

# **Conscious Community**

Belonging, identities and networks  
in local communities' response  
to flooding

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## **Abstract**

One response to the increasing incidence of flooding in the UK has been to shift more responsibility towards local communities, and to suggest that they become increasingly involved in the Flood Risk Management process and do more to help themselves. Whilst the more recent vulnerability perspective highlights the importance of understanding the social aspects of disasters, relatively little is yet known about responses and impacts within the local community. The term 'community' is itself highly contested within the social sciences and this should be seen in the context of claims by some that the 'local' is being lost to the 'global'. Qualitative research with urban and rural flooded communities in northern England found that the majority of the residents interviewed did identify with their locality and articulated a sense of belonging or attachment; however this could be expressed in a number of different ways.

The creation of a local community no longer appeared to arise naturally from residing in the same location but required both reflexivity and active efforts by residents. The research therefore suggests that the local community can be understood as a 'conscious community'. These communities were formed around different shared identities but dense, localised networks remained central to conceptions. Yet, in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world these networks had to be consciously created and maintained. Residents choosing to engage in community construction adopted different strategies to enable local people to meet one another and therefore local communities could take very varied forms.

The local structures created by residents and the network patterns this then produced largely determined residents' ability to respond in a collective way to flooding. The research suggests that local community has the potential to offer a way to help people cope more effectively with flooding and other disasters, but only by moving beyond idealised notions of the 'traditional community' which fail to adequately reflect these complex and diverse communities. To support and enhance the ability of local residents to come together to cope with flooding we need to engage with the messy, complexity of conscious communities.

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## Introduction

Central to this research is the long contested concept of local community. Both residents' and 'flood professionals' constructions of local community are examined to explore how these shape local collective responses to flood risk. These are investigated through qualitative research in urban and rural locations within northern England. The research has two broad aims which are closely related: first, to gain a better understanding of some of the local social processes operating during and after a flood; second, to further the understanding of the concept of local community, an idea that remains controversial amongst academics but widely used in many different arenas, including flood-related policy.

Floods are a problem of increasing concern, both in the UK and across the world they appear to be increasing in frequency and severity. This research is based in England and the Environment Agency's 2008 National Flood Risk Assessment shows there are 2.4 million properties at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea in England. Preliminary assessments suggest a further 2.8 million properties are susceptible to surface water flooding. In all, around 5.2 million properties in England, or one in six properties, are at risk of flooding (Environment Agency 2009a:6). In recent years the UK has seen a number of unusually widespread and severe flood events. These include the floods of Easter 1998, autumn 2000, the northern floods of 2005, the summer floods of 2007 and most recently the Cumbrian floods in 2009. These trends are likely to continue; *The Foresight Future Flooding Report* predicts that climate change will be an important factor in increasing flood risk, and that both the number of people in danger from flooding and the costs of damage from floods will rise significantly (Evans et al. 2004, Pitt 2008). Therefore continued research into flooding and its impacts is going to remain important.

Research from within the vulnerability perspective has shown that there are long term health and social impacts of floods as well as the more obvious physical damage (Enarson and Morrow 1997, Tapsell and Tunstall 2001, Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003). Social networks are disrupted during this time and may not return to their previous state even when residents return home (Fordham 1998). Qualitative research on floods and other disasters to date has demonstrated the existence of a number of issues concerning social relations at the local level (Enarson and Morrow 1997, Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1998, Tapsell et al. 2003, Tapsell and Tunstall 2001, Tapsell, Tunstall, Penning-Rowsell and Handmer 1999). However, research to date has tended to focus at the individual or household level and so "there is little work within the UK on social impacts at the community level" (Twigger-Ross 2005:25). It is social responses, within what might be considered the local community, that are explored here.

In both the UK and world-wide there is a move from flood defence to Flood Risk Management. This change has placed an increasing emphasis on local communities and their involvement in the Flood Risk Management process. It is suggested that both individuals and communities will have to take on more responsibility for the management of their own flood risk (DEFRA 2008, Johnson and Priest 2008, Pitt 2008). Whilst the concept of communities is being increasingly incorporated into emergency/disaster management, it is necessary to understand its complexities and not use the term in a simplistic way. To date there has been a tendency within this policy literature to treat local community as self evident and unproblematic, rather than complex and requiring investigation (Buckle 1999, Marsh & Buckle 2001, Twigg 2007).

In contrast the concept of community has a long and complex history in the social sciences, being defined, researched and theorised in diverse and contradictory ways (Crow 2002, Crow and Allan 1994, Day 2006, Delanty 2003, Frazer 1999, Valentine 2001). There is a huge literature on 'local community' and 'community' and it remains a contested concept. The concept became unfashionable during the 1970s and so was relatively neglected. There are signs of a revival and work on local community is slowly beginning to reassert itself. However societal changes and a lack of recent empirical research mean that current understandings of local community remain relatively under researched.

This research aims to bridge the gap between the academic problematisation of the term and the more basic understanding currently adopted by flood risk managers as they move into the field. If communities are to be successfully involved in the prevention and mitigation of floods and other hazards it is essential to understand how those communities are constructed and how they operate. There is also an opportunity to advance our conceptual understanding of community. The disruption of communities by floods can reveal aspects that are usually taken for granted. As Blaikie (1993:177) notes, "much of the activity of social life is routine, and is conducted in a taken-for-granted, unreflective attitude. It is ... when social life is disrupted, and/or ceases to be predictable that social actors are forced consciously to search for or construct meanings and interpretations".

Despite the long history and the changing theorisations, it is work from the beginnings of the academic study of community that seem to remain most resonant outside academia. Discourses of 'community lost' perpetuate a rather romanticised view of the local community as a separate, holistic, bounded, positive, largely self reliant social entity, with the rural village being seen as the ideal type (Day 2006, Delanty 2003). This rather idealised use has been one reason for some academics to reject the term in favour of less

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contentious ones such as neighbourhood (Hoggett 1997, Massey 2003). Yet the term's problematic associations and contested nature are not a sufficient reason for its abandonment (Sherlock 2002). One of the most compelling reasons for researching community is its continued use outside of academia, "outside of the seminar room the idea of community appears to remain alive and well and people, misguidedly or not, continue to refer to it ..." (Hoggett 1997:7). Its use in flood policy is a good example of its continuing popularity.

Recent re-theorisations have centred on community as a structure of meaning rather than as a social structure (Day 2006, Valentine 2001). Particularly influential in this move has been Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'Imagined Community'. This suggests that all the members of a nation form an imagined community because, although they will never meet, they "carry an image of their communion" (Anderson 1991). This move to understanding community as a mental construction has been beneficial and allows an examination of the ways in which it is contested and constructed. However there have been criticisms that there has been a neglect of the social aspects in this approach (Amit 2002, Mitchell 2000, Neal and Walters 2007). It is also argued, that in common with much of the earlier work, there is lack of serious engagement with what is meant by 'local' and the conceptualisation of space. This becomes even more crucial at a time when globalisation is reshaping what is understood by local (Martin 2004, Massey 2003, 2004, 2005, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). Therefore the concept of local community is explored alongside communal flood responses.

To examine these wider issues three specific research questions are addressed.

- a. How do constructions of local community, and the ways in which they are experienced in a specific locality, allow or constrain local residents' ability to respond collectively to flooding?
- b. What effect does flooding have on local social networks and the way these relate to the local area and ideas of community?
- c. How do professional discourses of community shape their expectations of local social response to flooding? What are the similarities and differences with residents' conceptualisations and responses?

The findings of this research suggest that to understand local communities it is necessary to pay attention to the social, spatial and mental aspects as these are inextricably linked. It is argued that rather than being imagined the local community is best understood as a 'Conscious Community'. Local communities no longer arise in an apparently natural way from residing together in the same location; they must be consciously desired and actively constructed by residents themselves. The first three of the analysis chapters each take as their focus one of these three aspects: the spatial (Chapter 3), mental (Chapter 4) and the social (Chapter 5). First however Chapter 1 considers the theoretical context and work to date, bringing together the literatures on flooding and community within the context of human geography. Chapter 2 then provides an account of the methods used, and considers both the theoretical and practical issues involved. It also introduces the three fieldwork locations.

The thesis then moves to the analytical chapters, which discuss the findings. Chapter 3 'Community, locality and belonging' focuses on the spatial aspects and examines the relationship between locality and community and considers how residents may form an attachment to the place in which they live. Chapter 4, 'Creating local identities' examines the mental aspects and explores the ways in which local identities were created. It investigates the means through which local people may come to feel connected to one another. Chapter 5, 'Constructing local social structures' examines the role of social relations and their creation within the local community. Chapter 6 then takes what has been learnt from the previous chapters and explores communal responses to flooding; the factors that influence this and considers to what extent this might be considered collective action.

The final analysis chapter is number 7 - 'Community conceptualisations and communication in Flood Risk Management'. In this chapter attention turns to the understanding of local community by flood risk professionals in the light of the earlier findings on the conscious community. Their conceptualisations are examined and compared to those of the residents. The relationship between the flood professionals and the communities are also analysed in order to understand what this can reveal about the current relationship between those involved in Flood Risk Management and the communities with which they are working. Finally chapter 8, 'Conclusions' draws together the findings from the earlier chapters, establishes what has been shown by the research, considers the implications, examines its limitations and makes some suggestions for future research.

# Chapter 1 – Conceptualising Community

*“...’community’ is a highly problematic term, alluring in its promise but to be approached with extreme care” (Day 2006:2)*

## 1.1 Introduction

As Pahl (2005:621) noted, writing about community is asking for trouble. It has been argued over by academics for more than 200 years, with some declaring it to be an empty concept. Yet its popularity outside academia continues and there has been a new interest in local communities and local identities in response to concerns over globalisation. The term is perhaps more widely used now than ever before and it can be seen in many aspects of policy, including flood related policies. In the move from flood defence to Flood Risk Management local community has become increasingly central, often being cited as the ideal location to situate flood response. Therefore despite the problems of conceptualisation it is a concept that needs consideration.

To understand the arguments for undertaking this research and the issues involved, the following chapter considers the subject matter in four sections. The first ‘Why flooded communities?’ argues the case for examining flooding in the context of local community. It outlines the increasing likelihood of flooding, how policy changes place growing pressure on local communities to participate in flood management, and how disaster research has revealed the need to understand the social impacts of flooding. It argues that as community, a complex and contested concept, is often used simplistically in this literature, much can be gained from an examination of the very substantial social science literature.

‘Community lost, saved or liberated?’ then considers the dominant discourses of community, and their ongoing influence, using Wellman’s suggestion that the long and complex debates on community can be characterised into three discourses (Wellman 1979; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988). ‘Community lost’ which fears community is being destroyed and has perpetuated the rather romanticised view of the village community; ‘community saved’ which finds community alive and well even in modern, urban areas and ‘community liberated’ which argues that location should not be the basis for examining community. The implications and limitations of the various conceptualisations are explored along with their impact on current UK policy.

‘Re-imagining Community’ explores current conceptions of community, in particular the notion of ‘imagined community’ which lies to some extent outside Wellman’s

characterisation. Community as an ideal, as a structure of meaning, is the theoretical approach adopted for this research. There are however some criticisms of and limitations to the concept of the 'imagined community' in its current formulation which are considered. Finally, community and questions of spatiality are explored within the framework of human geography, the value of investigating the notion of local community is considered and the advantages of this approach for the research are outlined.

## **1.2 Why flooded communities?**

There are a number of factors which are making it increasingly urgent that we understand how local communities both respond to and are affected by flooding. Firstly, flooding is likely to be an increasing problem, and although flood defences can help some residents, floods can never be totally prevented (DEFRA 2005a). Therefore a better understanding of the full range of flood effects (both tangible and intangible) is needed to help mitigate the impacts of floods, which can last for many months or even years. Secondly, a paradigm shift in disaster research is considered. This examines the impact of the increasing concern with 'risk' and findings from the 'vulnerability approach'. These have revealed the importance of understanding underlying social structures and the need to understand these 'everyday structures' such as local community (Blaikie et al. 1994, Fordham 1998). Thirdly, the recent changes in policy direction place an increasing emphasis on involving those at risk in the Flood Risk Management process. The concept of community is central to this and local communities are expected to have an increasing role in Flood Risk Management. Finally, although research has uncovered impacts at what might be called the local community scale, this aspect remains under researched as the focus to date has largely focused on individuals and households (Twigger-Ross 2005, Walker et al. 2005).

### **1.2.1 Increasing flood risk**

Perhaps the most apparent but regrettable reason to investigate flooded communities is the likely increase of flooding incidents in the future, both in the UK and globally (Evans et al. 2004). The Foresight Future Flooding Study published in 2004 provided an assessment of flood risk in the UK over a 30 to 100 year timescale to help inform long-term policy. This predicted that climate change will be an important factor in increasing flood risk, and that both the number of people in danger from flooding and the costs of damage from floods will rise significantly (Evans et al. 2004). There are indications that this is the case. The UK has seen a number of unusually widespread and severe flood events in recent years, such as the floods of Easter 1998, autumn 2000, the northern floods of 2005

(including Carlisle), the summer floods of 2007 and most recently the Cumbrian floods in 2009. In each of these cases many places were flooded for the first time, so that residents had little if any awareness of flood risk.

During the summer 2007 floods, which took place during the wettest summer since records began, 55,000 properties were flooded, approximately 7,000 people were rescued by the emergency services and 13 people died (The Pitt Review p ix). Following the 2007 floods The Pitt Review commissioned work to update the Foresight study. “The key message from the update is that the effects of climate change may be more extreme than had previously been estimated... “(p xi). The review states that “events of this kind are expected to become more frequent ... The country must adapt to increasing flood risk” (p xi). Whilst it is accepted that flooding is likely to be an increasing problem it is recognised that it will never be possible to protect people totally from flooding and therefore the impacts must be mitigated (DEFRA 2006, Environment Agency 2003, Johnson and Priest 2008). In order to alleviate the often devastating effects it is necessary to understand the full range of impacts, not just the more obvious physical factors. Once this is better understood strategies can be developed to help residents overcome these impacts as far as possible.

### **1.2.2 The changing paradigm of disaster research**

Disaster research has undergone a ‘paradigm shift’ in the last thirty or so years. There has been a move away from conceptualising disasters in purely physical terms, where the physical properties of the hazard and the physical damage were the focus of research. Instead there has been increasing recognition of the socially constructed nature of disasters and the need to investigate social processes alongside physical ones (Blaikie et al. 1994, Canon 2000, Enarson and Morrow 1998, Fordham 1998, Hewitt 1997, Wisner et al. 2004). There are two main strands or perspectives in this shift, one which focuses on risk and the other on vulnerability. These have impacted on flood research in different ways. The wide ranging, influential and complex literature on risk is considered first. This is then followed by the vulnerability literature, within which tradition this research is located.

Risk has become a key concept in the social sciences; it is claimed by some to be the central organising principle of society, so that we have become what Beck terms a ‘Risk Society’ (1992). The concept of risk goes well beyond hazards such as floods and is applied to all aspects of life. For example it is claimed that in “current sociology it is almost banal to make the claim we live in a risk society” (O’ Malley 2004:1). As Renn (2008:xiiv)

describes “risk plays a major role in most contemporary theories about modern or post-modern societies”. It has generated a huge literature which contains a number of often competing theoretical approaches (Arnoldi 2009, Lupton 1999). It is not possible to consider these in detail here but a brief overview of the main approaches are outlined and their implications for this research considered.

Risk has been central in attempts to explain the conditions of late modernity. Two figures have been particularly influential in this, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. They have come independently to largely similar conclusions, although there are important differences in their work (Arnoldi 2008, Lupton 1999). Beck uses the term ‘risk society’ to describe his belief that the distribution of risk has replaced the distribution of wealth as the central issue facing society. His argument is that new risks and hazards are systematically produced as a consequence of modernisation (Beck 1992). “In the modernization process, more and more *destructive* forces are also being unleashed, forces before which the human imagination stands in awe” (Beck 1992:20 *italics in original*). He claims we are now in a stage of ‘reflexive modernization’ where it is not tradition that is modernised but industrial society (Beck 1992:11). It is a “‘radicalization’ of modernity, which breaks up the premises and contours of industrial society and opens paths to another modernity” (Beck 1994:3). Giddens agrees on many points but prefers the term “high modernity” (1994a:91).

Giddens like Beck sees current uncertainties “as springing from the realization that the claims of modernity for human progress have been shown not to be as utopian as once was thought” (Lupton 1999:72). “To the enlightenment thinkers, and many of their successors, it appeared that increasing information about the social and natural worlds would bring increasing control over them “(Giddens 1994a:58). Yet this has not been the case, in ‘high modernity’ where ‘tradition’ is lost there is increasing complexity and uncertainty (Giddens 1994a). Giddens differs from Beck in that he sees risks as having both positive and negative aspects. “Risk is not just a negative phenomenon – something to be avoided or minimized. It is at the same time the energizing principle of a society that has broken away from tradition and nature ... Opportunity and innovation are the positive side of risk” (Giddens 1998: 63). There are three aspects from Beck and Giddens work that have particular relevance for this research. Whilst these ideas are introduced below they are discussed further at relevant points later in the thesis.

A major argument of both is that it is individuals (rather than some form of social group) that are increasingly seen as the locus of responsibility for risks. Beck in particular discusses this trend in his concept of individualization. (The consequences of this for



community are discussed in Chapter 3). This individualization means that risks have become individualized and subjectivized so that the negative consequences of risks are more likely to be seen as a result of personal failure (Beck 1992:136). Individuals have to take on much more responsibility, they have to weigh up and decide amongst conflicting 'expert' information. One example of this is the shifting of flood responsibility onto individuals and communities. This shifting of flood responsibility can be seen at both international and national levels as will be seen in the following section (1.2.3).

Whilst individuals have to take on more responsibility and have to weigh up more and more expert information the expert has come to be regarded with greater suspicion (Beck 1992, Giddens 1994a&b). The experts reach has become ever more extensive, spreading into more and more aspects of life. Whilst paradoxically, at the same time, there is a loss of faith in expertise and an increasing mistrust of the 'experts' (Beck 1992, Giddens 1994a&b). "Until the sixties, science could count on an uncontroversial public that believed in science, but today its effort and progress are followed with mistrust. People suspect the unsaid, add in the side effects and expect the worst" (Beck 1992:169). This changing relationship is said to have come about because of the complexity and interrelatedness of the new risks created by modernisation (Beck 1992) and the spread of technology into every aspect of our lives, from our bodies to global systems (Giddens 1994a). Technology and its associated risks are seen as the driving force behind these changes and therefore technological risks have been the major concern of work following these approaches, rather than 'natural hazards' such as flooding. However, the impacts on the environment are often the focus of this research.

The simple distinction between natural and technological hazards has always been questionable (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis 2004) but this becomes even more difficult to sustain when we consider the impacts of global warming and the interventions made to control the outcomes. For example the use of flood defences or other forms of flood management. Both Beck and Giddens argue that past understandings of society and nature as separate have collapsed. Beck claims that "nature can no longer be understood *outside of society*, or *society outside of nature* ", he describes this as the "societalization of nature" (Beck 1992:80). Similarly Giddens talks of the "socialization of nature" (1994a:77) where "nature is "thoroughly transfigured by human intervention" ... to the extent that Giddens can talk of "the end of nature" (Giddens 1994a:77). As he points out "[n]atural disasters obviously still happen, but the socialization of nature in the present day means that a diversity of erstwhile natural systems are now products of human decision-making" (Giddens 1994a:78). This will have implications for both the understanding and the management of what have traditionally been seen as 'natural hazards' such as floods.

However to date approaches within this 'risk perspective' have paid little attention to the natural hazards.

Whilst widely read and extremely influential Beck and Giddens have also been widely criticised (Arnoldi 2009). Some of this criticism has come from the 'governmentality approach' to risk. This perspective shares an interest in the way risk operates in late modernity, with a particular focus on how it is used in governance. "Governmentality scholars study in depth the usage of risk, along with other scientific and statistical concepts, because these types of knowledge have been crucial in constructing a governable population and in conducting the conduct of members of that population (Arnoldi 2008:54). "This approach means studying concepts of risk and their usage rather than real risks or the perception of these" (Arnoldi 2008:55). Its approach is more strongly constructionist than that of Beck and Giddens (Lupton 1999).

O' Malley (2004:9) claims that governmental studies "explore and dissect what are often 'details' of government that fall beneath the grand gaze of universal theories of risk society and global catastrophe, yet which structure existence in many important ways". He provides an interesting example of how drought in the Australian outback has "been redefined by governments from being a 'natural disaster' to being a 'manageable risk'" (2004:9). This then constitutes drought as "something farmers should anticipate and make provision for, rather than regard as an unforeseen cataclysm requiring state intervention" (2004:9). This illustrates how risk definitions can be used to manipulate who is responsible. He argues that there is a 'responsibilisation' of risk by government, so that generally responsibility for risk management is devolved downwards, on to individuals, families and communities (2004:72). However O'Malley also warns against "a kind of fatalism of risk (2004:26) which may result from risk society approaches. Instead arguing that we should ask what "configurations or ensembles of risk and uncertainty are being deployed, to what end?" (2004:27).

Another key approach to risk within the social sciences has been the cultural theory of risk developed by Mary Douglas. She has been critical of the idea of objective risk and psychological approaches which focus on individuals and ignore cultural factors (Arnoldi 2009:40). There have been a number of criticisms of some of the specifics of her work (Lupton 1999, Renn 2008). Despite questions about the validity of the grid-group model it is widely recognised that the cultural approach to risk is a valuable one. "The most important point about of Douglas's cultural theory is that perceptions of risk, including what makes for the gravest risks and who is to be blamed, are strongly biased by the classificatory and normative systems of a given culture" (Arnoldi 2009:40). As Renn's

following comment makes clear it has even had an influence on the more technical, cognitive approaches to risk: "... cultural analysis has demonstrated to the risk professionals that the concept of risk assessment as well as the rationale behind it cannot claim universal validity and legitimizing power among all groups and cultures" (Renn 2008:38).

As has been intimated above there is a tension between the 'techno-scientific' approaches to risk and the 'sociocultural approaches' (Lupton 1999). This relationship has at times been rather antagonistic (Arnoldi 2009, Lupton 1999, Renn 2008). Renn (2008:2) characterises this debate as one of social constructivism versus realism: "There is a major debate among risk professionals about the nature of risks: are risks social constructions or real phenomena?" The psychometric approaches to risk with their realist approach have limited relevance for this research with its more constructionist approach. It is interesting to note however that these approaches recognise the limitations of their previous focus on the individual, divorced from their social context. There are a number of attempts to create a framework which can incorporate the different approaches. The social amplification of risk framework (SARF) for example "is based on the thesis that the social and economic impacts of an adverse event are determined by a combination of the direct physical consequences of the event and the interaction of psychological, social, institutional and cultural processes ..." (Renn 2008:38). This illustrates the importance of a situated, local understanding of responses to risks and the necessity to consider aspects such as community.

Whilst 'risk' is an increasingly influential concept within the social sciences and has some relevance for this research, particularly in the changing relationship between 'expert and lay person' it has little to say directly about flood risk as yet. "The study of human responses to flood risk has become somewhat separated from the study of risk more generally" (Harries 2007:15). It is "psychological cognitivism that continues to dominate natural hazards research" (Harries 2007: 15) which offers little to this research. Others have also warned of the dangers of some risk based approaches to extreme events. Sarewitz, Pielke and Keykhah (2003) argue that risk based policy approaches which focus on acquiring probabilistic information about events can actually lead to increased vulnerability. They argue for 'vulnerability management' rather than 'risk management' as "*reduced vulnerability always means reduced outcome risk, but reducing the outcome risk does not always reduce vulnerability* (2003:809 *italics in original*). They believe that "[t]oo often vulnerability lies in the shadow of risk or worse still, the concepts are integrated with a net result of losing focus on vulnerability as a distinct contributor to the outcomes that we observe but seek to avoid" (2003:810).

Whilst recognising the contribution of the risk literature, and the increasing importance of the related notion of responsibility, this research is situated within the vulnerability approach, which remains at the fore in the study of 'natural disasters'. This approach has focused on the impacts upon those affected and the social nature of the construction of vulnerability and provides a body of knowledge and literature to build upon. Flood research within this tradition has begun to reveal the long-term impacts that flooding has on people's lives, which often last far beyond the more evident physical damage to property and the surrounding area (Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1998, Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003, Tapsell et al. 1999). As Tapsell (2000:i) notes the "flood event and subsequent recovery process, may impact upon people's physical, mental and social well being in many different ways".

This recognition and a developing understanding of the far reaching effects on individuals and social structures has come out of the change in disaster research that has taken place over the last two decades or so. This has moved away from conceptualising disasters in purely physical terms, where the physical properties of the hazard and the physical damage were the focus of research. The 'vulnerability perspective' recognises that disasters such as floods are essentially social events and that vulnerability is largely derived from the political, economic and social context in which people live. Vulnerability is therefore socially constructed and determined by factors in people's everyday lives (Blaikie et al. 1994, Canon 2000, Enarson and Morrow 1998, Fordham 1998, Hewitt 1997, Wisner et al. 2004).

Given that people's vulnerability to disasters such as floods, and therefore also their resilience, is rooted in their everyday lives, it is necessary to understand those everyday structures. As the authors of the influential book *At Risk* argue, disasters "should not be segregated from everyday living ... the risks involved in disasters must be connected with the vulnerability created for many people during their normal existence" (Wisner et al. 2004:4). "Disasters are not just about the extraordinary and the unusual, they are also about the ordinary and the everyday and a better understanding of the importance of these domains would aid the disaster management process" (Fordham 1998:140). As Quarantelli (2005:341) notes when discussing the future of disaster research, the "social dynamics and processes of communities and societies are where we should seek answers". This research focuses on the social impacts of flooding and the 'everyday' structure of the 'local community'.

### 1.2.3 The increasing role of local community in disaster policy

Community is an increasingly popular notion in the context of disaster management, here in the UK, across other countries and at the international scale. This is part of a wider change in the way disasters are perceived and managed by those responsible for dealing with them. As Buckle, Marsh and Smale (2003) describe, disaster management within both the developed and developing worlds is in the process of moving from a 'hazard management' paradigm, through a 'risk management' paradigm, and they argue towards a 'consequence management' paradigm. This moves the focus of policy attention away from the hazard itself and how to defend against it, instead placing greater emphasis "on understanding, prioritizing and dealing with the full range of consequences" (Buckle, Marsh and Smale 2003:82). One result of this shift is to give more attention to those affected and greater consideration of how these people can be better involved in the flood risk management process. This move has tended to focus around the notion of communities and how best to involve them. This process is operating unevenly and approaches to implementation differ, so the form that this takes varies between countries and organisations.

Internationally this move to risk management can be seen in the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) which was launched following the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (INDNR 1990-2000). The ISDR is shifting its emphasis away from "disaster response and relief" (Briceño 2004:3). The focus is now on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and community-based disaster risk management projects (CBDRM). The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is "the key instrument for implementing disaster risk reduction" (2007a:2) and the ISDR claims that "[l]ocal communities are the essential cornerstone in our effort to make the HFA a practical tool for saving lives and livelihoods" (UN/ISDR 2007b:iii). However, whilst community is given prominence it is taken to be a self evident and unproblematic term, for example in 2008 it was not considered necessary to list community in the ISDR's terminology of disaster risk reduction. In the drive to 'community resilience' debates have to date largely revolved around the issue of defining resilience rather than community (Twigg 2007). There is little consideration of possible conflicts within what might be considered a single community, to say nothing of what constitutes a community.

Similarly within England (in terms of policy this is located within England and Wales) a move towards involving local communities is apparent. This shift is taking place in a complex and frequently changing policy context. Government flood management policies have changed radically over the last 50 years, three key phases have been identified starting with 'land drainage', moving through 'flood defence' finally to 'flood risk

management' (Johnson et al. 2005, Tunstall et al. 2004). There is again evident a move away from the traditional focus on defending against floods to a focus on managing the flood risks, bringing into Flood Risk Management a much broader range of concerns than was seen with the flood defence approach. These changes in policy have been accelerated by the often unprecedented flood events in recent years which can act as catalysts of change (Johnson et al. 2005). There is also the more widespread pressure, discussed earlier, to shift responsibility for risk from institutions to individuals. Predictions, such as those made by the *Foresight Report*, that flooding is likely to be an increasing problem, also add to the pressure for policy change.

'Making space for water' (DEFRA 2005a) is the "key policy context for FRM". Published in March 2005 this strategy was designed for the next 20 years and beyond (Twigger-Ross 2005:9). As the name suggests it recognises that the state cannot always keep the water out, rather we must learn how to live with it (Johnson and Priest 2008). Based around the principles of sustainable development (see *Securing the Future - UK Government sustainable development strategy*, DEFRA 2005b) it argues the need for a more integrated approach to flooding, with a greater emphasis on the relatively neglected social component of sustainable development. "We will involve stakeholders at all levels of risk management, and we will achieve a better balance between the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) in our risk management activities" (DEFRA 2005a:8).

It is envisioned that the strategy will make the public more aware of flood and coastal erosion risks and that they will be "empowered to take suitable action themselves where appropriate" (DEFRA 2008:1). These changes are shifting risk responsibility away from the government, so that those at risk "are being increasingly required to take responsibility for the management of their own flood risk at a local community, business and individual household level (Johnson and Priest 2008:515). This illustrates the increasing responsabilisation (Arnoldi 2009, O'Malley 2004) of those at risk and the changing role between expert and layperson (Beck 1992, Giddens 1994a&b, Petts 2006). In this move community is again a common theme, being mentioned frequently in phrases such as sustainable communities, community well-being, community confidence, community partnerships, and community awareness, although these terms are used rather loosely. At present much of Making Space for Water "remains a vision rather than a detailed policy prescription ..." so how communities (however they are eventually defined) are to be integrated remains to be seen (Johnson and Priest 2008:516)

In 2008, following the floods of summer 2007, the Pitt Review was published. This was produced in response to what was described as “the country’s largest peacetime emergency since World War II” (Pitt 2008:vii). The role that those at risk must play themselves, in particular local communities, is reinforced by the review. It is noted that many communities pulled together and helped one another. The review encourages this and “strongly endorse[s] the announcements in the National Security Strategy relating to the promotion of Community Resilience by government in partnership with local organisations” (Pitt 2008:xxxiv). This strategy recognises the limitations of the government and suggests that “[h]uman and social resilience, often at the community level, will continue to be crucial to ensuring British citizens’ future security and well-being” (Cabinet Office 2008:42). Community is again a central feature and by the use of the term ‘community level’ it can be inferred that they are referring in this instance to local communities, rather than non geographic communities of interest.

Following the recognition of the role that local people will have to play themselves (Pitt 2008:xxxiv) recommendation 70 of the Pitt Review advises that the “Government should establish a programme to support and encourage individuals and communities to be better prepared and more self-reliant during emergencies, allowing the authorities to focus on those areas and people in greatest need” (Pitt 2008:xxxv). How this is to be achieved is not yet detailed but some suggestions are made, one of which is to encourage more local communities to invest in Flood Risk Management measures (Recommendation 24 Pitt 2008:xx). Another approach is through Local Authorities who “should coordinate a systematic programme of community engagement in their area during the recovery phase” (Recommendation 76 Pitt 2008:xxxviii). ‘Community action’ is seen to have “considerable potential for the future in wide area disasters” as “the authorities are overwhelmed and people have little choice other than to help themselves” (Pitt 2008:xxxiv).

Research also supports the view that communities need to be involved in the FRM process. “Successful management of the hazards, risks, impacts and consequences is not possible without community commitment and involvement” (Buckle et al. 2001:21). Therefore both research and recent policy developments suggest an increasing role for communities, who will be expected to take on more responsibility for themselves during flooding. These local communities are to be supported by government in some as yet unspecified way so that they may achieve this self-reliance. However, not only is it unclear what is to be expected of these communities, little consideration has been given to the complexity of the local community.

### 1.2.4 The problems with community

Community may be an increasingly important concept in FRM but it remains largely unexamined and undefined in the flood/disaster context. The term is taken to be self evident and unproblematic. “In conventional emergency management, communities are viewed in spatial terms: groups of people living in the same area or close to the same risks” (Twigg 2007:6). The dangers of this simplistic approach have been recognised, particularly in Australia where they are somewhat ahead of England and Wales in the move to a Flood Risk Management approach. In an examination of the concept of community in the Australian emergency context, it was found to be “used in a sweeping fashion without the recognition that all the people in the community may have in common is that they live or work in the vicinity of the risk; here community is defined implicitly by proximity” and the same is largely true in the policies in England and Wales discussed above (Marsh & Buckle 2001:5). However this relationship between the location (space) and the community (society) in local community is not straightforward.

Communities may be categorised in a number of ways but one that has been persistent since the concept’s inception is the urban-rural division. The reasons for this are considered in detail in the following section ‘Community lost, saved or liberated?’, what is relevant here are the ways in which the concepts of urban and rural influence flood related policy. At a broad scale flood management in England has since the Second World War shifted from a largely rural one concerned with agricultural land drainage towards a more urban flood management focus (Johnson and Priest 2008). Within the FRM policy literature the terms urban and rural are used frequently (Twigger-Ross 2005). This should be seen in the context of the government’s wider policy where “there has been an increased emphasis put on both urban and rural environments by central government” (Twigger-Ross 2005:9). Rural and urban communities are understood to have different problems which need different solutions and policy is tailored accordingly.

This is true of Flood Risk Management as well as wider policy. Research by DEFRA and the Environment Agency (EA) into the impact of flooding on urban and rural communities has suggested that it would be beneficial to both FRM and urban and rural policy agendas if they were to develop a much closer relationship. However, it was recognised that “there is still work to be done to unpack the relationships between impacts of flooding and specific communities” such as rural and urban (Twigger-Ross 2005:36). One of the recommendations for further work was to carry out detailed work examining the social impacts of flooding on an urban community and a rural community. This recommendation was published after this research had started but it is interesting to note that they have come to similar conclusions on the type of research needed. Quarantelli



(2005:383), in his suggestions for a new disaster research agenda, has also highlighted the need for more work on rural areas.

There may be an increasing recognition in flood management (and disaster management more widely) of the social nature and social impacts of disasters but there is little research into this at the community level (Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003). This is because research within the relatively new vulnerability perspective has to date focused on the experiences of individuals and households (Twigger-Ross 2005, Walker et al. 2005). Where wider vulnerabilities have been considered this has tended to focus on certain social groups who may be particularly vulnerable; such as the elderly, women, children, people with disabilities, etc. (Blaikie et al. 1994, Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003, Wisner et al. 2004). Therefore relatively little is known about the impacts on, and response of, social structures in the local area. Existing research however suggests that flooding does impact on the local community and that this needs further research (Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003).

There is considerable evidence that disaster such as floods can have a positive affect, and create or reinforce a sense of community (Tapsell et al. 1999, Tapsell 2000). The 'therapeutic community' is well documented in the disaster literature (Erikson 1994, Flint and Luloff 2005, Freudenberg 1997, Gurney 1977, Perry and Lindell 1978, Tapsell et al. 1999). What are less well known are the processes that operate to produce this effect and the longer term implications and progression of this phenomenon. There is also some evidence to suggest that the therapeutic community may be more prevalent in so called 'natural disasters' such as flooding rather than in technological or industrial disasters (Freudenberg 1997). In these types of disasters, particularly examples of environmental contamination, the 'corrosive community' or 'conflictual community' is thought to be prevalent, where communities are weakened and divided leading to conflict (Couch 1996, Freudenberg 1997, Shriver and Kennedy 2005). However flood research has also found evidence of divisions following flooding, which is often based on the division of resources and the perceived unfairness to certain groups (Dynes and Quarantelli 1975, Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1995, Tapsell and Tunstall 2001).

Despite the evidence of conflicts, there has been a tendency in some of the literature on vulnerability and resilience to suggest that communities are always benign and positive in their response to floods, not recognising that capabilities of one group can be exercised at the expense of another (Cannon 2000). Disasters may also damage a community's capacity to provide support, just when it is most needed. For example, the move to temporary accommodation may disrupt women's informal support networks within the

community (Enarson and Morrow 1997, Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1998). Whilst further research is essential, research findings do not automatically translate into policy change. The vulnerability perspective has been established within academia for 20 years or more but its uptake by policy has been slow and limited.

### **1.2.5 Community responsibilities**

The increasing policy emphasis on local community may be seen as recognition of the role that communities already play in disasters such as floods, where local people often undertake much of the rescue and rehabilitation work. Flooding in particular takes place at a local scale and often requires local action as it tends to inhibit, at least initially, aid from outside of the area. This change in policy could therefore be understood as a positive recognition of the vital role that those at risk have to play, and their right to be involved in the disaster management process (Buckle, Marsh and Smale 2003:82). Alternatively, it may also be seen as an attempt to shift responsibility away from the state on to those who are at risk. If there is not sufficient support for communities and a corresponding shift in resources or decision making powers, then it may simply be seen as a way to reduce expenditure at a time when increasing flooding is placing more pressure on limited resources (Manuta et al. 2004:xxiii). This is a situation that would be similar to that in Britain during the 1980s, where 'community' became a metaphor for the absence or withdrawal of services by the state, in policies such as 'care in the community' (Hoggett 1997:10).

The call for the involvement of local communities implies some form of collective action. What form this is to take is as yet unclear and more work will need to be done to clarify this. However, as a minimum, it requires locally organised networks based around a community identity. The difficulty is that to date the term community has been used rather unproblematically, usually to mean a group of residents living together in a particular but often undefined location. It is not enough to assume a group of people, at risk of flood, living in the same location will be a clearly identifiable, well networked group of people, who share a common aim based around their residence. Community is a highly contested term and FRM needs to engage with this complexity if community involvement is to be successful. The next section explores this complex community literature and considers the implications of the conceptualisation of the concept for flooded communities.

### 1.3 Community lost, saved or liberated?

Disaster management is certainly not alone in using the term community as though it were something straightforward and desirable. “There is a general consensus that ‘community’ is a good thing... [p]oliticians, religious leaders, the media, the police, social activists and many other interest groups all tend to use the term in this positive sense ...” (Pain et al. 2001:69). The often unproblematic use of the term local needs to be understood in the context of the changing discourses of community. The community literature is extensive and highly contested. Since its academic beginnings in the late 1800s community has continued to be discussed and debated, its study being described as resembling a ‘roller-coaster ride’ (Pain et al. 2001). An adequate definition has proved particularly elusive. This together with a lack of consensus on its meaning led to Stacey’s famous suggestion in 1969 that that the term community be abandoned altogether (Bell and Newby 1971, Hoggett 1997, Stacey 1974). However, despite these theoretical difficulties the term has always remained popular outside of academia. Understanding the history of the concept is essential, for “‘old’ models of community cast a profound shadow over contemporary manifestations and debates” (Day 2006:32).

The theories of local community can be characterised into three debates: community lost, community saved and community liberated (Wellman 1979). Community lost is associated with the concept’s academic roots; in this discourse local community is being destroyed by the forces of industrialisation and urbanisation. Community saved finds local communities alive and well, even in urban environments. This saw the start of the focus on networks, an approach that remains popular. Community liberated also sees the continuation of community but argues that it has been freed from the locality. The community networks are dispersed rather than tied to the locality and seen as largely free of the influence of space. The ideal of community set up in the community lost discourse, whilst most difficult to achieve, is the one that seems to retain most resonance, reoccurring frequently in public and policy discourses.

Community is a term that has become highly politicised and this has influenced the way in which concepts have developed. The concepts of communitarianism and social capital for example, have left academia and become popular ideas within New Labour’s government. Community is central to many of their policies as part of their ‘Third Way’ approach. Critics argue however that the view of the local proposed “suffers from a romance of local community ...” (Amin 2004:4). The current resurgence of interest in community is at least in part a response to anxieties about the effects of globalisation, and fears that this will lead to the destruction of local places. However, these discourses of the loss of authentic,

bounded local places are very similar to the community lost discourse (Massey 2003). The local is seen as a victim of the global in the same way that the community was a victim of modernisation. Rather than seeing networks as either freed from space or tied to space, this research explores the changing relationship between networks and locality, between space and society.

