributions are twofold: firstly, a  
14 theoretical contribution, on the role of physical infrastructure and how it is understood in  
15 making certain kinds of community development possible and impossible; secondly, the  
16 application of this theoretical insight to a concrete case, Westfield’s pub-turned-community-  
17 centre *Com.unity*. We conclude by arguing for the critical importance of ‘the publicness of  
18 public things’, and the need for a fundamental reimagining of the roles and responsibilities  
19 of both the state and communities, in valuing and investing in the infrastructures that make  
20 inclusive urban regeneration possible, if such efforts are to have any hope of success.

21

22 Keywords: Community buildings; Social infrastructure; Public things; Community-led  
23 regeneration; Asset-based community development; Big Local

24

25

26

## 27 **1. Introduction**

### 28 *1.1*

29 Since the 2007-8 financial crisis, some of the UK's most marginalised and deprived places  
30 have faced considerable hardship. Westfield, a planned housing estate on the south eastern  
31 edge of Sheffield is such a place (see *Figure 1*); a pocket of considerable deprivation in a  
32 post-industrial region that already had some of the lowest wages in the UK (Taylor, 2006).

33 During the period of harsh fiscal austerity that was instituted by governments from 2010  
34 onwards, resources were consistently sucked out of Westfield: the local authority, Sheffield  
35 City Council, saw its budget halved (National Audit Office, 2018); benefit cuts had huge  
36 impacts on households; the post office and pharmacy were closed; and the doctors' surgery  
37 was constantly under threat of closure. Given that the City Council had already identified  
38 Westfield as 'forgotten' and in need of regeneration (SCC, 2009), the outlook was bleak.

39 As long-standing infrastructures and publicly-funded resources disappeared from places like  
40 Westfield, however, community development professionals were making the case for a new  
41 approach; a variant of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), championed by  
42 community development professionals working outside the state with first-hand experience  
43 of the problems that come with top-down initiatives (e.g. Taylor et al, 2007). This centres on  
44 the idea that the residents of places represent an asset, with the potential to come together  
45 and regenerate their communities using their own ideas, talents and time. With the support  
46 of National Lottery-funding, the Big Local programme was launched with a view to doing  
47 just this. Big Local identified 150 communities around England and promised them each a

48 million pounds to spend over a ten year period on whatever residents identified as being  
49 most important. A light touch supporting framework was created to help residents come  
50 together, think through their challenges and plan for solutions. Westfield was designated a  
51 Big Local area in the third wave of allocations, in 2013.

## 52 1.2

53 Even in the brief introduction above we can see a host of different intersecting  
54 infrastructures - physical and social – and the changing political rationalities within which  
55 their provision and use is situated. Together these infrastructures form a backdrop that  
56 regeneration work seeks to strengthen, mobilise or rework in order to generate new  
57 possibilities for places and the people living in them. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is  
58 to critically explore how infrastructures create conditions of possibility for inclusive,  
59 community-led regeneration. Working through the ‘infrastructural turn’ in urban studies,  
60 our argument is that the socio-material interactions enabled by physical infrastructure play  
61 a significant role in urban regeneration, underpinning the potential for meaningful  
62 collaboration by influencing the forms of publicness that emerge in community settings.

63 The first contribution of the paper is theoretical. Drawing on political theorist Bonnie  
64 Honig’s (2017) work on the ways ‘public things’ bind people together and shape  
65 attachments to particular forms of democratic politics, we argue it is important to  
66 understand how physical infrastructures actively mediate patterns of inclusion and  
67 exclusion, shaping the experience of community, horizons of aspiration and the politics of  
68 recognition in community-led regeneration. As a result, we argue an infrastructural turn  
69 helps to productively rework long-standing debates in urban planning, regeneration and  
70 community development about the relative importance of investment in physical and/ or

71 social assets, opening up new ways of understanding the significance of what Klinenburg  
72 (2018) calls 'social infrastructures' in underpinning community-led regeneration.

73 The paper's second contribution is to apply this theoretical lens to a concrete piece of social  
74 infrastructure, a community centre in Westfield called *Com.unity*. Over time *Com.unity* has  
75 been home to a range of formal and informal uses that have seen it valued and invested in  
76 differently. Whilst it has played an important role in shaping day-to-day life on the estate, it  
77 has also been a node in a series of ideologically situated projects for change that reveal  
78 quite different understandings of community, urban regeneration and the respective roles  
79 and responsibilities of the state, local citizens and other stakeholders in decision-making and  
80 the life of the community. By exploring three distinct phases in the biography of this  
81 building, we show how its sociality as a piece of physical infrastructure has been reworked  
82 over time, with significant implications for community politics and the regenerated futures  
83 being imagined for Westfield. We conclude by arguing for a fundamental reimagining of the  
84 roles and responsibilities of both the state and communities in building and sustaining,  
85 investing in and valuing the basic infrastructures upon which inclusive urban regeneration  
86 might be built.

## 87 **2. Background**

88 In this section, we outline the historical background that led to Westfield being targeted by  
89 a series of regeneration initiatives. These initiatives have placed differing emphases on the  
90 physical and/or social dimensions of the area, depending on the prevailing priorities and  
91 finances of various public and non-governmental agencies and the respective place-based  
92 (physical) or people-based (social) urban policy approaches favoured by successive national  
93 governments.

