

The Community Mapping Toolkit

A guide to community asset mapping
for community groups and local organisations



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Introduction

Community Mapping (sometimes called asset mapping) is all about involving residents in identifying the assets of their neighbourhood, looking at opportunities and creating a picture of what it is like to live there. The exercise is a valuable and effective method of community engagement simply because maps are visual and easy to relate to; like photos and videos they cut through communication difficulties to reveal feelings and ideas which otherwise might be hard to express.

Every community has assets; facilities such as libraries and community centres, valued businesses, parks and forests are obvious. But most importantly the people and their capacities; organised community groups or individuals who have skills and talents. All of these things can be mapped to create a picture of the community which shows its capacity and its potential.

Community mapping can encourage people become powerful advocates for the transformation of the spaces in which they live, becoming more civically minded in the process. It can also foster a sense of environmental and community responsibility in local residents.

This toolkit will help you to conduct your own community mapping, from preparation through execution to possibilities you may want to consider as you move forward.

Depending on who you are able to involve in your mapping exercise, your findings may have far reaching implications; such as an agreed Neighbourhood Action Plan for your area, or being able to seriously influence planning and policy decisions for the benefit of your community. The process can also bring people together and get them talking about community matters and valuing what already exists, which is always a good thing.

You may already have very specific goals in mind for this exercise. For example you might want to work on engaging a particular demographic of the community, young people for example. Perhaps you don't know exactly where you want the process to lead . . . don't worry, the very act of mapping is extremely informative and may suggest a direction to you that you might not otherwise have considered.



Asset Based Community Development

Whether or not you are familiar with asset based community development, it is an easy concept to understand. It's all about the positives.

For a long time, local government and other organisations have taken a deficit approach to community development and regeneration; meaning they have always started by looking at the problems. Over the years much attention has been given to the deficits of our neighbourhoods; such as maps to reflect crime, unemployment and poor health outcomes. We've always been quick to ask the question "what is wrong with this area?" and slow to ask "what is right?" or "what do you value about this area?"

Sometimes it seems like the negative approach is so ingrained that we appear to be regarding the communities themselves as a problem. When this is the perception, it can be very damaging to the self esteem of these communities, to know that they are only regarded in negative terms. But we all know communities are not made up of problems, they are made up of people and every person has the potential to become asset to their neighbourhood.

Asset Based Community Development seeks to rebalance our view by properly cataloguing everything that is of value, it's just bad bookkeeping to ignore the assets and only ever count the negatives. Also, through the assets we may find ways of addressing the issues of an area.



There are three types of assets you may wish to look for:

1

Individual



A word cloud representing individual assets. The most prominent word is 'Individual' in large purple letters. Other words include 'skills', 'Talents', 'abilities', 'gifts', 'caring', 'volunteers', 'life-experience', 'creativity', 'organising', 'bloggers', 'capacities', 'interests', 'advocate', 'enthusiasm', 'vision', 'knowledge', and 'leadership'.

2

Community



A word cloud representing community assets. The most prominent words are 'Community' and 'social' in large orange letters. Other words include 'Groups', 'voluntary', 'groups', 'teams', 'activities', 'events', 'community', 'watch', 'youth', 'associations', 'cultural', 'neighbourhood', 'meetings', 'charitable', 'clubs', and 'residents'.

3

Institutional



A word cloud representing institutional assets. The most prominent words are 'Institutional' and 'schools' in large green letters. Other words include 'facilities', 'libraries', 'services', 'temples', 'churches', 'mosques', 'colleges', 'pubs', 'nurseries', 'accommodation', 'businesses', 'grounds', 'sheltered', 'centres', 'cafes', 'amenities', 'shops', 'housing', 'parks', and 'infrastructure'.

Types of Assets

Clearly as the individual assets cannot be plotted onto a geographical map, this kind of mapping is not always appropriate. The mapping of individual assets is usually more appropriate within an organised group – for instance a community association or youth club. When contained within a group, this kind of activity has also been called a ‘skills audit’. It is also extremely useful for groups which are newly formed, partly as a means of integrating the group but also for defining it; deciding what the priorities, the values and the capacity for action.

It is plain to see when looking through the community and institutional assets, that they are the very substance of our communities. In every asset there is potential to enrich and improve the community and seeing them all plotted out across a map is immediately encouraging for any resident. Not only is it important to list the assets, but how they are currently being used (if they are being used at all). Asking the right questions is the key to unlocking the potential of these assets. For example if you mark on the map that the local community centre is an asset, it is important to note who it is an asset to – Which demographic of the community is using it? Who could be using it? What activities is it used for? What could it be used for? These kinds of questions add context and meaning to the asset and could eventually be the key to unlocking that asset’s full potential.



The Process - Community Street Audits

The Community Street Audit process has been around for some years, the idea is to gather local residents, services and councillors and send them out into the neighbourhood equipped with clipboards and cameras. Traditionally all participants would come back with a long list of issues, and photos of vandalism, damaged infrastructure, poorly maintained amenities and anything else they could find that was ugly or in need of repair. The findings of the Street Audit would then be compiled into a long report of problems which could then be circulated to the services and agencies that had a responsibility for that area. This is the very model of a 'deficit approach', almost as if the process encouraged a wilful denial of all the positives that exist in a neighbourhood.