### 1.3.1 Community lost?

The pervasive 'community lost discourse' has been extremely influential over a long period of time (Clark 2007, Crow and Allan 1994, Day 2006, Delanty 2003). "For well over a century, the decline of community, and the loss of what this represents to society, has provided one of the more consistent themes of social commentary and public discourse" (Day 2006:181). In this discourse local communities are associated with pre-industrial 'traditional communities'; a view that is only sustainable if selective, romanticised views of the past are adopted (Crow and Allan 1994). The community lost discourse can be traced back to its early academic conceptualisations within sociology and "it has been the concern of sociologists for more than two hundred years ..." (Bell and Newby 1971:21). "Sociology came into being as a distinct discipline in order to tackle the novel problems of modernity: increased social and geographical mobility; the problems of urbanization, industrialization, and forms of democratization; the decline of religion" (Frazer 1999:68). Community was seen in positive terms and its study started with the fear that it was being lost, destroyed by the forces of modernity (Bell and Newby 1971, Day 2006). The assumption that this traditional, pre modern way of life and particular social organisation constituted community meant that it was inevitable that communities were seen as lost once this way of life changed.

Tönnies is usually considered the founding father of the theory of community (Day 2006, Hoggett 1997, Pain et al. 2001). His legacy has been the dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, although some authors' claim that his work has been to varying degrees misinterpreted or misrepresented (Davies and Herbert 1993, Day 2006, Delanty 2003). These terms are usually translated as community and society but sometimes as community and association (Day 2006) or community and mass society (Valentine 2001). *Gemeinschaft* or community is associated with traditional, feudal, rural life. For Tönnies there were three central elements: blood or kinship; soil, land or place and intimate human relationships (Bell and Newby 1971). The community was understood to act together for the common good (Day 2006). The rural village community was seen by Tönnies as an outstanding example of community (Day 2006, Valentine 2001). *Gesellschaft* or society was defined in opposition to community and it is "essentially

everything that community is not” (Bell and Newby 1971:24). Relationships were impersonal and individualistic, based on exchange and need rather than emotional attachment, existing at the large scale rather than the local (Bell and Newby 1971, Day 2006, Valentine 2001).

The legacy of this work and many studies that have followed is a number of problematic notions of what constitutes a community. Communities were understood to be small, rural, stable, bounded, holistic entities that were somehow ‘naturally’ occurring and closely tied to the location. The community was a complete and self sufficient social system. This focus on community as a single, harmonious, homogenous entity meant that little attention was paid to internal relations and differences of opinion or the impact of external forces. Social relationships are understood to be close and the community works together for a common goal and shares a common moral code. Extended family networks are an integral component in this, helping to bind people together and to the place. Individuals were understood to live the majority of their lives within the community; it supplied their social, material and spiritual needs. This led to the dense, interlinked, multiplex relations associated with community (Bell and Newby 1971, Frazer 1999). The rural, pre modern lifestyle was somewhat idealised (Bell and Newby 1971, Davies and Herbert 1993, Ilbery 1998, Williams 1973) contributing to the view of community as always positive, a force for good.

The urban/rural dichotomy has been one of the most persistent themes from this early work. Discussing the social relations associated with community, Philips notes how “[a]ccording to Tönnies, and more especially later writers who have drawn upon his ideas, these social relations were linked to a spatial division between urban and rural space. Rural areas were frequently described as places of community or *Gemeinschaft* and urban places were linked places of impersonal society or *Gesellschaft*” (Philips 1998:33). After Tönnies the debate came to be shaped by the conflict of town and countryside (Delanty 2003). In this debate the countryside or rural is often associated with an imagined “bucolic, pastoral community of harmony and togetherness” forgetting “the reality of most historic rural communities: that of unremitting toil, the constant threat of starvation and depredation by outsiders, internal rivalries, frequent back-biting and a persuasive intrusiveness” (Davies and Herbert 1993:2).

As Pahl (2005:633) notes, developments in historical demography and social history in the late twentieth century have meant that the “notion that there ever was a golden age of traditional community life has now been effectively destroyed by historians and cultural theorists”. Yet the rural/urban dichotomy has passed into everyday usage and although it

has been “put to death by several writers on the subject it still refuses to lie down” (Bell and Newby 1971:42). This remains true more than thirty years after their comment was made. The ‘rural idyll’ remains a potent narrative which continues to shape expectation of local communities (Ilbery 1998, Neal and Walters 2008, Valentine 2001).

In the period following community’s academic conception, approximately 1920 to 1940, many of the dichotomies set up earlier were reinforced. ‘Community studies’ was an influential and long lasting approach to tackling community. Researchers would go to and immerse themselves in a particular community in order to understand how it worked in its entirety. Many of these early ‘community studies’ made use of the techniques of classical anthropology. By labelling small, cohesive, bounded groups as communities and then finding and studying these groups as single entities, the idea that this constituted a community was perpetuated.

The Chicago School was also influential during and beyond this period, influencing geography, sociology and urban studies until the 1960s and 70s (Valentine 2001). Investigating different groups within Chicago it used an analogy with plant communities to describe the residential patterns found. Community was seen to be natural, homogenous and constant (apart from periods of invasion and succession). This approach led to the locating, mapping and measuring of neighbourhood communities (Valentine 2001). The rural was again privileged over the urban as Wirth drew on Tönnies typology to show how rural ‘primary’ relationships were fundamentally better than urban ‘secondary’ relationships (Pain et al. 2001, Stevenson 2003).

These early studies set the pattern of debate over what constitutes a community and these continue into the present time. Up until this time the location and the community were inseparable, there were only local communities. There was no explicit theorising on the role of space at this time. Rather it is assumed that communities can be mapped, that they are an object which a line can be drawn around. The structuralist-functionalist approach which underpinned the early studies saw communities as well functioning, coherent wholes (Pain et al. 2001). This functionalist underpinning saw social systems as something over which individuals had very little control (Crow 2002:6). The view of space that is implied is rather deterministic, people are seen to have little agency. The community lost discourse has led to a rather idealised and simplified view of local communities being widely used, in public and academic as well as policy discourses. It is perhaps ironic that it is concern for the loss of community that drives this view of community, but at the same time community is then seen as the solution to so many problems, particularly in current policies.

### 1.3.2 Community saved or liberated?

Dissatisfaction with current conceptions of community to adequately explain modern life grew, as fewer examples of ‘traditional’ or ‘folk’ communities could be found. As lives became less focused on a small area new ways of examining communities were sought. This saw the development of what could be called the network approach. The 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of the British community studies, which produced a number of studies that are now considered classics. Researchers such as Young and Willmott (1957) in *Family and Kinship in East London* found examples of close-knit networks of family and local people, and claimed that local or neighbourhood communities had survived and prospered in contemporary industrial societies, although these were later destroyed by slum clearances. Bott (1957, 1971:99) in *Family and social network* suggested that “the immediate social environment of urban families is best considered not as the local area in which they live, but rather as the network of actual social relations they maintain regardless of whether these are confined to the local area or run beyond it’s boundaries ...”. Bott is usually credited, along with Barnes, with being the first to use the concept of networks. Despite the criticisms of this approach, which can be seen in the following section, the idea of networks remains popular and they are the focus of currently popular approaches such as social capital.

With ‘community saved’ the focus was now on the networks, rather than the location, but a restricted spatial area with a fairly stable and dense network of social relations was still seen as an essential part of a community. However this relationship between the location (space) and the social networks (society) still remains unproblematised and unexplored. Local links with extended family were still understood to be a vital part of local community, in fact both Bott’s, and Young and Willmott’s studies explicitly concern family as their titles suggest. Critics have suggested that these studies had an “overly romanticised view of ... working-class hardship” and that “[s]ocial divisions within the community and within the household were glossed over” (McDowell 1997:62). Like earlier work community is understood in positive terms, therefore little attention is given to disagreement or conflict. Also, along with the earlier American community studies, many were criticised for being empirically rich but lacking in theorisation (Bell and Newby 1974, Crow 2002, Hoggett 1997). It became impossible to pin down what was being described by the term community, as it was being used in so many different ways under the guise of ‘community studies’ (Elias 1974:ix).

By the late 1960s problems of definition and criticisms that the community studies approach was theoretically barren (Hoggett 1997), along with a new focus on bigger structural explanations such as economics and politics, led to the argument that

community was not a useful concept (Pain et al. 2001). Stacey (1974) argued that not only was it still associated with its mythical, romantic roots, but neither were its newer meanings any more analytically valid. Community as social relations within a defined geographical area could never define these geographical boundaries, for “what system of social relations can one say has any geographic boundary except a global one” (Stacey 1974:15). She argued instead for the use of the term ‘local social system’. This led to community largely disappearing from the social sciences. Many of these problems arose from the implicit assumptions of space. Attempts to define community as something which can be circled on a map are bound to fail given peoples’ mobility even in pre industrial times (Davies and Herbert 1993, Wellman 1999).

Social relations continue to be of interest to researchers as the popularity of network studies illustrates but much of this discards the notion of community altogether, although some continue to work with the idea. Barry Wellman and his associates have since the 1970’s developed social network analysis and they continue to engage with the idea of community. Wellman argues that in the developed world “communities have changed from densely-knit “Little Boxes” (densely-knit, linking people door-to-door) to “Glocalized” networks (sparsely-knit but with clusters, linking households both locally and globally) to “Networked Individualism” (sparsely-knit, linking individuals with little regard to space)” (2002:1). Most people then operate in “multiple, partial communities as they deal with shifting, amorphous networks of kin, neighbors, friends, workmates and organisational ties” (Wellman 2002:2). As Wellman says, if we define community socially rather than spatially then contemporary communities are rarely limited to neighbourhoods.

Wellman recognises the dangers of a network approach, which can sometimes be forgotten; “a network can be anything we want it to be, it depends on how we define it. When we change the definition, the conclusions change too” (Wellman 1996). Such work illustrates the way networks have changed over time in response to changing conditions, moving away from the dense clusters of networks that were once common. However it tells us little of residents’ relationship to their local area or how this environment shapes local social structures. Nor does the network approach explore how the enduring appeal of local community may form the basis around which local networks and identities’ can be constructed. As he himself argues, there is a need to bring “proximity” back into investigations of community (Wellman 1996:353).



### 1.3.3 Community as a policy prescription

Community as a concept may have waxed and waned in academia but it has remained widely used outside of it. Community has become a popular theme in the political discourses of both the left and the right (Delanty 2003, Macdonald et al. 2005). It appeals to the political left “as it appears to emphasize notions of group solidarity, collective action and responsibility, concepts that lie at the root of socialism. To the political right community has considerable appeal because it carries with it ideas of people taking responsibility for themselves, rather than relying on the state” (Pain et al. 2001:71). For politicians communities are seen to offer a ‘Third Way’ between highly statist policies and neo-liberal free-market policies. Community has become a central part of New Labour policies which see it as the solution to a whole range of social problems. It is now the case that “community involvement has been mainstreamed as a routine aspect of policy implementation, and few initiatives emanate from government without some anticipation that communities will be implicated in their delivery” (Day 2006:240). This is part of the wider shifting of responsibility from government to citizens: “a political discourse emphasising active citizen responsibility has, since the mid-1990’s, formed a central plank of the New Labour government’s agenda...” (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008:1327).

Giddens’ work has been particularly influential in the popularity of community. His ideas attempt to redefine the relationship between the state and the individual, with implications for the role of community. “Having abandoned collectivism, third way politics looks for a new relationship between the individual and the community, a redefinition of rights and obligations” (1998: 65). He argues that with “expanding individualism should come an extension of individual obligations” (1998:63). Giddens is concerned about a lack of civil society. “Civic decline is real and visible in many sectors of contemporary societies ... It is seen in the weakening sense of solidarity in some local communities and urban neighbourhoods, high levels of crime, and the break-up of marriages and families” (1988:78).

Giddens’ concern for a decline in civic life and what he sees as an overemphasis on rights rather than responsibilities has led to his focus on the community. The solution to these problems is “[c]ommunity renewal through harnessing local initiative” (1988:79). As he says the “theme of community is fundamental to the new politics ... ‘Community’ doesn’t imply trying to recapture lost forms of local solidarity; it refers to practical means of furthering the social and material refurbishment of neighbourhoods, towns and larger local areas” (1988:79). He is rather vague on exactly what he does mean by community and in his later book seems to retreat slightly from this focus. For example he accepts

some of the criticisms of communitarian thinking and believes that the “term ‘community’ does too much work in a communitarian theory” (2000:63). Whatever his current position on community and its definition there is no doubt his ideas have played a key role in the popularity of community in politics in the UK and the shifting of responsibilities from state to both communities and individuals.

Two ideas have been particularly influential in this resurgence of interest in communities: communitarianism and social capital. Both are based on the notion of local community but they are somewhat hazy in their definition of community. They are both to a large extent focused on networks but also share some of the idealisations of the community lost discourse. The terms are similar in that they understand community as a largely positive force, and they propose particular sorts of community that should be worked towards. Communitarianism refers not to a single idea but to a range of positions in social and political discourse (Frazer 1999). However its most well known proponent, and popular with government, is Amitai Etzioni (Day 2006, Hoggett 1997) and so it is particularly his vision of communitarianism that is considered here; a position Delanty describes as ‘civic republicanism’ or ‘civic communitarianism’ (2003). Social capital also refers to a number of viewpoints but it is Robert Putnam’s version that has been most widely influential, being popular inside and outside of academia.

Etzioni argues the need to redress the balance away from a focus on individual rights, back towards responsibilities. He describes communitarianism as “a social movement aiming at shoring up the moral, social and political environment” (Etzioni 1993:2007). He has been criticised for being moralistic and conservative (Day 2006, Hoggett 1997) and nostalgic about the past (Delanty 2003). His vision “evokes a lost age when neighbourhood ties were strong and families socialised their offspring more effectively than they are held to do today” (Hoggett 1997:13). Family, as in the early conceptualisations, is seen to play a central role in communities, by providing the moral foundations of society. It is claimed that strengthening communities will reduce a variety of social problems such as crime and disorder (Day 2006, Frazer 1999, Valentine 2001). New Labour’s vision of community, which has many similarities to Etzioni’s, “is one of a harmonious, socially and culturally mixed community” living together in a particular location (Lees 2003:78). However as critics point out this ideal assumes homogeneity of interests within a particular geographical location, yet geographical places “do not represent single uncontested entities ...” (Raco 2003:238).

Social capital shares a number of similarities with communitarianism, again the term covers a range of positions but it is Robert Putnam’s theories that have been widely

influential, including within the New Labour government (Day 2006). Putnam was also reputedly the single most cited author across the social sciences in the 1990s, which suggests something of the popularity and influence of the concept (Fine 2001). Like Etzioni, Putnam argues that America has seen a decline in community involvement or 'civic engagement' (Day 2006, Delanty 2003). Putnam himself favours a 'lean and mean' definition of his version of social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" and his earlier definition added "... that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 2007:137, Putnam 1996:1). Putnam's work, although popular within academia, has also been widely criticised. It has been argued that his ideas simply repeat the old community lost arguments (Day 2006, Brinkley 1996, Greeley 1997).

Critics also argue that the concept is confused (Fine 2001, Portes and Landolt 1996, Putzel 1998), of no new value and so broad in scope as to be meaningless (Fine 2001). However despite the many criticisms within academia it has been embraced outside it (Galston 1996). Putnam, whilst frequently discussing the decline of community and the benefits of 'civically engaged communities', provides little discussion of the complex notion of community. However, implicit in his arguments are a number of problematic conceptualisations. Putnam admits to the possibility of negative impacts of social capital but these are seen as aberrations and mostly it is viewed extremely positively (Day 2006, DeFilippis 2001). As DeFilippis (2001:789) notes, Putnam's version of social capital fails to consider the role of power relations in community construction. Putnam's reliance on national statistics for his studies in the USA (such as the General Social Survey), employing quantitative methods and using certain types of group membership as an indicator of community health, have led to a focus on measuring the quantities of particular, readily available networks, rather than an exploration of the quality and meaning of the relationships involved (Galston 1996). These problems have led some to question the value of Putnam's approach.

Amin (2004:15) for example is critical of this policy focus on local community or what he terms this new "spatial sensibility" as it treats space as "container spaces that can be rejuvenated through the magic of community". As he notes "It seems odd that at a time of increasing connections and flows between places linked to diverse geographies of globalization which routinely affect all places albeit in different ways, we should think of some places as somehow spatially enclosed" (Amin 2004:5). Frazer also notes how, despite the disruption of the relationship between community and locality, "the overwhelming amount of political communitarian discourse – theory, argument, reportage, analysis – focuses on locality" (Frazer 1999:145). As Amin argues current

approaches lack “critical assessment of what community really means ...” (2004:6). Community involvement may have the potential to provide positive outcomes but this must be based on an understanding of the complexity of communities and the construction of the local.

### **1.3.4 The local and the global**

To a large extent these policies and the current upsurge of interest in community can be seen as a reaction to concerns about globalisation, individualisation and post modernisation (Savage et al. 2005). As the boundaries of community are being stretched and transformed, so issues of locality, belonging and identity are raised again (Day 2006:181). Many understand these changes in largely negative terms, for example Bauman claims that community can no longer offer the security that people seek from it (Bauman 2001). This threat has led to a new appreciation of the local, which arises out of the fear of its loss. So that the “the new emphasis on local identity should be seen as an unmistakable consequence of globalization, and not, as ... may first appear, as a phenomenon that contradicts it” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:25). Whilst many lament the passing of local community, others see current social changes in a more positive way, where networks are understood to have been freed from the constraints of place, or as Wellman said, community has been liberated. There is then by some a “celebration of the increasing ‘disembeddedness’ of individuals and families and the potential that this creates for individualisation, choice, negotiation and democratic relationships” (Charles and Davies 2005:672).

Whether seen as positive or negative in its consequences, current discourses tend to understand globalisation as the destruction of the local by the global (Massey 2004). Therefore local communities and local identities are understood to be destroyed by globalisation, as networks become detached from space. Yet as Mitchell (2000:278) argues “it is simply not enough to understand the world as an amorphous “network society” in which deterritorialization is the ruling process of the day”. The previously taken-for-granted meaning of the local is being challenged but that doesn’t mean that local communities and local identities are being abandoned. “The nature of the local is undoubtedly being reworked by globalization, but it is not receding in importance” (Martin 2004:150).

These arguments of the loss of local or the loss of place bear a strong resemblance to the community lost arguments, reproducing “many of the themes contained in the long record of assertions about the decline of community” (Day 2006:190). This time rather than

being destroyed by modernisation and industrialisation, it is the increasing interconnectedness of the world, brought about by the speeding up of travel and communications, that is blamed (Delanty 2003). The discourses on loss of community parallel that on loss of place. For “the way of defining communities, as bounded and authentic, is very much like the way in which place has so often been described. Moreover, the same big story is now being told about place as is told about community: that suddenly now, in the age of globalisation, our places are being invaded and fragmented, and that we no longer have a sense of place” (Massey 2003:1). The current fragmentation and disruption is compared to an idealised past when places were supposedly inhabited by coherent and homogeneous communities (Massey 1991:24).

However places have never been entirely closed, and space is not simply distance, rather it plays an active role in constituting society (Pain et al. 2002). Therefore “the really serious question which is raised by speed-up, by ‘the communications revolution’ and by cyberspace, is not whether space will be annihilated but what kinds of multiplicities (patterning of uniqueness) and relations will be co-constructed with these new kinds of spatial configurations” (Massey 2005:91). Rather than bemoaning the loss of the local the question should be what is the relationship between the local and community in a world of increasing interconnectedness? How is the local community understood and defined, by whom and for what purposes?

## **1.4 Re-imagining Community**

The concept of community has been long debated as earlier discussions indicate. Although only a fraction of the literature could possibly be discussed here, and there is much that lies outside of the scope of this research, community having relevance to so many topics. So far concepts of community have been examined using Wellman’s characterisation of these debates into lost, saved or liberated. However none of the conceptualisations discussed so far have really solved the theoretical problems besetting community. Community as a distinct social structure or social entity within a particular location have been rejected. The search for a definition, either through a place or a network, led most people to discard the term or to divorce it from locality altogether. Yet local community remains as popular as ever outside of academia. How then is it possible to get a theoretical purchase on this slippery concept?

Following the dismissal of community as a useful idea in the late 1960s there has been a long period of relative quiet, with little research directly engaging with community. Community was seen by many as a concept that had been worked to death, hopelessly

vague and unable to say anything useful about society (Bell and Newby 1971, Davies and Herbert 1993, Day 2006, Valentine 2001). Since the 1980's there have been the beginnings of a slow revival of interest and retheorisation of community (Charles and Davies 2005, Crow 2002, Day 2006, Hoggett 1997). Whatever academics may have felt, the term community has continued to be widely used. As Day notes “[c]ommunity has a form of social existence because people want to believe in it. This is why recurrent attempts to kill off the concept have failed ...” (Day 2006:157). The recent work has engaged more explicitly with theoretical debates and attempted to find solutions to the theoretical difficulties. This has been done by understanding community not as a physical or social entity but as a mental construct. By conceptualising community not as a social structure but a structure of meaning it is possible to question who is defining it, how and for what purpose (Valentine 2001).

#### **1.4.1 Communities of the mind**

One influential study to approach community in this way was by the anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen, who published *The Symbolic Construction of Community* in 1985. Cohen argued that community was essentially symbolic in nature and that this was enshrined in the concept of the boundary (Cohen 1985:14). “Community exists in the minds of its members ... the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms” (Cohen 1985:98). His was a move away from an emphasis on social structure to an approach to community as a “phenomenon of culture ... which is meaningfully constructed by people through their symbolic prowess and resources” (1985:38). This marks an important shift, showing communities as fluid and open to change, something that is created by those living within them. Locality or spatiality is downplayed as community is understood less as a social practice or structure but rather a symbolic structure (Delanty 2003:2). Critics have argued though that to understand community today it is necessary to go beyond the symbolic level of meaning to the imagined dimension of group formation, as community is more about belonging than boundaries (Delanty 2003:189).

Whilst Cohen is widely read and quoted particularly by those interested in rural issues (Day 2006), it is Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of the ‘imagined community’ that seems to have captured the academic imagination. It entered geographical debate through interdisciplinary studies of nationalism and become widely used, however, there are few prolonged geographical assessments (Hague 2004:19). Anderson proposed that all nations are ‘imagined communities’ “because the members of even the smallest nation will never

know their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each they carry the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983:15). Anderson suggests that we should understand the nation as a social construction and not a natural entity (Hague 2004). In his work community has become “imagined human connections forged through the filters of identity” (Neal and Walters 2008:282). Like Cohen, this perspective emphasises the meanings people attach to communities and their use to include and exclude and to define boundaries, rather than their rootedness in local social relations (Charles and Davies 2005:675).

### **1.4.2 The limits of imagined community**

The move to understanding communities as a shared ideal that is socially constructed is certainly welcome, for it allows an examination of the appeal that the ideal of community continues to exert. It then becomes possible to consider the processes that shape notions of community. Anderson’s ideas have been widely taken up and it has been described as “one of the most important concepts in political geography” (Hague 2004:16). It has also been suggested that Anderson’s ideas can be applied at other scales, such as the local community (Rose 1990). Yet if his ideas are to be used to understand local communities rather than nations, his proposals have a number of limitations as they currently stand. There have been a number of critiques of *Imagined Communities*. Many of these in relation to its original application to the nation state, however a number have relevance for local community, and these are considered here.

A number of these criticisms arise because of the focus on the cultural aspects of community at the expense of spatial, material and social aspects, what has been called a “hollowing out of community” (Neal and Walters 2008:282). As Herzfeld points out, Anderson fails to explain why the appeal to nation is so effective so often, to the extent that people are prepared to die for it (Herzfeld 2005). Herzfeld (2005:6) argues that this is because Anderson “does not ground his account in the details of everyday life ... that would make it convincing for each specific case ...”. This is because Anderson’s concept severs the link between community and face-to-face social relations; deliberately decoupling “the idea of community from an actual base of interaction ...” in order to explain the appeal of nationhood (Amit 2002:6). There is therefore no way to connect relationships and networks to the ideal of community which is said to bind people together. Yet claims for community are most commonly a claim for social engagement, either recognition of a set of existing social relations or a call for new relations (Amit 2002:10). If the imagination of community is “fundamentally orientated towards the

mobilization of social relations” then it is necessary to understand the role of those relations (Amit 2002:10).

Anderson’s separation of community from actual social relations has implications in understanding how community is constructed. His top down approach, focusing on large scale processes, gives those within the community a very limited role in its construction. As Herzfeld discusses, Anderson “says in effect, that ordinary people have no impact on the form of their local nationalism, they are only followers” (2005:6) and this is also true at other scales, such as local community. If community is not realised through actual social relations then it is difficult to see how community members can contest and negotiate meanings. As Mitchell argues, it is not enough to imagine communities, more attention needs to be paid to how this imagination is ‘forged’ (Mitchell 2000). It is necessary to consider “the *practices* and exercises of power through which these bonds are produced and reproduced” (Mitchell 2000:269 *italics in original*). This would then allow an examination of who is defining the community, how, and for what purpose, exploring how the meanings are produced and reproduced.

Anderson’s work has tended to de-emphasise internal divisions and contradictions, focusing instead on the shared ideal (Day 2006:163). This focus on the achievement of solidarity or consensus, what Anderson describes as ‘fraternity’ and ‘comradeship’, rather than negotiation or conflict, is a criticism of conceptions of community more generally. Anderson uses the term community rather unproblematically and as Haesly (2005:4) argues, the “community” aspect of Anderson’s term is underdeveloped. This has led him to accept at face value some aspects of community, such as the tendency to see communities as homogenous, harmonious entities. As Day notes, this ‘weak spot’ concerning a lack of consideration of power relations arises “since he tends to treat community as an unproblematic idea, and this leads him to underestimate the extent to which members of a nation can differ in the form and intensity of their commitment to it. The ‘meaning’ of a nation among its members is never uncontentious, but always open to interpretation (Day and Thompson 2004)” (Day 2006:163). The same is also true of local communities, or any other type of community; meanings must always be negotiated and contested, even if the outcome is one of apparent solidarity.

The use of the term ‘imagined’ carries with it the danger that it may be seen only as fantasy, unreal or trivial, even though Anderson has not conceived it in this way. However his lack of consideration of material and social relations perhaps encourages a separation between the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’. In some studies there has been a tendency to separate the imagined (mental or symbolic) community from the so called ‘real’ or



material community. The 'real' community is seen to reside in social relations or institutions that can be observed, while the imagined is unobservable for it exists in the minds of its members and the two are understood to be entirely separate. For example, Stephen Conway in his paper on ageing and the imagined community, associates the imagined community with 'myth and fiction', and this is opposed to 'historical reality'. He claims for instance that Mrs Brown's community "is imagined because she has no face-to-face contact with those who people it" (Conway 2003:para. 3.10). The 'imagined' community is seen to be completely separate from the 'real' community of social networks.

In contrast, what is argued here is that the two aspects are inseparable, ideas and discourses of community will shape those social relations and in turn those relations will shape discourses and expectations of community. One should not be seen as any more 'real' than the other, and the mental aspects of community should not only be seen as an abstract and unobtainable ideal. As Neal and Walters (2008:282) suggest, "the imagined community gives rise to a series of material activities and everyday labours to realize more tangible and more concrete structures of community feeling". By reconnecting the social to the mental, it becomes possible to address the processes through which community is negotiated and envisaged. When considering local community, both the mental or discursive aspects and the social structures need to be understood within the context of changing conceptions of locality.

### **1.4.3 The role of space**

The final limitation of 'imagined community' as it is currently conceived is one that it shares with the previous conceptualisations. That is, it doesn't adequately consider the role of space and what part the local plays in local community. Conceptions tend to assume either that space determines the community or that the community (imagined or otherwise) operates largely free of any influence of space. The conceptualisation of space itself is rarely considered. This lack of spatiality is perhaps because geographers have shown surprisingly little interest in community, tending to prefer other, perhaps less contentious ideas, such as neighbourhood. For example, in 1990, Rose when discussing Anderson's ideas, noted how "geographers appear to have dropped the term almost entirely" (p425). She found it surprising "that what might be tentatively be described as the new school of radical-humanist geography, concerned as it is with questions of meaning, power and place, has neglected to study the idea of community as an idea ..." (p426). She suggested that "[n]o imagining so crucial should continue to be so neglected" (p426).

Searches of geographical journals show this is still largely the case (although some exceptions have been discussed within this review). The majority of the work reviewed here has come from anthropology and sociology, from the earliest work to the more recent revival. Two more recent books critically reviewing the debates surrounding the concept of community: Gerard Delanty's *Community* in 2003 and Graham Day's *Community and Everyday Life* (2006) are both by sociologists. So the conceptualisation of space, whilst it has received some attention remains under-researched. Community theorised as either symbolic or imagined, while useful, can explain little of the role of space, at any scale, national to local, if it is seen to reside entirely in the mind.

Local places continue to be important; "place and locality matter not least because these are where people reside, and in which notions of community, belonging and character are invested" (Macdonald et al. 2005:597). Globalisation does not operate in an undifferentiated way and certain groups of people are less able or less willing to take part in increasing mobility. The poor, the elderly, children and young mothers for example, may be forced to rely largely on local people and services (Clark 2007, Frazer 1999). People cannot live disembodied lives; individuals must always remain embodied in physical space, however mobile (Clarke 2007). So whilst the role that the local environment plays in people's lives has undoubtedly changed over time, it continues to matter. Rather than dismissing locality as irrelevant the question should be asked, what role does the local play in constructions of local community?

## **1.5 Re-locating community**

Whilst the re-theorisation of community as a mental construct offers a new way to approach the concept both the symbolic community and the imagined community have a number of limitations. What is proposed here is that community is understood as a mental construct but within a framework that allows us to examine the way in which this is embedded within social relations, in a particular time and place. Communities, local or otherwise are socially constructed and it is this relationship between the discourses of community, the local social relations and the place in which it is situated that need to be examined. The theoretical framework is provided by human geography and the approach is probably closest to that of social geography. Accepting the post modern criticisms of a universal truth or grand narrative the remainder of this chapter outlines the theoretical approach and necessary assumptions made (Charmaz 2000, Cloke et al. 1991, Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Mason 1996). The research can then be conceptually grounded, theoretically consistent, and the positionality of the author explicit.

Geography is a holistic discipline and it allows the bringing together of the social, spatial and mental aspects of local community, within a single coherent framework. Given the disciplines focus on spatiality it is ideal for addressing the lack of consideration of this aspect of local community to date. The research is perhaps most closely aligned to social geography, described by Johnston et al. in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* as: “The study of social relations and the spatial structures that underpin those relations ...” (2000:753). It has as “a central concern the relations between people, people’s identities, the spatial variation of these, and the role of space in their construction” (Pain et al. 2001:9). This focus on the construction of social relations and social identities within space is ideally suited to studying the construction of local communities, as a particular form of group identity, based around a particular place.

### **1.5.1 Space, place and local community**

Community is often represented as homogenous, harmonious and spatially fixed, yet a number of authors, exploring very different types of community, have demonstrated its fluid and contested nature (Dwyer 1999, Rose 1990, Sherlock 2002). As Hoggett (1997:14) argues the concept of community is ‘saturated with power’ and it is a ‘continually contested term’. There are parallels between the narratives of community and place. The “way of defining communities, as bounded and authentic, is very much like the way in which place has so often been described” (Massey 2003:1). With the more recent view of space as relational and socially constructed has come a similar reconceptualisation of place, so that places are no longer seen as static, coherent, settled and bounded (Massey and Jess 1995). Places are not understood as bounded territorial units; rather they are created within particular social, political, historical and economic contexts (Dwyer 1999, Rose 1990, Valentine 2001). Places do not make people what they are, rather “places can be made, or re-made, to serve particular purposes ...” (Day 2006 p186). The same is true of local communities, which can be understood as one particular expression of place.

As Massey points out, “If places (localities, regions, nations) are necessarily the location of the intersection of disparate trajectories, then they are necessarily places of ‘negotiation’ in the widest sense of that term. This is an important shift which renders deeply problematical any easy summoning of ‘community’ either as pre-existing or as a simple aim (Amin 2002)” (Massey 2004:6). In this conception, communities, including local communities, are no longer seen as natural, pre-existing, harmonious homogenous entities; they are constructed and contested notions in which space is an essential component and which change through time. So that it is now possible to ask who is defining a particular vision of local community, for what purposes, and who is being

excluded (Rose 1990). The social, spatial and mental aspects of community can now be connected within this framework, as all three aspects are essential to the construction of place.

### **1.5.2 Why bother with the concept of community?**

As community is such a contested concept, being written off as useless by some, the question is why bother to continue with it? We could just use the notion of place or locality or neighbourhood instead. Community is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down; “[a]mbiguity and elusiveness in meaning seem to be gross understatements when one attempts to understand the many different ways in which the word ‘community’ has been used – whether by academics or in popular parlance ...” (Davies and Herbert 1993:3). Concerns have also been expressed over the conservative or reactionary associations of community. For example, Massey has spoken of her “great wariness about the notion of community in its current formulation” (2003:1). Hoggett (1997:7) believes that it is “the recoil from the possibility of guilt by association with nostalgic conservatism [which] has for too long prevented a serious encounter with community ...”. This perhaps explains geographers’ apparent reluctance to engage with the concept.

It is the very attractiveness of the term that makes it important to study. It is widely used, and is currently very popular with politicians and policy makers, its presence in recent flood policy being one example. As Day comments there “seems little point in sociologists lamenting the confusions and obscurities which surround the notion of community, when it is being put to work so intensively and determinedly by the members of society” (Day 2006:245). If we approach community as a structure of meaning then the “chaos of its conceptualization and the warmth with which it is upheld as a social idea are not seen as difficulties which render the concept useless for our attempts to understand society, but as the very reason for its interest” (Rose 1990:425). Research demonstrates that constructions of community continue to impact on people’s lives. It is a “social construct which had real, empirically observable consequences for my participants” (Sherlock 2002:para 1.1). As she argues “it is precisely the contested and normative nature of community ... that provides such a rich and rewarding concept for analysis” (Sherlock 2002:para 1.3). “[C]ommunity is an imagined but none the less powerful discursive reality with material consequences too important to be ignored” (Rose 1990:425).

### 1.5.3 Investigating local community through flooding

An examination of the literature has revealed both the increasing centrality of local communities in Flood Risk Management and at the same time the complexities of the concept of local community. Disaster and flood research recognises the essentially social nature of disasters such as floods, yet to date work has focused largely on individuals or households (Twigger-Ross 2005, Walker et al. 2005). There is therefore little research on social relations, either social responses to flooding or how floods bring about the social changes that have been observed. By bringing together the flood literature with the more complex understanding of community from the social science literature, within the framework of human geography, it is hoped that light can be shed not only on social responses to flooding but also on the construction of local community in a mobile society such as that in the UK.

The disruption to everyday processes caused by an event such as a flood can help facilitate our understanding of these social processes. As Enarson and Morrow found in *The gendered terrain of disasters* “[p]aradoxically, we learn most about ourselves and the physical, social and political environments we have constructed when our taken-for-granted lives are disrupted” (1998:1). There is, for example, evidence that a crises or threat such as a flood can create or strengthen a sense of local community (Delanty 2003, Pain et al. 2001, Valentine 2001). In turn by bringing a more complex understanding of community to flood research, it should be possible to gain a better understanding of the social responses to flooding, the impact it has on local social relations and how local communities may be effectively involved in the Flood Risk Management process.

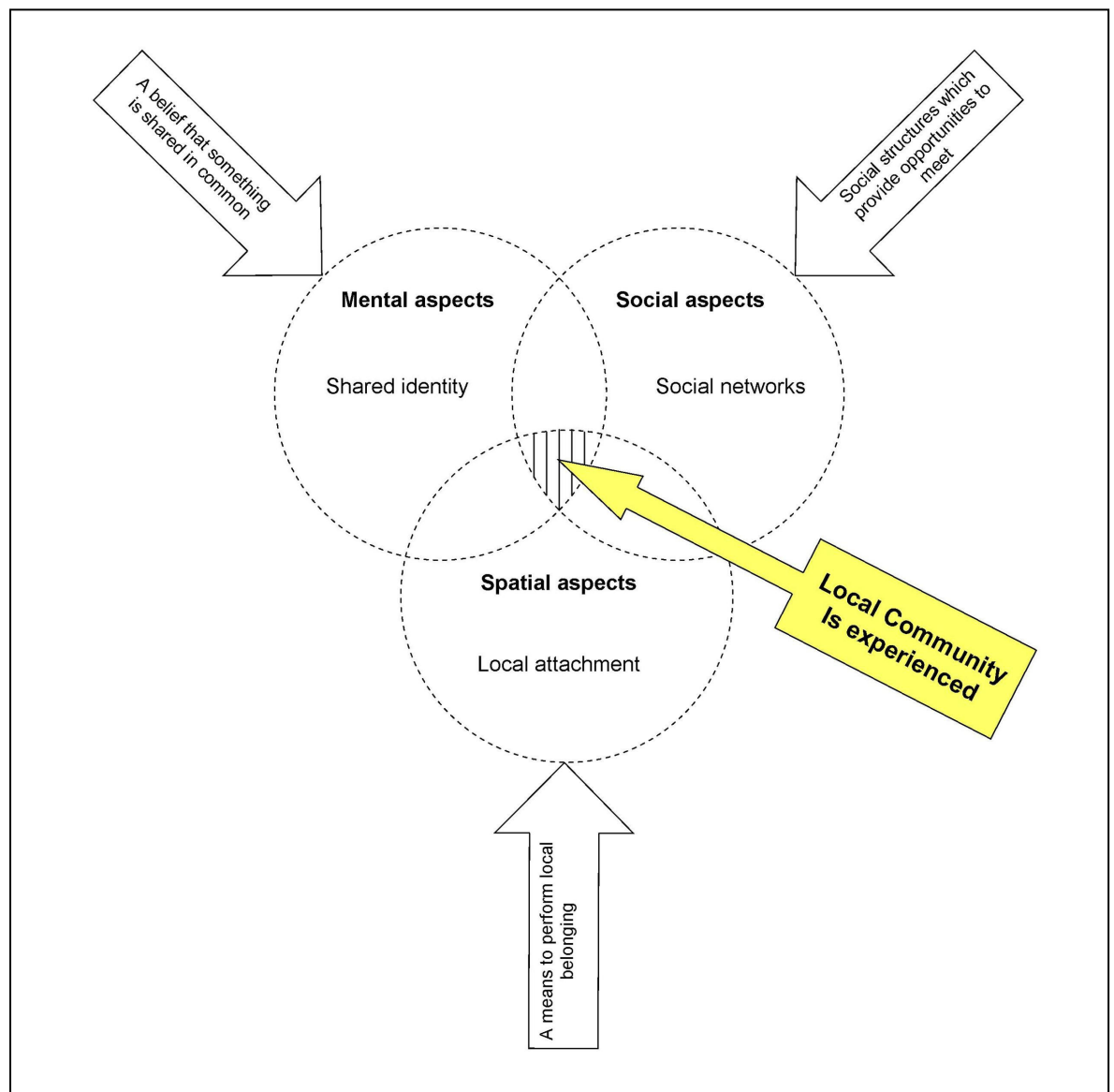
Whilst shared locality offers a potential territorial base, it is neither sufficient nor necessary to ensure common goals, common action and a common identity (Valentine 2001:121). This research sets aside normative ideals of what a community should be and instead sets out to explore what local community means to interviewees. As Rose (1990:434) argues, “the need for geographers not to impose their own definitions of community or locality onto people cannot be overemphasized”. A local community is not assumed to exist in the fieldwork locations, rather the constructions of community (or lack of them) within particular locations are explored, along with how these are negotiated and contested by local residents.

The research explores whether local community can, under some circumstances, provide an effective basis for collective action and in turn, what affect flooding has on notions of local community. Within the theoretical framework suggested above it is possible to address both residents’ and flood professionals’ discourses of local community, the

relationship between locality and community, the role of rural and urban in community construction and flood response, the construction and maintenance of local social structures (and how these are able to respond to flooding) and how local communities may be changed by flooding.