94 2.1 The Mosborough Masterplan

95 *The opportunity is offered to build an efficiently planned, properly structured layout,*  
96 *creating an environment where a fuller life can be enjoyed and where successive*  
97 *generations will be born, will live and develop in a setting designed for greater health*  
98 *and happiness and more complete fulfilment. (Sheffield Corporation, 1969, p. v)*

99 This quotation conveys the great hopes that Sheffield City Council had for Westfield and the  
100 other Mosborough 'townships', which it planned and constructed to its south east in the  
101 late 1960s and early 1970s as, '*one of the most spectacular community concepts in this*  
102 *country*' (Sheffield Corporation, undated). Underpinned by extensive survey research into  
103 urban and population structure, the masterplanners plan comprehensively for housing,  
104 employment, shopping, recreation, communication and utilities, education and social  
105 facilities. If this illustrates the ambition of the proposals, it also points to a certain  
106 paternalism. 'Townships' such as Westfield, comprising around 5000 people, would nourish  
107 and enrich the people who moved to them, allowing them to lead healthier and fuller lives  
108 than those they left behind in the inner city. We can read this as a promise to future  
109 residents, that the infrastructure to support a full and enriching life would be made  
110 available to them. Conscious of growing criticism of the physical determinism of post-war  
111 planning, however, the planners argue that the 'good life' cannot be designed and needs to  
112 flexibly consider social development: 'The Plan needs to be conceived as an infrastructure  
113 which will provide the opportunity for all kinds of activities to establish themselves and  
114 evolve with time' (p41).

115 To this end, community meeting rooms were provided and the notion of a hub for the  
116 community was expanded further in a promotional document for prospective residents,

117 detailing the wide range of support available in 'Westfield Centre'. The complex would  
118 include first and middle schools, alongside a health centre, the community rooms and pub.  
119 It also, however, reiterates that all of this is simply an enabling foundation: 'The community  
120 will flourish at its best by having an enthusiastic Community Association. Every  
121 encouragement is on hand for people to develop the community along the lines they wish in  
122 this way. Local community services, police, teachers, religious ministers, are all ready and  
123 eager to help all they can' (Sheffield Corporation, undated).

## 124 *2.2 Industrial decline*

125 Testimonies of early Westfield residents describe the 'holiday feel' that accompanied  
126 moving into a house that had hitherto unimaginable luxuries such as indoor plumbing. In  
127 more reflective moments, however, they also convey the difficulties that arose as the  
128 promised transport, shopping and social infrastructure was not yet in place to support  
129 them. In response, however, we can see people beginning to play the roles the planners  
130 imagined for them:

131 ...a lot of us got together and met in the community rooms and decided [to] form a  
132 committee. And that's what we did, we all put a pound in and we had our first disco.  
133 From there it escalated, we thought we could have a disco regularly and we could  
134 hire a bar in. Then we decided to have our first gala. A playgroup opened for kiddies,  
135 a luncheon club. I used to do the luncheon club, cook for old ladies, but all of a  
136 sudden you've got this community growing and coming together! (*interview with*  
137 *resident*)

138 The world of full-employment and industrial prosperity that conceived Westfield was,  
139 however, very different from the post-1973 one that delivered it. The new jobs promised in

140 the plan did not arrive as Sheffield experienced sharp post-industrial decline. The collapse of  
141 the city's steel manufacturing industry saw unemployment rise from around 4% in 1978 to  
142 15.5% in 1984 (Winkler, 2007). From the 1990s onwards residents report growing problems  
143 with drugs and crime but Westfield found itself overlooked by targeted regeneration  
144 programs made available in similar areas on account of being statistically masked by  
145 relatively affluent adjacent areas.

### 146 *2.3 Regeneration and the birth of Com.unity*

147 In 2002 events came to a head, when a high-profile murder occurred outside the pub in  
148 Westfield centre. The estate was belatedly deemed a priority for intervention, with official  
149 data indicating that the central core of the estate was among the most deprived areas in the  
150 country: the 10% most deprived for income levels, employment and health, and the 3%  
151 most deprived for education, skills and training. (SCC, 2009).

152 The creation of the new community centre, *Com.unity* (see Figure 2), was at the heart of a  
153 council-led plan for the regeneration of Westfield published in 2009, following a programme  
154 of community consultation. Emblematically, it would be housed in the pub where the  
155 murder had taken place. Having been characterised as a hot-spot for drug dealing and anti-  
156 social behaviour, the pub had quickly been closed after the murder (BBC, 2010). Funding  
157 would come from a Youth Capital Fund provided by national government, meaning that  
158 *Com.unity's* initial focus was to be youth work.

### 159 *2.4 Austerity and Big Local*

160 The aftermath of the 2007-8 financial crisis and the election nationally of a Conservative-led  
161 coalition government committed to austerity in 2010 saw Westfield and *Com.unity* facing

162 another markedly changed context. National regeneration funding disappeared and the  
163 resources and capacity of the local state were severely curtailed. Since 2010, Sheffield City  
164 Council has been forced to make year-on-year budget cuts amounting to a total of £430m  
165 and, by 2016, the Council had reportedly shed a quarter of its workforce as a result of these  
166 cuts (BBC, 2016). Austerity has impacted upon the quality and quantity of a range of local  
167 community and environmental services such as libraries, parks and highways maintenance  
168 and local councillors have been forced to make difficult decisions that have resulted in  
169 reduced levels of care for vulnerable groups and the cessation of certain non-statutory  
170 services. A report on the differential impact of austerity on local government, conducted by  
171 academics for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, found that the most deprived areas saw  
172 budget reductions of £220 per head between 2010 and 2014, versus just £40 in the least  
173 deprived (Hastings et al, 2015). In this context, as the Council's initial regeneration plan  
174 faltered, the arrival of Big Local in Westfield in 2013 was opportune, representing the  
175 prospect of ten years of support and £1million to be directed at locally identified priorities.<sup>1</sup>  
176 *Com.unity*, the still relatively new community centre, was central to the work of the  
177 residents who came together to form a Big Local partnership in Westfield, providing a  
178 potential base for the activities and initiatives they looked to foster.