Every community has assets; facilities such as libraries and community centres, valued businesses, parks and forests are obvious. But most importantly the people and their capacities; organised community groups or individuals who have skills and talents. All of these things can be mapped to create a picture of the community which shows its capacity and its potential.

However, Community Street Audits can be tailored very easily to the aim of mapping assets. There is no substitute to going out into the neighbourhood in order to gather intelligence, and the photos and notes are very useful when it comes to mapping.



Planning is important; here are some guidelines for a well organised Street Audit.

1. Venue: you will need a base of operations where you can brief and debrief all participants. Community centres, libraries and churches are usually quite suitable.

2. Safety: It is very important to include matters of safety in your briefing, especially if you are going out in the dark. Be sure to cover visibility, road safety and needles and sharps.

3. Boundaries: you will need to collectively define your neighbourhood before beginning the exercise. Councils, policing teams and local groups will all have different means of defining an area; such as electoral wards and main roads. These boundaries are worth looking at because they help the community to understand who represents them and who has responsibilities in the area. Don't let the boundaries constrict you if they differ from what you consider to be the natural footprint of your community, but also don't spread yourself too thinly.

4. Routes. Within your map you will want to plot out routes or define sections so you can split up into teams to cover them. Planning ahead will help you make the best use of time and resources and prevent you from becoming distracted and end up only covering a very small area in the allotted time.

5. Resources. For a street audit you will need a number of resources such as clipboards, comments sheets and cameras etc. See the 'Your Mapping Toolbox'.

6. Roles. Each team should have designated individuals to take notes and photographs. You may also want team members to concentrate on specific aspects such as aesthetics, or safety.

7. Feedback. On completing the route, it is always advisable to feedback to the group. Getting this initial feedback is useful because first impressions are often the best indicator of priorities for the neighbourhood. Your street audit may highlight an issue which needs dealing with urgently (such as the discovery of hyperaemic needles or sharps which need to be removed by a professional).

Who to Involve

Different participants can bring valuable intelligence, viewing assets from varying points of view depending on their individual experience of that asset; for example the user of a park will bring different insights to the organisation responsible for maintaining the park – but all insights are equally valid.



Ideally you need people from the following three categories:

Community Residents:

Including representatives from your local neighbourhood watch, local resident associations, sheltered schemes, voluntary groups, but be sure to welcome people who are not affiliated with any local group. Your street audit will have more validity the more demographically representative you make it – this is not easy and it is unlikely you will be able to assemble a group which is equally split along gender, ethnicity and age. However, what you can do is engage the people you come across in the street – it doesn't have to be complicated, your question could be as simple as "what is the best thing about living in this neighbourhood?"

Elected Representatives:

Be sure to invite your district and county councillors if you live under a two tier authority, and parish councillors if you have them. Contact details should be available on council websites. Your elected representatives are crucially important as they represent community interests in an official capacity – they can influence planning decisions, policies and budgets.

Local Services and Facilities:

See if you can invite representatives from all the services that have responsibilities in your area – IE your neighbourhood policing team, local agencies and the authorities responsible for highways, parks and woodland, social housing and health provision. Local businesses are also important, particularly the larger ones whose operations have a big impact on the local community.

The more 'buy-in' you get from the community and those that serve the community, the more validity your findings will have. The more key decision-makers you can involve in the process, the better the chance of meaningful dialogue with the community. If local residents judge the exercise to be a 'talking shop' which cannot achieve real change then there is a real danger of disillusionment.

You will get the best results when you focus on shared interests and commonalities instead of differences. There are always contentious issues in any neighbourhood, but there will also be priorities which the whole community can get behind. Focusing on these areas of common ground also has the benefit of fostering a sense of community cohesion and inclusion; making sure we are all on the same side.

Making it Meaningful

When you identify assets, make sure you give them a context – Why are they assets? Who are they assets to? Are they only potential assets (IE an underused building or piece of land)? Could more of the community benefit from their existence? Are they under threat in anyway (IE a building which is need of repair)?

Identify opportunities; when you come across problems and issues, try to be constructive. Be wary of simply listing the problems you encounter as this can lead you back to the 'deficit' approach mentioned earlier. When viewing these problems in the context of the neighbourhood and its assets – possible solutions may present themselves. For example one of the issues you may come across is high unemployment – but you may also have identified amongst the assets a suitable venue in which to set up a job club and volunteers who have the time to put together a network of support for people who want to get back to work. People are the biggest asset to any area, and particularly for areas which have seen their share of problems; people are often the best source of solutions to those problems. So try to encourage an attitude of looking for solutions alongside investigating problems – this more often than not will involve identifying networks of people capable of acting on these problems.

The whole point of the exercise is that it leads to decisive action; your mapping should be followed by informed and realistic action planning – this is a key part of the process. Realistic, because you need to be wary of the responsibility of managing expectations in the community – ambitions and ideals are good but beware of setting yourself goals that you can't reach.