The diagram below illustrates a model for understanding local community from the resident's perspective. It shows how the three elements intersect. Local community is experienced, but not always achieved, at the intersection of all three circles. The first three of the analytical chapters (3, 4 & 5), each takes as their focus one of the three elements; spatial, mental and social.

**Figure 1** – Constructing the Conscious community



The particular research questions, through which the wider conceptual issues of community are examined, are reiterated below. How this is to be put into action is discussed in the following chapter.

- a. How do constructions of local community, and the ways in which they are experienced in a specific locality, allow or constrain local residents ability to respond collectively to flooding?
- b. What effect does flooding have on local social networks and the way these relate to the local area and ideas of community?
- c. How do professional discourses of community shape their expectations of local social response to flooding? What are the similarities and differences with residents' conceptualisations and responses?

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## Chapter 2 – Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The following section discusses the methods used in this research and examines their strengths and weaknesses in the light of current debates on qualitative research. It therefore covers both the practical concerns of carrying out a piece of empirical research, as well as the more philosophical debates that underlie the use of any particular methods. There is no single definition, philosophy or technique for qualitative research, as it has “grown out of a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions” (Mason 1996:3). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000:2) note, it has become “a field of enquiry in its own right”. It offers a wide range of constantly evolving techniques based on different philosophical approaches to the world.

Given this complexity and range of approaches, the choice of method for a research project is a complex one, involving the consideration of what constitutes reality in this situation, how best to gain access to this, how information gathered should be analysed and in what way results are best presented. The qualitative researcher must address these complex issues before starting a project and continue to grapple with them throughout it. There is no simple, straightforward solution, it is not possible to simply choose a method and then unthinkingly adhere to it. Therefore the discussion that follows charts a course through some of the issues to be resolved. It discusses the relationship between the various parts of the research project, the implications of the choices made and the limitations of the methods chosen.

### 2.2 The Research Approach

The main method used for gathering information on people’s experience or understanding of local community in a flood situation was semi structured, in depth interviews. These were carried out with residents living in locations affected by flooding as well as with staff involved in the management of floods in these locations. This allowed an examination of how the different groups involved in floods and their management conceptualise local community. For residents, the interviews allow the exploration of meanings from their own perspective; to understand, from the ‘inside’ (Blaikie 1993) what it is like to be flooded or threatened by flooding and how local communities respond. Semi-structured interviews are not a series of identical questions to be asked. Rather the interviews were guided by a series of themes which aim to ensure all the relevant topics or areas are



covered but which allow interviewees to discuss issues in their own time and in their own terms.

Residents were either interviewed individually or if they preferred with their partner or other household member. In one instance two neighbours were interviewed together. The numbering of the interviews indicates how many interviewees were present. For example (Int 1) after a quote shows that only one interviewee was present whilst (Int 5&6) reveals that two were present. The interviews took place in the residents' homes. This was helpful as it was the scene of the flood event and interviewees would often point out certain objects or areas of the home when explaining something. Residents were first asked to describe their flood experience, which allowed them to tell their story in their own way and become comfortable with the interviewer. The interviewer also then has an understanding of the flood event and how it affected the individual. This knowledge was useful when following up with questions based on the interview themes, which can then often be related directly to the interviewee's experience. The interviews are analysed at different levels: to investigate the social processes involved in dealing with floods and their aftermath but also to examine the constructions that lie behind the accounts and explore the ways in which discourses of local community are used.

Whilst interviews allow an opportunity to gain access to peoples experiences and understandings, like any method they have their limitations. They do not simply "index some external reality" in what has been called a "realist" approach (Silverman 2000a:823). Interviews are a construction between the interviewer and interviewee. There is no simple mechanism for accessing meaning. Interviews are not neutral tools for gathering data, meaning is co-created between the interviewer and interviewee (Fontana and Frey 2000, Kvale 1996). "Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place" (Fontana and Frey 2000:663). It is recognised that the interviewer's stance and theoretical background will inevitably shape the research. The researcher does not uncover objective nuggets of truth, just waiting to be found (Kvale 1996). Rather together the researcher and the interviewer construct 'knowledge'. The background and approach of the researcher is then an important component of the research process and this is discussed further below.

The relationship between individuals and society is a central and ongoing concern in the social sciences, in what has been called the structure/agency debate (Hubbard et al. 2002). This research takes what can be broadly described as a social constructionist

viewpoint. It is understood that “all knowledge claims and their evaluation take place within a conceptual framework through which the world is described and explained” (Schwandt 2000:197). Rejecting “a naïve realist and empiricist epistemology that holds that there can be some kind of unmediated, direct grasp of the empirical world and that knowledge (i.e., the mind) simply reflects or mirrors what is “out there”” (Schwandt 2000:197). “Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz 2000:510).

Social categories such as class, gender, sexuality and race are understood to be socially constructed (varying over time and space) and as such they can also be contested, resisted and (re)negotiated (Valentine 2001). Individuals are seen as neither completely free of restraints imposed by society nor completely controlled by them. This social constructionist viewpoint can also be seen in much of the literature discussed earlier. For example the understanding of space and place as consisting of intersecting social relations and the rejection of communities as uncontested, natural, bounded, homogenous groups of people. This is an approach that allows an examination of the power relations operating in and on communities. It is a central idea in much of social geography and human geography more widely. Given this, much of the research will focus on the ways in which various categories are constructed and contested and how these categories interrelate.

The use of discourses of local community is also explored. Discourse is a complex notion which can be used in a number of ways. Wetherell et al. (2001: 5) identify three domains in the study of discourse: the study of social interaction; the study of minds, selves and sense making and finally the study of culture and social relations. This research lies within the final category, which is concerned with the “historical and institutional features of discourse” and “*power and the organization of social relations*” (*italics in original*). Wetherell et al. in their reader also identify “six more or less distinct, discourse traditions” (p6). Its use here follows the tradition of Foucault where discourse is concerned with competing representations. For Foucault, discourse is “a system of representation” which constructs the topic and “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge” (Hall 2001:72). In this conception “[d]iscourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity” (Mills 1997, 2004:13).

How different discourses concerning local community allow and constrain particular ways of thinking and types of behaviour are examined, as are the ways that different discourses may conflict. Power and its construction are a key theme in this type of analysis. As Mills sums up, in “Foucault’s analysis ... power is dispersed throughout social relations, [so] that

it produces possible forms of behaviour as well as restricting behaviour” (Mills 1997, 2004: 17). Valentine describes, for example, how hegemonic discourses can be inscribed in the landscape or more invisibly imposed across space, “influencing what assumptions, expectations and social behaviours are expected or deemed appropriate for particular spaces” (2001:5). The discourses of local community in academic and policy literature, and in interviews with both residents and ‘flood professionals’, are examined in order to understand the ways in which these potentially competing representations have come to shape ‘local communities’.

## **2.3 Interviewing Issues**

### **2.3.1 Interviews versus focus groups**

Interviews were chosen as the initial method rather than focus groups. Either method would have been a valid means of accessing information. Given the starting point that no assumptions about the presence of community should be made, interviews were chosen so that individuals’ constructions of local community could be accessed. As Fog Olwig (2002:127) argued in her study of Caribbean diaspora, “it is important to examine concrete instances of community formation as experienced by particular individuals, rather than take a point of departure in presumed categories ...”. If communities are contested and negotiated then each persons view may be quite different, and in a focus group you may lose some of that variation to the group consensus or the loudest people. As Neal and Walters (2008:291) note, “the focus group interview tends to create a forum for collective conversations which reinforce consensus rather than allow space for more diverse or contradictory truths to be expressed”. The choice was therefore made to use interviews, but with an option to also carry out focus groups later if this was felt necessary. They were however not needed, as the interviews produced sufficient data.

The advantages of carrying out interviews rather than focus groups quickly become apparent. Each account given was subtly different and would include or highlight different elements. The separate interviews allowed these to be compared and their significance considered. It was also evident that interviewees had different levels of knowledge regarding certain events, for example concerning the Flood Action Group and a separate community group. This became a useful way of examining how information travelled through the community and gave some indication of the local networks. The more subtle variations in extent of knowledge may have been lost in a group situation where knowledge is shared amongst everybody present. When combined with anonymity

interviews also allowed residents to be critical of others within the communities or to share restricted knowledge and this happened frequently.

In addition to this, the conflict found in one of the fieldwork locations, may have proved difficult to explore and manage effectively in a focus group, either with conflict erupting and obscuring other areas of interest or being covered up for fear of causing offence. The separate narration of the conflict was very interesting, as a whole range of different accounts were given. These varied from outright hostility, through carefully worded criticisms, to an amicable separation of interests. Taken together, the interviews with residents representing the various groups within the community and those of the 'flood professionals' involved gave a complex, rounded, multi perspective view. Whilst focus groups were not used these could have provided potentially interesting information on the dynamics within communities and how community identities are negotiated between members. However this was outside the scope of this research but this may be an interesting area for follow up research.

### **2.3.2 Sampling – places and people**

Sampling in qualitative research is not usually based on probability samples, which are designed to statistically represent the wider population in some way. This is not appropriate in research that examines socially constructed meanings. Rather, purposive sampling was used where the "sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study" (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam 2003: 78). Locations were sought where there had been significant flooding, so that those interviewed would have been affected by flooding or were likely to have some awareness of the event in what might be considered their 'local community'. The type of flooding (groundwater, sewer, fluvial etc.) was not at this stage considered relevant. There is currently no evidence to suggest that different types of flooding will have different impacts upon people's notion of community.

The sample was based on the concept of range "where the sample is designed to encapsulate a *relevant range* of units in relation to the wider universe, but not to represent it directly" (Mason 1996:92 *italics in original*). This is intended "to allow you to generate data to explore processes, similarities and differences, to test and develop theory and explanation to account for those similarities and differences, rather than to make statistical comparisons ... and to infer causality on that basis" (Mason 1996:97). The strategy also has elements of heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling as there is a

deliberate strategy to include phenomena that vary widely from each other. The aim is to “identify central themes which cut across the variety of cases or people” (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam 2003:79). This is particularly relevant as the concept of community continues to be associated with certain stereotypical extremes. Locations were sought that had a number of the superficial characteristics that are associated with the rural and urban stereotypes. However, one person does not simply represent one type of community sampled; many interviewees had a range of ‘community experiences.’ For example, some of those living in the rural areas had previously lived in urban ones; this greatly enhanced the richness of the data, as people could reflect on and compare these experiences.

Where possible the sampling was also theoretical. This is an iterative process, where after initial sampling and analysis, further samples are selected in order to develop and test emerging theoretical constructs (Mason 1996, Ritchie, Lewis and Elam 2003, Strauss and Corbin 1998). Therefore the initial sampling strategy aimed to capture a relevant range as discussed above and then when necessary or useful, ideas can be followed up with further theoretical sampling. This was possible to some extent but practical considerations limited the degree to which this can be pursued. In drawing from a fairly small total sample population, and with a limited number of visits, it was not always possible to obtain the ideal sample (willing interviewees) to pursue emerging ideas.

Three areas were eventually selected, an urban estate on the edge of the City of Leeds and two small villages in north Yorkshire. After visiting the first village, although results were interesting, it became apparent that relatively few residents had been directly affected by flooding. Therefore a second village was chosen to carry out additional interviews. This allowed some interesting comparisons between the first very small and isolated village, with a larger less isolated one. As areas were sought which had suffered significant flooding within the last three years and which had not already been visited by researchers, the sampling universe became quite small. This meant that compromises had to be made regarding some of the other desirable criteria. For example, although the area in Leeds fits the stereotypical expectations of an urban area in many ways it differs in having a relatively immobile population with many members of extended family living nearby. However, this proved very interesting and it provided an opportunity to explore the role that extended family can play in local community and to discover the attachments formed by a relatively immobile population. It also demonstrated that high residential mobility in urban areas is not universal.

Whilst the first sampling decision to be made is the choice of locations from which to select interviewees this is not a case study. The aim is not to thoroughly understand those

particular 'communities' but to understand what local community means to people in a range of settings. It asks how people draw on or use different discourses of local community in their particular time and space. There is then the second stage of sampling, which is the choice of interviewees within those areas. Again the strategy of covering a relevant range was used. The personal characteristics which need to be sampled are those which the literature has shown to be important in the concept of community (for example age, gender, family/household structure). As well as certain categories of people, once present in the communities various groups or interests within the communities became apparent. Representatives of these groups were sought wherever possible so that their different perspectives and interrelationships could be explored. (See Appendix 1 for a table of interviewee characteristics).

In Leeds initial contact was made through the National Flood Forum who provided contact with a resident who helped set up the local Flood Action Group. This led to contacts with other members of the group. It became apparent after the first visit that residents would be needed who were not involved in the group or whose involvement was more peripheral. Interviews with residents living on the estate who had not had their houses flooded were also required. Therefore on the second visit a different strategy was adopted and leaflets were delivered to the majority of houses on the estate and doors knocked on. This allowed the finding of interviewees not necessarily known to the flood group.

Over the two visits a good range of characteristics was achieved with a variety of ages, family structures and length of residence being gained, along with a reasonable balance of male and female. Return visits to the estate between 2005 and 2008, and repeat flooding over this time, have made it possible to follow the development of this community and its relationship with 'flood professionals' as it attempts to cope with flooding. This is not common in this type of research and presents an opportunity to follow changes over a relatively long time period. In the rural locations a similar strategy was adopted with a combination of gatekeepers, leaflets and door knocking being used to achieve a good range of interviewees. The issue of time spent in the field and what this means in terms of positionality is discussed in the following section.

This second stage of the research also entails interviews with 'professionals' or 'semi professionals' involved in flood management in those locations, to enable an understanding of their perspectives and how these might differ from residents' conceptualisations. The use of differing discourses of community by those involved in flooding and its management are likely to lead to ineffective management of the problem.

Attempts were made to talk to representatives of all those organisations involved with residents in the field-work locations. Those interviewed came from the Environment Agency, the City Council, the County Council, the District Council and the National Flood Forum. The only organisation approached who declined to be interviewed was Yorkshire Water. Further details of the various departments etc. represented are given in Chapter 7. (See Appendix 1 for a table of ‘professional’ interviewee characteristics).

### **2.3.3 Immersion and positionality**

In Leeds the repeat visits allowed a longer ‘immersion’ in the field and some interviewees were visited two or three times. This allows a further development of the research relationship. In the rural locations approximately a week was spent in each. In these small villages it was possible to build up a fairly good picture of ‘village life’ in this amount of time. The researcher also fairly quickly becomes visible and villagers will say “oh have you seen so and so?” and recommend other possible interviewees. This is a situation that requires discretion in order to protect interviewees’ privacy. Whilst the interviews proved fruitful these were only an encounter of an hour or two and cannot provide the same level of detail that a longer immersion in the field might. However immersion, as in the more traditional ethnographic style of months or years spent living within the researched group, also has its drawbacks. The debate over the advantages or disadvantages of immersion, as an apparently more complete or authentic knowledge, mirrors that over positionality as an insider and outsider.

One particular criticism of post flood studies is that they “have been limited to retrospective ‘one shot’ data collection and struggle to adequately capture the extended, systemic and interactive nature of social ... impacts” (Medd et al. 2007). This research addresses the issues of ‘one shot’ data collection through a number of strategies. Firstly, local community is explored as a complex and continually negotiated process, and not simply a static entity. Secondly, residents are interviewed sometime after the immediate aftermath and asked to reflect on the ‘community’ prior to the event, during the event itself, in the immediate aftermath and through the months and years following. Finally, in Upbeck it was possible to follow the ‘community’ over a number of years (2005 – 2008) as it attempted to cope with repeat flooding. Understanding these social relations and the processes involved will be important if local communities and not just individuals are going to be asked to take on a greater responsibility for responding to floods.

The interviews allowed access to interviewee’s memories of the flood event and the community before and after this time. These interviews are inevitably fairly short, however

on the whole interviewees were very generous with their time and themselves. They often were glad of the opportunity to talk about their experiences and they seemed to appreciate that their experiences were being taken seriously and were worthy of investigation. There was also a certain desire to help others like themselves in the future through the research findings. The success of the interviews is clearly dependent on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed. This relationship is often framed in terms of the insider and the outsider. The researcher is positioned in one or other of these depending on their characteristics in relation to those being interviewed. However as Crang (2003:496) argues this formulaic division is an oversimplification which can tell us little. He argues that we need to examine “what are the very real issues around the relationship of researcher and researched”. As he discusses, the researcher and the research project are not static with a single unchanging identity, therefore researchers cannot be straightforwardly positioned as inside or outside. Therefore what we need to explore is the “ambiguities, productivities and difficulties of positionality” (p497).

The first person tense is used in the next three paragraphs as it becomes very difficult to discuss this issue sensibly in the third person. Perhaps the most contentious difference between my self and the interviewees is the northerner/southerner divide. (It is worth noting though that a number of interviewees positioned themselves as southerners, having moved within their adult lifetimes from ‘the south’ of the country). There is a perceived difference between the inhabitants of the south and the north of England that has strong historical roots. My accent and my university affiliation would apparently place me as a southerner. However I was born in Manchester, my parents are from Manchester and I have relatives still living in the north. Therefore I do not consider myself exclusively southern, although neither could I in any straightforward way claim a northern identity. In regards to my accent, whilst undoubtedly largely southern, I retain certain northern pronunciations, which occasionally amuses southern friends. The inadequacy of simple dichotomies such as urban and rural is also apparent. I reside in a smallish market town, yet work on the edge of a large city. I have no real claim to a rural identity although my urban grandmother viewed me in this way. Despite being born in one city and studying in another, neither do I have any real claim to urban living.

Sometimes people would ask where I was from. I would usually explain that I was based in London for my research, that I lived near Cambridge but that I had been born in Manchester. This was an attempt to honestly answer the question, which is not as straightforward as it might at first appear. It also served to problematise the notion of identity, giving myself several place-based identities and so avoiding the simple northerner/southerner divide. To some extent I was claiming a northern identity and



therefore positioning myself with my interviewees, claiming something in common, albeit perhaps a slightly tenuous connection. The complexity and over simplification of the northern/southern divide is illustrated by the danger of claiming to be from Lancashire whilst in Yorkshire. There is a long held animosity between the two counties, although in modern times this is usually a joking matter rather than a reason for conflict.

Some kind of rapport is needed to create a successful relationship with an interviewee, but rapport can be based on a partial identity and it is unlikely that a shared identity could be based on all indicators. As identity is complex, there were usually some elements of my identity that were shared with the interviewee, and this differed from person to person. This shared experience, whether it is parenthood, pet ownership, educational experience, gender, flood knowledge or some other aspect, provides a point of contact and understanding. This was not a cynical manipulation of identity in order to create rapport. As Neal and Walters (2006) discuss, I was able to call on different aspects of my biography. This provides a starting point from which to venture into less familiar territory. Despite the importance of some connection, often residents wanted to tell their story, to get across their flood experiences, and so had little interest in a more conversation-like two way dialogue. The role of stranger can also be helpful and some people would enjoy filling in the gaps of my knowledge by explaining something about their lives and their localities. For example, some interviewees were keen to discuss what rural life was like and not like, which facilitates the interview process.

#### **2.3.4 When to stop sampling?**

How many interviewees are sufficient is always a difficult decision in qualitative interviewing. Quantitative samples call for precise numbers to ensure statistical standards of representativeness are met. In qualitative research, where the aim is to develop particular theories, this is less straightforward. It is also recognised that smaller numbers are necessary to achieve the kind of depth of analysis required. The ideal is to reach theoretical saturation, where no significant new information is emerging. This appeared to have been achieved, although it is impossible to be certain of this. There is always the possibility that the next interview will reveal something completely new. In an attempt to get a good range of perspectives within the communities researched as well as those of 'professionals' the numbers of interviews became quite high. This was further increased when the opportunity to return to Leeds was taken. Some interviewees had suffered repeat flooding, and this offered the possibility to study the ongoing relationship between the community, the flood action group and the flood professionals involved.

In total 63 interviews with 54 people were carried out (some were repeat interviews with the same individuals) which amounted to almost 46 hours of interview time. In addition to this there were some email communications. This was a larger number than originally envisioned and was found to be at the upper limit of what was manageable. In qualitative research the researcher is at the heart of the analysis and needs to be very familiar and thoroughly immersed in the material. This becomes impossible if the amount of material becomes too great. The use of the computer programme N6 (discussed further below) was useful as it enabled effective categorisation, search and retrieval options. It is difficult to see how such a large quantity of data could have been effectively managed by a lone researcher using more traditional pencil and paper or even word processing cut and paste methods.

## **2.4 Grounded theory approaches**

### **2.4.1 Transcription issues**

Before analysis of interviews can take place they are transcribed, to allow a detailed examination of what was said. However, this is in itself a construction, which involves decisions by the transcriber. "Transcribing involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes" (Kvale 1996:165). As far as possible the transcripts were transcribed word for word, including repetitions, mistakes, umms, ahhs, etc. Punctuation was used to retain the sense of the original conversation, rather than to convert it to correct written English. These were used for the analysis; however, when representing interviewees' views through the use of quotes a very limited amount of 'tidying up' was carried out. This might include the removal of some repetition, or separating out two conversational strands. The aim was to remain as close as possible to the original whilst providing clarity for the reader. This clearly involves a judgement by the researcher but so too does transcription and the choice of which excerpts to use.

A transcription service was used, rather than the researcher undertaking this task. Transcription is a skilled job, which is time consuming for a professional, (approximately four hours for every hour of recording) but even more so for an amateur. Therefore it was decided that the researcher's time could be better spent elsewhere. There are criticisms that the researcher will be less close to the data when someone else transcribes it (although this is common practise in larger research projects). To reduce the likelihood of this, and to ensure quality, all the transcripts were checked against the original recording

and mistakes corrected or gaps filled in as far as possible. This retains the closeness to the data whilst avoiding the boredom and over familiarity which can occur through the endless repetitions necessary for an inexperienced transcriber. Using the same transcriber throughout allowed a relationship to develop and a good understanding of what was required to be reached.

### **2.4.2 Objective or constructivist grounded theory**

Analysis takes place through 'coding' where segments of text, chosen by the researcher, are gathered together into 'nodes' or themes. These nodes are again chosen by the researcher and reflect the interests of the research. As certain activities, words, ideas or themes seem significant they are gathered together to allow their further examination. This coding technique is widely used by many qualitative researchers, from different backgrounds, and in different ways. The methods of grounded theory, initially proposed by Glaser and Strauss, have been influential in this. They offered what was perhaps the first detailed exposition of a systematic inductive method for analysing qualitative data and producing middle range theoretical frameworks (Charmaz 2000:509).

Grounded theory has of course been developed since its initial proposal in the 1960s and has been taken in somewhat different directions by its two original creators. Grounded theory was initially a reaction against the dominance of quantitative studies in the social sciences. Whilst grounded theory offers a number of useful techniques for analysing qualitative data such as interviews, there have been some criticisms of its premises. Bryant (2002) for example has argued that it has failed to seriously engage with any of the key developments in epistemology and philosophy of science in the last thirty years. Others have also been critical, "[p]ostmodernists and poststructuralists dispute obvious and subtle positivistic premises assumed by grounded theory's major proponents and within the logic of the method itself" (Charmaz 2000:510). Grounded theory as proposed by Glaser assumes an objective, external reality and a neutral observer who discovers data. Strauss writing with a new partner Corbin has addressed some of the issues raised by post modernism but they still assume an objective external reality and unbiased data collection (Charmaz 2000, 2006).

It has already been argued that it is not possible to separate the viewer from the viewed in this way. The researcher cannot be a neutral and objective observer. The argument put forward by grounded theorists is that knowledge can be 'bracketed' so that the researcher can somehow "set aside their knowledge and experience" in order to maintain an "objective stance" (Strauss and Corbin 1998:43). This in itself displays a particular set of

beliefs. This observer then “allows the theory to emerge from the data” (Strauss and Corbin 1998:12). Glaser is even more concerned to enforce this separation of data and analysis from existing theory and the researcher’s knowledge and is frequently critical of Strauss and Corbin for ‘forcing data’ (Charmaz 2000). However this distancing of theory and data, fails to address the relationship between the two and how codes arise, why the data is broken into certain parts and labelled in particular ways, rather than in any other way.

Given these problems the question is perhaps - why use this method? However what the grounded theory method can offer is a well developed strategy for conducting qualitative research (Bryant 2002, 2003). “The rigor of grounded theory approaches offers qualitative researchers a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts” (Charmaz 2000:510). The strategies and methods within grounded theory can be used in empirical studies with different “fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphases and theoretical levels” (Charmaz 2000:511). Therefore as Charmaz goes on to say a “simplified, constructivist version of grounded theory ... can supply effective tools that can be adopted by researchers from diverse perspectives” (2000:514). This research therefore uses some of the tools offered by the grounded theory method, but takes a constructionist approach.

### **2.4.3 Using computers in qualitative analysis**

To assist with the analysis N6 (a version of NUD\*IST) has been used. This is one of an increasing number of computer programmes designed to assist in qualitative research (collectively known as CAQDAS - computer assisted qualitative design analysis). Whilst these have been gaining in popularity there have been some concerns and criticisms. Some researchers are worried that the use of a computer will distance them from the data (see Gibbs et al. 2002, Charmaz 2000 and Weitzman 2000). This seems partly to do with disquiet over the use of a machine. Yvonna Lincoln for example asks her students “Why would you want to engage in work that connects you to the deepest part of human existence and then turn it over to a machine to ‘mediate’?” (Charmaz 2000:520). This may simply express an unfamiliarity and unease with computers generally by some researchers, whereas they are more comfortable with the older technology of paper and pen.

Another concern is that expressed by Charmaz that “these software packages appear to be more suited for objectivist grounded theory than constructivist approaches” (2002:520). She does not give a detailed account of why this is so but it is worth some consideration.

As N6 simply provides tools for coding and adding memos, it is hard to see how this is tied to an objectivist approach. The researcher chooses what to code and how long the piece of text to be coded should be. The software makes it easy to choose any length of text, except for very short pieces of text less than a line long. It is also possible to code the same text into multiple codes and easily keep track of where that text is coded. The researcher also decides what node or topic to place the codes in and what these nodes represent, as well as what relationship should exist between nodes. These are also very easy to change and therefore the research can develop in a flexible way. The categories or themes can be as 'constructionist' as the researcher chooses, therefore there seems to be no reason why this should suit or produce a more objectivist approach.

Charmaz is also concerned that when using a computer only a fragment of the whole can be seen. These fragments then "may seem to take on an existence of their own, as if objective and removed from their contextual origins and from our constructions and our interpretations" (2000:521). As any material coded using N6 can instantly be seen either with more lines of the surrounding text or jumped to in the original document, it is much easier and quicker to see the code in its original context than when using pen and paper. As data management and retrieval are much easier, it is possible to find previous notes, memos or half remembered quotes quickly, helping the researcher to retain a sense of the whole and not just the parts as some have claimed. Whilst coding by any method inevitably breaks the data into parts, N6 and some of the other packages can make it easier to bring them together again. It seems unlikely therefore that using N6 carries any more danger in this respect than pencil and paper methods.

As Lee and Fielding (1996: para. 4.5) point out, the computer is neither "a panacea for analytic woes or ... a devil-tool of positivism and scientism". Other authors have given some examples of how CAQDAS can make a positive contribution to achieving good quality research. Gibbs et al. (2002) point out how, given the huge amounts of data involved, and the necessity to be selective, it is easy to be partial and inconsistent in that selection. The use of software makes it easier to be exhaustive in the analysis and to check for negative cases, as well as providing an 'audit trail' of how ideas emerge and develop. It is a useful tool which can help the researcher quickly and effectively complete some of the routine tasks associated with qualitative analysis, leaving more time for the researcher to spend on the actual analysis.

#### **2.4.4 The relationship between existing theory and analysis**

During analysis, theories are developed and explored in the light of existing theories. However the role of the existing literature and theories, and the point at which theory construction should take place (if at all, as some approaches reject the possibility of theory construction) is another area of debate within research. In the traditional positivist model the theory comes first through hypothesis testing, often called the hypothetico-deductive model (Mason 1996). This approach has largely been rejected by qualitative researchers, often being replaced by an inductive approach. In some approaches the theory comes last and is said to arise from the data, often with little reference to the existing literature. Strauss and Corbin (1998:43), for example, suggest that researchers “set aside their knowledge and experience to form new interpretations about phenomena” and maintain an ‘objective stance’. This is a position which fails to adequately address the issues raised earlier concerning the role of the researcher in the analytical process

The research strategy taken here is one, where theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process (Mason 1996). This recognises the active role the researcher and their knowledge play and how these produce certain ways of seeing the world. However the analysis does not seek simply to confirm these. The relationship between analysis and the literature is a complex one, constantly moving backward and forward between the two in an iterative process. The aim is to extend existing theory or create new theories to explain the social phenomenon under investigation. Data are not forced to fit existing theories, but theories are examined for their usefulness in helping to understand the complexity of local community.

### **2.5 Representation**

Although this is discussed under a separate heading, writing (a form of representation) and analysis are not separate activities. Part of the analysis occurs through writing and rewriting about themes and analysis continues as ‘writing up’ takes place. “Writing is ... a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable” (Richardson 2000:923). At this final stage, as ideas were pinned down in text, it became clear where some themes needed further analysis and new connections sometimes became apparent, therefore this was quite clearly still a part of the analysis. As the research took its final fixed form some themes or ideas had to be rejected or given a lesser role as others were chosen to be more central. In constructing a final, coherent narrative that meets the expectations of a PhD thesis, inevitably some detail is lost in the

pursuance of clarity, again illustrating the continuance of analytical decisions into the 'writing up' stage.

A major concern has been how to represent 'the voices' of the research participants. Particular concern was expressed over this in what has become known as 'the crisis of representation' which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), took place (in North America at least) in the late 1980s. This has led to an ongoing debate over how qualitative research can ethically give voice to or represent those who take part in the research process. Bound up with this issue is how the researcher themselves should be represented. The difficulty here is how to balance the competing claims: of representing those who take part in an ethical way, of representing the researchers role; of making explicit analytical decisions which are based on huge amounts of data whilst presenting a coherent theoretical argument. Given these criticisms, a wide number of strategies, from a variety of different theoretical perspectives and disciplines continue to be developed. These range from forms of writing where the researcher's role is made more explicit, through to representing research results in different forms such as fiction, poetry or performance (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

Another important consideration is the audience for which the research is written. Denzin and Lincoln could write in 2000 in their widely read *Handbook of Qualitative Research* that "[f]ictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, and multimedia texts are today taken for granted" (p17). Whilst this may be the case, there are some audiences that are likely find these approaches incomprehensible and would not give them serious consideration. Given the position of this research project within a multi disciplinary centre (quantitative and qualitative), in a subject that was traditionally quantitatively approached (flooding) and a desire to positively influence policy, a course needs to be steered between a suitable way of representing the research and those taking part whilst remaining credible and intelligible to the potential audience. Given this, a relatively conservative approach has been taken, with the traditional approach of writing in the third person being used but the researcher's stance made as explicit as possible.

In order to provide anonymity, and as far as possible confidentiality, neither place names nor interviewees real names are used. To try and retain a sense of interviewees as real people with whom readers can identify, interviewees were given new names rather than simply using numbers. Each interviewee is given a unique name, if that name appears with multiple interview numbers it indicates a repeat interview. Names can carry a great deal of cultural information and expectation, often giving clues to factors such as gender, age, class etc. As far as possible interviewees new names replicate the expectations of their old

names. For example, charts were used to select names that were popular at the time of birth of the interviewee. Traditional names were replaced with equally traditional ones. Similarly new place names reflect the form of existing place names in that area.

There was a constant tension between 'giving voice' to the interviewees and expressing clearly the conceptual findings. Within a limited (although generous) word limit it is not always easy to balance conceptual clarity, especially at the more abstract level, with sufficient illustration of interviewees views, these are therefore relatively limited. Moreover, the findings presented can only ever be a small sample of the whole whatever approach is taken. It is the analytical processes outlined earlier that ensure the findings were based on critical investigation of *all* the data and not simply a few chosen examples, therefore avoiding what has been called 'anecdotalism' (Silverman 2000b). So whilst in the presentation of results only a small sample of interviewees' contributions can be given, the findings are based on all of the data. The research process has been rendered as transparent as possible and the researcher's role and underlying theoretical assumptions are made explicit. This then enables the reader, to some extent at least, to form their own judgements on the findings rather than simply having to accept the view presented.

## **2.6 Some limitations of the research**

The theoretical limitations have already been highlighted in the discussions above. There are also specific limitations associated with the more practical concerns of empirical data collection which are outlined separately here. Whilst it is hoped that the research will provide insight into some of the processes and conceptualisations of local community, building on what is already known, it cannot possibly discover everything there is to know, even within the fairly tight confines of the theoretical approach and structures of concern expressed here. There are also of course other equally valid ways of examining local communities which would uncover different aspects, such as economic, political, social capital, psychological or network analysis (counting and mapping) approaches. In a similar way it can never be possible to present all of the findings, even within the generous 80 000 word limit of a PhD. This means that inevitably those ideas presented are a partial and selected sample of the whole.

The research is not intended to be statistically representative and therefore it cannot be used for that purpose. Inevitably only a very small sample can be investigated and so some potentially interesting contexts will not be explored. Only more extreme rural and urban contexts were represented, and even within these categories no doubt many other types of context exist; and then there are all those categories in between. The research takes place



in a specific time and place but it is designed to give insight into some of the processes operating within local communities and their response to flooding within particular contexts. With an understanding of those processes other contexts can then be explored to see if the concepts and frameworks suggested by the research prove useful in other situations; the developed world and the developing world are likely to be very different, for example. Different countries may also provide a very different cultural context where the ideals of community may be very different. Within England, constructions of north and south may be significant. Minority groups may experience community in a different way. It can never be possible to examine every variation but the theoretical frameworks developed can then be used to explore other contexts.

## **2.7 Ethical concerns**

Whilst ethical concerns are described in a separate section this does not mean it should be seen as something tagged on as an afterthought. Ethical concerns are central in many of the debates concerning qualitative research, some of which have been touched on earlier. Rather, the use of a separate section is meant to highlight its importance and allow the reader to access these issues easily and conveniently in one location.

All research has ethical implications that must be considered and the potential benefits of the research must be weighed against the possible harm. The Social Research Association presents its ethical guidelines as a series of obligations; to society, to funders and employers, to colleagues and to subjects. It recognises though that different obligations may conflict and difficult choices may have to be made. As this research is funded by University Bursary, University guidelines must be adhered to and supervisors satisfied. However this is one of the least constrained types of research funding and ethical problems arising from this should be few. Working as a lone researcher obligations to colleagues are minimal. The main concerns would not be damaging the reputation of the university or Flood Hazard Research Centre and not 'tainting the field'.

Obligations to participants will need most consideration. Individuals will be asked to talk about an upsetting experience. This needs to be treated with sensitivity and not seen simply as an opportunity for the researcher. The first stage was to gain informed consent, so that participants can freely choose to take part, knowing what is involved and the likely outcomes. If participants became upset during the process they could withdraw if they wished. Sources of support were recommended where appropriate, for example the National Flood Forum, local flood groups, Samaritans etc. Unexpectedly sensitive issues may arise, for example previous disaster research has found evidence of increased

domestic violence (Enarson and Morrow 1998) and researchers need to be mentally prepared for this. It must be remembered though that being interviewed or discussing flood experiences can be beneficial, flood victims often appreciate the opportunity to talk to someone who is interested in their experiences (Coates 2002, Gill Holland personal communication).

Dealing with the concept of community also revealed issues of conflict and confidential information being shared. To ensure not only anonymity but also confidentiality it has been necessary to not only provide new place names and interviewee names but also to withhold some information. In such small communities if too much detail is provided, who is being discussed may be obvious to other community members. For example in the infamous “Springdale case”, whilst the interviewees were given fictitious names, and the name of the town changed to “Springdale” residents were still identifiable by their role. Residents objected strongly to this and how they had been represented and refused further cooperation with any social scientists (Kimmel 2003). Care was taken to avoid this, particularly when those involved felt the information shared to be sensitive, even though at times this has led to the loss of some interesting information being presented, however it still formed a part of the analysis. Wherever possible all perspectives were discussed so that different groups were represented fairly. For example, the split between the two groups in Leeds was narrated in a number of different ways, and this has been explored.

All aspects of research involve power relations, both upwards and downwards. With flood ‘victims’ the researcher is likely to be seen as exercising most power. Yet ‘victims’ can withhold their consent and may well be socially advantaged. When working with flood or community ‘professionals’ the researcher may be in a weaker position, reliant on those people’s cooperation and good will. In one instance the researcher was denied access to a particular organisation. However, this organisation’s lack of transparency eventually formed an interesting part of the analysis. Whatever the power relationship it is important to consider how this impacts on the research. A gatekeeper for example may skew the sample by withholding certain information. The social characteristics of the researcher and the participants may also affect the outcomes of the research. There is considerable debate over the necessity and desirability of the researcher and researched sharing certain social characteristics, as was discussed earlier (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Mohammad 2001). The researcher’s safety was also a consideration. Interviewing alone in a subjects home is potentially dangerous. A list of interviewees’ names, addresses and times were left with someone, who expects the researcher to call in at regular intervals.

Dissemination and use of the findings needs to be addressed. Participants who requested information were sent a summary of findings, a transcript or a copy of the relevant section of the thesis as requested. There were no objections made by any of the interviewees. If there had been then attempts would have been made to resolve any disagreements of interpretation. If this were not possible then any objections or alternative viewpoints would have been noted within the text. It is hoped that some influence can be made on policy through organisations such as the Environment Agency, which will allow more effective flood management. Both academics and practitioners with an interest in flooding can be reached through conferences. Academic audiences can also be addressed through journal articles etc. A number of the 'professionals' involved have requested a copy of the thesis once it is in its final form, this will be sent to them once the PhD process is completed.

## **2.8 The Fieldwork Locations**

Field work has been carried out in three locations. The following place names are not the real ones. The locations are: the Upbeck housing estate, an urban area in the eastern part of the City of Leeds; Aylesby a small isolated village in North Yorkshire and Haylton a slightly larger village, which is less isolated, also located in North Yorkshire. (See Appendix 1 for a list of key characteristics of those interviewed).

### **2.8.1 The Upbeck estate, the City of Leeds**

This area has been flooded three times, in August 2004, May 2005 and June 2007. The main cause of flooding is believed to be heavy rainfall which caused the beck, which runs through the estate, to overflow. There were other factors involved, one of which was maintenance of the beck. The flooding rose and subsided very quickly, within a couple of hours. The residents have formed a Flood Action Group with assistance from the National Flood Forum. In the summer of 2007 a flood warden scheme was set up with the assistance of the Environment Agency and Leeds City Council has also been involved.

The Upbeck estate (which is how residents tend to refer to their area) consists of the principle street Upbeck Road, which is off the main 'A' road and then there are seven streets leading off this. The only access by car is off the 'A' road onto Upbeck Road and the only other access is a footpath at the back of the estate. Approximately 70 houses were affected by the flooding, in five of the streets. Many of the houses affected back onto the beck (a small watercourse) and the householders are riparian owners. Houses are mostly

small two or three bed semis and short terraces. The Acorn classification of the estate describes its type as “traditional blue-collar neighbourhoods” further detail of this can be seen in Appendix 2.

This part of Leeds will shortly be undergoing redevelopment and money is to be invested in the area. This project, known as EASEL is outlined in the following paragraphs, taken from Leeds City Council website. *“EASEL is a new vision for the most deprived communities in the city, with plans for more than 5,000 new homes, bringing 10,000 more people into the area. The scheme will stimulate the local economy by directly creating 2,000 new jobs and indirectly many more ... It includes extra investment in new schools, road and transport improvements, new leisure facilities including better parks, and new shops and businesses. It will also deal with issues such as crime, anti-social behaviour and low household incomes – making East and South East Leeds a place where people want to live and work”*. Although many areas of East Leeds are described as deprived and incomes are generally low the Upbeck estate had a good reputation and before the flooding was a sought after location in that part of Leeds. Unlike the Upbeck estate many of the nearby houses are council owned. Some of the surrounding estates have a poor reputation with crime rates being higher than the city average.