179 Whilst the Big Local programme had a self-conscious commitment not to substitute for  
180 provision resourced by other organisations, however, this sat uncomfortably in the wider  
181 context: savage cuts being driven through by a national government committed to 'The Big  
182 Society', which sought to reduce the state's role and devolve responsibility for many local

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<sup>1</sup> For context, the impact of the £220 cut in local government spending amounts to just under £200,000 per year in Westfield, the Big Local investment amounts to £100,000 per year. Reductions to centrally administered benefits, significant for individuals in a community where unemployment was three times the Sheffield average (SCC, 2009), are not included in this figure. Moreover, as the JRF report also notes, it is important to recognise that as resource was diminishing demand for services was increasing.

183 services to local voluntary and community groups. Featherstone *et al* (2012) have described  
184 this as ‘austerity localism’, with communities left seeking ways to fill the gaps left by a  
185 rapidly shrinking local state. The process of ‘asset transfer’, through which infrastructure  
186 such as libraries and leisure centres have been transferred from the public to the voluntary  
187 sector, has become a defining feature of this austerity localism (Findlay-King et al, 2017).

188 Just one-year into Westfield Big Local (WBL), the newly formed, resident-led Partnership  
189 confronted this tension in the starkest terms. Two local authority directors came to a  
190 meeting to announce that the council would no longer be able to fund *Com.unity*. The  
191 officers said that, as much as they disliked the term, this was a ‘Big Society’ moment; WBL  
192 could run *Com.unity* for themselves, using the Big Local resource, or it would have to close.  
193 WBL was not alone in facing this dilemma: as Gregory (2018) reports, many of the 150 Big  
194 Local areas across England have found themselves involved in similar asset transfer  
195 arrangements in their efforts to sustain vital elements of local social infrastructure.

196 The story of Westfield’s development has been shaped by major economic and social  
197 changes that have undermined many of the optimistic promises made by its planners.  
198 Responses to these changes have also tracked wider political shifts in urban governance,  
199 from state-led planning to regeneration and on to contested forms of community-led  
200 development. Each of these regimes operates with different understandings of people,  
201 place and the importance of various forms of infrastructure to their prospects. To explore  
202 this further we go on to consider the idea of ABCD as a particular way of thinking about the  
203 physical and social resources required for inclusive regeneration.

### 204 **3. Theory**

#### 205 *3.1 Big Local and ABCD*

206            *The starting point for ABCD is what's strong, not what's wrong.* (Russell, 2020, p. 16)

207 Ideas of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) were developed and gained ground  
208 in the United States from the early 1980s as an alternative to traditional 'needs' based  
209 approaches to community work that start from the assumption that certain places are  
210 deficient in key resources and therefore require external assistance (Kretzmann and  
211 McKnight, 1993). Proponents argue that needs based approaches have reinforced territorial  
212 stigma and, sometimes unwittingly, fostered top-down leadership based on denigrating  
213 local people and interpellating them as passive recipients of external 'help' (Mathie and  
214 Cunningham, 2003). Top down initiatives fail, Russell (2020) argues, because they rely on a  
215 two-dimensional framework for understanding change in places, which consists of  
216 institutional interventions and individual behaviour change. ABCD by contrast introduces  
217 and privileges a third dimension, the environmental/social (p. 14). From here, he identifies  
218 five categories into which the principles and practices of ABCD fall: 1, Citizen-led; 2,  
219 Relationship-oriented; 3, Asset-based; 4, Place-based; 5, Inclusion-focused (2020, p. 15).

220 The relationship between map and territory runs through ABCD, both as metaphor and  
221 practice. ABCD suggests that prevailing approaches to community development have missed  
222 the fact that all places must be mapped afresh, based on a fine-grained understanding of  
223 the territory. By 'mapping' both tangible (physical) and intangible (social) local assets, ABCD  
224 seeks to start from recognition of the often underappreciated skills and resources that exist  
225 within all communities, building on these to address local concerns with a particular focus  
226 on the associational networks through which people can be organised. In this regard, ABCD  
227 has strong affinities with community-led approaches to planning and regeneration that seek

228 to empower local people to take control of the development of their own communities  
229 (Reardon, 2014).

230 The Big Local programme built on the roots of similar community-development experiments  
231 in the UK, critical of the failure of large-scale, often physically orientated public  
232 regeneration funding to generate lasting community capacity-during the 2000s (Taylor et al,  
233 2007). By offering a relatively long-term, ten-year commitment and a flexible process, the  
234 Big Local programme was designed to enable the patient development of community  
235 capacity in areas previously overlooked by regeneration funding.