You could start your action planning with some quick wins, problems which have simple, achievable solutions – for example getting local services to give particular maintenance issues their attention (overgrown hedges or a broken street light). These things are indeed simple, but in some circumstances they make all the difference to residents feeling of safety and level of service.



Start with the easy things and move on from there . . . building mutual confidence as you go.

Table top Mapping/ Google Mapping

Mapping can be a table top exercise and a computer based exercise, if you have the resources there's no reason it can't be both – they both have advantages and disadvantages.

It's really helpful if you can get hold of a large map of your area. If you have plenty of people taking part then you don't want them all crowding round an A4 sheet of paper, also the bigger the map the more information you can fit onto it, foam mounted maps are good because you can stick map pins into them. If you have representatives attending from your local authority then they will likely have access to maps such as these.

Google mapping is an incredibly popular method of mapping virtually anything as it's free and extremely versatile. While table top mapping is useful for the initial exercise, Google mapping is a great way of demonstrating your findings and tracking any changes that you can bring about.



Through Google Maps you can...

- Place markers with a variety of icons. When clicking upon each marker, the user will be presented with a pop-up bubble containing text and any other content you should wish to add.
- Use lines and shapes to mark out specific areas such as ward boundaries or sites marked for development.
- Insert links to relevant web content such as the websites of organisations you are mapping or news articles about specific markers (e.g a local newspaper writes a web article about your local park, you can insert a link to this article in your pop-up bubble).
- You can also embed photos or videos into the pop-up bubbles so they can be viewed instantly without having to follow a link.

DID YOU KNOW?...

For more instruction on the use of Google Maps, search "google mymaps tutorial" to find useful and practical content.

Your Mapping Toolbox

In order to map effectively, you will need the right tools. here is a checklist for you.



perhaps you don't have access to all of these items? If you get enough people involved in your mapping exercise then you should be able to pool these items together amongst yourselves, especially if your local council or housing association is involved.

Follow-up/Sharing Information

Once you've done your initial mapping, and drawn from it some kind of Neighbourhood Action plan; keeping the community and local agencies informed will help you keep the agreed priorities at the front of everyone's mind.

There are a number of options you might want to consider; if you have plotted all of your assets, opportunities and issues onto a Google Map then you could look into getting a local organisation to embed the map in their website. Alternatively you could email all of your community contacts with a link to the map, so they can use the map as a means of tracking the progress of local projects and concerns.

If you have the time and know-how you could start your own community website; hyperlocal websites are a popular way of engaging with a community, provided they are regularly updated. Alternatively you could look into using Social Media to keep discussion and information flowing, but be careful not to rely on approaches such as these as you may end up excluding certain demographic groups who are unlikely to engage with these methods.

Some groups may be in a position to have the agreed priorities as standing agenda items at regular local meetings, such as the PACT or Parish meeting.

Perhaps you have the resources to write and distribute a newsletter or leaflet throughout your neighbourhood, this obviously has a cost implication but it is a good way of keeping people informed. You may be able to work in partnership with a local organisation who already has a newsletter, such as the Police, Parish Council or Neighbourhood Watch.



Case Study: Broadgate, Preston

What follows is two extracts from a leaflet which was distributed by Preston City Council as a follow-up after a Community Street Audit.

Living in Broadgate!

Outcomes from the Community Street Audit

In September 2011 Preston City Council's Citizen Zone parked up on the Gujarat Hindu Centre car park and invited local people, councillors and the Neighbourhood Policing to take part in a Community Street Audit. This involves 'mapping' things that are important and valued within the local community, to identify opportunities and get ideas on how things could improve.

Community Involvement Workers were on hand to support the people who took part and loaned cameras to provide photographic records (see overleaf) and, which have been posted on Preston City Council website www.preston.gov.uk

Many people came on to the Citizenzone to give their views as well as walking the streets, taking photos and chatting to people asking what they thought were the best things about living in Broadgate. Local people had many positive things to say including 'good neighbours, community spirit, being close to the city centre and feeling safe' all of which gives the impression of a happy and friendly community. They also appreciated having 'local sports facilities, good public transport and close places of worship'.

A number of families and extended families took part on the day and talked passionately about the local Broadgate newsletter, the Broadgate Residents Action group, convenient local shops and being close to Avenham and Miller Park.

Broadgate Street Audit Priorities

Supporting Friends of Euston Street park to improve the Play facilities.

Update - Friends of Euston Street Park needs more local people to support them in order to put in an external funding application to fund the refurbishment of the play area if you would like to be involved please get in touch using the contact details on the back of the leaflet

Access to Preston Sports Club and BAE Club

Update: Both clubs are open to new members from anyone in the local area at anytime.

Issues with litter and back alley clearing

Update: Back alley clean ups have taken place at on Lauderdale Street and Grafton Street

Linear park tree pruning to make the street lighting columns more visible and improve lighting conditions throughout the park

Update: Tree pruning work has just taken place throughout linear park to improve the lighting conditions for all users. If you would like to see further improvements in the area we are looking for local people to start a 'Friends' of linear park group - Would you be interested? If so please get in touch today?!



Clean-Up on
lauderdale street
and grafton street