Thirty four interviews (with twenty six people) have been carried out regarding this location. Nineteen residents were interviewed (some more than once) and five interviews were carried out with staff from organisations involved in dealing with floods in this location. In addition, two interviews were conducted with members of the National Flood Forum. Interviews took place on three separate visits to the fieldwork location in October 2005, June 2006 and May 2008. Contact with the EA was maintained via email in 2009. Non-flooded residents on the estate were deliberately sought, and three of the interviewees had not personally been flooded.

### **2.8.2 Aylesby, North Yorkshire**

Aylesby is a small isolated village, reached only by narrow winding roads through moorland and it has very small population of between 30 and 50 people (figures vary). A flash flood in June 2005 destroyed bridges and left the village cut off. Effects were severe but short lived and water only entered a small number of properties close to the river but these were badly affected. One woman was almost washed away and later had to be taken to hospital by helicopter. The village’s small size and isolation mean that few people use it as a base to commute. Interviewees tended to work in the village or surrounding

countryside. The Acorn classification describes these as farming communities with a significant number employed in agriculture (see Appendix 2).

Although there were few commuters a number of interviewees had moved in to the village from elsewhere. Four of the interviewees had previously lived in urban areas; one couple in Leeds and one couple in London. There was a small shop with a tea room, and a hotel with a bar. There was also a church and a village hall. The Parish Council for Aylesby covered a wide area, with a scattered rural population, of which Aylesby formed a small part. In this small community 'everybody knew everybody' quite literally. Interviews took place in May 2007 nearly two years after the floods. Ten residents were interviewed, two of these had been personally flooded and two significantly affected through their business, although their property wasn't flooded.

### **2.8.3 Haylton, North Yorkshire**

Haylton is larger than Aylesby with a population of approximately 120 but it is still small in size for a village. They were also flooded in June 2005 by flash flooding. A bridge was destroyed and the road damaged so that for a time they were cut off. Flooding was more extensive and approximately 18 properties were affected. In one property next to the river flood water reached the upstairs and the occupants had to escape from an upstairs window using a ladder. The village was less isolated than Aylesby and its attractive setting had attracted a number of professionals who commuted some distance to cities and towns within the region. This is supported by the Acorn classification which states many of the people who live in this sort of postcode will be wealthy commuters living in villages (see Appendix 2 for further details).

There were also some residents who had lived there all their lives. There was no pub or shop or church within the village but there was a well used village hall and recreation field. There was a very active village social life based on the hall and field which was run by committees of residents. There was also a Parish Meeting for the village, which is similar to a Parish Council (see Appendix 2). Interviews took place in June 2007, two years after the flood. 11 residents were interviewed in total, 5 were badly flooded, 5 suffered minor flooding which didn't necessitate leaving their homes and 1 was not flooded in their property.

For the two village locations seven interviews were carried out with 'flood professionals'. The division of responsibility by different organisations involved varies, so that some of the organisations listed below had responsibility for both villages and some for only one.

Interviews were carried out with representatives of the Environment Agency, the County Council and the District Council. Further details are given in Chapter 7 and Appendix 1.

## Chapter 3 – Community, Locality and Belonging

*“there is a need to move beyond binary categorization of the ‘community’ idea being either social or spatial to explore how the social and the spatial interact...”* (Clarke 2007:27).

### 3.1 Introduction

It is the changing nature of locality that is perhaps seen as the greatest threat to community. The increasing mobility of people and information across the globe has led to a destabilisation of ideas over what it means to be local. Delanty (2003:195) for example discusses how the revival of interest in community is “undoubtedly connected with the crisis of belonging in its relation to place”. Similarly Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) argue that the new emphasis on local identities and concern for community is a consequence of globalisation. Changes since the beginning of capitalisation and industrialisation and their associated mobility threatened the view of local community as a bounded, stable and largely separate entity. Where “proximity, continuity and stability” are seen as “forming the crucible within which the ties of community are forged” (Day 2006:28) mobility is inevitably understood to destroy community. Hence the long and continuing discourse of community lost.

Concerns over postmodernism and globalisation have intensified that concern, leading to some authors such as Bauman (2001) claiming that communal relations cannot survive in the face of such mobility and interconnectedness. Parallel concerns are raised over locality and place, with many fearing that these are being destroyed, as the local is lost to the global, which is said to result in placelessness and homogeneity (Martin 2004, Massey 2005, Savage et al. 2005). Yet if we do not accept that places are separate bounded entities and that geography does not deterministically create community, then the question that needs to be considered is how the relationship between community and locality has changed. How do people relate to their local area, and what relationship does this have to expectations of communality and local social networks?

Exploring this relationship between the spatial and the social is important if local collective flood responses and the affect that flooding may have on local social structures are to be understood. Floods tend to have a local impact and may for a time cut off residents from outside assistance which then requires a local response. Government is also looking towards a local community response to flooding. If there is to be a local communal response to flooding then there needs to be some sense of community within the locality. If “there is no underlying community of interests whatsoever, the possibility of joint action

is more constricted, if not impossible” (Day 2006:117). If local communities are to be involved in Flood Risk Management and supported and encouraged to be better prepared and more self reliant during emergencies as The Pitt Review suggests, then this relationship between the locality and the community must be investigated, it cannot simply be assumed.

It is this relationship that is explored in this chapter. In the diagram on p. 34 illustrating the construction of the conscious community the focus of attention is on the circle labelled spatial aspects. The question being asked is can residents still feel a sense of attachment to their locality in a mobile and interconnected world and how does this relate to concepts of community? The answer is that yes interviewees did express a sense of local belonging, but in ways much more complex than the notion of the traditional community might suggest.

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) suggest, people’s lives are much less ascriptive. “Opportunities, dangers, biographical uncertainties that were earlier predefined within the family association, the village community, or by recourse to the rules of social estates or classes, must now be perceived, interpreted, decided and processed by individuals themselves” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:4). People are no longer born into a community and a role in which they must remain; rather individuals must constantly make choices. It is argued that the relationship with the locality has become a conscious one, where individuals not only have a choice of where to reside but where they also take part in actively constructing their sense of the local and their attachment to it.

The majority of residents interviewed felt attached to their locality but the routes to belonging were varied, as the discussion below illustrates. For some, relative immobility, family connections and familiarity remained important elements of their sense of belonging. For others, belonging could be achieved through participation and so mobility need not be a threat. Attachment to the locality could be expressed outside of ideas of local community. The spreading out of people’s lives, both daily and over the life course had led to the separating out of elements that were once seen as essentially combined in the holistic vision of the local community. However, conceptions of local community remained tied to the idea of dense local networks, or the face-to-face community. This led to the construction of local community boundaries at a small spatial scale within which these types of networks were at least possible. Yet as the final section demonstrates, the institutions that were once seen as central components of local communities were unable to create the types of dense, localised networks that residents envisioned as part of local



community. Residents had to create their own structures to enable these networks to develop, and how they did this is considered in Chapter 5.

### **3.2 Local Attachment**

In the 'traditional community' the locality and the community were seen as inseparable. The features once considered essential to the notion of community seemed inextricably linked when communities were understood as coherent functioning wholes; where people lived, worked, worshipped, socialised, raised families and obtained all of their material needs. Some still claim that it was the confinement and immobility of traditional communities that led to the apparently close and harmonious relationships which then attached them to the locality. For example, Bauman (2001:48) argues that "no aggregate of human beings is experienced as 'community' unless it is 'closely knit' out of biographies shared through a long history and an even longer life expectation of frequent and intense interaction. It is such experience which is nowadays missing, and it is its absence that is reported as 'decline', 'demise' or 'eclipse' of community ...". In this conception the sense of belonging, the social networks and the notion of community are inseparable. When many people had little choice but to live all aspects of their lives in a single location it is perhaps not surprising these were understood to be indivisible.

The relationship between the people and the place is central to the notion of local community. Analysing over ninety different definitions of community and despite despairing at their lack of coherence, Bell and Newby (1971:16) found that all of them contained "a sense of belonging". Clarke (2007:4) more recently argued that whilst there are different ways of "approaching the community question" all "appear united around attempts to understand 'belonging'". It has long been feared that increased mobility and industrialisation has destroyed this connection. Over the past two centuries the end of local identities has frequently been pronounced (Savage et al. 2005). Despite this, the research found that for many a sense of belonging and attachment to the locality was present but this could be expressed in different ways; it was not tied to immobility within an unchanging local community.

In the traditional community belonging is achieved through birth and family, you are born into it, you do not choose it (Bell and Newby 1971, Frazer 1999). For a number of residents a lifetime in the area and local family were important components in their sense of belonging to the locality; this was expressed through a discourse of 'familiarity'. This was particularly the case in Upbeck, where many residents had lived in that part of Leeds all their lives and they had members of their extended family living within the same area of

Leeds. However, despite the resemblance to the traditional community, this belonging was not expressed through a sense of local community. Prior to the flooding local community was felt to be largely absent. The ‘rooted’ discourse expressed in the village of Haylton was in many ways similar, but in contrast this was articulated through ideas of local community. The final discourse to be identified was that of belonging through ‘participation’. Here belonging is achieved not through birth or the presence of extended family, but through actively taking part in local activities and networks. This discourse of community like the participation discourse separates community from immobility and family ties.

### 3.2.1 Belonging through familiarity

The stereotype suggests that the urban population is a mobile one, with residents rapidly moving through, so that local people are strangers to one another and there is no sense of attachment or community (Valentine 2001). The association of community with the pre industrial tends to see industrialisation and urbanisation as the destroyer of community (Crow and Allan 1994, Day 2006, Delanty 2003, Phillips 1998). Urbanity is also usually associated with change and progress, whilst ruralilty is connected with tradition and timelessness (Stevenson 2003). This leads to the expectation that the most extreme examples of societal changes will be found in urban areas, whilst the rural locations are insulated against these to some extent (Stevenson 2003). Yet contrary to the stereotype, on the Upbeck estate many interviewees had lived in that part of Leeds all their lives and they often had extended family, such as parents, siblings and adult children, living within a mile or two. These residents felt an attachment to the locality that was expressed through the familiarity discourse.

In this discourse the local area was seen as familiar, known and therefore safe. Elizabeth for example, when asked “So what is it you like about this area?” replied “*Because it’s familiar, because we’ve grown up here*” (Int 11). People were contented with the area and did not consider moving outside of it. When Elizabeth was asked about the factors influencing her move after the flood she replied: “*I think it was more just we always lived at this side of Leeds, never really entered my head to look further afield. ... I know round here, the nicer areas and the not so nice areas, so you know where you’re looking ...*” (Int 59). James similarly would not consider moving away; “*We’ve been brought up this area all our lives so why move out?*” (Int 57&58). For John the area expresses something of his own identity: “***this is what I am*** ... *I suppose with hindsight there were other places just as good, but not as far as I’m concerned ... I’ve never wanted to live anywhere else. I just like this side of Leeds*” (Int 4). This narrative of familiarity was

very common amongst those who were born in the area. It provided a sense of attachment and belonging and connected residents to a certain section of Leeds.

Family is an important part of this discourse and residents valued having extended family members living close by and involved in their daily lives. Keeping family close was a major consideration when moving house, and therefore moves were usually within two or three miles. Ideas of near and far, and at what distance extended family should be located, could be very varied. In the familiarity discourse distances are small and a move of even a few miles significant, whereas for others who find belonging through participation, much greater distances from family are considered acceptable. Ian was born on that estate, his parents' still lived in the house he grew up in and his sister also lived on the estate, all of whom he considered to be '*living in the area*' (Int 5&6). Ian has since moved house because of the flooding, a distance of a little over a mile. Although they remained within two miles of family, Ian and his wife felt that moving further away had a negative impact on their lives, making visiting and services such as baby sitting more difficult. In a lifetime spent living within a few miles, where frequent contact is considered normal, even small changes in distance became significant.

Savage et al. (2005) in their research found a discourse very similar to the familiarity one expressed here, yet this did not lead to a sense of belonging. They found a comparable expression of familiarity and safety in Cheadle, where there was a group of residents who had similarly spent their lives within a mile of their current location and who were strongly embedded with kin. They also appeared to be similar in terms of socio economic status, neither being especially affluent. Whilst similar in their local family connections and immobility this "did not convey a sense that they belong" (2005:53). The reason for this was the "pervasive sense for locals that immobility was a mark of failure". This is the key difference with those on the Upbeck estate, they had chosen to live there and when they moved they chose to remain near by. The estate was a sought-after location, at least prior to the floods, and some residents had waited a considerable time in order to move onto the estate. People did not feel trapped in east Leeds, their relative immobility was through preference rather than financial constraints. Those who chose to move following the flood remained within this area of Leeds.

This immobility and desire to remain close to extended family may be at least partly related to socio economic status and associated cultural expectations. Although this particular estate was sought after it is in an area that is part of the East and South East Leeds Regeneration Initiative (EASEL). It is largely surrounded by council estates and there are issues of deprivation. Charles and Davies (2005:687) found in Swansea that

close-knit networks of kin and friends were particularly evident in “working-class neighbourhoods...”. Although some of those interviewed in this location were young professionals, these were few and they had not been born locally. The Acorn classification describes this area as “traditional blue-collar neighbourhoods” where “[f]ormal educational qualifications are below average. People tend to work in routine occupations in manufacturing and retail, in a mixture of skilled, semi-skilled and manual jobs”. This classification fits well with the known information of those born in this area of Leeds.

It may be as Charles and Davies suggest that there is a cultural association between close-knit networks and the ‘traditional’ working class (2005:687). Further research would be needed to see if this were the case. Class, which is a complex issue, was not a focus of the research, and not one that was particularly raised. Interview information included occupation, house type and whether rented or owner occupied but not salary details. However it did appear there was some relationship between socioeconomic status and geographical mobility, with more affluent professionals appearing to move more frequently and further. Research by Larsen et al. (2005) supports this. They suggest that “people with higher level qualifications are ... more mobile, especially graduates. ‘Only 12% of graduates live in the same local authority as they were born – compared with 44% of the general population” (p65). This issue would benefit from further research, but whatever the underlying causes the familiarity discourse was clearly expressed by this group of Leeds residents.

This attachment was created through familiarity, identification with the area, and extended family networks. It could therefore exist at a scale of a few square miles, the areas where people had lived, which they knew well and where their family were located. It might be expected that this immobile lifestyle, with extensive family networks reminiscent of the traditional community would lead to the dense confined networks associated with local community but this was not the case. This is not to say they had no networks of friends in this wider area; networks of good friends within this wider area were a part of what tied them into the location. However they knew few people living on the estate. Immobility, familiarity and family had not been sufficient to produce the interlinked social networks across the estate which were envisaged as local community. Moving house within the East Leeds area allowed residents to maintain their bonds with family and friends, but it tended to break the few, more tenuous localised networks that had been created with neighbours.

### 3.2.2 Rooted belonging

The rooted discourse was in many ways similar to that of the familiar one found in Upbeck. It was based on a lifetime spent in the locality and the presence of extended family close by. Where it differed was in the deep emotional attachment expressed, for both the village and the surrounding countryside. Unlike the familiarity discourse this attachment is tied up with the notion of community. The two came together, as did the scale at which they were expressed. It is in a number of ways close to the traditional notions of community, where belonging is expressed through birth and family. Thomas Carter described how *“when you’ve lived somewhere all your life and you’ve grown up and your family have grown up with you, you just get in an attachment that’s very hard to explain”* (Int 46). Thomas was born in the village of Haylton, all his now adult children, and their children, still lived in the same village, as did his sister. He also had a business based in the village, where he worked with two sons and a daughter.

Thomas articulated a strong emotional attachment to the village but this also extended to the surrounding countryside. *“I’ve always loved the surrounding area, I never go walking miles away but over the years I’ve done long walks and I know every nook and cranny of this countryside”* (Int 46). He was eloquent when describing Haylton and the surrounding countryside, which he knew in intimate detail. The presence of family is an important component and he really valued having all his family still in the village, describing it as *“wonderful”* and recognising that this was no longer common. Those who were born locally were understood to share a special bond that was associated with community. Immobility, allowing people to spend a great deal of their lives together is essential for this type of attachment. Yet this wasn’t understood in a closed way excluding those who were not local from belonging, as the following section and later chapters will illustrate.

### 3.2.3 Belonging through participation

The idea that you could achieve belonging through active participation in the community was expressed by many and it is implicit in many discussions of community. However it was in Haylton that this was most prominent and most clearly expressed, and it formed a central part of Haylton’s identity (community identity is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). The residents of Haylton saw themselves as fortunate to live in what they considered an exceptionally good community. *“... I thought I would never see it again, I thought that sort of village life had gone, but no, it exists in Haylton”* (Carol Int 52&53). The community was seen as superior because of its active social life based in the

village. This revolved around a wide range of groups and activities which took place in the village hall or the more recently purchased village recreation field.

These had produced dense local networks where everybody knew everybody and there was a tradition of helping others, the village motto being 'pulling together'. The discourse of participation enabled those who were not born locally to become part of the community through their willingness to participate in its activities. Again, perhaps contrary to the rural/urban stereotypes both of the village locations had a considerable number of residents who were not born locally. These came from all over the country and some from other countries. This discourse of participation was found elsewhere, but it was generally less clearly articulated, and less central to the community identity than in Haylton. This participatory view of community allowed newcomers to become members in a way that the traditional 'born and bred' view doesn't. So in a more mobile society those moving in to a village or another type of local community have a way in which they can belong. In turn the wide range of events, especially the village wide events helped create a strong community identity.

Aylesby was also considered by residents to be a good village, where everybody knew everybody. Again there is an emphasis on the importance of local networks to create a good local community. Not all the residents were born in the village but the relative newcomers had been accepted as part of the village. There was however less of an overt emphasis on the importance of participation to belong. The main difference with Haylton was the ways in which residents could meet and form networks. Aylesby had fewer organised groups and events but a number of ways that residents could meet casually. (The ways in which local social networks are constructed and maintained is considered further in Chapter 5). This could explain why there is less emphasis placed on taking part than there was in Haylton. Local networks could be created and maintained through these informal structures. People did talk about supporting the shop, which was a meeting point and an important part of the village, which could be considered a form of participation. The fact that the local minister (who lived outside of the village) didn't ever use the village shop was seen to show a lack of support and made him unpopular with some residents. So some forms of participation are still seen as necessary.

In the participatory discourse extended family are not expected to be part of people's daily lives and they do not provide a sense of local belonging. Although extended family remains important the networks may be much more extended and living at some distance was considered acceptable. For example Brenda in Haylton was pleased to move closer to her aging parents and considered them to be at a convenient distance at sixty miles away. This

contrasts strongly with Ian discussed earlier who found moving a distance of less than two miles from his parents to be inconvenient. Brenda had led a mobile life, moving around the country with her husband's work whilst Ian had lived all his life within a few miles and they had very different ideas of near and far and the role of extended family. Whilst contact with her parents was important for Brenda she did not expect the kind of daily involvement that was possible for Ian and others in Upbeck.

Whilst extended family can be an important resource, particularly following a flood (see Chapter 6) they may also be a responsibility. Brenda found that caring for her parents limited the extent she could participate in Haylton's community activities. *"I was asked, I think twice, to be on the social committee at the time when my parents were both, you know, not well and I didn't feel I could commit myself. I prefer to help when it's you know, when I'm able to rather than, I always feel if you're going to be on a committee it is a commitment and you must be prepared"*. If she had lived closer to her parents, within the local community as was once common, she would not necessarily have experienced the same difficulties. This separation out of elements once thought to constitute local community can lead to tensions where in the past there would have been few. People still feel a responsibility for extended family and wish to help but if greater distances are involved this can be time consuming. Although, alternatively, living at some distance may also relieve them from certain duties.

Haylton had the most developed and particular notion of the participatory community but it is present to some extent in all the discourses of local community. Participation in the form of local relationships remains essential to the notion of local community. The participatory community is more reflexive and allows residents much more agency in constructing the local community than the more traditional notions. People choose, at least to a certain extent, where to live and they choose whether to participate in community, if there is one, or perhaps to try and create one if there isn't. They can also choose to leave, an option that some took following flooding. There were a number of residents in Upbeck for whom the floods destroyed their relationship with their house and immediate locality. They therefore moved away, yet they moved only a short distance and remained in the wider area to which they expressed attachment. The local community networks were broken by this move but the wider local networks of family and friends remained intact. This is very different to the traditional community where people had little choice but to get on and live where they were born in a 'community of fate' (Pahl 2005). Attachment to the locality through participation in communal networks remains valued, but this does not mean it is always present.

### 3.2.4 Belonging in a mobile society

As the above discourses illustrate, many interviewees expressed an attachment to the locality, despite the many claims in the literature that mobility destroys local attachments. These discourses understand the impacts of mobility in different ways. The participation discourse allowed interviewees to create a sense of belonging which was not reliant on immobility of the population, and could accommodate people who came from all over the UK and beyond. Mobility does not threaten this vision of community. This bringing together of a variety of people from different backgrounds can even be understood positively. Charles for example believes this diversity of people is one of the reasons for their success as a community. *“One of the things we identified why this village was probably cohesive is that it is a big cross section of society here, we’ve got a sort of orthopaedic surgeon, a university professor, we’ve got lads working on the farm. A complete mix, there’s retired people, there’s people commuting, there’s young people ...”* (Int 39). A similar phenomenon has been noted by Massey (2004:6), where Londoners have begun to assume an identity which is based around “mixity rather than coherence from common roots”.

Identity and belonging need not be formed around some essentialised category, places need not be seen as bounded and closed and so mobility need not be threatening. This is not to say there is never any opposition to this view, one elderly resident of Aylesby spoke of the people in the village all being ‘strangers’ now because they came from outside of the village. She was also very disapproving of Polish people living in the village. This was however the only example of open hostility to non locals, and her disapproval was part of a discourse of general decline in modern life. The majority of interviewees expressed no resentment against those who were not born locally. (It is however possible that this tolerance of ‘non locals’ may dissipate should their numbers increase beyond a certain point). Even those discourses which revolved around ideas of a lifetime spent in the location did not exclude those who came from elsewhere. These discourses provided a personal sense of attachment through family and familiarity. The presence of non locals did not threaten this relationship. So whilst mobility may alter the understanding of local community it need not always be destructive.

Savage et al. (2005:52) concluded from their research that attachment to place is detached from historical communal roots in the place. In contrast, this research found that for some residents a sense of history in a place can be important. There can still be a connection between immobility, family networks, a sense of history and attachment to locality. This is not through a straightforward recreation of the traditional community. It does not rely on total immobility of the population and a conception of community as closed and bounded.



As Savage et al. note it is “important to resist the nostalgic current, still evident in communitarian thought and urban sociology, to defend the idea of a historically rooted local community ...” (p52). Rather what is suggested is that a sense of historical connection can still provide for some individuals a sense of belonging and connection to a place. This does not mean that this arises from, or goes on to produce, the type of community usually envisaged in these traditional discourses. In fact this sense of belonging can be detached from notions of local community.

The different discourses of attachment were reflected in the variation in residents’ personal mobility. All those interviewed had moved residence within their lifetime but some chose to move within a very confined area whereas others had moved around the country. Yet both groups could express attachment to their locality and a sense of belonging. The mobility within the locations similarly varied, with Upbeck having many residents who had lived in that part of Leeds all their lives, whilst the rural locations, Haylton in particular had attracted residents from across the country and internationally. Again this mobility need not threaten the relationship to the locality. Despite the evidence of considerable movement locality was expressed at a small scale and this was reflected in the construction of the local community boundaries.

### **3.3 Constructing community boundaries**

Local communities are necessarily identified with particular places. However it should not be assumed that the town or village equates to the community in any straightforward way. As Clarke (2007:8) has pointed out in the study of local community there is the danger of “reliance on a somewhat naïve appreciation of spatiality that could potentially lapse into environmental determinism”. The local community is not simply a portion of space or a bounded territorial unit, or a separate social entity; it is an expression of a particular vision of a relationship between the people and the place in which they reside. The recognition of community as a mental construct allows us to examine how residents create, maintain and contest their boundaries of local community. Rather than assume or impose a definition of the local community, it is necessary to understand how residents construct this spatial identity. Neither should the existence of a local community be assumed; residents whilst they usually felt a local community was desirable did not see it as inevitable or essential.

In the shift to understanding community as a mental construct there has been something of a neglect of social relations (Amit 2002). Yet as the interviews with residents revealed, networks remain central to conceptions of local community. This is not to say that

community was reducible to networks alone but these networks were seen as an essential part of what a community should be. The ideal sought (but not necessarily achieved) is the type of community where ‘everybody knows everybody’. This then impacts on the spatial delineation of boundaries. As the first section discusses, the local community was identified as a small area within which these networks were at least possible, even if they were not actually present. Yet as the following section shows, unlike earlier notions of local community these boundaries were not seen as confining and exclusive but porous and open. Finally, whilst community cannot be assumed to reside in particular places, the ‘official’ boundaries can coincide with the community boundaries.

### **3.3.1 Size matters – small is beautiful**

Extensive, interlinked networks within the locality remain central to notions of local community. This led residents to define their local community or potential local community at a small scale. It would be difficult to have these types of dense, interconnected networks over a wider area as the numbers of individuals involved quickly becomes too numerous. People do of course belong to many networks spread over a wide area, and these can be worldwide in their reach. However these are very different to the type of networks envisaged in the local community discourse. Whilst the types of networks reflect in many ways the traditional notions of community, the boundaries which are constructed to contain them are much more porous. They are crossed frequently, both daily by residents travelling to work etc. and more permanently as properties are sold and new people move in. Residents no longer expected the majority of their lives to take place within these boundaries.

Interviewees were conscious of the movement and interconnectedness of people lives. Robert for example says *“I’ve lived all over Yorkshire and it’s always been like that, it’s always been you know, a quarter of the people are from, you know, London or Birmingham or Bristol and a quarter of the people are local and then the other half are all from Scotland or Ireland or, you know, the other side of the world, and so it’s a, its a very cosmopolitan world that we live in”* (Int 36). Despite this movement residents felt able to define their local community, although for some this was a potential community rather than existing one. In each of the locations there was a considerable consensus regarding what constituted the local community. This is not to say there was a homogenous view of the community, or that there were never any divisions. Rather, there was largely agreement on the area that could be considered the local community.

This consensus was perhaps most surprising in Leeds, as to the outsider there were no apparent boundaries. Yet residents frequently referred to the housing estate and identified with this as their local community. They highlighted spatial features which delineated the estate and provided a sense of separateness from the surrounding area. To the outsider the estate is largely indistinguishable from the surrounding houses. However an important factor in its construction as the community was the lack of exits on and off the estate. The estate consists of eight streets; one main street and seven side streets which are all cul de sacs (dead ends). This meant that there was only one access point on to and off the estate for cars, and a further route which is only suitable for pedestrians. Residents felt that this created a boundary and good conditions for developing local networks.

Tony, for example, discusses how *“we’re kind of a small community, we’re kind of one road in and one road out, with a few streets and, you know, as a community we would fare very well really. It’s nicely compact”* (Int 23). Similarly, John describes how *“we’re just one little community, that’s the only entrance and exit by road, there’s only one other and it’s by foot, so we’re sort of cocooned here, surrounded by that embankment and by the beck really”* (Int 4). In both cases the community, although clearly delineated, was seen as potential, rather than actual, because of the lack of networks on the estate. Residents’ discourses call on these traditional elements of small size and relative isolation which are seen as providing good conditions for developing networks. However simply residing in the estate had not provided a sufficient identity around which people could create communal networks prior to flooding. John believed that this relative isolation combined with the *“common bond”* of being flooded and the way that *“more people talk to one another now”* could be *“nurtured”* so that the estate could become *“a better place”* (Int 4). To a large extent this proved to be the case as the following chapters discuss.

In contrast to Upbeck in Leeds the rural locations were chosen, at least in part, for their small size and apparent isolation, to allow the relationship between size, isolation, boundaries and identity to be explored. Aylesby in particular was in a remote position on the moors, reached only by steep and difficult roads. Whilst in both cases the village was clearly felt to constitute the local community, where the boundaries of this lay was not always clear. The inclusion of outlying farms and isolated houses in particular could be ambiguous. This did not cause any confusion or loss of identity for those interviewed, although those on the borders may have felt differently. This clear identification is perhaps made easier because the village is often portrayed as the ideal community. This combined with a strong village identity allows a fuzzy boundary to be easily accommodated. In these small villages this identity was reinforced because it was possible for ‘everybody to know everybody’ which allowed people to feel part of a known community.

A boundary which contains people who feel they have something in common and a sense of belonging must also create those who don't belong, outsiders as well as insiders. In the past the emphasis was on exclusivity, and the community was seen as separate and distinctive. Loss of the apparent separateness of communities led researchers to look at other ways this insider, outsider distinction could be made. Cohen's work for example centres on how residents created symbolic boundaries once the spatial boundaries are less clear. Yet residents tended to focus on what they had in common as a community, rather than try and define themselves against those outside the community. Similarly, others have found more of an emphasis on group belonging and identity rather than boundary defining (Delanty 2003, Gray 2002). However a threat to the boundary or the emphasis of difference to an outside group could still help reinforce the sense of being an insider. In Haylton a friendly inter village competition took on this role. It helped to reinforce the boundaries and the village identity.

Haylton was one of a group of four villages who saw themselves as having something in common and they would come together for certain activities. "*There's four local villages and you tend to support each other, you know, at certain times and certain things*" (Int 50&51 Judy). The four villages took it in turns to host an annual sports day where villagers competed in a variety of events to win points for their village. Whilst they felt they shared something in common and supported one another the "*friendly rivalry*" to win the 'village cup' at the annual sports day helped to strengthen Haylton's individual identity. The event allowed the villages to show their unity and closeness by coming together, yet at the same time to assert their individuality through competition to be the winning village. The competition allowed the villagers to demonstrate their support for their village identity. The boundary was reinforced through interaction rather than separateness.

### **3.3.2 Porous boundaries**

Whilst the spatial boundaries could be drawn with a reasonable degree of agreement there was considerable movement across them as people moved into and out of the community. Some authors such as Bauman (2001) maintain that isolation and a distinct boundary are necessary conditions to produce an 'authentic' local community. However others such as Massey (1991, 2003, 2004, 2005) argue for a more open conception of place, where uniqueness is not predicated on separateness. Rather place arises from a unique combination of interactions at all scales from the very smallest up to the global. The findings tended to support the latter, in that the residents' sense of local community was not threatened by movement across the boundaries. However it is unlikely that Bauman would recognise the residents' experience of community as an authentic one. The concern

here, however, is not a normative one, to decide what constitutes a valid community. The aim is to uncover conceptions of community and understand some of the implications of this conceptualisation.

As houses are sold and bought newcomers will arrive in the community. The communities were able to accommodate these without feeling they threatened the community identity. Post war community studies suggested that places are characterised by tension between 'born and bred' locals and migrant incomers (Savage et al. 2005). Yet like Savage et al. the research found that respondents differentiated between the groupings in a "relatively muted way" (Savage et al. 2005:31). 'Incomers' can become accepted and active members of the community. There were some tensions in Haylton between local families and incoming professionals who were seen to have pushed house prices up. However this problem had largely been resolved with the provision of some social housing within the village. The slight tension had not impaired residents' ability to present themselves as a united village and it had not prevented inhabitants working effectively together. Where the community is created around a shared ideal rather than immobility then mobility need not constitute a threat.

The porosity of the boundaries did not just allow the acceptance of newcomers. Those who have moved out of a local community may continue to participate in those networks to some extent. In Haylton, which had very active community networks, some residents who had moved away from the village still maintained their contacts there, returning for village groups and events, or even still holding a position in the organisation of them. Carol discusses the Plimstock's "*who moved down into Nether Poppleton, north side of York, they come to everything in the village and he's still the secretary of the history group*" (Int 52&53). Others who had left maintained similar contact, Joyce an elderly woman who was a key figure in the village, but who has now had to move to somewhere closer to amenities and services, still remains very involved in village activities (Int 48&49). Frank who organizes the village newsletter finds it is the people who have left the village who appreciate the newsletter most (Int 48&49). So in many ways these ex villagers were still participating in the community, although by residence they no longer belonged to it.

There were occasions where crossing the boundaries could be contentious. Tourism raised some issues, especially in picturesque Aylesby. People who relied on tourism for their business wanted to encourage it and relied on it for their income, whereas others disliked having so many visitors coming into the village. "*So a lot of this village is actually taken up with tourism and, you know, actually the tourists are a bit of a bloody nuisance sometimes*" (Robert Int 36). Robert was also critical of the owners of the pub, arguing that

by catering for tourists they had destroyed its role as hub of the village. In contrast, the owners of the shop and the pub emphasised the need for the countryside to provide a practical place to live and work. A lack of visitors after the floods was one of their major concerns. This demonstrates one of the many tensions over how countryside is used and reflects different visions of the rural community. (This is discussed further in the next chapter, which considers how the notion of the rural idyll can be a key factor in constructing a community identity).

Local community no longer provides an encompassing place where the majority of daily activities take place, rather it is now seen as a node, or central access point. Many interviewees spent a great deal of their day outside of the area defined as local community. When deciding where to live, and assessing what they like about their local area, what can be reached outside of the boundary is as important as what lies within it. As lives have become less spatially restricted being able to manage these aspects effectively becomes important. Louise explains their choice of location when moving onto the Upbeck estate *“that’s why we picked it, didn’t we as well, when we first moved here, because it was such an easy, easy place for buses and schools and things like that”* (Int 5&6). Being able to reach work, family, friends, shops and leisure activities was important to interviewees. However what was considered near and far was very subjective and the distance people were able or prepared to travel for different purposes varied. In Upbeck, Leeds residents usually appreciated having many amenities close by, with all the essential ones reachable by walking or public transport. In the rural areas villagers were prepared to travel some distance because they valued the village and the surrounding countryside. Residents weighed up their priorities and chose their location accordingly.

For some the range of options was more limited. The increased mobility associated with globalisation is not equally available to everybody. A certain level of wealth and private car ownership was necessary to live in either of the rural locations. As residents aged and reached a point where they could no longer drive some felt they had little choice but to leave. The inability to access any amenities on foot or by public transport eventually made living in the village impracticable, particularly when combined with the health problems associated with aging. A number of aged residents in Haylton had reluctantly left to be nearer amenities, particularly shops and healthcare. Others felt they would have to do the same as they became less active. Patricia for example explains *“you know we’ll have to move eventually, as we get old ... unless you can drive there’s nothing. I mean we have no shops, no pub, no public transport, nothing within reach, so eventually we’ll have to move to a town, somewhere there are more facilities”* (Int 38). In Leeds, those reliant on public transport, usually the less wealthy, were particularly aware of the need to choose

the position of the residence carefully. Distance is less about miles and more about the time taken and the resources needed. The less mobile in society had fewer options available to them, and had to choose their location carefully.

The expectations of local community remain similar to the traditional community in terms of the localised networks. These networks must be interlinked and exist within a confined area to allow residents to know the majority of the other residents in the traditional face-to-face community. Yet whilst the network patterns of the traditional community remain central to community constructions, the traditional institutions through which these were once constructed have changed. Many of these local institutions still exist but they now operate at a different scale of locality that fails to coincide with local community, as the following section explores.

### **3.4 Community institutions and local networks**

The presence of dense networks within a small area remains essential to residents' understanding of local community. Yet how these networks can be produced is not clear. In the 'traditional community' where residents spent the majority of their lives these relations were said to arise through repeated contacts occurring within the community. A number of institutions were involved in this, so that residents would meet through employment, religious practice, maintaining family connections, leisure and gaining their material needs. This produced the multi-stranded (multiplex) relations formed through meeting in a range of roles, once claimed to be essential to community (Bell and Newby 1971, Frazer 1999).

The extent to which life was so locally circumscribed is debatable but few would argue with the claim that many people's lives have become more spatially dispersed. As Shelley (2003:606) points out, since the early 1800's "the invention of and diffusion of the telegraph, telephones, radio, television, railroads, automobiles and aviation meant that social interaction was no longer limited to the immediate proximity". To this list we can add the mobile telephone and the internet. This is not to suggest that the local has become unimportant, or that we do not need to consider the role of space in these relations. Rather that there is no straightforward relationship between certain institutions and the production of the types of networks considered to constitute a local community. (How these types of networks were produced is considered in chapter 5)

What this research finds is that those institutions once understood to be central in local community construction were no longer able to create the types of networks that residents

understood as essential to local community. This included institutions that retain an explicit link with community, such as schools or local government. This is not to say that no networks were produced, or that they were not centred on a particular place. However, the networks produced were neither sufficiently dense nor localised to be understood as local community. The scale of local in the two different contexts did not coincide.

### **3.4.1 Defining Institutional Structures**

The structures examined below are not an exhaustive list of community structures. Rather they are those that were present in the fieldwork locations which might have been expected to play a role in creating local community networks. Family has already been discussed above so is not included here. Institutional structures are defined for the purposes of this research as formal organisations, which whilst they have local representation are wider in their administration. They are usually national in scale but could potentially be international. Some are government structures such as Parish Councils and Parish Meetings (local government), the Environment Agency or schools. There were also religious structures of varying kinds. The types of structures discussed are those that are present whether or not there is local support for them or not.

A group such as Brownies or Scouts is not considered an institutional structure. This is because whilst these have national and international organisations, at the local level they are reliant on willing volunteers to start and maintain a local group. The question regarding institutional structures (as defined here) is to what extent do local people choose to take part in these organisations and what role do they play in constructing the local face-to-face networks associated with local community? They all retain to some extent, despite their national or wider organisation, a belief that they can have an influence at the local level. Many of these types of structures would once have been seen as central components of the local community; however their role now was often only limited. These types of structures have not ceased to exist but their role within the local community and their relationship with the locality has become more complex.

### **3.4.2 Religious institutions**

Organised religion was once a central part of many people's lives and the church was seen as a vital part of the traditional community. It is, as Day (2006:232) notes, one of the pre-existing social bonds from which conventional community ties tended to draw their strength. In Tönnies *Gemeinschaft* or community the church, along with the family, are the "moral custodians of the community" who make their code clear and their injunctions



are well internalized (Bell and Newby 1971:24). Religion has of course not been without its conflicts and it cannot be assumed the relationship between community and religion is straightforward. What is argued here is that it was commonly expected that religious institutions would play an important role in the traditional community. What is examined in this section is the function that religious structures have in the fieldwork locations, in terms of creating local networks. Religion was found to have a limited role in constructions of local community in the fieldwork areas, through both historical legacy and current practise.

In Upbeck and Haylton religion played only a very minor role in community networks. In Leeds there was a Catholic club which some residents of the Upbeck estate used for social purposes, but this did not lie within the estate or create estate wide networks. A small number of estate residents did know one another through the club, but the clubs networks spread much wider. In Haylton the nearest church was in a neighbouring village, so although it helped create inter village networks it didn't particularly contribute to the village networks. Religion had played a more significant role in shaping Aylesby, quite literally as it is effectively in two halves because of a historical disagreement between different denominations. There is a high part and a low part which still has some impact on social relations today, with mixing within the lower and higher parts being more frequent than interaction between the two.