236 As noted above, however, such programmes and philosophies sit in an ambiguous political  
237 relation to other political currents. As austerity localism was introduced, for example, Aiken  
238 et al (2011, np) sounded warnings about the potential risks of communities taking over the  
239 control of local buildings and land:

240 Without the right conditions in place, asset ownership/management can struggle to  
241 achieve benefits. Community organisations need to be mindful of the risks and costs  
242 involved in asset control, as assets can become liabilities that undermine community  
243 aspirations. Community organisations need to strike a difficult balance between  
244 achieving financial sustainability and delivering community benefit. The  
245 opportunities for generating income vary among different organisations and  
246 communities, and support is needed in developing the skills required to manage  
247 assets effectively.

248 Thus, in the context of neoliberal retrenchment of welfare spending and programmes of  
249 public austerity, there is a clear danger that calls for ABCD may intersect with varieties of  
250 'self-help' or the promotion of entrepreneurial over activist orientations to community

251 action, legitimising the retreat of the state and regressive forms of localism (Featherstone et  
252 al, 2012; MacLeod and Emejulu, 2014). As Wolf-Powers (2014) highlights it is therefore  
253 important to critically analyse the political norms underpinning different conceptions of  
254 community development and planning, examining their theories of change and  
255 understandings of underlying socio-economic drivers.

### 256 *3.2 The Infrastructural Turn*

257 The use of the term ‘assets’ in ABCD is deliberately broad, encompassing both physical and  
258 social resources for community development. In this regard there are important  
259 intersections with the recent expansion of interest in ‘infrastructure’ in urban studies.  
260 Indeed, recent years have seen a marked ‘infrastructural turn’, with a significant expansion  
261 of scholarship on the relations between various forms of technical infrastructure, patterns  
262 of urban social life and the politics of urban development (e.g. Amin, 2014; Lemanski, 2019).  
263 Drawing on wider theoretical interest in vital materialism, scholars have drawn renewed  
264 attention to the socio-technical underpinnings of urban life and how the provision and use  
265 of urban infrastructures form part of the governing apparatus of contemporary societies  
266 (Larkin, 2013). In doing so, they recentre long-standing debates in planning and community  
267 development about the interrelations between the physical and the social in the  
268 development of places.

269 Infrastructural studies re-examine the manifold ways in which the built environment can be  
270 considered political (Wakefield, 2018) often by focusing on the “system of substrates” (Star,  
271 1999, 380), such as the networks of pipes, cables and roads, that underpin the urban world.  
272 Recent work has also, however, prompted a gradual broadening of the always fuzzy  
273 definition of the term to encompass a wider range of both material and immaterial

274 infrastructures considered ‘platforms providing for and reproducing life in the city’ (Simone,  
275 2004). In this wider theoretical sense, infrastructures are conceived theoretically as part of  
276 the grounds on which social action unfolds, binding people and things together and enabling  
277 various forms of ‘transmission’ from one state to another over time (Berlant, 2011).

278 In a related but more prosaic vein, Eric Klinenberg (2018, 16) defines ‘social infrastructure’  
279 broadly in terms that encompass both the physical and social to focus on “the physical  
280 places and organisations that shape the way people interact” suggesting they are a crucial  
281 ‘building block’ of social life that “helps make us who we are and determines how we live”  
282 (32/33). Clearly distinct from more technical forms of infrastructure like power or sanitation,  
283 Klinenberg’s work nonetheless illustrates how certain forms of social provision, schools,  
284 libraries and the organisations that use them, provide a crucial ‘platform’ through which  
285 interactions and mutual support between people can grow. Klinenberg’s argument, that the  
286 value of social infrastructures has been underestimated leading to long-term  
287 underinvestment, resonates powerfully with the long-standing concerns of regeneration  
288 and community-development practitioners working in marginalised places where the  
289 physical and organisational fabric of associational life is frequently strained by  
290 disinvestment. It also intersects in significant ways with scholarship on the effects of  
291 austerity regimes on community facilities and marginalised communities in many global  
292 northern states over recent years.

293 Pain (2018, 388), for example, discusses how long-term disinvestment in parts of north-east  
294 England is akin to successive waves of ‘slow violence’ being visited upon particular urban  
295 areas and she describes how it “appears to become encoded in the material, ecological and  
296 social fabric of certain places” producing a “collective spatial trauma”. Reflecting on the

297 most recent phase of retrenchment in England, Shaw (2019, 973) argues that austerity  
298 “harms the social infrastructures of co-existence” by imposing a ‘slow uricide’ on the  
299 “buildings, streets and other built ecologies of everyday life”. Robinson and Sheldon (2019,  
300 112), meanwhile, highlight the difficulty of gaining recognition of the value of “‘ordinary’  
301 community buildings, such as libraries and day centres, [that] are pivotal yet under-  
302 acknowledged participants in the maintenance of forms of life, which are both threatened  
303 by austerity and offer modes of responding to it”. Such studies not only re-affirm the  
304 importance of social infrastructures but also highlight that, like other forms of  
305 infrastructure, they often only become visible when they are threatened, break down or  
306 cease to exist, producing an enforced reconfiguration of the social relations they have  
307 hitherto enabled.