In Aylesby the church also retained some role as a community meeting point. Although the village church no longer had a full time minister, and most residents did not attend regularly, it did provide both a place and activities which could bring together at least some of the village. There were for example Easter and Christmas craft sessions for children which helped bring parents together. On occasion it would bring the majority of residents together, as when all the villagers were invited to a wedding in the church. So the church in Aylesby did help create community networks, but by providing a social space rather than through regular religious observance. The minister for Aylesby felt that the church could play an important community role in remote rural areas with a small population as *"there's not a lot else in the way of social or community events going on"* (Peter Int 31). So even if church attendance is low the church can provide a social space. However in a less remote location, with a wider range of nearby activities then this role is likely to be less significant.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that church attendance has declined in the UK (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). Tearfund research found that two thirds of adults in the UK have no connection with any religion or church. What this means in terms of religion

is open to debate but not of relevance here, rather its social role is examined. The church was once understood as a central part of the local community but it no longer appears to play a significant social role as only 10% of adults attend at least weekly, and this figure only rises to 15% when at least monthly attendance is considered (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). Of course in a multi faith society different religions with their own social structures may have a key role. For example, Dwyer (1999) illustrates how a Muslim identity may play a role in local community identity for young women in Hertfordshire. However in the three fieldwork locations this was not the case. Christianity remains the predominant faith in the UK with over half (53%), that is 26.2 million adults, claiming to be Christian; while other faiths account for 6% and the remainder claim to have no religion (39%) (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). So although religion may play a key role in creating local community networks in particular locations it is unlikely to have a role in many instances.

### **3.4.3 Local Government Structures**

Local government is seen to have a significant role in local communities. The labour government has made the idea of local communities and supporting them central to many of its policies. In flood response the interface between local government and local communities is understood to be an important one. Parish and town councils are seen as “the tier of local government closest to their community” which “can be of great assistance to the other authorities in providing a link to the communities” (Hampshire Flood Steering Group 2002). The Pitt Review stresses the importance of their relationship to the local; “the role of local authorities should be enhanced so that they take on responsibility for leading the coordination of Flood Risk Management in their areas ... Their place-shaping role and local democratic accountability will help to ensure that the right local action is taken” (pxvi). Yet the exact nature of the relationship between local government and residents’ understanding of local community is unclear. As the following discussion illustrates, the scale of local in the two discourses can be very different and local government may have almost no role in residents’ construction of local community as a social structure. However in Haylton there was a close relationship between the local government in the form of a Parish Meeting, and the local community.

Haylton was the only one of the three locations where local government structures played a significant role in creating and maintaining networks prior to flooding. There was an active Parish Meeting (similar to a Parish Council, see Appendix 2) which dealt exclusively with government issues. Unlike some parishes, the social aspects were dealt with separately by the Recreation Association. The Parish Meeting was well supported, and along with the many other groups in the village, it helped create dense networks within the

village. The Parish Meeting also helped provide a sense of history and tradition for the village, as it had been running since the 1890s. The Clerk still wrote in the original book, a point mentioned by a number of residents. The Chair of the Parish Meeting had been active in helping after the flood and had negotiated with various agencies on behalf of villagers. It is significant that the boundaries of the Parish Meeting coincided with the boundaries of what was considered to be the local community, which was the village. The Parish Meeting formed a part of an already active community, drawing on the same networks and sense of communal identity.

This was not the situation in either of the other two locations where the government boundaries were much wider than the local community boundaries. Aylesby's Parish Council covered a large area with a scattered rural population. The Upbeck estate in Leeds was part of a ward which was part of the City Council. There was little relationship between the boundaries of these structures and residents' delineation of the local community. There also seemed to be little engagement with these organisations, which for most people appeared to play no part in their daily lives. The Parish Council responsible for Aylesby covered a wide area which contained a number of villages. Its role within Aylesby appeared to be quite limited and many residents had little awareness of its responsibilities and activities. The relationship between the village and the Parish was not straightforward or close. It appeared to have at best only a very limited role in local community construction.

Initially, local government structures had no role in community construction in Upbeck but this situation changed once they had suffered from repeat flooding. Various government departments and organisations became involved with Upbeck in order to deal with the flood issue. Prior to the floods, local government appeared to play no role in the development of local networks or local community identification. This is not to say that people were not politically engaged, simply that it did not play a part in the construction of local community. The scale of even the lowest tier of local government for Leeds bore little relation to the notion of the estate as the local community. With repeat flooding, residents of the estate came into contact with staff from the Environment Agency and the City Council who were responsible for dealing with flooding on the estate. Over time, relationships were developed and a flood warning scheme was set up which involved the use of flood wardens. This institutional intervention played a significant role in the construction of community networks and structures where there had been few before. Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the effect of the role that 'flood professionals' had in supporting the development of local networks in Upbeck following flooding.

### 3.4.4 Schools, networks and the community

Schools are another institution, which despite societal changes remain linked to the ideals of building local communities. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) 2007 strategy *A Good Local School For Every Child and For Every Community* makes very explicit the perceived link between community and schooling. Point 5 notes that “high quality, publicly provided education is vital both for local communities and for the country’s ability to respond to global economic challenges ...” They argue that the best way of achieving this is “to ensure that every child should go to a good local school” (p10). It might then be expected that school is a key institution in developing local community networks. The research found that although local networks were formed by parents through schools and other child-based activities, they were at a wider scale than the residents’ construction of local community boundaries. This was equally true of the rural village locations and in urban Leeds. There was therefore often only a limited intersection between diffuse parenting networks and local tight knit community networks.

The ideal is that schools are located within the community and schools are positioned within catchment areas from which their pupils are drawn, so that residence is linked to schooling. This direct relationship between locality and school attendance might be expected to provide a structure through which local networks can be developed. However whilst it tended to attach parents to the locality, this was through wider, more diffuse networks than those envisaged as the local community. Neither is the link between residence and catchment area as straightforward as might be expected. Families did not necessarily reside in their schools catchment area. In Leeds some had moved out of the catchment yet kept their child at their previous school. Others had stayed at the same address but moved their children to different schools. In both villages children had a choice of school, none of which was located within the village. So the link between catchment area and residence is complex.

The small villages might be expected to be closer to the traditional notion of community and therefore school might play a key role, but even here most school networks lay beyond the bounds of the community. In isolated Aylesby, the nearest schools were several miles away and children travelled on a school bus. Attending school and ‘after school clubs’ tended to take villagers outside of the community, rather than cementing relations within it. As Michelle explains “*we’re forever up and down, we’d take him down Monday no, Tuesday we go down for cubs, come back, Thursday it’s after school clubs so you go down and you come back, Friday it’s another after school club, so you go down and you come back ...*” (Int 29&30). A similar situation existed in Haylton with children attending schools some distance away. So there is no direct mapping of school location, child based

networks and what is considered to be the local community. Savage et al. (2005:54) in their research found similar results, in that whilst mothering could become a means of attaching both women, and indirectly men, it “generates detached social networks, rather than close social ties with neighbours”.

The only person to articulate a direct link between schools and community was Thomas who was born in Haylton and whose children and grandchildren still live in the village. He attended a small school in the next village which at the time of interviewing had recently closed. *“It builds a community if you grow up with somebody that you started school with at five years old. I bet you that you will stay friends with them for the rest of your life. And that’s what’s happened round here. All the kids know each other, probably know each other better than if they were related to each other”*. He goes on to describe how there are still a number of people locally who he attended the village school with and how *“we just have something in common, I don’t know what it is, that you don’t have with the people who’ve come into the district later”*. In a narrative that reflects the traditional community he privileges a relationship based on immobility and growing up together. However his experience was not typical and some parents had chosen not to send their children to the village school.

Susan, whose children are now adults, had made a conscious choice to send her children to a larger school outside of the community. *“I’m glad we didn’t [send them to the village school] because, you know, everybody says these small village schools are wonderful, but they’re very insular and they don’t have great facilities ... I think it just creates problems when they get to eleven and then have to go up to a bigger school”* (Int 44&45). She felt the small village school was not good preparation for coping in wider society. So the village school was not understood by all as ideal and neither did all children in the village attend it. With the closure of the local school, and the movement of people in and out of the village, it seems unlikely that school based networks will play the type of community-building role suggested by Thomas in the future, even they were able to in the past.

None of the institutions described above played a straightforward role in local community creation, either with local networks or local identity. Neither did other activities once understood as central in community play a significant role. Communities based around shared employment for example, such as mining villages, are well documented but those interviewed were employed by many different employers and many travelled considerable distances to work. The means residents used to meet and create networks are considered

in detail in chapter 5, but as this chapter indicates the once traditional institutions of local community rarely played a role.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

The research found that residents felt a sense of belonging or attachment to their locality, despite the fears in much of the literature that the locality will become irrelevant as mobility has increased. This could be performed in a number of different ways, and some of these lay outside of the notion of the local community. Whilst mobility need not always be a threat to community, relative immobility and local family connections could provide an attachment to the locality, both for those who experience this and for others within the community. In contrast, active participation in community networks can provide a sense of belonging which is not dependent on immobility. The relationship to the locality is more voluntary and more complex than is envisaged in the traditional community.

Despite the many changes from the traditional notions of community, dense local networks, where the majority of residents are known to one another remained central to understandings of local community. This requirement for the face-to-face community led to local community boundaries being constructed at a small scale. In the rural locations the village was sufficiently small whereas in the urban location the community was identified with the eight streets of the housing estate. These boundaries are not seen as separating the community from the rest of society, rather the community provides an access point from which all aspects of life can be reached, whether they lie within or beyond the community boundaries. This is much closer to the notion of place as socially constructed, from intersections at a whole range of scales, than the more deterministic view of communities as bounded, closed entities determined by the space.

Whilst the ideal of close-knit localised networks remain from the traditional notion of community, the traditional institutions once assumed to play a key role in their development, were not able to fulfil this purpose. Schools, local government and religious organisations can play a role in developing local networks. However these networks tend to be dispersed across a much wider area, and be more diffuse, than those associated with local community. As people's lives have become less spatially defined, so the various aspects once understood as combined have become separated out. Some elements from the vision of the traditional community persist whilst others have been left behind. Attachment to the locality may be constructed in a number of ways and at different scales. The relationship to the locality is more complex than a simple identification with an entity called local community.

The focus of this chapter has been on the spatial, and exploring the relationship between locality and community. What has become clear is the interlinked nature of the social, spatial and mental aspects of community. It has not been possible to understand one without examining the others. For example it was impossible to identify the spatial limits of the community boundary without appreciating that community remains associated with localised networks, and considering how those networks might be produced. To understand the ways in which residents feel attachment to their locality it was necessary to recognise the ways in which belonging might be performed. The local in local community encompasses much more than a small portion of space. Its construction involved both a mental aspect in the form of a communal identity and a social aspect in the form of localised networks. The perspective now shifts to consider these aspects in further detail, starting in Chapter 4 with 'Creating local identities'.

## Chapter 4 – Creating local identities

*“She came specifically because she heard that village life was good. So she came with the intention of joining in village life, which she seems to have done” (Terry, Haylton).*

*“You’ve got a bond between you because you’ve all suffered the same things, whereas the other people, sort of sympathise with you but they haven’t experienced it so they can only imagine what it’s like ...” (John, Upbeck).*

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways in which local identities were created. It explores the means through which local people can come to feel connected to one another, and what can unite them together in a particular place. This is similar in some ways to the idea of belonging discussed in the previous chapter. Yet as we saw, whilst *place* belonging or local attachment involves social relationships and connection to the locality it need not connect residents to one another. People can feel a sense of belonging to the locality without knowing their neighbours or feeling that they have much in common with those living around them. Upbeck prior to the flood provides a good example of such a situation. A shared local identity cannot simply be assumed.

In the traditional holistic concept of community, the community was understood as the creator or source of identity. As Day (2006:29) notes, such “communities approximated to social groups, in that they were relatively bounded, and set apart from the rest of society, and so [were] able to confer upon individuals a definite sense of membership and collective identity. Part of the continued longing for community is understood to arise from a desire to recover this lost identity (Lee and Newby 1983:38). As Gray (2002:38) comments transnational processes have disrupted peoples’ relation to an “apparently fixed and identifiable place which is constitutive of self, identity, and/or community ...”. One response to globalisation, with its increasing mobility and interconnectedness of places, has been to “abandon the notion altogether of the uniqueness of place and particularly of place as a source of *identity*” (Jess and Massey 1995:58 *italics in original*). Globalisation has been seen to challenge identity in the same way as it was seen to challenge the local because the two were understood to be co-constituted.

Yet if we do not understand space deterministically but as socially constructed out of unique intersections at all scales, as Massey has suggested, then place need not be abandoned as irrelevant to identity. It has involved instead a “significant refiguring of the



nature of identity” (Massey 2004:5). So that we can explore how place must be “a site of negotiation” (Massey 2004:7). It is then possible to consider how place identities are constructed and contested. In this conceptualisation the place does not deterministically dictate the identity but neither is it rendered impossible. Rather it is possible to belong to many different communities where place or location need not play any role (Howell 2002). Community becomes a “collectivity which is actively struggled over rather than passively received” (Dwyer 1999:54).

In the reconceptualisation of community as a mental construct, whilst networks and place have been downplayed, identity has remained a central feature. For example, Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ attempted to explain how a shared vision of nationhood could be constructed without being experienced directly through personal inter-relationships (Anderson 1983, Fog Olwig 2002). As Anderson suggests, there is what we might call an imagined element or mental aspect to community in the form of the construction of a shared identity. Yet for local community at least, social relations remain an essential element in the construction of these identities. The efforts made to enable these social interactions are considered in the following chapter. What this chapter reveals is how, whilst different collective identities are mobilised, they retain actual social interaction as an essential part of that identity.

The research attempts to move beyond the classification into therapeutic or corrosive community often used to understand post disaster social changes. These are widely used terms in the disaster literature but some argue there is a lack of empirical evidence to support either assumption (Flint and Luloff 2005:404). To date the notion of the therapeutic or corrosive community has been the main framework used to try and explain the effects of flooding on local communities. This has been limited in its ability to explain the changes to local communities and there has been little recent empirical research. The suggestion is that flood intensifies existing relationships, deepening divisions or improving cooperation although how this takes place is less clear.

There has been a tendency in literature, to assume the outcome for communities will be one or other, with natural disasters being associated with the positive therapeutic community and technological disasters with the negative corrosive community (Freudenburg 1997). There has however been criticism of this association and the “bifurcation between presumed origins of risk” on which it relies (Flint and Luloff 2005:403). These assumptions tend to mask some of the complexities of the changes that take place. The research has shown how the flood experience has come to have a significant impact on the ‘local community’. It affected both the local identity as will be

discussed below and the social structures which are considered in Chapter 5. The 'flood experience' could even form the basis of local community creation.

The flood had a significant impact on the notion of local identity. In all three cases, despite some conflicts, flooding eventually led to a reinforcing of the sense of a common local identity. The shared experience of flooding led to a heightened community consciousness. This was especially true in Upbeck where a new sense of local identification was formed around the flood experience. In the two rural locations a strong local identity existed prior to the floods but this was enhanced through the flood experience. These rural identities were based around a vision of rural communal life, although this vision differed in the two locations. An important aspect of all three was the presence of local social networks. These identities were not merely imagined, central to their conception was their articulation through local networks. The identity formed the basis around which these local community networks were constructed.

The chapter below considers first the appeal of the rural lifestyle and the narrative of the 'rural idyll'. Haylton and Aylesby are then considered in turn to see how, in varying ways and despite some differences, they are able to come together around a shared vision of village life. Both experienced a strengthening of their community identity through the flood experience, although this was expressed differently. Upbeck is then examined, the residents' appreciation of the urban lifestyle is discussed, and the creation of a flood identity explored. The Upbeck Flood Action Group played a key role in this but the relationship between the group and the community was not straightforward. There were struggles over who could be identified as a legitimate leader and representing the community was problematic. Despite some difficulties a shared identity has been constructed around the shared experience of flooding.

## **4.2 The appeal of the rural community**

What connected the residents to one another in both Haylton and Aylesby was a shared vision of village life. They drew on particular notions of rural life as an identity around which they could construct a community. There is considerable evidence to suggest the continuing appeal of the rural community. As Bell and Newby noted as long ago as 1971, the rural-urban dichotomy refuses to lie down, despite being "put to death" by several writers on the subject (p42). Its current popularity can be seen in the recent trend of increased migration into rural areas. "Processes of rural restructuring and counterurbanization have meant the movement of significant proportions of new people into country districts throughout Britain ..." (Day 2006:168). Between 1981 and 2002 the

rural population in England grew by 14 per cent compared to 3 per cent population growth in urban areas (Neal and Walters 2003:294). It has been argued that one of the key drivers for this has been “the seductiveness of ‘village England’ is its apparent offer of small-scale, orderly, *intact* or *‘thick’* communities” (Neal and Walters 2008:280 *italics in original*).

The association of the rural with supportive communities containing dense local networks was certainly evident in the two rural fieldwork locations. However the identities drawn on in each were subtly different and a certain amount of disagreement or variation could be expressed whilst still maintaining a coherent community identity. In Haylton the community was built around the notion of the active village, which has a lively social life based within the village, where residents regularly interact and will help one another. Running alongside the notion of belonging through participation is an older narrative of the traditional village, with settled families with a long historical connection. Despite the apparent contradiction these two narratives could work together.

In Aylesby the identity was more complex and more implicit. The isolation meant that the boundaries of the community were relatively unchallenged and so could to some extent be taken for granted. Participation was still important but less explicit. For those from urban areas the village was seen to offer a particular lifestyle, an important aspect of which was a supportive local community of known individuals. In both locations the residents drew on these identities to construct the local community envisioned. The flood raised resident’s awareness of themselves as communities and demonstrated in differing ways the unity and effectiveness of these communities and so reinforced these local identities.

### **4.3 Haylton – village life as active participation**

The ideal of village life in Haylton is constructed around the idea of participation in village events. As we saw in Chapter 3, participation allows those moving into the community to feel a sense of belonging to the place but it also serves to connect village residents together. The creation of social networks is central in this version of village life. Both organising events and taking part are ways in which these networks are constructed. The means by which the networks are created and maintained is considered in detail in Chapter 5. What is important here is the centrality of the networks and the participation in them for the construction of a shared identity. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly running alongside this notion of participation, where anyone can become a member, is a notion of local community as arising from families with a historic connection to the village. The two groups that this creates did not split into two opposing identities. Instead they were able to come together in way that reinforced one another.

### 4.3.1 Connecting to the past

The historical association played a role not only in the identity of those with this connection, but also for others in the village, so that it became part of the village identity. The presence of 'local families' was felt to be important for Haylton. Susan for example believes that it is families like the Carters who make Haylton such an atypically good local community. *"I think it's because there are some traditional, some families who've been born and brought up here, I think they hold us together in a way because they do have this strong community spirit that has sort of been inbred in them so to speak and to be quite honest I think if they were all to move away and you would get commuters in I think it would go"* (Susan Int 44&45). Charles similarly believes that the Carters have been instrumental in *"keeping the tradition up"* and that Thomas Carter's *"moral philosophy on life"* has contributed to making Haylton the sort of place where *"everybody mucks in"* (Int 39). So whilst what residents value about the village is the way that everybody knows everybody and the way residents participate in the active social life within the village, the Carter family and in particular Thomas, are seen to play a key role in this. Not simply through their presence or the resemblance to a traditional community but by setting the appropriate standards of community life.

These long term residents also come to represent the village in some way and provide a sense of connection to the past. Terry (Int 52&53) described the Carters as the *"cornerstone of the village"* and Thomas as *"the father of the village"*. Thomas and the Carter family are such a key part of the village's identity it is even sometimes referred to as Cartersville. Other long term residents are also seen as important. Frank, talking of elderly resident Joyce, went so far as to say that, *"she is the village"* (Int 48&49), whilst Carol said of her *"she's wonderful and she's always been a great sticker together of the village"* (Int 53&53). These people had been active participants in village life but their importance was more than their organisational skills or commitment; they had in some way come to symbolise the village and its ideals, forming a part of its identity. So whilst it is important to resist a nostalgic view of a traditional community or make simplistic assumptions that attachment will be automatic through birth, a sense of history can play a role in the construction of local identity, not just for those born there but also for others within that community.

Conversely, those with historical connections were able to use the notion of participation in their construction of the village identity. This 'rooted' attachment was very important to Thomas, and he was emphatic that he would never consider moving away from the village. Yet the way in which people in the village came together and participated in village events helped create for him a good local community. The village was popular and had attracted

people from a wide area, so that many residents had not been born locally. Yet he still felt Haylton had an “*excellent*” local community where “*you get to see each other and you get to talk to each other and that’s important*” and that “*it’s a good village and people do get together and do things*”. It wasn’t necessary, as might be expected in the traditional discourse, for everybody to share a lifetime in the village to experience it as a community. So whilst immobility is central to Thomas’s account of his deep sense of belonging, the mobility of others need not impair this, although if there was a high population turnover and less commitment from newcomers to village activities this might change. These newcomers took part in village activities and helped create what Thomas considered to be a good community and in turn Thomas provided for them a sense of history and tradition which formed a part of the communal village identity.

### **4.3.2 Constructing the ideal**

The identification of village life and the idea of belonging through participation seen in the previous chapter were mobilised by residents to create the ideal being sought. Rather than arising out of village life, immobility and repeated contacts, residents took part in actively constructing this type of village. The desire to belong to this type of face-to-face community had led some to move to small, rural villages in the expectation of finding it there. Having desired this type of community they were then willing to help construct it, through their active participation in village groups and events. Once a village has established a reputation as being a good community, with active social relations, it can then attract new people looking for this ideal. In this way a virtuous cycle may be established.

In Haylton people heard about the village and its social life from friends and colleagues, wanted to become part of this, and were prepared to wait in order to be able to move into the village. In the following example Geoff discusses a doctor who heard about the village from someone else in the practice: “*It’s taken him quite a while to get here but he’s eventually got here. And he’s loving it, you know, but it’s what he expected anyway because he’d heard it from other people*” (Int 50&51). Similarly Katie an Australian woman had moved to Haylton “*specifically because she’d heard that village life was good. So she came with the intention of joining in village life, which she seems to have done*” (Terry Int 52&53). People with a similar outlook on the role of local community are gathered together, they are prepared to put in time and effort to create an active community, attracting like minded people and reinforcing their belief that it is these types of places that have the best communities. This is not to suggest that this happens in every

situation, or that a belief in the rural idyll will always have such a positive outcome. People were in many ways attracted to Haylton because it was exceptional.

This contrasts with previous research findings which suggested that those moving in order to find the rural communal ideal, destroyed what they were hoping to find. In contrast it is argued here that the shared vision of rural community can form the basis for creating it. Community has become a conscious creation, which residents must construct and maintain themselves. Increased mobility since the 1950's "was deemed to erode the fundamental significance of place" and to undermine "communal social relationships" creating a divide between locals and non locals (Savage et al. 2005:30). Pahl for example in the 1970's argued that "middle class people come to the countryside and by their presence they help to destroy whatever community was there" (Savage et al. 2005:30). However, he now believes that he had an "over-romanticised view of working-class life" which led him to his theory of polarisation occurring in rural areas (Pahl 2005:627). He suggests that community as a shared mental construct should be given more attention - "imagined communities may have greater resilience and continuity than the seemingly solid occupational communities which have so rapidly disappeared" (2005:634). The way that residents of Haylton were able to take part in the construction and maintenance of the type of rural social life that they had been seeking supports his argument that "community-in-the-mind" is no less real than "imputed community-on-the-ground" and that they are just as "real in their consequences" (Pahl 2005:637).

### **4.3.3 Negotiating identity and accommodating difference**

The village has a number of power bases each with an allotted role. So power was not concentrated on to one or two people as can happen, particularly in small villages. Through negotiation these groups and residents reached a consensus, which could accommodate small differences of opinion without threatening the village identity. There is the Recreational Association which has a number of committees and sub committees, the Parish Meeting run by a chair person and a secretary, the influential Carter family and there were also other influential individuals. The Parish Meeting structure, where the whole village makes decisions based on consensus, rather than a Parish Council run by a committee, was seen to be particularly appropriate to Haylton.

There were differences of opinion and people weren't necessarily friends with everybody in the village but they were able to work together. For example when somebody found they had "*a bit of a problem with the chairman*" of the Parish Meeting they chose to have less involvement with the organisational aspects but still attended the meetings. The idea of

participation was one loosely based on ideas of equality, where as long as you took part as far as you were reasonably able in an unostentatious way, then you could achieve belonging. In this situation then, those who don't participate may be made to feel outcast. All those interviewed were involved in some way but there were a small number of households who reportedly had little involvement in village activities. It was claimed that they were still known and would not be censured and nobody was critical of them. Those people may have felt differently but their view is not known. Inevitably, any position that creates those who belong also creates those who don't. However Haylton had been successful in creating for themselves a coherent local community identity.

#### **4.3.4 How flooding reinforced the collective identity**

In Haylton the villager's response to flooding reaffirmed and strengthened the collective identity. The extensive networks within the village had proved effective in providing practical and emotional support both during and after the flood. The villagers felt that the flood had demonstrated what they already knew about the village but they were still very touched by the amount of help they received. *"People were brilliant, but this, this is what you get in this type of community. They all pull together and help one another"* (Geoff Int 50&51). *"Haylton is renowned, its motto is 'pulling together' and it worked with the flood ... Haylton is a village that helps itself ..."* (Carol Int 52&53). Flooding had not led to a quantitative change in networks in this tightly knit community but it led to an appreciation of what they had and a deepening of some relationships. It had confirmed the collective identity of the village and showed that they really could 'pull together'

Whilst the village as a whole worked well together and people appreciated this, those whose properties had been flooded felt it had brought them particularly close. Susan, when asked if the flood had any longer term effects on the community, replied *"I think it has yes, it's bonded us even more, particularly the ones who were involved with the flood. Certainly the Green's ... their kids grew up with our kids and we've always been friendly, but we have a real bond with them now that we didn't have before and you know, the same with other people who've been flooded ...When you're in a situation like this I think you need to talk to people in a similar situation because they are the only ones who can understand and I think it has made a tremendous bond with the people who were flooded"* (Susan Int 44&45). There was a particular identification between those who had been flooded based on the shared traumatic experience and a belief that only others who had experienced it could truly understand the experience. This proved particularly relevant in Upbeck as will be discussed shortly.

## 4.4 Aylesby - rurality, isolation and lifestyle

The rural identity in Aylesby is in some ways more complex, than that of Haylton. There is less emphasis on participation, as the presence of some casual meeting points allows meetings to take place in an apparently natural way (See Chapter 5). The isolation also means that to some extent the boundaries can be taken for granted and so there is less need to actively maintain these. For those who have come from urban areas the rural lifestyle and the associated notions of community are important. There was some evidence of contestation over the rural identity. Some preferred to stress either their individual or communal isolation, whilst others wished to attract tourists in order to maintain viable businesses. Despite this, residents could articulate a coherent identity for the village and feel that they belonged to a good local community.

### 4.4.1 Isolation and identity

Aylesby's very small size and its situation in an isolated and fairly difficult to reach position many miles out on the moors meant that its identification as a community was straightforward and its boundaries largely unthreatened. This, combined with the expectation that this represents the archetypal community, meant that the communal identity could be to some extent taken for granted. It therefore required less activity than that seen in Haylton. As community expresses a relational idea, so it may be argued that the use of the word is only occasioned by the desire or need to express the distinction between those who belong and those who do not (Cohen 1985, Howell 2002). Aylesby residents could be more complacent about their identity because it is buffered by distance and rarely contested.

For those who have lived there all their lives there is an element of the familiar discourse and taking it for granted. Alan when asked what it is he particularly likes about the village replied "*Because it's a small village I think. You know everyone. Quiet, peaceful, what I'm used to*" (Int 34). Similarly Lisa discussing why her husband would not want to leave the village; "*He hasn't known anything else ... He's not one for changes is my husband!*" (Int 37). They both stress familiarity and continuity, with no desire to explore other options. For those moving in, they are more aware of and make a more conscious effort to maintain this type of lifestyle and vision of the rural community.



#### 4.4.2 Living the rural lifestyle

Aylesby had attracted residents drawn by their ‘imagining’ of the “English rural idyll” (Valentine 2001). Two couples interviewed had moved to Aylesby from urban locations and they expressed the change in terms of lifestyle. In this narrative the rural is contrasted with the urban. Rebecca says “*we had a cosmopolitan lifestyle in London, we have a very rural lifestyle now. Yes it’s completely different*” (Int 32&33). Michelle and Sean both talk about being “*out of the rat race*” (Int 29&30). In another common representation both understand the rural context as a better and safer place to bring up children than urban areas (Valentine 2001). Michael for example describes it as “*a great spot to bring up children*” (Int 32&33). The village was seen to offer local community, in terms of supportive relationships, in a way that urban areas could not. “*If you’re stuck you help each other out. I think that’s why you live in a village*” (Rebecca Int 32&33). As Neal and Walters (2008:279) note “the idea of the English countryside as a picturesque place of safety and neighbourly community is a familiar and well-established metanarrative of the rural”. Yet the interviewees did not draw on these narratives in an unthinking way or simply accept them at face value as the following section discusses.

#### 4.4.3 Reflecting on the rural idyll

The rural idyll is a well established discourse and there have been critical narratives of the middle classes “capturing rural space” whilst pursuing a nostalgic rural lifestyle (Milbourne 2007). Yet these narratives of the rural were not deployed unthinkingly. Interviewees were reflexive and conscious that there was an idealised element. Michelle for example is aware that her comments might appear comical to outsiders. “*It’s a different way of life, it sounds really poncy to say that doesn’t it, but it is different*” (Int29&30). She is aware that it might sound over idealistic or ridiculous, referring to the BBC television sitcom ‘A good life’ where a middle class couple convert their suburban garden and attempt to become self sufficient: “*It sounds like an episode of ‘The good life’ doesn’t it?*” (Int 29&30). Reflecting on their rural lives she says it is harder work than their urban lives but worth it.

Similarly, Rebecca looks back on her decision to move from London. “*I ... had this pipe dream of living in the country. It was all a bit romantic really and Dave found this, and this is the reality*” (Int 32&33). Again, despite working long hours, the change is felt to be worthwhile. Sherlock (2002:14) similarly found in her research that “[m]any participants showed a reflexive, ironic and self-aware understanding of the nostalgic and romantic overtones often accompanying their discussions of community”. It cannot be assumed that those seeking a rural lifestyle unthinkingly pursued an unrealistic vision. They recognise

the nostalgic elements, are wary of being seen as ridiculous romantics, and are willing to work hard to contribute to their vision of the rural community.

#### 4.4.4 Contesting the rural identity

Almost all of those interviewed considered themselves part of a community which provided tangible networks and social support. Within this though were some differing interpretations of the rural community and rural lifestyle. Robert for example was critical of the new owners of the hotel. In his vision of local community the pub should form a central role in village social life. He felt that the pub had ceased to fulfil its role as a social hub because the new owners were overly focused on making money, which led them to excessively cater for tourists. Robert felt that *“it isn’t a pub for the locals”* (Int 36). *“The hub of the village is not the pub and it was and it should be according to a lot of people because it’s important for it to be, you know”* (Int 36). He claimed that because of the way the owners ran the hotel that *“without exception the locals feel that they’re not an asset to the community”* (Int 36). It is not possible to verify this claim but he was the only person to criticise them in any way and other residents did claim to visit at least occasionally. This illustrates not only different visions of the community but also the conflicts of interest over how the countryside should be used. Tension between tourism and residents was evident in Aylesby, with those reliant on tourists for their living trying to promote it whilst others resented the influx of visitors.

Whilst for most the rural village represented closeness and community one interviewee positioned himself largely outside of the community. Instead he emphasised its quietness and the possibilities for being alone. Joe, when asked *“Is there much going on in the village, events and meetings or groups, that type of thing?”* replied: *“Well there might be, but I don’t get involved in them”* (Int 28). When discussing the future possibility of living near extended family he said *“I’m quite happy living here by myself. It’s an arsehole free zone! If you know what I mean. No bother from anything... I like the lack of people”* (Int 28). Despite this he claimed to know everyone in the village, and was reported to receive help in the months following the flood when his wife was seriously ill. Why he should choose to distance himself in this way is not clear but the death of his wife sometime after the flooding may have had some impact, he described her as *“friendly with everyone”* (Int 28). Whatever the cause, despite some involvement in the ‘village community’, he rejected the more familiar discourse of the rural idyll as the site for close communal relations.

One way in which the community identity was challenged was through the involvement of the National Parks Authority, particularly in the restoration following the flooding. Their

role is to “conserve and enhance” the countryside valued by the residents and they also have “a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities” (Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority 2006). Despite this, the National Parks were resented as interfering outsiders. Joe, for example, when asked “*Do you think there’s been any positive things at all to come out of the flood?*” replied “*Yes, I’m positive I hate the National Parks*” (Int 28). He had to negotiate with them over the rebuilding of his house and business and he felt they were bureaucratic, callous and vindictive. Michelle and Sean saw them as unrealistic, hypocritical and overly focused on a romantic rather than practical vision of the countryside. Again they were seen as bureaucratic to a ridiculous degree. It was felt they should “*care more about businesses*” and people (Int 29&30). Villagers tended to try and subvert their authority, for instance cutting down a tree themselves to avoid the Parks removing it and having to turn the village’s power supply off. Sean claimed that “*nobody’s a big fan of the National Parks*” (Int 29&30). This dislike of what is perceived as outside interference has implications for the involvement of communities in flood management.

#### **4.4.5 Flooding validates the collective identity**

In Aylesby the flood again strengthened the shared identity. It was felt to have demonstrated the village’s unity and ability to work together. This was previously a largely untested quality, so although residents felt it existed, the flood validated this belief. The flood was understood to have “*brought the village closer together*” (Lisa Int 37). As Lisa goes on to say “*It was, it was amazing the team spirit that just came into the village like that*” (Int 37). Whilst Michelle feels “*It would be a shame if it ever happened again but it really did bring out the spirit, it was kind of Dunkirky wasn’t it, because everybody was doing something ...*” (Int 29&30). Both of these quotes suggest that a dormant or untried aspect of the village has been brought out by the flood event and they both appreciate the way in which everybody in the village was able to come together to deal with the flooding. Those interviewed were pleased by the way the village could work together and it helped to reinforce the village identity. Villagers have become more aware of what they have and more appreciative of their community, as Rebecca says it showed itself to be a “*true community*” (Int 32&33).

## 4.5 Urban convenience and flood identities

Amongst the Leeds residents interviewed in urban Upbeck, the romantic rural vision of community was absent. When discussing local community the issue of rural and urban simply wasn't raised. Even when asked specifically about urban and rural communities, the romantic rural discourse remained absent. Neither did they subscribe to a negative view of the city. They were clear they wished to stay in the city with all the amenities that this offered. In fact some interviewees were quite emphatic about not living in the countryside, although they were happy to visit. *"On holiday ... we'll go to sort of local village pubs and things like that. And that's when we're on our way home and it's pitch black and there's no houses and you think, God, no, I wouldn't want to live out here"* (Elizabeth Int 59). In Upbeck, prior to the flood, despite the relative immobility of the population and the sense of belonging through familiarity, a shared identity was absent. There was nothing to connect estate residents and an absence of localised networks across the estate was seen as an absence of local community.

The sections below first explore how a shared identity developed after the flood, based around the shared traumatic experience of flooding. The way in which the flood creates two distinct identities is then considered and this is followed by consideration of some of the limitations of a flood identity as the basis of community formation. The construction of a Flood Action Group was central to the development of the community identity and this is examined in some detail. First there is a brief history of the group, followed by an exploration of the struggles over leadership. The next sections then examine how the group can be said to represent the community. The final section of the chapter looks at the impact that repeat flooding and outside intervention has played in the struggle to create a coherent local identity.

### 4.5.1 Shared experience and a flood identity

The flood experience led to the development of a shared identity in two ways. It provided the shared experience which united estate residents but it also provided mechanisms to develop the networks seen as essential to the community. The experience of flooding and the many months of recovery are traumatic and residents appreciated the support and understanding they received from other residents. The construction and maintenance of the newly developed networks is considered in detail in the following chapter. Where networks are discussed here it is their role in creating a shared identity that is considered.

During the flood event, and in the immediate aftermath, people helped one another out as much as possible and in the emergency situation people were less reserved. This was an important factor in Leeds where there were few opportunities for people to meet, and many new social contacts were established in this way. The shared, although traumatic experience of flooding then provided a basis around which these new relations could be developed. This included those personally flooded and those who had not flooded in their homes but helped out in some way. People who may have felt previously they had little in common now felt they had a strong bond. As Sharon in Leeds finds *“Well I think that’s the reason why you do get on so well with these people, because they know how you feel. They’ve been there, they’ve gone through exactly what you’ve gone through and you are able to support each other with that”* (Int 7&8). Brigid similarly found that *“well you got to know your neighbours better because you’d a lot in common”* (Int 15&16). Howell (2002) has found similar ‘communities of shared experience’ between Norwegian families who adopted children from other countries. In a very similar way to that expressed by those who have suffered flooding, adoptive parents insist that *“although their family and friends were very supportive during this difficult time, only those who have gone through the same process themselves can appreciate what it means”* (Howell 2002:95).

#### **4.5.2 Flooding creates two distinct identities**

The flood identity brought residents together and formed the basis of a shared, place-based identity. However it also has the potential to be divisive as it creates two distinct identities: the flooded and the non-flooded. Being flooded is a difficult and emotional experience and people really appreciated any help and support that they received. However they often feel that the only people who can truly understand what they have been through are others who have suffered flooding in their homes like themselves. This tends to create an especially close bond between those whose properties were flooded, particularly where they are able to see one another regularly in the months of recovery. As Sharon says, *“they’ve been there, gone through exactly what you’ve gone through and you are able to support each other with that”* (Int 7&8). John, like others, feels that unless you have had that experience you cannot fully understand what it is like. *“Those who’ve been flooded, have that common bond because we all know what it’s like and, whilst with the best will in the world, if its not happened to you, you’re only imagining what happens, you don’t, you don’t know what its like”* (Int 4). This experience binds people together but at the same time excludes those whose houses did not flood.

There was an example of some slight tensions between those who had flooded and those who had not in Upbeck. *“It became a bit of a divide between this side and the side that*

*didn't get flooded. An example was that the lady over the road was wanting to sell her house, so she got really miffed with the amount of skips that were out on the street because it put buyers off ...*" (Elizabeth Int 11). This had not developed into a serious issue in any of the fieldwork locations, residents felt they had more that joined them than divided them. However in other circumstances there is the potential for this to become a divisive issue. There is plenty of research evidence to show how the poor handling of different groups has led to conflict (Fordham and Ketteridge 1995, Tapsell et al. 2001, Tapsell et al. 1999). The flooded, non flooded split in identity was also at least partly implicated in conflicts within the flood action group, as will be seen shortly.

Whilst the shared experience of flooding can help construct a shared place based identity at the same time it may destroy it. For some, the experience was so traumatic they no longer felt able to continue living in that location and so had moved away. This then broke the connection with both the location and the residents. One woman was so upset that she no longer wanted to have anything to do with people or places that would remind her of the flooding. Quite a number of those interviewed moved away from the estate and this tends to dissipate the 'community affect' of the flood although it did not destroy it.

Despite the creation of two distinct identities the flood did provide a basis from which to create the estate as the community but these various identities had to be negotiated. John when interviewed in 2008 felt that it had brought the whole of the estate together; *"because it's the talking point isn't it? Even the people that are not directly affected, when they're coming in and out, stop and talk to all the people, because they're all out on the streets when it rains, you know looking to see how high it is, even people that its not affected look over the beck now to see how high its got, and everybody talks really"* (Int 60). So although complex and fragile, a sense of shared identity has been created across the estate.

### **4.5.3 Limitations of the flood identity as the basis for community**

The closeness between neighbours following the flood and the development of a shared identity played a key role in the development of local community in Upbeck. However this effect may be dissipated as residents are moved to temporary accommodation as their houses are repaired. Elaine found that *"initially that first four weeks, everybody were really close and helping each other and talking about it and you know just having a shoulder really and sharing it between you. But then everybody moved in different directions and then when we came back things were different"* (Int 1). This is an important stage in the development of shared community feeling and if residents are

widely scattered then the improvements noted in this research may not be found. This was not a widely reported problem as the majority of residents moving into temporary accommodation were able to stay nearby. In other cases with widespread flooding, local resources such as houses for rent become overwhelmed and flooded residents are dispersed over a wide area.

For example, in the Carlisle floods of 2005 over 3000 people were made homeless and local social support networks were disrupted (Cabinet Office 2009a). With this dispersal of the community not only are the potential social benefits threatened, so are the existing support networks. As Katherine of the National Flood Forum, when discussing Carlisle, says *“You lose your friends, you lose all your support groups, all the people you want to talk to about what’s happened to you and find out what’s happened to them, all of a sudden are miles away”* (Katherine Int 24). This is supported by research in other flood locations. Fordham (1998), for example, found that the move to temporary accommodation disrupted women’s support networks when they were most needed. In such situations a lack of understanding neighbours to talk with and the stretching or breaking of the usual support networks could leave recently flooded people very vulnerable when they most need support. These problems were largely avoided in the three fieldwork locations, which allowed the overall improvement to community networks.

The floods allow the creation of a shared identity but it is very narrowly focused, which may have limitations as the basis from which to develop community. Liam found that although local networks had improved after the flood, and there was some *“aspect of larger community life”* this remained quite limited, with little interest in wider community issues. He felt that the flooding had led to a narrow focus on flood issues, particularly after the second flood. *“They don’t want to really participate in anything larger, because it’s happened twice now”* (Liam Int 22). So whilst flooding may lead to increased networks, these can remain very narrow in focus if there are no other community structures or if none develop. It is also likely to dissipate if the flood threat is seen to have vanished. In Leeds repeat flooding had sustained a communal interest in the flooding but where floods are infrequent, new community structures based exclusively around flooding may fade away.

Communities formed around the flood experience also pose difficulties for those flood risk professionals who intend to mobilise local communities to improve flood response. Whilst the flood experience provides the basis for community formation, helping to create the structures and networks necessary for the types of community response sought by policy, at the same time it often positions the organisations people will need to work with as

enemies. Flooded residents often hold the ‘authorities’ to be responsible for allowing them to flood. This can focus very specifically on certain organisations deemed to be responsible or more generally on often unspecified authorities. This may be beneficial for developing a shared identity and common purpose, but detrimental to a good working relationship with flood professionals.

## **4.6 Upbeck Flood Action Group and the struggle for identity**

Upbeck in Leeds offered the opportunity to study the development and impact of a local Flood Action Group. Local action groups appear to be a popular response to the problem of flooding. In 2009 the National Flood Forum (NFF) had more than 90 ‘community groups’ listed on their web site, and there are likely to be others not listed. The NFF (2009), have found that “[f]orming a community based flood action group to work on behalf of the local residents and businesses in finding ways of minimising the effects of flooding, has proved very effective in many locations across the UK”. These groups represent one form of communal response to flooding and can provide a useful way for local authorities to work with local communities. “Time and again it has been proven that the most effective way of finding solutions to flooding problems that are acceptable to the local community is for a community based group to work closely with the various agencies” (NFF 2009). Whilst numerous groups have been formed in recent years there has been little research into this phenomenon. The focus in this chapter is the group’s role in creating a shared local identity and community creation, other aspects are considered later.

### **4.6.1 The history of the Upbeck Flood Action Group**

To understand the role of the group it is necessary to first know something of its history. The group has changed considerably over time but began when Liam, a young man on the estate, who wasn’t flooded himself, set up an informal group to tackle cleaning out the beck. This watercourse runs through the estate and rubbish blocking the beck had been identified as one of the causes of the flood. A group of residents came together and the beck was cleaned out but only days later there was a second flood. This angered residents and galvanised them into further action - *“I think it was the second flood that really put people together because that was the one where we thought, Christ its happened again, you know, we’ve got to do something”* (Tony Int 23). A lively public meeting was held, involving the Environment Agency and the City Council and more people became involved in the group.



Issues arose concerning leadership of the group which led to conflict, which was eventually solved by the group splitting into two. The National Flood Forum was consulted and they assisted in the setting up of a more formal Flood Action Group, with a committee elected by residents. Liam continued by leading the Upbeck Community Association, where the focus became “*anti social behaviour and environmental regeneration*” (Int 22). Sadly in 2008 Liam died and the Community Association appears to have ceased. By 2008 all but one of the original flood action group committee members had moved away from the estate, leaving only the Chair person. However the Environment Agency and City Council have continued to work with the community, constructive working relationships have been developed and new systems are in place to cope with flooding.

#### **4.6.2 Struggles for the right to be identified as group leader**

When Liam set up the first group he was only eighteen and still lived with his parents. His house had not flooded, although others in his street had and he helped residents on the day of the flood. However, he struggled to maintain his identity as group leader. Eventually a number of factors led to his claim to represent the group not being seen as legitimate. This difficulty was eventually solved by Liam leaving to form a different group with a wider community focus. The following explores why his claims were not seen as genuine. As these types of groups are a common response to flooding and conflicts reported as being relatively common (Kathryn of the National Flood Forum, Int 24), the disagreement is worth consideration.

When difficulties arose within the group Liam’s legitimacy as a leader were questioned on the grounds that he himself had not been flooded and that he was not a householder as he still lived with his parents. Some residents therefore felt he was “*jumping on a bandwagon that’s got nothing really to do with him as they see it*” (John Int 4). This suggests that only those who have had their homes flooded are believed able to represent this flooded group. This again emphasises the division between flooded and non-flooded identity. The non democratic way in which he appointed himself chairperson also became an issue when there was dissatisfaction with some of his decisions which were not seen to represent the local community accurately. One example of this was the spending of money received by the group on a reward for a selected few, rather than on something benefitting the community as a whole, which was seen to be unfair. Also some of the activities of the group, such as a garden competition, were seen as trivial or inappropriate after people had suffered flooding.

Liam also appeared to lack some of the skills necessary for dealing with other people. When a public meeting he arranged and was chairing became heated and rowdy, he was not able to handle this effectively. It became what was described by some as a “shouting match” and comments he then made upset a number of people. He also did not always appear to be effective at communicating with other members, a problem some felt arose from his lack of experience due to his age. This had led to some relationships deteriorating to the point where they were no longer workable. Eventually these factors led to a split, narrated by some as an amicable separation of interests and by others as an embittered disagreement.

The eventual outcome was two separate groups, Liam continued in his role as leader of the smaller Upbeck Community Association which concentrated on wider community issues. Flooded residents called on the help of the National Flood Forum and with their expertise called a public meeting and elected a committee to run the Upbeck Flood Action Group. Once this was set up the group ran without further serious conflict, although it has changed considerably over time and representation remains an issue. The remainder of this section focuses on the Flood Action Group (rather than the Community Association).

#### **4.6.3 The role of Upbeck Flood Action Group**

The group was understood to be a vehicle to express the resident’s’ anger and to bring about change. By coming together and electing a committee it was hoped that the residents’ interests would be more effectively represented. The group was seen to provide “a voice” (Elizabeth Int 11). Anna recalls how “a lot of us were very, very angry and upset and we wanted something to be done, which is why I think the committee was made in the first place, so that all these people’s views and opinions could be heard” (Int 3). Residents had generally felt powerless against what they felt to be indifferent authorities. “I don’t think anybody gets anything done as an individual when you’re going up against someone like Yorkshire Water or Leeds City Council or the EA” (Elizabeth Int 11). It was hoped that by forming the group they could gain some agency, a point of view that had been endorsed by the National Flood Forum’s advice.

It was felt they had achieved some success in this, as they believed they had made more progress than people elsewhere in Leeds who had flooded at the same time; “compared to these other pockets, which have, seem to have suffered similar sort of catastrophes but haven’t really got anywhere, you know single voices sort of shouting and they’re not being heard, so one good, we can see that we’re being heard” (Elizabeth Int 11). Forming a group to represent the community as a whole had gained residents’ visibility and a

certain amount of power. However the relationship between the group, as represented by the committee and the wider community was not straightforward. Problems of communication meant their ability to represent the community as a whole was doubtful and this became even more of an issue when all of the committee members apart from the Chair person moved away.

#### 4.6.4 Representing the local community

Difficulties in communicating effectively across the estate made claims by the group to represent the whole community questionable. The group acted as a communication point, bringing together information from a range of sources on behalf of the community. Residents then expected this information to be passed to the rest of the community. For example Tony, who is not a committee member, believes the group's role is to *"keep people informed of what's been going on, what is about to go on, keeping in touch with such as the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water, Leeds City Council, reporting anything that is untoward, and really it's keeping an awareness of being able to communicate any information and news to people who may be affected"* (Tony Int 23). He sees them as gathering together information and then redistributing it to the community. This communication could also work in the other direction, as staff from the EA and City Council also found the group to be a useful way of communicating with the community. The group did gather a great deal of information and had contact with a range of authorities, however effective communication proved challenging, within the group, between the group and the local community and with other organisations. Claims to represent the community and the ability to develop a shared communal identity then become difficult.

The community was initially represented through the election of a committee to run the Flood Action Group. There were however some information sharing problems within the committee. Elizabeth felt that the Chair had not always worked well as a team member, *"he used to get the information and he never shared it with everybody, so we never knew what were going on, he didn't organise meetings or anything like that"* (Elizabeth Int 59). The Chair was ambivalent about his post, which he had been put forward for, rather than nominating himself. *"As far as I were concerned if they didn't form anything the first time ... I would be doing exactly the same as I'm doing now, which is fighting for my rights. If that gives everybody else what they want great but I'm not fighting for them as such, I'm fighting for me aren't I?"* (John Int 60).

Any gains made on behalf of the community were therefore incidental. This makes his role as a representative of the community problematic, although he said he would consult the community if he felt there could be a negative outcome. *“If it’s a decision that’s going to affect everybody and I think it could be detrimental if it didn’t go right, then I’d ask everybody, because its their right to say no ... if I’m doing it for me then I won’t* (John Int 60). This relies entirely on his judgement of what might be detrimental to the community, there is no clear mechanism for the wider community to be involved in the decision making process.

There were also problems of communication with the rest of the estate due to the lack of social structures through which messages may pass. In a community with existing networks and social structures, such as in Aylesby and Haylton this is likely to be less problematic as information can travel along these established routes. Without effective communication it is difficult to build up a strong shared identity and hard to see how the committee can be said to represent the community’s views. Many interviewees had only limited awareness of what the group was doing and had not realised that they were using the bakers and another local shop to post messages.

The committee only tended to send out information when they felt they had something new to report. Elizabeth’s comment is typical of the committee members *“we tend not to have meetings for the sake of them, it’s usually if something’s developed”* (Int 11). These absences of information left residents uncertain of the group’s activities. Gary talking about the group expresses this well. *“The only downfall I’ve seen with the group is that we don’t get, even if it’s only once a quarter or once every month, just get a newsletter saying whether there is any update on what is happening ... So we know something’s happening because people must be thinking - has it all just gone away and nobody’s bothered about it?”* (Gary Int 14). Regular information would have avoided this problem and allowed the rest of the community to feel informed.

The difficulty lay in a gap between expectations, with residents believing they should be kept informed whilst the committee only sent out information when there was ‘news’ to report. This problem was exacerbated once only the chairperson remained, as in the past other committee members had taken on the role of keeping people informed. The chair however expected residents to seek out information if they required it: *“I’m not about trudging around the streets running around after you, if you want information come here. You know where I live”* (John Int 60). He believed residents should be more proactive and take more responsibility for themselves: *“they want to moan but they don’t want to do anything about it, and when you give them the opportunity they either don’t*

*turn up or they expect you take whatever it was that was given out and then go round and give it to everybody”* (John Int 60). This contrasts with the residents’ expectations and led to a certain amount of friction.

The lack of contact with non-committee members also tended to exacerbate a decline in active support for the group. Elizabeth, an ex committee member, had found that over time support for the group dwindled - *“people get complacent very quickly don’t they... So they sort of just settled back into normal life and never really give it any thought. ... So when we had the meetings, the open meetings we didn’t get a massive turn out”* (Int 59). She felt the Chair’s current approach was likely to increase this problem: *“If you don’t keep them informed then it’s even easier for them to drop off”* (Elizabeth Int 59). The differing expectations of communication and a dwindling of support over time meant that for many of the estate residents there may be little involvement in or awareness of the Flood Action Group.

These difficulties highlight some of the problems a group may have in representing the community as a whole (however that community may be defined, which may in itself be an issue). Katherine, as former member of the NFF, had a great deal of experience of flood groups. She found that many groups were driven by a very small number of particularly enthusiastic residents. *“I would say that most flood groups are driven by just one or two people and not by this imaginary group they represent. So when the Environment Agency is talking about communities, or the National Flood Forum list community groups, it’s really only talking about usually a very, very few people”* (Int 24). As she points out, this may mean that only a very few residents’ views are then portrayed as representing the community as a whole.

The other residents may of course be content to accept this situation. John for example became frustrated when people would turn to him with their problems, complaining to him rather than the authorities. He believed they were trying to pass on their responsibility to him. *“The impression I get, is that once they’d done that, elected them people, their bit was over. So then you become, you become the brunt of their frustrations because they forget that you’ve been flooded just like them and they think it’s your fault then ... They think their responsibility has passed now, they’ve done what they needed to do, which were they needed to get somebody else to do it, because they don’t want to do it”* (John Int 60). Whilst residents may be content to let others run the group, difficulties are likely to arise from this situation if a controversial decision is taken. If the group is not seen to be representative of the community and acting democratically then

conflict is likely to arise in this situation. As happened when Liam's decisions were not popular.

#### **4.6.5 Repeat flooding and intervention maintains identity**

The Upbeck estate has flooded three times between 2004 and 2009. Research has shown that it is very difficult to engage residents in flood mitigation measures prior to flooding (Harries 2007). Even after being flooded estate residents did not necessarily believe they would flood again. The first flood was often seen as a unique event: *"I can't see it happening again, I would have thought this would be a one off, you know"* (Tony Int 23). In Upbeck it was the second flood that really galvanised residents into action. A third flood and another threatened flood have kept the flood identity very strong in a way that is unlikely to happen if there is only very occasional flooding. Upbeck has been very unfortunate in suffering from repeat flooding so frequently, but it has had the benefit of maintaining the community identity and maintaining support for the Flood Action Group.

The repeat flooding has also led to intervention and considerable support from the Environment Agency (EA), together with the City Council (further details in Chapter 7). In trying to mitigate the flood effects, the EA has been involved with the flood group, and supported them in their activities. They have used the group as their main contact point and helped them to reach the rest of the community, for example by sending letters. By June 2009 the EA had brought in independent community consultation specialists to assist them in the process of working with the local community. They, together with the EA, have made concerted efforts to involve more people in the process of deciding on flood reduction measures. Considerable efforts, involving contacting all estate residents by letter and in person, resulted in a handful of new people becoming involved. The Chair of the Flood Action Group has also broadened out his interests and has made contact with other groups with similar interests. So whilst difficulties remain in achieving estate-wide involvement, efforts are being made towards this goal. This however is for a very particular purpose and has required a significant input from outside organisations.

### **4.7 Conclusions**

Despite the more pessimistic views on globalisation, a place-based identity remains possible. This did not arise in a deterministic way simply from living together in a location. Rather, in each of the locations, residents drew on different notions to construct a shared identity, rooted in the place. For both Haylton and Aylesby this was a variation on the

rural idyll, and shows the continuing influence of earlier conceptualisations based on the rural-urban dichotomy. As Day notes, “[o]f all the familiar settings for traditional community, it is the village which provides the most archetypal, to the extent that at times the two are synonymous” (2006:39). However residents recognised the problematic nature of these narratives and utilised them in a reflexive way.

In contrast in urban Upbeck, a shared identity was absent prior to the floods, and had been constructed since, around the shared experience of flooding. This is not to suggest that all rural locations will have an identity based on some version of the rural idyll and all urban areas will be lacking in a shared identity. This was simply the case in this very small sample, and many other identities may be mobilised to create a local identity. For example, Dwyer (1999) has shown the complex ways in which a Muslim identity may be mobilised in construction of local communities. A shared identity is certainly possible but by no means inevitable; it requires effort and negotiation, is not fixed and unchanging but is an ongoing process.

The impact of the floods on the local identities illustrates this fluidity. After some early conflicts in Upbeck, in all three locations the sense of a shared communal identity was reinforced. The external threat from the flood provided the opportunity for local people to act together and gave residents a feeling of unity and a sense that they had something in common. In varying ways, in all three locations, it heightened the community consciousness. Residents became more aware of having something shared and appreciated the way that people had come together. Similar results have been found elsewhere, for example, within the New Orleans Vietnamese American community.

The Vietnamese American’s “community identity and cohesion has increased in the post-Katrina period as the elderly refugee population and the American-born generation have gained greater appreciation of each other through shared Katrina experiences ...” (Airriess et al. 2008:1344). Similar experiences have also been found following other types of emergency, such as bush fires in Australia (Winkworth Healy, Woodward and Camilleri 2009:8). This is not to say this is an automatic outcome, there is ample literature detailing conflict and division following floods. Even where a shared identity already exists it cannot be assumed this will lead to effective collective action.

Sherlock, in her research in Australia, found that although residents of Port Douglas shared a sense of community and collective identity, the “discursive work by residents in creating the ideal of community did not appear to be matched by practical collective action” (Sherlock 2002: 9 para 5.1). The problem lay in the fact that the identity around

which residents mobilised, which revolved around privatized consumption, undermined the possibilities for collective social action (Sherlock 2002: 11 para. 5.10). Similarly Marsh and Buckle (2001:6) note, “even when the neighbours and the people living in proximity do communicate with each other, feeling a common bond, this does not necessarily lead to participation in local issues or to even taking part in community emergency management processes”. A shared identity is not sufficient in itself to enable collective local action.

This chapter has taken the construction of shared identity as its focus, but like the previous chapter this has illustrated the interconnection of the mental, spatial and social aspects of local community. In creating a shared identity which allowed them to feel connected, residents drew upon place identities and spatial features in varied and complex ways. What comes across clearly in all the discourses of local community is the centrality of social networks. The practicalities of constructing and maintaining these networks within the locality are what we turn to now in the following chapter.



## Chapter 5 – Constructing local social structures

*“I think the trick is where you see the energy nurture it. If somebody’s interested in keep fit nurture that because that will become something. Then the history group, there’s a lady in the village who lectures on the history of old buildings at the university, and she’s very keen so she puts a lot of energy into it” (Charles, Haylton).*

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the focus shifts to the social aspects of local community. In the recent revival of interest in the concept of community this aspect, what might be called the sociality of community, has been somewhat neglected (Amit 2002, Neal and Walters 2008). This is perhaps not surprising when we consider that Anderson’s influential ‘imagined community’ set out to explain why members of a nation could feel united despite their lack of social contact. As he says of the nation, it “is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1991:6, *italics in original*). The nation as community is understood to be imagined because it is not grounded in actual social relations. Yet social relations remain central to the ‘imagining’ of *local* community as was seen in previous chapters. They are the visible culmination of local community and the means by which community may be judged to be present or absent. Therefore these social relations, their role, how they are constructed and maintained, and how they are changed by flooding are considered in detail.

Networks may take many forms. “A social network refers to a set of actors (also called ‘nodes’) who are tied to one another through social relations” (Prell 2006:para. 2.9). Alternatively “a social network can be defined as any bounded set of connected social units (Streeter and Gillespie 1993:202). In the language of social network analysis; a network consists of one or more nodes which can be persons, organisations, groups, nations. “Any theoretically meaningful unit of analysis may be treated as actors: individuals, groups, organizations, communities, states, or countries” (Streeter and Gillespie 1993:202). These are connected by one or more ties which may consist of one or more relationships. These form distinct, analyzable patterns or networks (Wellman 2003). Some of the structural variables of a network are density and clustering, boundedness, size and heterogeneity, specialised or multiplex relationships, directness of connections and position within the network (Wellman 1998). It is residents’ construction of what constitutes a local community network that is examined here. Networks are explored in relation to notions of locality and community, which shapes both their nature and their extent. This focus on

residents' construction of the local community network is not meant to deny their membership of other forms of network.

Following Neal and Walters (2008:293) it is argued that "the everyday, small-scale and mundane efforts of social organizations to construct local social relations through notions of community are worthy of attention". In the traditional community residents were relatively isolated and most social contact, most of life's experiences were expected to take place within the community. In this situation the "overall pattern of social relationships would be dense, multiplex, bounded and encompassing, providing a total framework within which the individual was embedded" (Day 2006:45). The vision of community networks as being dense, interlinked and occurring within the locality was retained by residents. Yet interviewees' lives were no longer confined to the locality, and as Chapter 3 illustrated the traditional structures of community largely failed to create the types of networks understood to be an essential part of community. There is then a gap between the expectations of community networks and the means by which to create them

It is not suggested that all communities in the past were completely isolated separate entities. Indeed much research has shown that such isolation was not possible. However there is evidence to suggest that movement and interconnection has increased and that historically at least some communities came close to the ideal of the traditional community. With increased mobility it has become increasingly unlikely that local networks would be created in such a way. Some have even argued that communities are increasingly becoming sets of "networked individuals" where networks are "sparsely-knit, linking individuals with little regard to space" so that the village or neighbourhood are of little importance (Wellman 2002:1). In contemporary society people may belong to many networks at a whole range of scales. There is said to be a general tendency towards people operating in "far-flung, loosely bounded, sparsely-knit and fragmentary" networks (Wellman 2002).

Whatever the situation, the point here is that however idealised this notion of the traditional bounded community, it continues to shape expectations of local communities and their networks. It is residents' constructions of what constitutes a community network that is explored here and therefore the focus is on these small-scale, interconnected networks within the community boundary. However it is recognised that they may belong to many other networks at a whole range of scales. Chapter 6 for example shows how kin networks provided assistance following flooding. So traditional visions of dense, localised communal networks persist, whilst the community structures once expected to build these

networks, no longer fulfil this purpose. How then can local people meet to create the types of networks they envisaged, or do they simply fail to materialise?

The research found that the creation of local networks now requires considerable reflexivity and active efforts by local residents, who then had to set about consciously creating their own local structures, which could enable these types of networks to develop. It is proposed that that local community rather than being an imagined community is better understood as 'conscious community'. Not only must residents consciously desire it, they must make continual efforts to construct and maintain the local networks they still consider an essential part of local community. In the rural areas, the community structures were constructed almost entirely around leisure pursuits. Groups and activities were set up that would allow villagers to meet. In Leeds, prior to the flood, these local structures were absent and so networks were few.

In the categorisation of communities into the therapeutic or corrosive following flooding there is a lack of understanding of the social processes through which these changes may arise (Flint and Luloff 2005), perhaps partly because of the terms' origins in psychology (Perry and Lindell 1978). A recent research proposal suggested "there is a dearth of empirically-based understanding about the processes people go through in recovering from flood disasters in the UK ..." (Medd et al. 2007). The previous chapter showed the impact that flooding can have on community identity, particularly in Upbeck where this was lacking. The flood had a parallel effect on the networks. Following the flood, Upbeck residents decided to invest the necessary time and effort to create community structures. Networks developed on the estate where there had previously been few. These were focused almost entirely around flooding and its mitigation. In contrast, there was little quantitative change in villages with their existing local structures and dense networks.

The majority of interviewees desired local networks and some were prepared to put considerable effort into creating them. However the desire for sociability with those in the community was balanced against the need to maintain a level of household privacy and independence and this is discussed in the first section. The following sections then discuss the types of social structure through which community networks were formed. The first of these is 'casual structures', which offer an opportunity for residents to meet informally in an unplanned way. This was the predominant method for meeting other residents in Aylesby. The next, 'organised structures', played the most significant role Haylton. Organised social structures are created by residents to provide an opportunity for locals to come together. The third looks at the absence of social structures in Upbeck prior to the flood, and their development following flooding.

## 5.2 Networks, trust and privacy

Chapters 3 and 4 have already illustrated the importance of networks to the construction of local community. They are an essential part of the way in which the boundaries of the local are constructed as well as the shared identity. The role of these networks in the concept of local community is discussed first. Secondly the relationship between networks, strangers and trust is considered. Finally, the tension between community sociability and household privacy is explored.

### 5.2.1 Community networks

Whilst local networks within the community are central to the idea of community, it is not reducible to networks alone. There is an intangible element, which is typified by phrases such as *community feeling*, *sense of community* or *community spirit*. These refer to the shared, spiritual aspect, where community members are expected to support one another, particularly in times of crises. A simple but telling description of a ‘good community’ by Alan in Aylesby which emphasises the role of positive social relations was “*that people get on together*” (Int 34). When Elaine, who was living on the Upbeck estate in Leeds, was asked if she would describe herself as living in a good local community, she answered “*I think that since the flooding has taken place, yes, people you know try and help people out more*” (Int 1). Asked if it was not so good before the flood then she replied “*No. We didn’t really know each other, so we didn’t really speak that much, but now people help each other out ...*” (Int 1).

In Elaine’s construction of local community people must know one another and in a good community these people will help one another. It was generally believed that communities, at least in their ideal form, should be “*tight knit and supportive*” (William Int 44&45). The response to the flood for many people demonstrated the positive aspects of community. Charles in Haylton describes how after the flood “*you got a warm feeling about the sense of community. That’s a funny sort of thing to say because it was a disaster and it was a shocking thing to see but the way people rallied together sort of kept my faith in human nature in a way*” (Int 39). Similarly, Susan in Haylton was very touched by the assistance they received after being flooded; “*people would come round and offer to help, I mean the community was amazing*” (Int 44&45). Both of these accounts imply the presence of local networks but above this a common identity and willingness to come together. Helping those in need is seen to express the ideals of community.

Community in the form of local networks was something that almost all of those interviewed valued. In Leeds (Upbeck) where these had been very limited prior to the floods the increase in local networks was felt to be one of the few benefits of the flood. This was commented on widely and frequently and very much appreciated by the majority of interviewees, irrespective of whether they had lived there a few months or a number of decades. As Anna describes, *“I think the positive thing is the way that people talk to each other and make time for each other now”*. In Aylesby the close-knit village networks were one of the most important features to those who had moved there from urban areas. Haylton had the most active locally-based social life of the three locations and this was a key feature of the village. It was seen to be the envy of other villages and it was the close-knit social networks that had attracted people to live in the village.

This is not to say that these types of local community networks were taken for granted or always seen as necessary. For example, even when they were largely absent in Upbeck, residents were content with their choice of residence on the estate, and still felt a sense of belonging through their wider family connections and a sense of familiarity. In the villages whilst some residents had gone there in search of ‘local community,’ a number of residents were agreeably surprised to find themselves belonging to active communities. For example, when Charles was asked, did you consider what the community was like when you moved here? He answered, *“no, I mean it came as a very pleasant surprise to us”* (Int 39). So whilst the face-to-face community is for many (but not all) desirable, it is not seen as either an inevitable or essential part of residents’ lives. When relocating, interviewees tended to prioritise more tangible factors such as: access to work, amenities, family and friends, the physical features of the residence and the surrounding area or social features such as crime levels. So whilst local community is generally understood to be desirable, and appreciated where it exists, for most it is not essential.

### **5.2.2 Networks and trust**

The creation of local networks helps provide a sense of safety and enables the establishment of a certain level of trust. Fear and mistrust in the community arose largely from not knowing people; it is a fear of strangers. So by developing networks this fear was largely removed. Crimes may of course be committed by those known to the victim but this was not an issue raised in this context. Fear of strangers was also an issue bound up with notions of urban and rural. The rural residents tended to reflect stereotypical views and associated urban areas with crime. Lisa, for example says, *“I wouldn’t consider living in a town now, especially with the things you hear on the telly like drugs and murders*

*and rapes and things like that ...*" (Int 37). Fear was a common theme for those who expressed negative views of urban areas, imagining the city as full of dangerous strangers.

This fear could be seen in parents' attitudes towards letting children play out. *"I think a lot of people when they live in more populated areas you don't really like your children going out to play, unsupervised."* (Sally Int 50&51). As Michelle explains *"... they can go out on their bike here, if you were in town [Leeds] you couldn't let them just go on their bike ..."* (Int 29&30). These concerns are not grounded in particular incidents; again it is a fear of the unknown and in particular strangers. In the small villages residents felt they knew and could therefore trust (at least up to a certain point) everybody. As Geoff says *"...it's safe for them [children] really, because everybody knows everybody else"* (Int 50&51). This discourse of fear was largely absent in Leeds, parents were happy to let their children play out within certain limits.

Anna, when discussing what constituted a good local community gives a reply which shows she believes the development of at least a limited amount of trust is necessary to communities. *"If there's a problem or if you need help, depending on the people you've built the relationship up with, I think you can, you can rely upon people. Obviously you don't give them your prized possessions but, you know, if you ask them to do something for you, they definitely will help you"* (Int 3). John (Int 60) saw trust as an increasingly scarce commodity because of a decline in society, whilst Joe (Int 28) felt there was a lack of trust amongst southerners. Both felt this was detrimental to community development. However issues of trust were rarely raised in discussions concerning the local community. In contrast trust became a major talking point when discussing relations with organisations such as the Environment Agency and Local Councils, as Chapter 7 will illustrate.

### **5.2.3 Household privacy**

This desire for sociability in the form of local networks was balanced against the need to maintain privacy. Numerous local networks may be the ideal but these must not be too intrusive. The communitarian vision of the close communities of the past, with residents frequently calling on one another unannounced, and the regulation of behaviour through community sanctions, held no appeal for interviewees. Their assertions about not 'living in one another's pockets' appear to be made against this implicit view of local community. Discussions of community by interviewees were often qualified with the need to limit local people's access to the private space of home. As Elizabeth in Upbeck illustrates when asked *"is it important to you, that feeling of community or is it not something that really*

*bothers you?" she replied "It's two fold really. I don't like to think I'm living in someone's pocket, you know, popping in for tea every five minutes, but I think you need to know that they're there, or you're there as well if you need each other"* (Int 11). As Dyck (2002:106) observes, because "neighbours potentially pose the greatest danger to domestic privacy, a fine line needs to be maintained between 'being friends' and 'being friendly'", a distinction that was also made by a number of interviewees.

A number of interviewees in Upbeck were critical of people being too private, which was a reflection of the lack of local social networks. Whereas those in the villages tended to stress the importance of maintaining privacy, this was more of an issue in these small communities with close-knit networks. These Upbeck residents echoed the individualisation and privatisation discourses, which argue that there has been a decline in communal relations as increased significance has been placed on the individual and the private sphere (Allan 1996). Society was criticised for being more "*closed off*" (Liam Int 22) with people being "*more insular*" (Tony Int 23). John for example felt that "*everybody wants to be private, they want to barricade themselves in, which is a shame really*" (Int 18). Maintaining privacy was an issue raised in all three locations, but especially in the villages.

Whilst privacy was commonly discussed, a lack of respect for privacy was not a problem that had been experienced. Residents wanted to make it clear that this was not what their community was like, defining themselves against a particular vision of community, where people are constantly dropping in on one another. As Judy says "*it isn't the sort of village where everyone's on top of each other all the time, you're really left to do your own thing and then there are these activities up at the village hall that you can go to if you want to*" (Int 50&51). Some felt lack of privacy was an exclusively rural issue, Rebecca found that when living in London "*it's not a problem because no-one talks to you, you won't necessarily even know your neighbour in London. We lived in a flat and I didn't even know who lived upstairs, so everybody lives their own little cocooned life*" (Int 32&33). A number of the village residents had accepted a certain loss of privacy as inevitable but felt that this was compensated for by the gains in local networks and social support. In developing local networks sociability was balanced against privacy and there was a boundary beyond which sociability was considered intrusive and unacceptable.

This desire to protect privacy is centred on defending the private space of home. Residents were careful not only to protect their own home space but also not too intrude on others. This sensitivity tends to inhibit the development of local networks, particularly where there is an absence of clear structures for developing these relations. Privacy is essential to

the notion of home, in western cultures at least, even though it can never be entirely private, as it will always to some extent be open to public scrutiny (McDowell 1997; Darke 1996). Residents are usually careful to protect this privacy. “Who an occupier allows into the house, and which rooms they are invited into is a signal of the closeness of their relationship with a visitor. Some people are only invited in as part of planned visits, whereas close friends may ‘pop in’ spontaneously” (Valentine 2001:73).

The importance of maintaining this as a private space means that local relations cannot be created within the home space, although once established they may be developed there. Relationships had to be well established before neighbours would be invited in. Respecting privacy could also become a communal act. In Haylton, villagers would defend a resident celebrity’s privacy by refusing to tell tourists where he lived or by misdirecting them. During the flood incident however, the normal rules of privacy were largely suspended as people did all they could to help their neighbours. This was an important factor in the increase of social contact in Upbeck, as later sections illustrate.

Once relationships are established then some communal activities may move into private spaces. For example, neighbours were invited to a barbecue and a village fund raising party that was held at a private residence. But these were the outcome of relationships that had been initiated elsewhere. Given the privacy of the home there has to be another site for local relationships to develop. In the multiplex communities of the past, members of the local community would meet frequently through activities such as work, shopping, leisure and religious practice. In the fieldwork locations these failed to produce the desired networks. It is not clear therefore where the localised networks that residents desire as part of local community can be formed. The following section explores the structures through which local relations were established and the types of local networks that these structures generated.

### **5.3 Casual meeting points**

Casual meeting points are those that offer an opportunity for residents to meet informally in an unplanned way. This type of structure only played a significant role in Aylesby. These may appear the most natural because of the lack of planning. Through the use of these types of meeting points, residents ‘bump into’ one another and are able, through repeated encounters, to develop relationships. When Joe in Aylesby was asked “*So it’s the kind of place where everybody knows everybody is it?*” his reply was “*yes, well you’ve got the one shop haven’t you? So I mean you’re hitting them all the time in the shop*” (Int 28). For this



type of meeting point to be effective in developing dense community networks, the majority of users need to be local community members.

If there are too many users from outside the community it cannot function to create community networks unless those community members are already identified by some other means. If residents cannot recognise who are fellow members of their local community then they cannot develop networks or create a communal identity. It is also unlikely to be effective in a large community unless supported by some other means. Encounters need to be repeated and faces must become familiar if a relationship is to be built up through these brief and casual encounters. This is unlikely to occur if the numbers involved are too great.

The majority of Aylesby's networks were built through casual encounters. There was a small shop selling a range of basic foodstuffs which had a tea room attached. In addition to this there was a hotel which was also the local public house. Through the use of these residents got to know one another quite quickly and extensive networks were built up so that 'everybody knew everybody'. The isolation of Aylesby meant that a number of residents worked locally, either within the village or on the surrounding estates. This allowed some networks to develop, as residents met casually through work-based encounters, whereas in both Haylton and Upbeck residents' employment was spread across a much wider area.

Robert for example found that working in the village of Aylesby had enabled him to develop relationships with a wide range of local people. *"I do know nearly everybody in the village now, after four or five years, and because I work doing all sorts of different things ... I have met and worked for quite a lot of the locals already. Which, you know, has helped me integrate more quickly than if I were working out every day in Thirsk or Northallerton or somewhere. So I'm lucky to be able to work locally a lot"* (Int 36). Those working in the shop and the hotel found that they quickly knew people through the business. The very small population size (only approximately fifty) and the isolation of the village meant these casual encounters were an effective means of producing dense local networks. This was supported by a limited number of groups and village-wide events, which helped to cement the village identity. Although small, the village had a number of 'community spaces' in the form of the village hall, the sports field and the church. Use of these was relatively limited but they provided places for the community as a whole to come together.

In a number of ways Aylesby resembled the traditional community. Residents met one another in an apparently natural way in a range of different situations. There were a variety of casual meeting points and a few organised ones which allowed the development of dense networks and everybody felt that they knew everybody else. However where this differed from the traditional bounded community was the way in which a large part of residents' lives took place outside of the village community. The majority of shopping and leisure activities happened outside of the village, as did schooling and health care. In many ways Aylesby is unusual in possessing a range of its own amenities, such as the shop and the hotel, even if these are unable to provide for all the needs of residents. Villagers were aware of this and would talk of supporting the shop, indicating their consciousness that it was a scarce resource that needed their custom to survive.

There were no effective casual meeting points in either Haylton or Upbeck. Facilities such as shops, post offices etc. are under threat in many locations, as this is written there are protests about threatened Post Office closures in rural locations, including in Aylesby. The apparent naturalness of the casual meeting points hides the efforts needed to maintain these types of structures. The village is largely owned by a single landowner and it is managed, at least partly, to maintain this ideal of the self sufficient working community. Robert, for example, said that he was accepted as a tenant as the village because he was going to be "*working locally and not just using the place as a dormitory*" and because he's "*kind of half a family*" (Int 36). This illustrates the conscious effort to maintain the village as a place where people live and work and bring up families.

The groups and events that take place within the village are run by committees of residents, which requires their effort and commitment to these. Some people inside the community, and some involved with but not living within the community, felt that these could be more numerous and comparisons were made with other more active communities. However others felt that they were better than some villages. Both positions reveal that the local activities rely largely on residents' efforts. These social structures, whilst appearing to be a natural part of the community, exist because of efforts to create a particular vision of the rural community.

All the villagers were known to one another, even though there was some mobility through the village. The interlinking of the networks was illustrated by the effectiveness of word of mouth as a means of communication. "*Oh jungle telegraph. It's awesome isn't it*" (Sean Int 29&30). News travelled quickly through the village. Its isolation not only served to highlight the difference between residents and outsiders, it also helped to create a coherent identity for residents. Choosing to live in this fairly remote community indicated

a shared commitment to a particular lifestyle and a willingness to sacrifice a certain amount of convenience. Newcomers to the village were clearly visible and through the various meeting points available could become quickly integrated into the local social structure. Despite a number of minor grievances with other residents, interviewees felt able to present themselves as part of a coherent local community with a clear social structure.

### **5.3.1 The impact of flooding on Aylesby's casual structures**

In Aylesby the flood was felt to have demonstrated the village's unity and ability to work together, a previously largely untested quality. Those interviewed were pleased by the way the village could work together and it helped to reinforce the village identity. Villagers have become more aware of what they have and more appreciative of their community. Whilst it changed the quality of the networks, it had little impact on the local structures or the quantity of local networks. The church and churchyard were quite badly damaged, but a combination of villagers, outside volunteers, television crews and insurance money ensured that this was restored quickly so that it could be used for a wedding, to which all the village residents were invited.

## **5.4 Organised structures**

Organised social structures are created by residents and are intended to provide an opportunity for locals to come together. These structures are situated within the community, and are intended to appeal largely, but not necessarily exclusively, to members of that community. Residents meet at particular times and for a particular purpose. The effort needed to create and maintain these types of structures is more apparent than for the casual structures. It was in Haylton that organised meeting points played the most significant role. Haylton, in contrast to Aylesby, had no casual meeting points as it lacked a shop or pub or similar, however it had a wide range of village activities and groups based around the village hall and the more recently purchased village recreation field. Without the organised structures opportunities to meet would be extremely limited.

The groups in Haylton generally met either weekly or monthly and were based around particular leisure activities or interests, some examples include whist drives, cricket matches, keep fit, an art group and a history group. Village wide events were usually annual and included a Sunday lunch, a cyclists' lunch, Christmas events and a sports day.

These events were organised by committees of residents and were well attended. Being a part of the organisation of these events as well as participating in them played an important role in building networks. Not only did these groups and events create opportunities for villagers to meet, they were an important part of the village identity. Residents prided themselves on Haylton's wide range of activities where people came together to socialise.

The conscious or reflexive nature of these social structures is much more apparent in Haylton than it was in Aylesby. The absence of any casual meeting points means that they are totally reliant on those structures that residents create for themselves. This requires considerable and widespread effort from residents. A strong discourse of participation prevailed so that people came to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance through taking part in these local activities. Whilst everybody is expected to participate in some way, it is recognised that people will have different amounts of time available. So some residents participated occasionally whilst others played a key role. As well as the social structures and those willing to give time to maintain them, it is necessary to have a suitable space for these activities to take place.

Activities in Haylton centred on the village hall and the recreation field. The village hall is an old wooden army hut, which physically would not appear to be ideal. Yet when the floor needed replacing and it was suggested it might be easier to build a new hall this idea was rejected. The hut was not simply a convenient container for social activities; the villagers felt an emotional attachment to it. *"It's got real character, that's the thing and people feel ownership for it"* (Charles Int 39). The continuing efforts of residents to create an active community can be seen in the more recent purchase of the village recreation field. Residents of the village lent the recreation committee the money to buy the field, and they were then paid back as the money was found through fund-raising activities. This demonstrates considerable commitment and belief from those involved.