308 Studies of infrastructure failures amidst huge inequalities in access have been a particular  
309 focus for urban scholarship in the global south. Abdul Maliq Simone (2004), for example,  
310 argues that people themselves become infrastructures amidst the ‘ruined’ physical  
311 infrastructure of Johannesburg, enabling the ongoing transmission of basic goods and  
312 services and facilitating economic and social opportunity. Austerity-induced retrenchment  
313 of social infrastructures, however, means that such insights increasingly resonate with the  
314 lived experiences of marginalised people and places in the heartlands of neoliberal  
315 capitalism. Potentially perverse intersections with austerity political projects like the Big  
316 Society, for example, place asset-based community development programmes like Big Local  
317 in danger of providing cover for the retrenchment of state support for social infrastructure;  
318 legitimising a falling back on people as infrastructure to backfill lost services and resources  
319 (see e.g. MacLeod and Emejulu, 2014; Tonkiss, 2013).

320 3.3 *'Public Things' and the dynamic political relations of social infrastructure*

321 Debates about disinvestment, the loss of social infrastructures and their disproportionately  
322 negative consequences for already disadvantaged people and places clearly raise important  
323 political and strategic questions for community development and regeneration practice.

324 However, if “[t]hinking infrastructurally... is important to consider the kinds and qualities of  
325 facilities that allow social life to happen, the kind of sociality that is afforded by them, and  
326 how this can be recognised as a kind of public life” (Latham and Layton, 2019, 4), it requires  
327 more than a focus on key moments of loss or contestation of infrastructure provision.

328 Lemanski’s (2019) concept of ‘infrastructural citizenship’ is useful here, pointing to the  
329 ongoing forms of state-citizen relations enabled by engagement with, sometimes faltering,  
330 public infrastructures. Her argument intersects too with political theorist Bonnie Honig’s  
331 (2017) concern for the political and democratic potential of what she terms ‘public things’.

332 Drawing on the object relations of D.W. Winnicott and Hannah Arendt’s concern for things,  
333 Honig (2017, 5) argues that a wide range of objects, including infrastructures, can be  
334 considered “part of the “holding environment” of democratic citizenship; they furnish the  
335 world of democratic life. They do not take care of our *needs* only. They also constitute us,  
336 complement us, limit us, thwart us, and interpellate us into democratic citizenship.”

337 Honig argues that continuing attachments to ‘public things’ evidence alternative ways of  
338 relating to and caring for the world, beyond the dominance of instrumental economic  
339 rationalities. In this way Honig argues public things can help anchor ongoing attachments  
340 that orientate the commitments of actors in important ways, binding them together as  
341 (always potentially fractious) collectives around shared concerns that create the possibility  
342 of political community. For Honig this does not necessarily mean an exclusive focus on the

343 agency of things rather “...the human remains the focus, but things have agency enough to  
344 thwart or support human plans or ambitions, and we do well to acknowledge their power  
345 and, when appropriate to allow that power to work on us...”(28).

346 Social infrastructures like community buildings are both an ordinary and fairly obvious  
347 example of a public thing. After all, as Mattson (1999, 13) contends, “Democracy requires  
348 places where citizens can gather together to discuss the issues of the day and work on  
349 solving problems”. Honig’s provocations, coupled with recognition of the ways that social  
350 infrastructures shape citizenship relations, suggest the importance of paying close attention  
351 to the social relations that are configured around them, however, and the forms of  
352 collectivity they would ‘interpellate’ people to be part of. In particular it challenges scholars  
353 to recognise and explore the complex ways public things interact with the political regimes  
354 and projects in which they are situated, generating changing patterns of inclusion/  
355 exclusion. Rather than assuming, for example, that shifts from public, to private or  
356 community ownership or control imply clearly defined changes in these relations it instead  
357 becomes important to empirically explore those patterns and the forms of publicness they  
358 enable.

359 This argument has considerable significance for community-led regeneration efforts that  
360 advocate community-ownership and control as a means of strengthening associational  
361 networks. As we have suggested, the implications for a programme like Big Local, operating  
362 in the shadow of a wider austerity agenda that seeks to offload and download responsibility  
363 for the provision and maintenance of social infrastructures, are particularly stark (Peck,  
364 2012; Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2018). In the rest of the paper we therefore set out to  
365 explore the community centre, *Com.unity*, as a ‘public thing’ in Westfield, exploring the

366 ways its publics have been made and remade over time and assessing what this means for  
367 inclusive community-led regeneration.

#### 368 **4. Methods** (500 words)

##### 369 4.1

370 The paper draws on a range of data gathered through more than three years of engaged  
371 action learning and action research work under the auspices of a community-university  
372 partnership with WBL. Over the period of our engagement, a variety of participatory action  
373 research (PAR) projects were undertaken. PAR involves a commitment to aiming for  
374 democratic engagement with research participants (McIntyre, 2008; Reason and Bradbury,  
375 2008). These projects were designed to inform WBL's plan for how to invest their resources  
376 to realise long-lasting, positive change on the estate. Activities included background  
377 research on existing data, asset-mapping exercises, story-telling workshops, visioning  
378 exercises and plan-writing workshops. This work generated a community profile, vision and  
379 ultimately contributed to a plan, approved by the funder in 2015 (Westfield Big Local, 2015).  
380 For further consideration of the authors' experiences of community led planning through  
381 the Big Local programme in Westfield see XXX (2020).

382 Our analysis here rests on our role as participant observers whilst engaged in this work. As  
383 Flick (2006, 220) has it, participant observers 'dive headlong into the field', observing from a  
384 member's perspective but also influencing on account of their participation. This was  
385 combined with archival, documentary and interview research including 35 semi-structured,  
386 qualitative interviews with participants and local service providers conducted between  
387 August 2015 and February 2016.