The social structure of groups and events in Haylton was supported by a number of methods of communication for the village as a whole. There was a village newsletter, which was issued four times a year, which kept people informed of the various events, noted changes in the village and reported who had left or joined the village. There was also an email system and village notice boards which were actively used to communicate information. They also took other proactive measures to maintain local interaction. When it was found that people were not meeting during the winter as often as they were in summer, a new group was created to enable people to come together and chat informally. In this way they were able to create an organised solution to help counter the lack of casual

meetings. This had been effective but it is a strategy that is less likely to be successful in a different setting where people did not already know each other well.

Haylton was also the only location which had a system for greeting new residents, this allowed newcomers to be quickly integrated into the local networks if they so desired, although there was a concern for privacy. As Carol describes; “ *it’s a very friendly village, when you move in here you’re invited to join all sorts of things and they’ll sort of give you two invitations and then they decide that umm well, it’s intrusive, they obviously don’t want to join in, so then, you know, it’s up to them after that*” (Int 52&53). Again a concern to maintain privacy is balanced against the desire for social contact. The clear social structure, in the form of a wide range of activities supported by a range of village communications and backed up by a system for integrating newcomers’ into this structure, means that the potentially negative effects of residential mobility can be quickly overcome. There is a clear structure to which newcomers can join and additional support to integrate them. Any lack of involvement by residents is likely to be a conscious choice rather than an inability to access the local structures or a lack of social life in which to become involved.

In contrast to the more isolated Aylesby, the village had attracted professionals prepared to commute a considerable distance in order to be able to live in this attractive village. Travelling to work and long or incompatible working hours were found by many to be factors which could limit their social contact with neighbours. Charles for example, describes how travel through work meant his networks developed more slowly than his wife’s. “ *Well I think it first of all it depends on what you’re doing with the rest of your life. If you, as I had, a very busy job, travelling internationally, it took longer. Jane got to know people more quickly than I did. Just because I was away a lot*” (Int 39). As well as daily absence from the community through employment there are also few opportunities for casual local meetings through employment. However the clear local structures described above were able to mitigate the potentially negative effects of this. Whilst relationships developed through casual meetings can be slow to develop, the clear structures in Haylton allow much quicker integration.

The wide range of groups and events in Haylton had led to dense interlinked networks, where all the villagers knew one another. The disadvantage of almost all social contact being through groups, meetings and events (and the absence of casual meeting points), was that it could be quite some time before residents who were not members of the same groups would meet. Patricia explained that the lack of a “ *meeting point*” such as a local shop meant that some time could pass before she would see particular individuals. She also gave the example of another resident she may see in the nearby town more frequently

than in the village. This occurred when they coincidentally worked the same hours in the Tourist Information Centre. *“If we meet down there, we’ll talk about all sorts of things that have been going on, you know, because we just haven’t met up here”* (Int 38). So although residents would meet eventually at one of the village-wide events, some residents may not be encountered as frequently as others if they belonged to different groups.

Considerable commitment was required from Haylton residents to run and support such a wide range of events. Behind this more widespread commitment there are often a small number of particularly committed individuals, who ensure that local activities continue. As Charles says when discussing village events: *“These things are absolutely great, but it’s because there’s one or two people prepared to put the energy in”* (Int 39). Frank similarly discusses how you need a small number of people to take on a particularly active role, what he calls *“prime movers”* (Int 48&49). As chapter 4 described, once these activities were established and a reputation developed, then they could draw like-minded individuals attracted by the stories of ‘village life’. It was then quite straightforward for newcomers to take part in this social structure, there were even systems in place to facilitate this. There is no reason to assume this phenomenon is widespread or common to rural villages. In fact Haylton had a reputation as a particularly good community, residents saw themselves as fortunate and most had stories of less friendly or more divided villages locally.

#### **5.4.1. The impact of flooding on Haylton’s organised structures**

The flood had relatively little long term effect on Haylton’s networks. There was initially a reduction in community activities as residents focused on restoring their houses. It was also felt inappropriate to hold some events, given what local people had suffered. However the local structures proved resilient and all resumed again and were not diminished in any way. Haylton’s community structure was resilient because it is not reliant on a single group or organisation. It has multiple structures which are all centred on the village as a community. If one was to be damaged or reduced in some way then others can continue to bring the community together. The extensive networks within the village had proved to be effective in providing social support both during and after the flood. Flooding had not led to a quantitative change in networks in this tightly knit community but it led to an appreciation of what they had and a deepening of some relationships as the previous chapter illustrated.

## 5.5 An absence of community structures

It cannot be assumed that any type of local social structure will exist that is capable of producing the dense localised, spatially restricted networks associated with local community. Where there was an absence of such community-level structures (as in Upbeck) the development of local networks was very slow, only a few existed and these tended to be in isolated clusters. Residents in Leeds identified the estate as the potential local community but there were no active meeting points at this scale prior to the first flood. Group membership of any sort was very low and there were no community-level social structures within the estate. There were plenty of opportunities for socialising but these all lay outside of the estate.

Residents had access to a wide range of services, amenities, and leisure activities locally, but again at a wider scale than the estate. There were some places just outside of the estate which a few residents used socially, but these were of limited value in developing estate wide networks. These lay outside of the area considered by most as the local community and they could be used by a wide range of people from the surrounding area. This meant that the people who met through these amenities weren't necessarily residents of the estate. There was no place available that residents could go and know that they would meet other estate members.

The lack of effective casual, structured or institutional structures at the estate level meant the only avenue left for developing relationships with others on the estate was through fortuitous meetings on the street. This was not because the street was a particular site of social activity, but neighbours would sometimes pass as they went to and from their houses and this provided a brief opportunity for social contact. However, meetings between residents on the street were infrequent as residents would enter and leave their houses at different times and so only met occasionally, especially during the winter. *"You can go almost all winter without seeing the neighbours really"* (Elizabeth Int 11).

Where you work, how far you have to travel, and the hours worked, can all have a significant impact on the relationships built up with local people. As Anna a teacher found: *"with the job I had ... I didn't really see people because people have routines ..."* (Int 3). Where accidental meetings on the street are the main route to socialising, even small differences in working times can mean that neighbours rarely meet. This type of unplanned meeting proved a very inefficient method for developing networks. Elaine, for example, describes how it took four years to start to develop a friendship with her next door neighbour: *"me and my next door neighbour, we've always been, we've been good friends, well not always, we lived here for about four years before we really started to*

*talk*” (Int 1). Given the physical proximity of the next door neighbour they are likely to be the people you ‘bump into’ the most, yet even so it took a number of years for the relationship to begin to develop. Under these circumstances small scale spatial features such as the shape of the street and the position of the house became important factors in how social networks developed.

Those living at the end of a side street, nearest where it joins the main street for example, would see more people as they had to pass by; *“I mean we’re sort of strung out along this street and because we live at the end obviously we see more than most because everybody has to pass our door to get in and out”* (John Int 4). Being in a position where residents must pass regularly provided opportunities to socialise briefly. Some residents at the end of a cul-de-sac found they formed a particular bond with those in the circular, end part of the cul-de-sac, with the people in the houses that they could see from their own house. *“I would say, here, for us, we’re closer to the ones in the cul-de-sac because we see them more, you know, we’re opposite everybody here, so we do see them more ...”* (Sharon Int 7&8). The relative boundedness of the cul-de-sac and the ability to see those houses from your own, can create suitable conditions for a ‘micro community’ to form.

Similar results have been found in East London, where a cul-de-sac in a housing estate “offered opportunities for informal social occasions, from street games among children to the gathering of parents on front drives ...” (Dines and Cattell 2006:38). Whilst particular parts of the street provided some opportunities to socialise, this reliance on casual encounters led to very limited networks, despite the relative immobility of those living on the estate. Even though residents moved infrequently and then only usually a short distance this still tended to break the networks within the estate. Relationships with new neighbours then took a long time to form. Networks were sparse and tended to be clustered, extending to the street of residence at most, but often to only a small number of houses either side and opposite. Networks across the estate were very few and usually occurred when people had some other factor in common, such as a shared workplace. A wider range of mechanisms for meeting are needed if more extensive networks are to be created.

The public space of the street proved an inefficient way of forming local networks. Other types of public spaces such as parks, green spaces or squares might seem a better location for local networks to develop casually. This is often said to be one of their roles and Dines and Cattell have shown that public spaces can play an important role in the development of local social contacts. This includes “unexceptional” spaces as well as the more formal traditional notion of public spaces (2006). However public spaces of any sort, where



people would meet other locals from within the area considered to be local community were few. This was particularly the case on the Upbeck estate in Leeds. In contrast the two villages were small enough for a certain amount of interaction to take place whilst simply walking around the village and a bus shelter in Aylesby was used as a meeting point. There were no shared public spaces on the estate apart from the street itself.

It is interesting to note that the only group of people visible in the public space of the street, groups of teenagers in Leeds, were viewed as a threat. Their presence alone was enough to cause concern. This was raised as an issue by a number of interviewees in Leeds and yet there had been no incidents or problems. This would appear to be a symptom of the 'moral panic' about children's behaviour, where children (particularly teenagers) are seen as a threat to hegemony of the street (Valentine 2001:184). This suggests that even where suitable public spaces exist, their use as a local meeting point will not be straightforward.

There are also fears for the openness of public spaces, as they become increasingly privatised creating what have been called 'private-public space' (Minton 2006). Such as shopping malls and town centre regeneration sites, where what was previously public space has been given over to private companies to manage and to police. Critics "claim they create sterile, uniform places, which inhibit genuine public access and lack the diversity and humanity of traditional street life, while also displacing social problems into neighbouring ghettoised enclaves" which is thought to be detrimental to community construction (Minton 2006:10).

Interviewees in Leeds also raised the issue of changing gender roles and their impact on community formation. The role of developing and maintaining social networks is gendered with women usually being seen as those largely responsible. McCulloch even talks of the triple burden of women of household, work and community (McCulloch 1997:67). In the past the notion of the male breadwinner was dominant, with women usually remaining at home to care for children, and providing the 'community cement' (McDowell 1997:62). The increase in the number of women, especially mothers in employment was felt by some interviewees to have had an impact on local communities. This had led to a different situation from when they were growing up, and mothers at home would form local networks. *"When I was small ... that was very much you pop in next door for coffee and things like that. It was the Bermuda triangle, my mum and my friends mum and another friend's mum, nothing went on without them knowing ... but I think that were more to do with us parents, or mums being at home when we were kids"* (Elizabeth Int 11). Some women, such as Anna, felt that being employed left them little

time for developing relationships with neighbours. In Leeds, where networks were reliant on accidental meetings and given the slow and erratic nature of these meetings, absence through work is likely to have a significant impact.

On the other hand despite the increase in working mothers, parenting offered occasions to create local networks, with children providing opportunities for socialising. The shared parenting experience enhanced the network development through interactions on the street. As Louise explains, talking about the street where they used to live: *“I think it were the children before the first flood who knew everybody, Adam as eldest, he knew more people because he’d play out with the older children and that, you know, and that’s how we got to know some of the mums and dads, didn’t we? But then the rest of the people who didn’t have children we got to know them after the flood.”* Children who were less constrained than the adults played together on the street and this allowed parents to approach one another. This effect was largely confined to the cul-de-sac in which they lived, rather than the estate as a whole. This has some similarities to the way in which the flood experience became the basis for shared community identity (discussed in Chapter 4). It provided both an opportunity to meet and a shared experience (flooding or parenting) around which to develop the relationship.

The small clusters of networks, with few connections across the estate, limited the effectiveness of communication. Unlike in the villages information did not travel effectively by word of mouth and there was little awareness of other residents beyond the street of residence. So whilst there was a consensus that the estate could be considered as the potential local community, the lack of networks and shared identity limited their ability to communicate and to act coherently. Whilst the floods revealed that many residents desired estate wide communal networks, without any social structures to support this there was no means for residents to pursue this. In the other locations there was to varying degrees a local social structure which residents could engage with if they wished to develop local relationships. The only option available in Upbeck was to create new structures and engage in the creation of a conscious community. This would require considerable time and effort but this is what happened following the flood.

## **5.6 The flood as an opportunity for social contact**

The flood was instrumental in Upbeck in providing an initial contact between residents, which could then be developed into local networks. Prior to the flood opportunities for estate members to meet were very limited, and so network development was very slow. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the improvement in local networks in Upbeck was

widely commented on and appreciated by all those interviewed. The flood provided the opportunity for local people to meet, and this could then be developed around the shared flood experience. The flood brings people out onto the street, in the crisis situation and in the immediate aftermath people helped one another out as much as possible. In an emergency situation the usual protocols did not apply and people were less reserved. This was an important factor in Leeds where there were few opportunities to meet and many new social contacts were established in this way. Whilst networks were developed, these tended to remain clustered, usually being confined to people living on the same street.

In Upbeck, following the first flood, there was a spontaneous celebration on the street as the flood waters receded, which provided contact for those living in that street. Looking back interviewees were surprised that it had happened: *“this is something we can’t believe we did. All the residents got together and sat in the street and we had wine we had alcohol; we just sat there and drank. And it was kind of, euphoria, you know, we were like on a high ... we were just laughing and joking”* (Elaine Int 1). As well as arising out of increased contact on the street relationships could also develop in unexpected ways. Sharon and Eddie and their children developed a close relationship with another family living on the same street when they found themselves renting temporary accommodation next door. During this time they became good friends and have subsequently been away on holiday with them. Similar situations had arisen with other families, demonstrating the role that proximity may play in developing relationships. Without being brought together in temporary accommodation outside of the community, these families may never have developed a close relationship inside the community.

This increase in local networks was felt by residents irrespective of how long they had lived on the estate. It was remarked on by those who had lived there only a few months to those who had lived there for decades, therefore indicating the slowness of networks to develop. It might be expected that the longer term residents would already know a number of other residents. Liam who had lived all his life on the same street felt that *“before probably the majority of people didn’t know any of the neighbours but now I think the majority do”* (Int 22). John who had lived in the same house for nearly thirty years had found that *“now people talk to one another a lot more. You find that people you’d seen in passing, but you didn’t really know anybody, now you do”* (Int 4). The floods achieved what 30 years residency had failed to bring about. Earlier research has found similar effects, with the flood providing opportunity for contact and a breakdown of the usual privacy barriers. For example, in Kidlington one interviewee described how *“[p]eople speak to each other ... people that had not spoken to each other prior to the flooding. Now you say hello if you see somebody at the bus stop. It has broken down this silly English reserve”* (Tapsell et al.

1999:82). Similar results have also been found following bush fires (Winkworth et al. 2009).

This effect was largely confined though to individual streets, which was the scale at which people were able to help each other during the flood (the lack of community wide structures inhibiting wider action). *“In fact, its maybe done a bit of good for the street because everybody sort of talks now ... we all know each other now”* (Louise Int 5&6). Eddie feels that now *“it has more of a community spirit in this street”* (Int 7&8). The expansion of networks across the estate as a whole was more difficult. The formation of the Flood Action Group did allow the development of some networks across the estate. A limited number of wider networks were formed through the public meetings concerning the floods. For example, Elaine found that *“We’ve met people now in the, the other streets, I mean Laura, I only met Laura, I only met Laura through being flooded. I’d never spoke to her, never seen her, you know, you do get to know a lot more people”* (Int 1). However the increase in estate-wide networks was most prominent amongst committee members who would meet fairly regularly.

As the previous chapter discussed, communicating effectively with the whole estate and creating a shared identity was problematic. The committee struggled to create and maintain social structures that would enable this to happen. The narrow focus and single structure of the Flood Action Group means that it has to work hard to create and maintain networks, despite the support from external agencies. Such groups are vulnerable to collapse if the key individuals leave or lose interest. Haylton and Aylesby, Haylton especially, have multiple overlapping structures which proved resilient to flooding and are less vulnerable to change. Flooding had such a significant impact on the development of local relations in Upbeck because it has a three-fold effect: it brought neighbours into contact, it broke down the usual protocols of privacy, and it created a shared, place based identity. Despite this, constructing and maintaining local social structures proved challenging.

## 5.7 Conclusions

It has been suggested that Anderson’s notion of the ‘imagined community’ can be applied not only to nations but also to local communities. The use of the term ‘imagined’ suggests something that remains in the realms of the unreal and something that requires no effort. Yet the opposite is true, the local community required not only continual effort but also negotiation. There was an ‘imagined’ element in the form of constructing a shared place-

based identity. What emerges from the research though is the connection between the so called imagined and the real.

The discourses of local and community shaped the more observable elements of networks and social structures. In a time when networks are tending to become more widely dispersed, the creation of local networks has become a much more reflexive process. Some residents were prepared to make conscious efforts to create their vision of a local community. Without this activity, local community as residents understand it, remained absent. It is therefore suggested that local community can be best understood not as imagined community using Anderson's term but rather as *conscious community*.

The term 'conscious community' is intended to convey how it is a mental construct but also how to achieve this ideal requires continual efforts by those involved. It exists not only in the mind as a shared local identity, it is also expressed through the creation of a social structure and the construction of boundary which defines local in this context. The three elements of community (social, spatial and mental) are inextricably intertwined and the findings suggest that all three must come together for residents to feel they have achieved a successful local community (See figure 1). The mental elements are as essential as the social and spatial elements, and the more measurable aspects should not be seen as more real than the others. The conscious community must be actively constructed, and this means that some may not be able, or may not choose, to do so.

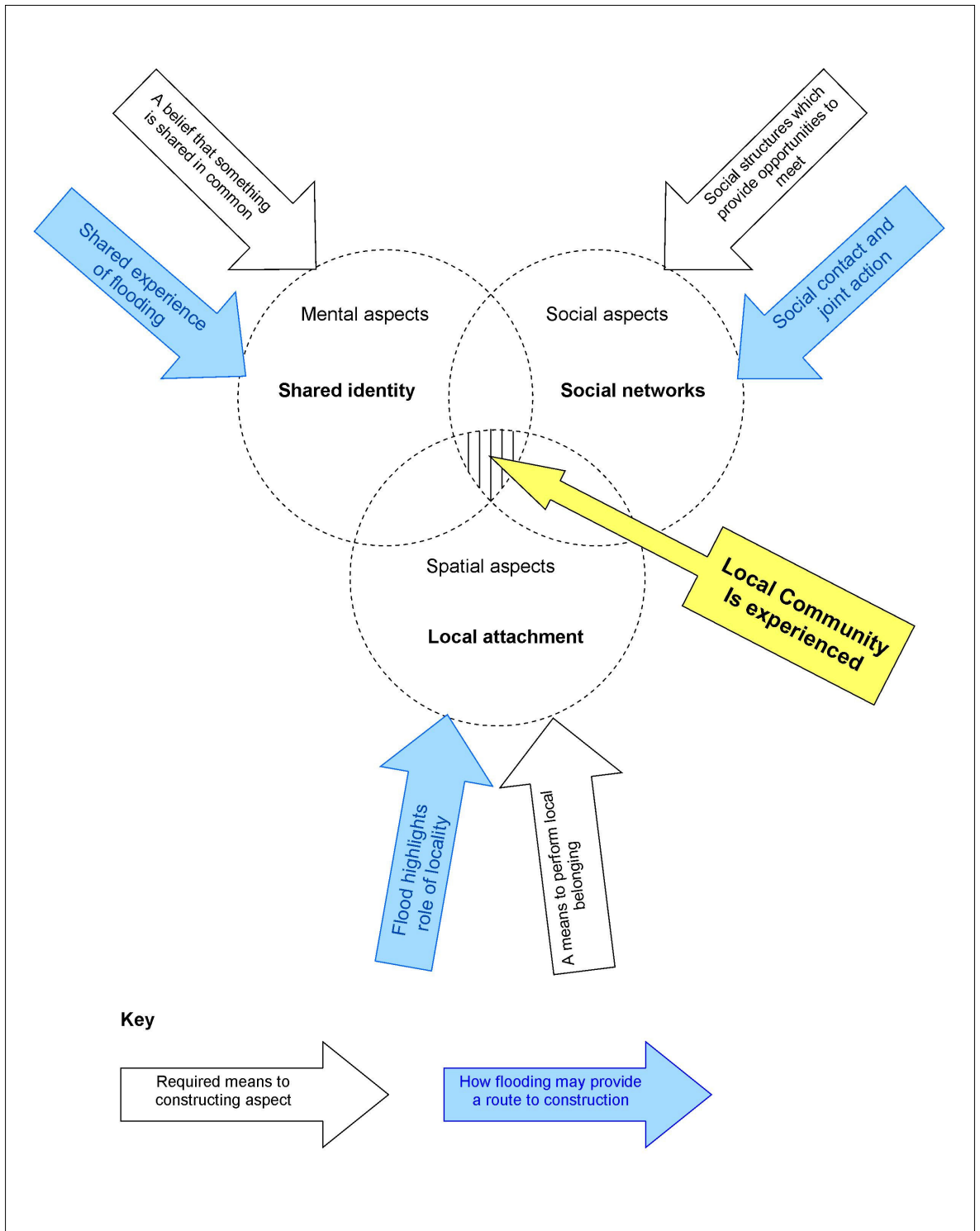
In a situation where communities must be consciously created, where boundaries, identity and social structures must be negotiated and agreed by residents, it cannot be assumed that local community in the form of local networks will exist. Household privacy is strongly protected and the benefits of local relations are balanced against this need. The self-regulating communities of the past, where behaviour is closely monitored held no appeal. Rather, residents were keen to stress that their communities were not like this. Where some form of local community has been constructed it can take very different forms. The balance between the types of local structure constructed (absent, casual, organised and institutional) will influence the network patterns produced.

In the past certain institutions may have been common, as communities had to be largely self sufficient and this led to a number of shared features. Where each community must be consciously created variation is likely to be considerable, and the structures may not be immediately apparent. To understand such communities it is argued that attention needs to be paid to the community identity, the local social structures developed and the spatial context in which these take place. These three come together to create a unique

community. Given the absence of relatively fixed structures and the mobility of residents through communities, these communities may be very variable through time as well as space. For example, all three communities were changed to some extent by the flood experience, Upbeck in Leeds the most dramatically. The ability of these communities to respond to flooding is also very variable, as the next chapter goes on to consider.

Before moving on to the communal responses to flooding the model first presented in the introduction is revisited (see following page). This summarises the findings of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 and illustrates how floods come to play such a key role in local community construction. The diagram demonstrates how the floods impacted on each of three aspects of the conscious community: mental, social and spatial. A shared identity is either constructed or reinforced through the traumatic experience of being flooded. Local networks are utilised, and in some cases created, through coming together to help one another cope with the flooding. The flood also heightened awareness of the local surroundings, isolated residents from the wider world and provided a sense of shared fate.

**Figure 2** – The role of flooding in the construction of the conscious community



## Chapter 6 – Communal responses to flooding

*“How do communities respond to risks and disasters? This question is central since communities are where risks and disasters are experienced. Understanding community response can provide a foundation upon which mitigation and amelioration of future problems can be based” (Flint and Luloff 2005:404).*

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the social aspects of practical actions taken in response to flooding, in the context of what has been learnt from the earlier chapters. It examines how local people help one another, and to what extent this may be considered to be collective action. It considers the factors that enable residents to take action to assist one another and by what processes this can become an organised social response. Two types of response are explored. There is the ‘first time’ response, where residents are coping with an unexpected event of which they have no previous experience. Then there is the ‘experienced’ response when flooding has been experienced previously; there is therefore some expectation of flooding and adaptations may have been made. The first type is examined in all three locations, the second type occurred in Upbeck only.

The current calls for greater community involvement are as yet unclear about the form that this should take. The implication is however that there must be some form of local collective action otherwise responses would remain individual rather than communal. It is clear from Pitt’s review that residents will be expected to help one another and that this is reliant on some form of social structure. “Although resilience begins with the individual, greater dividends can be achieved if activities are organised at the community level. ... In part, successful community resilience requires people to know who, and what, is where” (2008: 353). DEFRA’s move towards communal involvement and organised action was signalled by Martin Hurst, Director for Water at the *Flood and Coastal Risk Management Conference 2009*. He said “working with communities is top priority and the only way forward” and gave examples of communities that had been effective in doing this, including some in Leeds. The assumption is that there will be some kind of relationship between residents, in other words it is reliant on the face-to-face community and the existence of local networks.

The issue of responsibility was found by the research to be an important one and interviewees questioned the balance between individual and state responsibilities for flooding. The state would like those at risk to accept more responsibility, not just for floods but risks more generally (Arnoldi 2009, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, O’Malley 2004). In



this 'responsibilization' or 'responsibilisation' individual control is valorized (Arnoldi 2009, O'Malley 2004) as part of the more general tendency towards individualisation (Arnoldi 2009, Beck 1992, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, Giddens 1991, Kent 2009). The research however shows that this attempt at responsibilisation may be contested and resisted.

The findings of this research support Miller's claim that when responding to an emergency the pre-disaster social organisation is the community's primary resource (Miller 2007:45). The ability to respond collectively was very dependent on existing social structures. Social responses were reliant on the local social structures constructed by residents and the networks that this created. The types of local structures that were explored in the previous chapters - absent, casual, organised or formal - influence both the extent to which residents can assist one another, and the potential for this to become a more systematic response. As conscious communities may take very different forms, so may the communal response be very diverse. To understand them and their flood responses requires an examination of the individual community's characteristics.

A popular discourse which offers potential for community-wide response is examined first. This is followed by a diagram which illustrates how the various aspects of the communities discussed so far can explain the types of communal response within these locations. There is then a brief discussion of the factors influencing flood response in each location, followed by a more detailed look at the three types of response identified: unstructured, structured and formalised. The urban and rural contexts were found to have some implications for the types of resources available, which are discussed. The final section considers various factors which may limit the local community as a site for collective response.

## **6.2 Assessing communal responses**

Despite the range and complexity of constructions of community there was a widespread discourse which remained present across them all. This widely-shared ideal formed a basis around which communal action could be organised and offers considerable potential for the greater involvement of local communities in FRM. This was the idea of community as a resource; where local people are there when you need them, emotionally and/or practically. This may be understood by residents as an outcome of some other aspect of community or in some cases it represents a view where community is fairly inactive or dormant until required. For many, this support was a central part of what constitutes a good community and one that had been demonstrated in residents' response to the flood.

The response to questions asking if there was good local community produced surprisingly similar answers across all three locations. This was despite the considerable variation in other aspects of community. The reply could be summarised as, yes because people are there for you. Sean in Aylesby replied *“In a crisis people pull together”* (Int 29&30). Similarly, Anna in Upbeck said *“I think there is. I think if there’s a problem or if you need help, depending on the people you’ve built the relationship up with, I think you can, you can rely upon people ... if you ask them to do something for you, they definitely will help you”* (Int 3). Judy in Haylton replied *“It’s a real tight community, you know, we help one another”* (Int 50&51). Residents’ response to flooding both tests and highlights this aspect of community. As was seen in earlier chapters, this raised the community consciousness and strengthened the community identity. Almost all residents interviewed really valued the help they received during and after the flood.

In the fieldwork locations the sense of community was reinforced because their expectations that others would help were met. However the opposite may be true and residents may become disillusioned if the actions are not found to meet the expectations. Alternatively, there may be an initial feeling of community improvement which wears off as flood memories recede, especially if there are no social structures to support ongoing contact. Initial closeness may also turn to conflict. Whilst there is the potential in this discourse for united action and positive post flood changes this is by no means certain. There is evidence from the north of England that suggests disasters may impair the quality of community life for quite some time following a disaster due to the disruption of community activities and a sense of community breakdown (Tapsell and Tunstall 2001). Similarly research in Banbury and Kidlington found *“there were few suggestions of positive longer-term community impacts from the flooding”* (Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003:59). Whilst flooding frequently produces an initial feeling of togetherness, as earlier discussion showed, the subsequent development of this phenomenon arises from the communities’ pre flood construction.

Residents in the fieldwork areas were able to help one another in a wide variety of ways, both during and after flooding. The degree to which many of these types of services could be considered collective however is doubtful. They tend to be spontaneous offers of help from individual to individual, or household to household, rather than wider collective action. In the days and months following the flood there was potential for more collective action. Three types of communal response to flooding are identified: unstructured, structured and formalised. The types of response are closely linked to the types of local structures created by residents and the networks that then developed. Unstructured responses require no local networks but local support was more extensive where these

existed. Structured responses exhibit some level of organisation and formalised actions are where specific systems have been set up to cope with the flooding. Whilst the type of collective response possible is reliant on existing communal systems, the repeat flooding in Leeds demonstrates that given time and commitment these structures can be developed to allow more systematic responses.

The diagram on page 131 illustrates how the intersection of spatial, social and mental aspects of community shaped social responses to flooding in each of the three locations. In Upbeck it also shows how this has changed over time. The central arrow illustrates the steps to assessing likely community flood responses. This involves considering the context in which the community operates (social, spatial and mental), the form of the local social structures, and the local network patterns. This is not a simple deterministic relationship where a particular set of factors will always lead to a particular outcome. Rather by considering these and how they interact, likely responses can be established. The boxes within the diagram illustrate how in each of the fieldwork locations the context, local structures and networks led to particular flood responses. The two boxes for Upbeck illustrate the change that has occurred over time with repeat flooding.

In Aylesby the very small population size, relative isolation and shared rural identity meant that the largely casual social structures had been effective in producing dense local networks and a situation where everybody did literally know everybody else. Therefore when the flood occurred the news travelled rapidly through the community. Residents then quickly came together to help one another cope with the flooding, and this included assisting a number of trapped tourists. Collective help tended to centre on those institutions which were also central in network creation, the hotel and the shop/tea room. Unstructured one to one help was quickly and widely offered, and collective action, such as clearing the road, also took place. In this small isolated village where residents are well known to one another the largely casual local structures were sufficient to provide at least some immediate organised responses to the flood. However the development of formal responses seems unlikely.

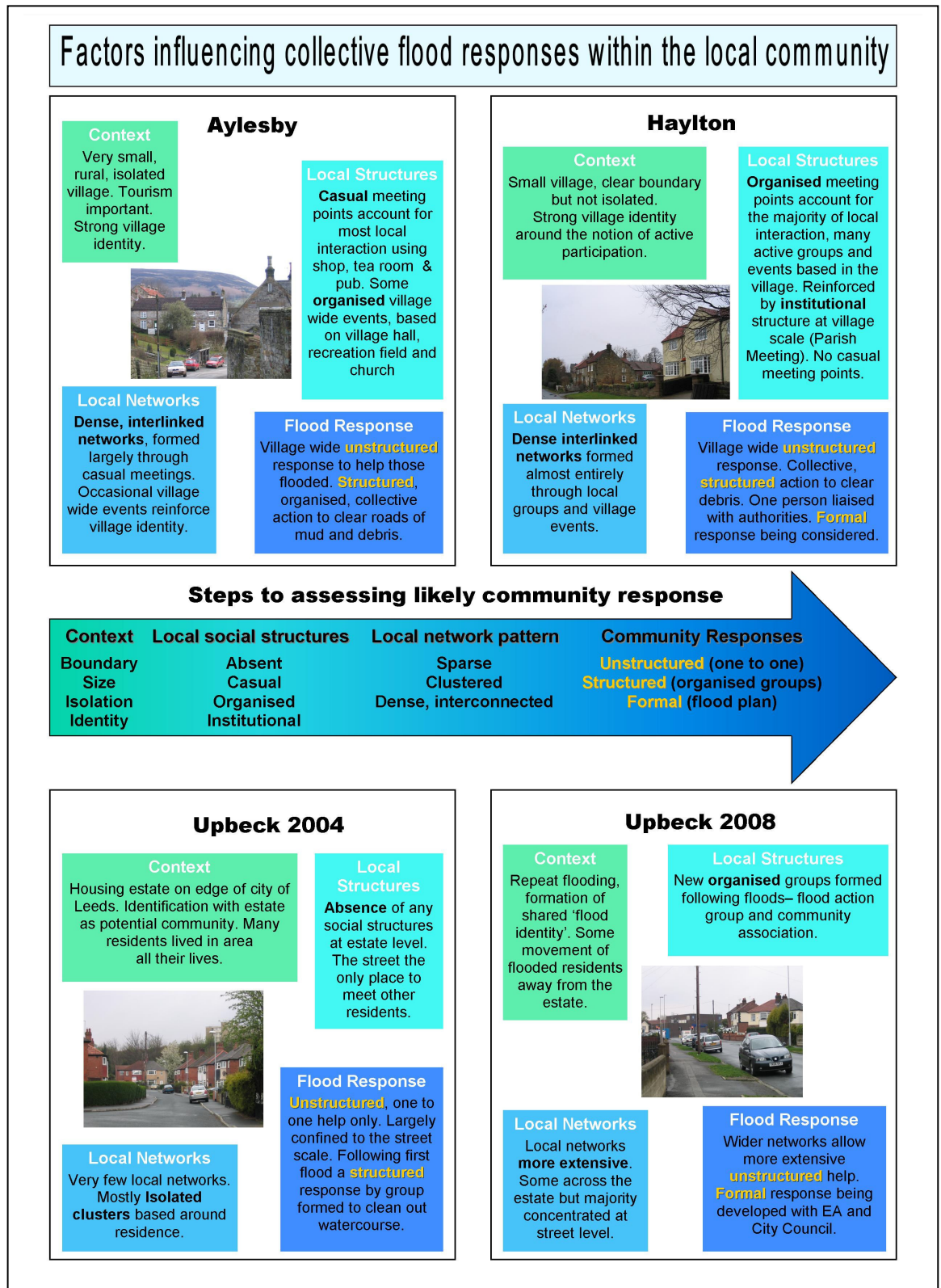
Haylton was similar in that residents were well known to one another. However this had come about through very different local structures. In the absence of any casual meeting points all social relations are formed through organised meetings and this is supported by the Parish Meeting which operates at the village scale. Like Aylesby, the dense local networks meant that unstructured help was quickly and widely offered. The strong belief in active participation and existing pattern of residents helping one another in times of crisis meant that assistance was quickly offered. The organised structures within the

village lend themselves well to systematic responses and villagers came together to cope with flooding. These local structures have also enabled them to gather information after the flood and reflect back on the experience. They have considered adopting a more formal response and the structures already in place would make this relatively straightforward.

Upbeck is very different as prior to flooding it lacked any local structures. The presence of extended family nearby meant that some support was available for many. However within the estate networks were few and clustered. So news of the flood did not travel beyond the street scale initially. All the responses to the first flood were unstructured, and this was spatially limited, again to the street scale, because of the lack of networks. The flooding though played a key role in developing localised networks and a shared identity. This proved instrumental in the development of the first social structures at the estate scale.

These flood-based social structures have been developed to enable organised and formal responses. Following the first flood a group formed and this allowed residents to come together to clean out the water course. The wider networks have also allowed the unstructured responses to become more widespread and move beyond the street scale. Subsequent flooding led to the formation of a Flood Action Group which enabled more organised responses to take place. Together with support from the Environment Agency and the City Council this group has developed a formal response to the flooding. There are now systems to disseminate warnings, for neighbours to assist one another and for checks to take place on vulnerable community members. There are also processes to include residents in decision making on flood alleviation works. These are structures developed and supported specifically for the purpose of flood response and they have arisen out of flood experience.

**Figure 3 – Factors influencing communal flood responses**



### 6.3 Unstructured Responses

The first type of social response to flooding to be examined in detail is unstructured. This type of assistance was both common and widespread; it requires no organisation and it is not dependent on extensive local networks. It usually comprises spontaneous offers of help from one individual or household to another, and can be from flooded or non flooded residents. Residents do not have to be well known to one another as in the emergency situation the usual privacy barriers are overcome. Where there are few existing relationships this type of help is usually spatially limited, as it is spontaneously offered to those who can be seen to be having difficulties. In the immediate crisis, as the flood takes place, residents are often unaware of the extent of the flooding beyond their own street. So help is likely to come from immediate neighbours or those nearby on the street. Examples during the flood event include offering hot drinks, moving household items and moving people away from the flood waters. After the flood it can include tasks such as helping to remove damaged items, taking in washing, shopping, providing telephone services, storing household items and offering meals.

In Upbeck following the first flood event, where local networks were few, the majority of aid from local people was of this unstructured type. People either helped those they know, usually immediate neighbours because of the lack of local structures, or those they could see needed assistance. This generally limited aid to the street of residence at most. Residents were generally unaware until some time after the event that the flooding had extended beyond their own street. The lack of local networks meant that this information did not travel across the estate. The lack of community level structures or extensive networks prevented wider scale, or more organised responses. One illustration of the types of problem that can be caused by a lack of local structures was the distribution of sandbags. A pile of sandbags was left on a street by the City Council for the at risk residents of the estate. However without communal structures there was no local mechanism for distribution. Therefore only a few residents on that street, who noticed the sandbags, received any.

Where local networks are more widespread assistance was less spatially restricted. In Aylesby, which is small with extensive networks, word of the flood spread quickly through the village? Similarly in Haylton, news of the damage caused by the flood spread rapidly and the extensive networks meant wide-ranging assistance was promptly offered. For example villagers' helped rescue people from their houses, provided temporary accommodation, helped with rescuing items and clearing up, offered meals and washing facilities and much more. Where residents are well known to one another some very generous offers were made. One example in Haylton was of a couple who were about to go

on holiday who lent their house to another couple whilst they were absent. These were not especially close friends and in fact they had made the offer to several people. This unstructured type of support is much appreciated and can be very important in the immediate crisis situation as it may be the only immediate assistance available. Aylesby and Haylton, for example, were both cut off following the flood as bridges and roads were destroyed. Where networks are extensive the response is rapid and widespread as residents offer assistance to those they know, and check on those they believe to be vulnerable.

A factor in the effectiveness of this type of response is the extent of damage within the community. In both villages and in Leeds the flood entered only a relatively small proportion of residents' homes. Therefore the remainder of the community was in a position to offer assistance. If flooding takes place in the majority of the community's properties residents' time is likely to be largely taken up coping with their own difficulties. In such a situation resources external to the community will become important. Gaining access to these will then be an issue, particularly in situations such as those described in the villages where the communities are cut off for some time. More isolated, rural communities may be more vulnerable in this respect.

The types of responses described above are very common and reports of flooding frequently cite such cases. These unstructured offers of aid provide considerable assistance when most needed and can form the basis of improved community networks as was seen in earlier chapters. However they are communal only in that they take place within the community. They may take place within the community and be carried out by community members and residents may help one another extensively but this is not collective or organised in any way. However, existing networks will influence the extent to which this takes place, and the types of offers made. More extensive networks leading to more one to one offers of assistance and closer relationships can lead to more substantial assistance being offered. However, even more may be achieved when residents are able to come together to form a more systematic response, and this is considered in the next section.

## **6.4 Structured Responses**

In this section we move to more systematic types of social action, where people have come together to organise to cope with floods. Existing networks and structures play a much greater role, as collective activity is very difficult without any existing structures and networks. These may of course develop over time but if flooding is unexpected then

responses will be dependent on the pre-flood structures. This 'structured' category covers a wide variety of activities, from those that are only very loosely structured to those that require significant organisation. The types of social structures present will shape the form of the response and the degree of organisation possible. In Leeds, following the first flood, lack of structures meant that immediate responses on the Upbeck estate were unstructured but several months later residents were able to come together to form a group to clean out the beck. In both Aylesby and Haylton immediate organised action was possible. However the more organised local structures in Haylton more readily lend themselves to continued and coordinated action than the casual structures in Aylesby.

Aylesby's dense village networks are based largely on casual meetings. These networks together with the speed with which information travelled around the village, enabled villagers to quickly come together to clear the roads of mud left by the flood. Michelle (Int 29&30) describes how all the farmers brought down suitable equipment such as diggers and chain saws and there was "*kids with their spades*" and people with buckets so that it was "*like a production line*". This coming together helped reinforce the collective identity of the village. Michelle stresses the way in which everybody came together "*I can't think of, I couldn't, I really couldn't, my hand on heart name anybody who didn't help that could have helped really. There was a seventy odd year old man sweeping and washing the road.*" (Int 29&30). In this very small community, news travelled fast and residents were quickly able to come together. They could tackle clearing the roads with minimal organisation as relatively few people were involved. The largely casual local structures were therefore able to cope.