388

389

390 **5. Results and Discussion** (2000 words)

391 Above we laid out the wider economic, social and political contexts that led to Westfield  
392 being targeted for regeneration and chosen as a Big Local area. We also introduced  
393 *Com.unity*, as a significant piece of social infrastructure on an estate where  
394 deindustrialisation and long-term disinvestment has seen many of the carefully justified  
395 promises made in the Mosborough masterplan unravel. This section of the paper traces how  
396 these broad changes have found expression in the changing configuration of the building  
397 that housed *Com.unity*, drawing on the discussion above to consider the inclusions and  
398 exclusions that the building's physical character and changing uses have engendered to  
399 draw out their significance for inclusive regeneration.

400 **5.1 The Public House**

401 That the masterplan made provision for a pub in the centre of the new Westfield estate is a  
402 testament to their perceived importance. Klinenberg (2018, 44) quotes approvingly from the  
403 Mass Observation study of British industrial culture that the pub, "Of all the social  
404 institutions that mould men's lives between home and work in an industrial town...holds  
405 more people, takes more of their time and money, than church, cinema, dance-hall, and  
406 political organizations put together." The pub is perhaps then an archetypal example of  
407 social infrastructure. There is little record of the life of the 'Golden Keys' and the forms of  
408 sociality this infrastructure supported, though long-standing residents recall it as a space  
409 where residents who had arrived from all over Sheffield could meet and form bonds. In

410 keeping with other estate pubs, however, by the time it closed, it had developed a bad  
411 reputation (see Whitney, 2017). A place apparently avoided by many for its hostile  
412 atmosphere, which accommodated anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and other criminal  
413 activities; a symbol of the issues that had seen the estate increasingly stigmatized as a  
414 problem.

#### 415 *5.2 From public house to public service, 2011-2014*

416 The local authority's decision to purchase the building was taken before the financial crisis  
417 and formed part of a wider package of regeneration measures that recognised a  
418 concentration of "extreme multiple disadvantage" located in the council housing in the  
419 centre of the estate. Following a process of community engagement, the regeneration plan  
420 identified a long list of 'issues' to be addressed. The £420,000 renovation of the former  
421 Golden Keys was central to this and was seen as a way to address problems of anti-social  
422 and criminal behaviour by creating a positive focus for young people (SCC, 2009). The  
423 building was refurbished and decorated in consultation with local young people. An upstairs  
424 area accommodated a youth club with café, gym and 'chill-out' areas, which provided IT  
425 facilities. Redesigned basement rooms hosted public health and educational activities.

426 Having been closed and then put up for sale, the former pub site offered a relatively  
427 inexpensive opportunity to create this new community space in Westfield. At the same  
428 time, it also symbolised the incremental effects of long-term disinvestment and fragmented  
429 decision-making by public bodies on social infrastructure in the area. The community rooms  
430 provided in the original plan, where early residents had come together to form an  
431 association, had been taken over by the local authority led multi-agency support team,  
432 providing social care and welfare services. The only other remaining meeting space on the

433 estate was a small room housing the Tenants' and Residents' Association (TARA) which had  
434 been disbanded and reformed several times in acrimonious circumstances.

435 Whilst this reveals the marked need for social infrastructure in Westfield, the opening of a  
436 community centre, administered by the local state nonetheless marked a significant break in  
437 the building's use and the forms of publicness it assembled. For some Westfield residents  
438 whose sense of place had The Golden Keys at its heart the change was reported to be  
439 alienating:

440 *We had an issue, when it was turned from a pub to a youth club, me and Angela*  
441 *went round this estate six, seven weeks talking to people. Getting them to accept it.*  
442 *Because they wouldn't. They didn't want their pub to go. Even though they never*  
443 *went in it, it was their pub. (Big Local Member and Youth Worker)*

444 The 'Youth' focused refurbishment of the revamped facility arguably exacerbated this,  
445 generating a sense that the centre was not intended for all residents on the estate. Activities  
446 for young people were key part of the centre's early offer, with a well-attended youth club,  
447 after-school homework clubs and holiday activities organised. Local authority appointed  
448 community workers noted with pride that the building was one of the few community  
449 centres in the city never to be 'tagged' or vandalised, suggesting a level of 'ownership'  
450 amongst local young people. Although those involved admitted that it was often hard to  
451 generate interest, a range of other community activities were made available through the  
452 centre including adult learning classes, mother and baby mornings, exercise classes and, for  
453 a while, a community café, .

454 During this period, *Com.unity* was owned and managed as a public facility, subject to a  
455 particular regime of managerialised local authority control, ostensibly intended to

456 guarantee accountability to a wider public. But the policies (and sometimes corporate  
457 contracts) of the local authority which governed access, use and maintenance of the  
458 building sometimes worked against the very publicness that they sought to facilitate. Whilst  
459 ostensibly a public asset available to citizens, access and use of the building was highly  
460 controlled, symbolised by a CCTV-controlled door entry system, signing-in procedures and  
461 'polite notices' on the walls reminding users of their responsibilities. Nor were citizens  
462 invited to participate in the running of the centre. *Com.unity* belonged to the council rather  
463 than the community, with access conditional on following the rules specified by the local  
464 authority.

465 The 'supervised' and highly conditional form of publicness this created sometimes had  
466 moralistic undertones, as when council representatives insisted the Big Local group only  
467 offer healthy food choices to local residents at a 'family fun day' organised as part of the  
468 launch of WBL. This may have kept some residents away from the centre. In Honig's terms,  
469 *Com.unity* never became a 'public thing', anchoring the realisation of a political community  
470 in Westfield. The services that were provided from the building certainly helped to meet  
471 some of the day-to-day needs of local people but they were addressed primarily as  
472 individual service users rather than as democratic citizens.

473 Alongside this regime, however, staff also used the centre to offer a range of informal care  
474 and support for some of the most hard-pressed residents on the estate. This included the  
475 operation of an unofficial food bank, support for those who struggled to access online job  
476 centre and benefit payment systems and the frequent organisation of 'whip rounds' when  
477 people found themselves short of money for bills, electricity or food. In this way, the

478 conditionality underpinning formal use of the building was countered by street level  
479 community workers who knew and genuinely cared for the area.

480 Against the background of funding cuts and rising levels of local need, the local authority  
481 then announced their intention to withdraw further funding or support for *Com.unity*. In the  
482 minds of the members of the WBL partnership, the perceived success of WBL and the  
483 broader regeneration of Westfield was now seen as being inextricably entwined with the  
484 survival of *Com.unity*. The threatened closure of the building served to foreground its  
485 importance as one of the few remaining examples of social infrastructure on the estate and  
486 its transfer from the state to the community (in the form of the WBL Partnership)  
487 potentially signified a transition from the council's top-down, deficit-based approach to  
488 regeneration to a new era of community-led regeneration.

### 489 *5.3 From public service to community 'asset'*

490 As a council-owned youth-cum-community centre, *Com.unity* had come to fulfil a specific  
491 kind of role, offering a base for a dwindling range of formal services and informal support  
492 and advice. The most recent phase in *Com.unity's* biography now involved WBL taking over  
493 the lease of the building from the council, assuming responsibility for its day-to-day running  
494 and, crucially, its financial sustainability. This new regime ushered in another significant shift  
495 in the understanding and use of the building and generated significant tensions.

496 Negotiating the lease for *Com.unity* involved a small group of WBL partnership members  
497 engaging in protracted meetings with the local authority, as part of which WBL was required  
498 to produce an initial business plan to set out its plans for generating revenue to safeguard  
499 the building's financial viability. The focus of WBL therefore quickly narrowed and much of

500 the discussion now veered toward matters of cost, income and the potential uses of the  
501 building, rather than the broader regeneration of the estate.

502 This shift in focus coincided with the appointment of a new Locally Trusted Organisation  
503 (LTO), the notionally arms-length organisation chosen by every Big Local partnership to  
504 administer and account for the distribution of their funding. Where the previous LTO role  
505 had been performed by an officer of the local high school, the new LTO comprised two  
506 directors of a local social enterprise, both of whom were former senior managers with a  
507 large supermarket chain and they brought a much more entrepreneurial mentality to the  
508 Partnership's meetings. Their experience of managing community buildings to produce  
509 financial returns appealed to those members of the WBL partnership involved in the  
510 negotiations who were rightly concerned that the costs of running the building would  
511 quickly deplete the group's resources, without leaving any lasting legacy.

512 The physical space of *Com.unity* presented constraints in this regard. Even if all available  
513 space was rented out or used for revenue generating activities, projections suggested a  
514 struggle to break even. Those who had invested energy into the asset transfer were  
515 reluctant to concede this point, however. Instead they repeatedly pointed to the savings  
516 that could be made on maintenance costs once they were freed from the expensive  
517 contracts entered into by the local authority. Whenever people began to question the  
518 wisdom of pursuing the asset transfer, the cost saving for changing light bulbs was repeated  
519 as a symbol of the benefits that would flow from community control. Over time, the  
520 Partnership's monthly meetings became increasingly dominated by the LTO's fixation with  
521 securing financial returns, to the point where one discussion involved serious consideration

522 of the potential for charging residents and visiting public sector workers to use the centre's  
523 toilets.

524 Whilst nominally focused on mundane issues of maintenance and accountancy, these  
525 discussions also revealed much deeper tensions within the WBL partnership, most of whose  
526 members were drawn from the wealthier, privately-owned housing on the edge of the  
527 estate rather than the social housing in the centre, where households experienced multiple  
528 forms of concentrated disadvantage. Few had used or been attached to the previous  
529 incarnation of the building and they were quite content for WBL to move towards a more  
530 commercial orientation, with financial imperatives trumping social concerns.

531 For others who had been involved with the centre previously, however, this was a worrying  
532 change of direction:

533 I think, I think the partnership problem is, and what I'll say, I think they want to make  
534 money... [T]hey don't seem to be looking at the outcomes, they're not looking outside  
535 the box, it's as though the outcomes is money.

536 In the absence of any other social infrastructure on the estate, May, a local resident, felt it  
537 was vital for *Com.unity* to play a much more central role in the life of the community:

538 For me, this would become a place where people can call it their hub and their  
539 socialising spot because Westfield 'ant got anywhere else to socialise. They've got a  
540 school but they've got no libraries, no church, they've no post office, and that might  
541 sound silly, but that's where old people used to talk, y'know. If they've got somewhere  
542 where they can socialise you can start building relationships... then you're going to  
543 have a good estate.

544 May's vision for *Com.unity* articulated a strong commitment to realising the building's  
545 potential as a more inclusively public thing: "we're low on education, we're low on jobs...  
546 but we've got this place, we're taking over this place, you put the right things in, education,  
547 youth clubs, things what people can develop in, what is not all about money". Standing in  
548 stark contrast to the LTO's narrow, commercial concerns, May's comments envisaged a  
549 social infrastructure that would provide a basis for a much more inclusive approach to  
550 Westfield's regeneration, better aligned with the hopes, aspirations and resources of those  
551 she saw as 'real' Westfield residents:

552           This is the core, to me, the people what need to be helped are the people what's  
553           inside, in this block (of social housing) of the real people, as I call 'em. I don't mean  
554           that as it sounds but, it's the people what are struggling.

555 The clash between these two different logics and their attendant conceptions of the  
556 building and the publics it should serve became increasingly divisive, with the increasing  
557 dominance of the commercial orientation symbolised by the LTO's attempts to restrict the  
558 informal forms of support that some residents and new employees of WBL had sought to  
559 continue:

560           [There is a notice now] saying: "Big Local don't take any responsibility for any advice  
561           given." That's aimed at me. I'll tell you now, that is aimed at me. But I'm not giving  
562           advice. I'm giving them support...What I'm doing is perfectly normal on an estate  
563           that I care about. So to me [the notice] is an insult. (Big Local Member and Youth  
564           Worker)

565 In this way, WBL arguably shifted away from Big Local's more progressive style of localism  
566 and concern to develop the wider assets of the community to something that was much

567 more entrepreneurial in character, concerned with a single 'asset' and with the pressure to  
568 make *Com.unity* financially sustainable, foreclosing many of the social aims and objectives it  
569 had initially promised.

570 May summarised her fears about the direction being taken, her emotive language which  
571 alludes to the previous murders in Westfield, demonstrating just how strongly she felt about  
572 the future of *Com.unity*:

573 I am frightened of it, because, if they don't get it right there's gonna be uproar on this  
574 estate. This estate, what you have to remember has been promised a lot, a lot of  
575 times and it's always they've never had it. It's all right them taking *Com.unity* on, I  
576 think it's brilliant, but they've gotta get it right what they put in here otherwise there's  
577 gonna be murder.

## 578 **6. Conclusion**

579 Advocates of social infrastructure rightly highlight that it can, "capture an ethos of  
580 democratic living...an ethos of citizens as equals in shared space" (Latham and Layton, 2019,  
581 10) and has the potential to generate a social surplus, encouraging trust, civility, encounter  
582 and common purpose (Amin, 2008). In this way, the concept and role of social  
583 infrastructure, helps to bridge long-standing distinctions between tangible and intangible  
584 assets, or physical and social planning, highlighting how the material and the social interact  
585 to create the conditions of possibility for regeneration. The ways long-term disinvestment in  
586 the physical infrastructures initially planned to support the development of community in  
587 Westfield combined with the slow violence of austerity to constrain the options available to  
588 WBL are , testament to the importance of infrastructural provision in underpinning  
589 prospects for community-led development. Preventing ABCD approaches from perversely

590 legitimising a reliance on people as infrastructure under conditions of austerity requires an  
591 active politicisation of the roles and responsibilities of both the state and communities in  
592 building and sustaining, investing in and valuing the basic assets upon which inclusive urban  
593 regeneration might be built.

594 However, as the experience of WBL and the biography of the building housing *Com.unity*  
595 illustrate, community leadership is no guarantee of greater inclusivity. Following Honig  
596 (2017), the building housing *Com.unity* has always been, in some sense, a ‘public thing’,  
597 even from its very first incarnation as a public house. As Latham and Layton (2019, 9)  
598 contend, however, “studying social infrastructures is also about studying how they get  
599 practiced”. The building’s publicness and ability to advance, support or constrain certain  
600 modes of sociality and ‘infrastructural citizenship’ has been an ongoing and contested stake  
601 in the politics of regeneration in Westfield.

602 As one of the few remnants of the area’s carefully planned social infrastructure this  
603 mundane, unremarkable building has, over its life, been subject to the imprimatur of a  
604 series of different and contested ideological understandings of community, citizens, service  
605 users and customers. But those different stages of its life have also been constitutive of its  
606 lived publicness insofar as those who have exercised control over the building have been  
607 able to act literally and figuratively as ‘gatekeepers’, determining who should be admitted,  
608 how they should be interpellated or addressed, whether as citizens or customers, and who  
609 has the right to engage with and influence the constitution of this public thing. As pub  
610 landlord, youth worker or WBL Partnership member, various gatekeepers control access to  
611 the building and, by implication, effect who is included/excluded, define what constitutes  
612 (un)acceptable forms of behaviour and determine who or what constitutes an ‘asset’. Over

613 time, these everyday processes of incorporation and exclusion have worked to produce a  
614 series of limited, contingent and value-laden constructions of community and this, in turn,  
615 has excluded a wider public from getting involved in the area's regeneration and severely  
616 delimited possibilities for change. By exploring three distinct phases in the biography of this  
617 building, we have shown how its sociality as a piece of infrastructure has been reworked  
618 over time, with significant implications for community politics and the regenerated futures  
619 being imagined for Westfield. In doing so the paper points to the critical importance of  
620 understanding and enlarging the publicness of public things.

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623

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