A car-sharing system was a set up in Aylesby which illustrates the advantages of belonging to a known community where there is a considerable degree of trust. The system was set up to overcome the problem of the bridge that was made impassable to vehicles, with residents having cars stranded on either side. Cars were left with keys in the ignition and residents could borrow a car that was on the other side of the bridge to their own. The isolation of the village which was increased by the flooding also plays a role in this, as there was little fear of strangers coming to take advantage of this situation.

Similarly in Haylton, the existence of local social structures and extensive networks allowed collective action to take place. The more organised and formalised structures readily lend themselves to organised action. Residents were able to come together to clean out a local business premises and to clear the trees and other debris blocking roads, bridges and paths. Charles the Chair to the Parish Meeting was able to act on the village's behalf in a number of ways. He liaised with the authorities and was able to secure help for



the village, which had been largely overlooked initially and he took on tasks such as getting utilities repaired. Flood related information and knowledge was also shared by residents which proved useful, for example on dealing with insurers or builders. The extensive local networks and tight-knit nature of the village meant that a great deal of help was quickly offered and accepted.

Haylton already had an established pattern of people helping one another in a time of personal crisis which could be drawn on after the flood. When Brenda had her foot in plaster villagers would call round to see if she needed anything, often bringing cakes etc. with them (Int 48&49). Carol received support and help when her husband was seriously ill in hospital and as she says *“the minute anybody at all in the village has any problem whatsoever there’s help around”* (Int 52&53). This meant that although the flooding was completely unexpected and rapid, and the village was cut off and received no external assistance for some time, they were able to respond rapidly and it was generally felt they had coped well.

In Upbeck immediate responses to the first flood were largely unstructured but as networks have developed, so they have been able to create more structured solutions to flood-related problems. Some months after the first flood a number of residents of the estate came together to clean out the beck, removing several skips worth of rubbish. A report had blamed some of the flood on debris in the beck and many residents are riparian owners and so have a responsibility to keep the beck clear. An informal monitoring system was developed where residents who are away from the estate would phone to ask about the water level in the beck, or where residents at work could be rung in the event of an emergency. (This is now superseded by a formal warning system). The setting up of the Flood Action Group has played a key role in the development of more organised responses and it has helped to create local networks and structures where few existed before. The Flood Action Group has also been involved in the development of a more formal response to flooding, and this type of response is considered next.

## **6.5 The development of formalised responses**

In considering the development of more formal structures we are moving from an immediate post flood response to longer-term responses and in the case of Upbeck repeat flooding responses. Formal structures are those that have been set up specifically in order to deal with flooding, where systems have been set in place that will be triggered by the emergency event. The examples of residents helping one another seen in earlier sections came about spontaneously. There was no time for planning or the setting up of systems.

There was no flood warning and no expectation of flooding. Reactions were therefore entirely dependent on existing structures and networks. However following a flood experience, residents may choose to engage in some form of planning to cope in a repeat situation. That they choose to do this is by no means certain. Those who had been flooded tended to believe the flood was a one off occurrence. Following the floods, those in Aylesby show no signs of setting up a more formal response, residents in Haylton have been seriously considering the possibility and Upbeck's inhabitants have received considerable external support to develop a system to help them cope with repeat flooding.

Aylesby residents gave no indication that they would develop a more formal response. Whilst residents are well known to one another, the looser social structures based largely on casual meetings mean that it would require significant effort to set up a formal system. The Parish Council might be developed to form the basis of a formal system but as was seen earlier, at the time it played little role in the local community. However there is a good foundation in terms of strong village identity, many networks, places available to meet and formal organisations which could become more involved. There was little concern that there might be repeat flooding and so there were no plans for future flooding.

In contrast those in Haylton were seriously considering setting up their own formal response system. Haylton is very aware of itself as a community and the reflexive nature of local communities is very apparent. They had reflected on their experience in different ways and had already had ideas on improving how the community can cope with such events in the future. Written summaries of the flood event and subsequent recovery process have already been gathered via the history group and the plan is to produce a book, the appendix of which would include *"suggestions for tackling any future major event"* (Carol Int 52&53). Some ideas have already been suggested for the future, such as organising a shopping rota via the village notice board. The Chair to the Parish Meeting produced a document reflecting back on his experience and how things might be improved. A working group was set up to look at coping with future emergencies, which would include flooding. After serious consideration and an examination of meteorological information it was decided that repeat flooding was very unlikely and that an emergency plan wasn't needed. If they had decided to proceed with a plan then this would have been relatively straightforward.

Previous chapters have already highlighted the effectiveness of Haylton's organised structures. They were also unusual in having an institutional structure that operated at the same scale as the local community and which formed a part of the communal identity. The more formal structures pre-existing within this type of organisation make it an ideal

location for future flood plans. The Parish Meeting is already established as a democratic structure, through which residents can make decisions and negotiate with higher levels of local government. It also has the advantage of being recognised, at least to some extent, by the various 'flood authorities'. This meant the residents were able to seriously consider a formal response and could have put this into place if they choose to adopt this approach, simply by utilising and adapting the existing structures.

The parish in this instance was able to provide a good link between the community and the Flood Risk Management Structures. However the Chair to the Meeting felt that his role was not always taken seriously by those responsible for dealing with the flood. He felt the systems failed to recognise the value of having "*nominated local responsible people*" (Charles Int 39). Charles had been effective through relationships developed with particular individuals within the system with whom he had been able to build up a level of trust. He had tried to engage the District and County Councils with his ideas but had found them unresponsive. When representatives of these organisations were questioned by the researcher on this they felt the existing systems were adequate. The relationship between 'flood professionals' and community structures can be problematic, as the next chapter will explore. The main point here is that Haylton, through their pre-flood community structures, were in a position to implement formalised responses to flooding and had been able to learn from their experience.

The situation in Upbeck, with its absence of community structures, was very different. A formalised response continues to be developed here, not from the pre flood 'community' but out of the structures which have been created in response to the flooding. The response in fact has played a key role in the community's continued development, helping to maintain a shared identity and estate-wide social structures. This formal response has been made possible through the support of external organisations. The problems of repeat flooding on the Upbeck estate meant that staff from the EA and the City Council continued to work with residents through the Flood Action Group to alleviate the situation. They have arranged meetings, sent out letters and information to residents, helped set up the flood warden scheme, assisted the Flood Action Group with finding information and remained in close contact with the Chair. By 2008 formal structures were in place to deal with future flooding

The development of a good working relationship has taken time and it took considerable effort to overcome the original mistrust for these organisations, as the next chapter will explore in more detail. It also remains an ongoing process. There is now a flood warning system in place, based on water levels in the beck. There are also a number of flood

wardens, who have some community responsibilities such as checking on vulnerable people. Wardens receive an earlier warning than the other residents, so that they are aware in advance that there might be a problem and are able to monitor the beck and be ready to take action. A system for next door neighbours has also been set up, where they help with flood defences particularly if neighbours are not at home. However this wasn't always welcomed as positive, and one ex resident saw this reliance on neighbours as a weakness rather than an advantage. A handbook had been developed in conjunction with John, the flood group Chair, which was available to all residents, giving them guidance on what to do in the event of a flood warning. This system had been tested during a flood 'scare' and adjustments made based on this experience. The systems developed appeared to work well, although they had not yet been tested by an actual flood, but they had responded well to the threatened flood.

Despite generally good progress with the community, the EA experienced some difficulties over certain aspects of the ongoing projects and decided in 2009 to bring in the help of an independent community consultation specialist. This group had delivered the training package 'Building Trust with Communities' to staff in Leeds. Following this, it was felt the group with its independent status and community experience could support communication and maintain progress. It is interesting to note that this has been achieved though addressing the problems identified earlier in this research: the separation of flooded and non flooded, difficulties of communication, and limited social structures. The group have been helping to widen interest across the estate and have, after considerable efforts, involved some new people. A Task Group has been set up which consists of local people, staff from the Environment Agency, Leeds City Council and ward councillors which will work with the independent community consultation specialists. This group planned two Community Sessions where local people will be able to give their views on the best option for work on the beck. The aim is to assist residents in achieving a consensus over choosing a scheme to reduce the risk of flooding.

Community structures were created following the floods, however creating an effective formal solution has required considerable efforts, both from within the community and from external organisations. Repeat flooding within a short timescale has led to the involvement of external organisations and a number of residents who are committed to finding solutions. In other circumstances it is less likely to get the support needed. Residents tend to believe that flooding is a 'one off' until proven otherwise, and authorities are unlikely to be able to invest the time unless there is seen to be a high risk. The development of a good working relationship with staff from the EA and the Council played

a vital role in the development of these systems. This took continual effort by the staff involved and, as the following chapter shows, it remained challenging at times.

## **6.6 Urban and rural resources**

The responses considered so far have cut across both rural and urban environments. Whilst visions of rurality played a role in the creation of a communal identity, it is not suggested that a simple dichotomy into rural and urban is a particularly helpful way of understanding either local communities or their ability to respond to flooding. However there were some variations in the available resources within the urban and rural environments that are worth considering, as these did play some role in how residents were able to cope with floods, and the longer term impacts of the floods.

One practical advantage that both the rural communities had in the immediate aftermath of the flood was the presence of heavy machinery, and those able to operate it who were living within the local area. Large trees and other debris were rapidly removed by farmers and others who possessed the appropriate equipment. In this way the local communities were able to clear obstructions fairly quickly. However this has to be balanced against the difficulty of outside assistance being able to reach these locations, especially as the flooding damaged roads and bridges, cutting them off. Residents in these locations were able to help themselves, moving the earth and trees and other debris washed down by the water but they had little option as assistance was not immediately available. The urban locations did not contain this type of equipment and expertise but they were much closer to external assistance. There was also less large scale debris because of the type of flooding and the surrounding environment.

The rural locations also contained a number of small businesses run by residents. These were important social as well as economic institutions. The impact on these was significant even where flooding did not directly affect the business premises. Those in Aylesby suffered in particular, as access to the village became difficult and trade, which is very reliant on tourism, was lost. Michelle and Sean, for example, felt their business took considerably over a year to return to pre flood levels. Yet the fact that the water didn't enter their premises meant they couldn't claim for interrupted business, despite the roads being closed. They felt that the Highways department and the media had exacerbated this situation, by making the village seem more inaccessible than it actually was, and by not being responsive to their problems. The lack of amenities within the villages also meant that life became more difficult as residents found it difficult to travel to shops, schools etc. The loss of a number of bridges in Aylesby resulted in journeys taking many additional

miles and the cost in petrol and time was a concern. The isolation of the community exacerbated some of the problems caused by the flood.

The concepts of urban and rural have long been entwined with that of community. There has also been, over the past decades, an increased emphasis put on both urban and rural environments by central government (Twigger-Ross 2005). The way in which Flood Risk Management is embedded within sustainable development and quality of life issues, together with the highlighting of urban and rural issues within *Making Space for Water*, provide “powerful reasons” for examining “the social impacts of flooding on rural and urban communities” (Twigger-Ross 2005:9). The research has been carried out in both urban and rural locations. However it is not straightforward to separate out issues that are urban and rural in nature and those that simply arise because of variation between the communities.

Whilst there were some differences between the urban and rural communities it is important that these are not understood in an overly deterministic way. Particular conditions and discourses within the two environments may make some outcomes more likely, but they are not inevitable. The rural environment did not produce a certain type of community, rather a shared subscription to certain ideals of the village community, had in those particular locations led in different ways to the development of close-knit communities. Some factors associated with rural areas however may be beneficial to the construction of a close-knit local community, especially as these remain an important part of residents’ constructions of local community. So, for example, small size and relative isolation may be important elements in the creation of those communities but they do not determine that they will be close-knit communities. To understand the community response it is important to understand the spatial, mental and social elements of that community, a part of which may be shaped by the urban, rural, or something in between, context.

## **6.7 The limitations of local community as the site of collective response**

Whilst the local community does offer some possibilities as a site for collective flood response there were also a number of factors that could limit its effectiveness. Support networks may exist within the community, but many extend beyond the community boundaries and this needs to be considered if local communities are to take on more flood responsibility. Whilst the majority of people really appreciated the support they received,

there was also a need to maintain independence. Finally, responsibility is a complex issue and residents were reluctant to take on any flood related responsibilities that they did not feel were morally justified or within their capabilities. Simply giving communities more responsibilities does not mean that they will be accepted and taken up by those communities.

### **6.7.1 Support networks that extend beyond the community**

The previous sections have looked at what shapes the responses within what residents consider the local community, focusing on localised groups of residents and their networks. However a great deal of help and support also comes from networks that extend beyond the boundaries of the local community. Local communities are not self-contained units and residents are likely to have many networks extending beyond the community. “Communities do not exist in isolation. The level of a community’s resilience is also influenced by capacities outside the community ...” (Twigg 2007:7). Residents received support from family, friends and sometimes strangers from outside of what they would define as the local community.

Family and friends were both called on, during the flood and in the recovery period and they provide an important resource. Conversely, in some cases there was a breakdown of friendships when there was felt to be a lack of understanding of the stresses following flooding. Family were usually asked for support whether they lived near or far. “Generally for more major assistance we turn to primary kin , for ... these ties are more enduring and less dependent on the need for reciprocity and balance” (Allan 1996:109). Where family members lived nearby, as in Leeds, they could help out with daily tasks such as meals and child care. When they were further away the types of support possible are more limited but can still be an important resource. Susan in Haylton, for example, is very touched by how her grown up children came to stay and helped them out, becoming tearful when remembering this. She finds despite the floods being a very difficult time that *“it’s strange really but I have very happy memories because everybody was so good”* (Int 44&45). Of course, being located outside of the community may have advantages as they will be unaffected by the flood themselves.

Sometimes support can be offered by strangers who have heard about the flood and feel some connection with those affected. For example, a local business in Haylton was offered assistance from a number of similar businesses in the surrounding area. *“Like one small instance there was a chap who I’d never heard of before, lives yon side of York ... and he rang me up and he said can you use some inch and a half oak and I says yes we can and*

*he arrived with a trailer load of oak and he wouldn't take a penny for it and I didn't know him from Adam*" (Int 46). In Aylesby strangers would turn up to help with clearing the village because they had some previous connection with the place, such as spending holidays there in the past. Any attempts to involve local communities in the FRM process need to consider these wider support mechanisms and their role in new developments.

### **6.7.2 Maintaining Independence**

In tension with the notion of community as resource (people there when you need them) was the desire to maintain independence. This mirrors the need for privacy which was balanced against the desire for sociability. In a similar way, the desire to maintain independence was considered when asking for or accepting help. This was not such a widespread concern; rather it was important to particular individuals. The majority of people appreciated the help they received and some were very touched by it. Thomas for example said *"I'll never forget all the people that offered me help ... It was quite humbling really the amount of help that we were offered and given"* (Int 46). In most cases giving and receiving help brought people together and had a positive impact on local relations.

In contrast, Tony in Leeds explains *"I didn't ask for help, I didn't really need any... there were friends there to offer help if need be, but I said I'm fine I'll carry on as I am"* (Int 23). Gary, who also lived on the Upbeck estate, when asked if he had received any help from his extended family replied *"They could have helped out but I never asked to be honest, I'm a bit, unfortunately I don't like burdening anybody ... we did a couple of occasions we went to one of our family and had an evening meal with them. We could have probably spent nearly every day with somebody but, for me, I'm a bit proud like that. I just like to have my own family life"* (Int 14). Not all residents will willingly turn to others for assistance, even when it is offered.

Charles, the Chair to the Parish Meeting in Haylton, found that people would gladly accept offers of help but this had to be made in an appropriate way and be balanced with their need to do things for themselves. *"A lot of families wanted to be independent and do their own thing. There was a strong feeling that people wanted to help themselves"* (Int 39). *"I think it taught me a bit about you know, just how, I suppose if I had been a bit younger I might have gone in there and interfered a bit more"* whereas he realised you can't interfere too much in peoples lives, that *"they're proud and when you can actually offer help and when you need to intervene is a nice balance"* (Int 39). It cannot be assumed all help will be gratefully received; sometimes residents need to be able to do things for themselves.



This independence can also be expressed at the community scale. Carol found that when they first moved to Haylton the villagers were *“loath to take any help that was offered by charities or the Council or anything like that. It seemed to be felt by some of the people who’d always lived here that that was losing your sort of control ... they were so used to doing things for themselves, getting together and working together that that’s how they wanted it to continue”* (Int 52&53). An example of the villagers continued desire for independence was buying the recreation field with money they raised themselves even though grants were available, in order to retain control. Charles described how the role of Parish Meeting is to defend themselves against outside influence. It is *“to do with Big Brother coming down on top of us to tell us what to do ...”* (Int 39). The village positions itself as an independent entity, defending its autonomy from outside organisations such as the County or District council. This echoes interviewees in Aylesby who resented the intervention of the National Parks Authority. This dislike of what is perceived as outside interference has implications for the involvement of communities in flood management.

### **6.7.3 Accepting Responsibility**

Responsibility is a theme that came to have more significance than was envisaged at the start of the research. Responsibility is a complex area in Flood Risk Management, as it is divided amongst a number of different organisations. This has caused difficulties in the past, both for flooded residents and the organisations involved. How the various authorities can best work together remains an issue, as does simplifying the process of dealing with them for those who have been flooded (See Chapter 7). Current policy directions are shifting more responsibility towards local communities to deal with flooding themselves (Johnson and Priest 2008) as part of the wider trend to shift risk responsibility.

However, this attempt to position individuals as ‘responsible citizens’ in relation to various forms of risk has been met with citizen ambivalence, both towards assuming the responsibility themselves and towards the exercise of responsibility by institutions (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008:1327). This ambivalence is also seen here in residents’ response to flood responsibilities. As research into other types of risk has found, agency was a key factor in accepting flood responsibility (Eden 1993, Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002). Where residents felt they lacked agency they did not feel they could be held responsible. This can help explain the ‘value-action gap’ (Blake 1999), that is the gap between concern over an issue and a lack of action to address this concern. The results found in this research were similar to that on air pollution in that many “were critical of a devolving of what were perceived to be the

government's (moral and causal) responsibilities over to the individual ..." (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002:2187).

The current moves to place more flood responsibility within local communities is operating at a number of scales or levels. It may refer to individuals within the community having more responsibility for their own household, it may mean the community as a social structure coming together to take collective responsibility or it may mean the community as represented by some form of official structure, such as the Parish Council, being given more formal responsibilities. It is the second of these levels, collective responsibilities within the local community, which is of most interest for this research. The following chapter does however look at the implications of 'flood professionals' tendency to conflate local community with the Parish. As there are as yet few formally assigned communal responsibilities, the first level is also examined here, as this provided some indication of residents' current attitudes to their existing flood responsibilities.

A number of residents in Leeds had responsibilities as riparian owners of the section of the small watercourse that ran through their gardens. Whilst they accepted this was the case (at least once everybody became aware of it after the first flood), where this was not felt to be practicable, or if they were not the cause of the problem, residents did not feel they could be held responsible. Anna asks *"my neighbour, who is 70 years old, is it right for him at that age to be in the beck, cleaning his part of the beck when he's not thrown anything in it?"* (Int 3). Whilst Tony says *"we've a lady in her seventies, next door but one, who can't be expected to paddle about in the beck trying to keep it clear"* (Int 23). It is not the legality that is questioned, but the practicality and the morality. Residents' responsibilities as riparian owners are clear but if these are not felt to be reasonable then residents were not prepared to carry them out.

Some of the local people in Upbeck decided to work together to clean out the beck which had been implicated in the first flood, however the second flood occurred only days later. When their actions failed to prevent a re-flooding this reinforced their view that it was unreasonable for them to be held accountable. Liam, who helped organise the clean up, found that *"because three days after we did the first clean up, we got flooded again, so people weren't willing to go and do it, because they were blaming the Council then"* (Int 22). The flood occurred despite residents' efforts to clear the beck which affirmed their view that it is a problem that lies outside of their control. This lack of control, or ability to take effective action, is critical in the acceptance of responsibility.

This supports previous research looking at other forms of risk which finds that an ability to make meaningful changes (Bickerstaff and Walker 2002:2183), a sense of agency (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008), or self efficacy (Eden 1993) are necessary if individuals are to feel a sense of personal responsibility. Without this ability to effect meaningful change individual acts are seen as futile (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008). The failure to prevent flooding despite their collective efforts demonstrated not only their lack of individual agency but also their lack of collective agency. The blame then shifted back towards those believed to have the ability to take effective action, the council. In a similar way, elderly residents' physical inability to clean out the beck is seen to absolve them of responsibility.

This acceptance of responsibility has serious implications, as residents' willingness to take action regarding the flooding was linked to whether they felt a responsibility for that task. This was not the same as having a legal responsibility, what mattered was whether they believed they ought to be responsible, whether they felt a 'moral responsibility'. This 'moral responsibility' implies not only the acceptance that it is their duty to act but also that this action is achievable and can produce observable results. What has here been termed 'moral responsibility' is similar to Eden's (1993) notion of 'actionable responsibility' which involves making a link between moral values and one's own behaviour, where personal efficacy is a key factor. However, her notion of 'moral responsibility' is very different to that used here, she uses it where responsibility is not connected to personal behaviour and so does not produce a sense of duty to take action. Also, as has been found elsewhere, there was a tendency to see government as responsible, particularly for risks that are seen as beyond the individual's capacity to cope (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Eden 1993). (This is discussed further in section 7.6 Fragmented responsibilities, communication and blame). Residents' questioned their existing flood responsibilities which were relatively few and clearly defined. This suggests that residents will be reluctant to accept further responsibilities, and the question of responsibility becomes much more complex when we consider this at the communal level.

Chapter 4 illustrated how local communities, may be constructed around different shared identities and differing discourses of community. The identity around which communities form, and the structures that are created, may not lend themselves readily to the types of flood response desired. For example, Sherlock (2002) found that in Port Douglas, Australia, the community identity was constructed around a "celebration of hedonism". The very narrative that connected residents simultaneously undermined collective social action and produced what could be described as a "community without obligation"

(Sherlock 2002: para 5.10). Therefore, even where a sense of local community exists, there is no reason to assume residents will feel obliged to act collectively.

There were however, in interviewees discussions of community, and in the communal responses to flooding, a sense that the members of a local community, at least in its ideal form, did have obligations to one another. As section 6.2 at the start of this chapter outlined, there was a common discourse of local people helping one another, especially in a time of crisis. Residents did feel some sense of moral obligation and did help one another during and after the flood. This was dependent to some extent on existing relationships and was most effective where there already existed extensive networks and a level of trust. This sense of obligation did not however absolve the 'authorities' of what were considered to be their responsibilities and residents were often critical of what they saw as organisations failings. Residents' sense of obligation cannot be assumed to match what may be wanted from them in terms of Flood Risk Management. Also, as Chapter 7 explores in more detail, residents became angry and mistrustful when organisations were seen to be denying or shirking their responsibilities.

The question of communal responsibility is also problematic when considering the types of local social structure described in Chapter 5. The notion of local community responsibility would appear relatively straightforward in the traditional vision of community, as a self sufficient, largely self governing entity, which encompasses all aspects of life. In the more informal, voluntary, and partial structures of the conscious community, which revolve to a large extent around leisure interests it is not apparent where responsibility might be suitably located. Haylton was the only one of the fieldwork locations which had pre-existing structures which might be appropriate, the Parish Meeting being democratic and accountable to the community. If the local community is given flood responsibilities who is ultimately responsible and to whom are they accountable? If for example a community takes on the task of the erection of portable flood defences who is responsible should this fail to be done correctly?

Asking people to take on a communal responsibility is likely to be challenging, particularly where there is little community identity or few community structures. How can residents accept a communal responsibility and act collectively in the absence of any structures to support this? If agency is central to an acceptance of responsibility at the individual level (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, Eden 1993) then this is likely to be the case at the communal level. Therefore social structures will need to be in place which can be seen to offer this collective or communal sense of agency and ability to cope with flooding. It seems likely that few communities will be in a position to

accept greater responsibility for dealing with floods without considerable external support. This will require not only an understanding of the processes operating to construct that particular conscious community (if present) but also giving consideration to questions of democracy, accountability, and transparency. As the Upbeck Flood Action Groups difficulties have illustrated, this is by no means straightforward.

## **6.8 Conclusions**

Social networks are the more visible aspect of local community and it is these that will be called on in flood response. The concept of the conscious community provides a way of understanding how communities both respond to, and can be changed by, flooding. It can explain the network types and their extent and pattern and therefore the communal flood responses and the degree of their collectivity. In addition to this, it provides an understanding of the processes underpinning these structures. By starting with the focus on the community and its construction, rather than on the flood outcomes, not only can those outcomes be explained it becomes possible to predict to some extent the likely responses and changes. Yet, communities are not isolated entities and a great deal of assistance was received via networks which extend beyond the community boundaries.

A great deal of help was given and received in all three locations following flooding. The discourse of community as a resource provides a basis from which community responses could be supported and developed, as does the widespread appreciation of such assistance. The extent and type of this assistance is, however, very dependent on the form of local community created by residents. Understanding the local social structures, network patterns and the context for these is essential to understanding the communities' response. The types of responses identified (unstructured, structured and formal) are closely linked to the types of social structures outlined in the previous chapter (casual, organised, institutional or absent). Which in turn are very dependent on the mental and spatial factors discussed in earlier chapters.

Whilst the locations might seem to support the view that close-knit communities exist in small rural villages and are absent in urban areas, this is not being suggested. Urbanity and rurality is only one factor which will influence the local social structures, it does not determine their outcome. There were some differences between urban and rural responses which need to be considered but it is argued that communities should be assessed individually. Conscious communities can be very variable and each needs to be considered as illustrated in the diagram near the start of the chapter. This will include deliberation of the role of the urban and rural context without falling into the trap of simple stereotypes.

The move to Flood Risk Management would seem to suggest a shifting of responsibility towards local communities but achieving this will be not straightforward. The acceptance of responsibility is complex at the individual level and becomes more so at the communal level. In the variable and informal local structures that residents create for themselves it is not easy to see where communal responsibility might be placed. Some communities, such as Haylton, may already have suitable structures but this is likely to be an uncommon situation. Suitable structures can be developed, as was seen in Upbeck, but this requires considerable effort and was achieved with the help of external support. In the next chapter we now turn to this relationship between local communities and the 'flood professionals' and look at their differing conceptions of community.

## Chapter 7 – Community conceptualisation and communication in Flood Risk Management

*“There’s an issue about the point at which this stops being a problem for central government and where you empower communities to take community solutions.”*

*(Martin Hurst, Director of Water, DEFRA).*

### 7.1 Introduction

Community is very malleable concept and its ability to mean so many things helps to account for its appeal and its longevity (Day 2006). However, difficulties arise where groups attempt to come together, with community as a central notion, but without necessarily sharing the same vision of community. Different conceptualisations will lead to different strategies and interventions. The problem and its solution will be framed in different ways. Local community has become a central theme in Flood Risk Management, yet to date the concept has been subject to little scrutiny in this context and is taken to be largely self evident. This chapter examines some of the ways the term is used by those working with communities and the implications of these discourses. It also explores some of the difficulties encountered in the relationship between ‘flood professionals’ and local communities.

Whilst there is considerable pressure on the increasing use of participatory approaches research has identified a number of issues with the process as it currently stands in the UK. Bickerstaff and Walker (2005:2123) in their research on local transport planning identify “a deeply problematic relationship between citizen involvement and established structures of democratic decision-making”. They found that lay knowledge had little impact on policy and that unequal power relations were often reinforced (2005:2138). Eden (1996) found that discussions tend to be dominated by ‘experts’ of one sort or another and that the public’s relationship with science is complicated. “[A]lthough people can be both critical and credulous of science, in the public arena they have not always had the power or the confidence of their own ‘expertise’ to raise their criticisms forcefully ...” (Eden 1996:191). As Petts and Brooks (2006:1045) note the benefit of the input of lay knowledge and values to decisionmaking beyond simple consultation on proposed courses of action is supported theoretically, empirically and officially. Yet participation practice beyond consultation is still relatively immature in Britain and they find evidence of the continuing ‘deficit model’ of public knowledge being espoused by experts at the heart of environmental planning (Petts and Brooks 2006:1046). So participation although encouraged remains problematic.

In the changing relationship between the expert and the public, trust has come to be seen as a key issue (Arnoldi 2009, Beck 1992, Drevensek 2004, Dunn 2008, Giddens 1994a, 1994b, Rayner 1992, Renn 2008). For example Dunn et al. (2008:710) in their research on stakeholders in environment and health found that “trust emerged as a critical force”. Whilst Adler and Kranowitz (2005:23) argue that the “community is more interested in trustworthiness and credibility than in risk data and the details of quantitative risk assessment” (Adler and Kranowitz 2005:23). As Bickerstaff and Walker’s (2001:133) research demonstrated there is usually “a trust in personal experiences over any kind of information-based evidence”. Petts and Brooks (2006:1048) claim that “[p]ublic trust and confidence in decisionmakers, and decision and regulatory process, lie at the heart of the changing relationship between science and society”. It is worth noting that Sjöberg (2001) disagrees and he argues that lack of trust in experts only plays a relatively weak role in explaining the public’s scepticism. This is however very much a minority view. This research supports the majority view in that trust was found to be important issue.

Whether the local community is the ideal location for flood response is open to debate. Regardless of its suitability, this is where initial action usually has to take place as “communities are where risks and disasters are experienced” (Flint and Luloff 2005:404) and where policy is increasingly demanding a response. If local people are to be supported so that they can come together at a local level to organise collectively to cope with flooding, then the social structures and the factors shaping them will need to be understood by those involved in FRM. They will also need to appreciate the ways in which communities can respond to, and may be changed by, the flood experience. As Buckle (1999:26) has argued “by a more careful analysis of community we should be able to identify assets and characteristics that can be used to support resilience”. This involves engaging with the concept of community and understanding the complex interaction of factors, explored in earlier chapters, which come to shape flood response and the impact that flooding will have on communities.

As policy is still evolving it is as yet unclear what form this increased community involvement is expected to take; the aims and proposed methods are not yet well defined. In this constantly changing environment, therefore, it is not possible to be definitive about policies but the general direction towards more ‘community’ involvement is clear. The focus of some of this is on individuals, and individual or household responses, but some implies a social or collective action. The Pitt Report, for example, recommends that both communities and individuals should be supported and encouraged to be “better prepared and more self reliant during emergencies” (Pitt 2008:355). The Review’s belief that, in part, “successful community resilience requires people to know who, and what is where”



suggests some form of collective action involving local social networks (Pitt 2008:353). So too does the 'Emergency Response and Recovery' Guidance recognition that "where a community experiences a significant emergency, there is a need to supplement the personal, family and community structures which have been disrupted" (Cabinet Office 2009b:103). If communities are to be supported in this way it is first necessary to examine what is understood by and experienced as local community, by all those involved.

The disaster literature also suggests that a greater involvement and understanding of community structures by FRM would be beneficial (Buckle, Marsh and Smale 2003, Enarson and Morrow 1997, Fordham and Ketteridge 1995, De Marchi et al. 2007, Harries 2007, Tapsell and Tunstall 2001, Walker et al. 2006). This literature also contains warnings against the rather simplistic approaches to community taken to date. As Buckle states "if we are to base emergency management on the community, if we are to engage the community in planning and self-protection then we require a clear and accurate sense of what we mean by community. Our current, simplistic notion of community as all the people in a given area (ignoring internal diversity and external links and relationships) is not adequate to meet the needs either of emergency managers or of local people themselves" (Buckle 1999:21). There is also evidence that poor management, which fails to consider the social aspects of community, is not only less effective but can be harmful (Amlôt and Page 2008).

This chapter examines the different conceptualisations of community and how this has affected the relationship between the 'flood professionals' and the 'local community' in the fieldwork areas. It is not an investigation into 'public participation' or 'citizen engagement' although certain aspects that have proved relevant are given some consideration. (There already exists an extensive literature in this area which has been considered in the flooding context - for example see Speller 2005 for a discussion on '*improving community and citizen engagement in flood risk management decision making, delivery and flood response*'). However, it complements that literature by providing information on community structures. Neither can the research provide a complete solution for engagement with the community. Some suggestions are made on how to involve the community, based on what has been found out about them and their responses to flooding, and 'flood professionals' efforts to engage with the community (See below). However, the central question posed by the research is '*What is the community?*', rather than '*How can we involve the community?*'. It is argued that this is an essential precursor to engaging the community effectively.

The first section introduces the various organisations involved with the communities and briefly outlines some of the departments from which staff members have been interviewed. This is followed by an examination of the discourses of community they utilised and considers the implications and limitations of some of these narratives. These have been categorised into two main types: the simple discourses which largely serve to label groups and the institutional discourses which tend to define communities in terms of the institution's characteristics rather than the communities. This is followed by an exploration of the continuing relationship between staff and residents in Upbeck. This outlines the problems caused by the division of flood responsibility and considers how these were largely overcome. Finally, there is consideration of what the findings of this chapter might mean for the support of the types of social response that were seen in the previous chapter.

## **7.2 The 'Flood Professionals'**

In this chapter the focus has shifted from understanding the community and its structures from the residents' perspective to how it is understood by the 'flood professionals' involved with these communities. (In earlier discussions these have been referred to as the 'experts' however that term is not used here, instead the more neutral one of professionals is adopted). 'Flood professionals' is not perhaps the ideal term for the numerous and varied roles connected with FRM. For many of those interviewed, flood response only constitutes a small part of their working life, whilst for others it is more central. However, some generic term is needed to describe those who, through their employment, have a responsibility for dealing with flooding and its aftermath. Through qualitative interviews with these professionals their understanding of local community was explored and compared to the residents' understandings discussed in earlier chapters. There are a number of organisations involved in dealing with floods at the 'community level' and as wide a range as possible were represented. Interviewees held a range of responsibilities and were of different levels of seniority. The following list, as well as outlining the departments represented by the professional interviewees, also illustrates something of the complex division of FRM responsibilities within England and Wales. See Appendix 1 for further details.

In Leeds the main organisations having some involvement with the Upbeck residents were the City Council, the Environment Agency, and Yorkshire Water. Those interviewed represented the Land Drainage Department and the Emergency Planning Department from within the City Council. From the Environment Agency the Asset System Management Team, the Flood Risk Mapping & Data Management Team and the Flood

Incident Management Team were represented. An interview with a representative from Yorkshire Water was requested but they declined. In North Yorkshire the organisations having involvement with Aylesby or Haylton (or both) were the Environment Agency, the County Council and the District Council. Within the Environment Agency the Flood Risk Mapping & Data Management Team and the Flood Incident Management Team were represented. From the County Council members of staff from the Major Incident Response Team and the Emergency Planning Unit were interviewed. From the District Council the duty officer at the time the floods took place and a member of staff with responsibility for Emergency Planning were both interviewed. Whilst the interviewees do not constitute a complete list of all those involved, they represent a wide range. In total 13 flood professionals were interviewed.

Two members of the National Flood Forum (NFF) were also interviewed as the organisation was involved with residents on the Upbeck estate in Leeds. They do not have the same kind of responsibilities as those listed above. They sit in some ways between the professionals and the residents, having experienced flooding themselves, yet also having gained considerable 'expert knowledge'. This in-between status proved significant as it allowed them to act as mediators in Upbeck, helping the residents and the professionals to communicate effectively. Both members had considerable experience of the NFF and its operations and one member had substantial experience with community groups similar to that in Upbeck. This meant they were able to comment more widely on the organisation's role and the issues faced by community based flood action groups generally.

If residents and professionals hope to come together, with the notion of local community as central, then some kind of agreement over the use of the term will be needed. It is not suggested that some understandings are more correct than others, but that if local community is to be mobilised as an organising force in collective responses to flooding, then a common understanding will need to be reached. As the earlier chapters indicated, the conscious community is complex and may be constructed in many ways, or may simply remain absent. If professionals fail to grasp this complexity then their ability to effectively harness or support local structures will be very limited. To be able to mobilise the social structures of local community will require an understanding of the processes involved in community construction.

The discourses currently employed generally failed to recognise local community as a complex structure. They tend to focus on one or at most two of the three aspects of conscious community; usually the spatial and/or the social. The mental aspects, on which flooding has such an impact as chapter 4 illustrated, remain absent apart from an

occasional reference to 'community spirit'. As the earlier chapters illustrated, to understand local communities and how they respond to, and may be changed by flooding, requires an appreciation of all three aspects. The professional discourses only rarely progressed beyond straightforward labelling or classification, which provides a means of identifying a group of people. These fall into two main types: the simple and the institutional. The simple discourses were shared by both residents and professionals. The second type, the institutional community, was largely limited to flood professionals. In these narratives the community comes to be defined by the institution's requirements or responsibilities rather than the properties of the communities themselves.

### **7.3 The simple discourses**

The simple discourses are often a shorthand way of referring to a particular group of people; the context and location discourses are often used in this way. The term local community will be used in this way by most people at some time. As Day describes, at "its most rudimentary level, and probably that resorted to most frequently in everyday speech, 'community' is simply a label for a specific unit or object of study. Nothing more is intended by it than that some particular set of people or institutions can be grouped together, in order to comment on them ..." (Day 2006:30). As he points out these "categories may share nothing except the fact that they all represent some kind of aggregate, or grouping, around which a boundary has been drawn" (Day 2006:30). This type of usage is common and is only problematical if discourses do not move beyond this simple labelling.

There are three strands to this discourse: context, location and traditional-rural. In the first, the use of the word community is simply a way of placing individuals in a wider context, a means of talking about people in the plural. The emphasis is on the people rather than the place, although confinement to a certain location may be implicit. In the second, the emphasis is shifted to the place or location. The name of a place will usually be used to refer to a location and all the people living within it. The people are seen to constitute a community because they live within a defined area. The two strands share a lack of consideration of any internal processes or differentiation. The third reflects the traditional view of community being associated with rurality, found in the community lost discourse. It differs from the first two in that it does consider some of the internal structures of the community, but in a fairly stereotypical way.

### 7.3.1 Community as context or location

The community as context discourse was often used by professionals as a convenient way of talking about groups of people. The 'wider community' is a common phrase when making the distinction with individuals and the term is sometimes used interchangeably with 'the public' (Int 12&13). The extent and location of this wider community is often unspecified and may vary considerably depending on the context; there are often no distinct boundaries. It may also be linked with a particular category of person, for example an EA staff member referred to the 'elderly community' (Jennifer Int 21) and a council employee to the 'agricultural community' (Lynda Int 40-43). It simply provides a way of talking about people in the plural. Given the popularity of the term community in recent government policy, and more recently in FRM specifically, the use of the phrase is unsurprising. The concept's overwhelmingly positive connotations means it offers an apparently more caring way of discussing many individuals and one that chimes with current expectations.

The location discourse shifts the focus onto the 'local' part of 'local community'. As the term implies a relationship between the people and the place, it is not surprising this usage is common. Many discourses will have some spatial element, what is considered here is where the location defines the community with little thought to other factors. In terms of model of community proposed earlier, this narrative considers only the spatial circle and fails to recognise the intersections with social and mental aspects. Yet as earlier discussions have demonstrated locality is much more than a portion of space. At its simplest, this discourse sees a group of people as constituting a community because of their shared location; terms like area and community are sometimes used interchangeably. Some EA staff will talk about 'communities at risk', meaning groups of people living in a particular location at risk of flooding. The way in which the EA is divided up geographically, as are local councils, tends to reinforce this emphasis on location as community. Marsh and Buckle (2001:5) found similar results looking at disaster management in Australia, where the community was defined "implicitly by proximity".

An emphasis on location does not necessarily exclude other aspects of community. Problems arise where this remains the only or dominant discourse, as this then masks the complexity and ambiguity of the concept. If all the inhabitants of a location are considered unproblematically to be a community, little consideration is given to residents' construction of community identity and boundaries. The internal social structures and processes are then ignored, and the possibility of multiple viewpoints or conflicts is suppressed. Both the context and location discourses are essentially about groups of individuals, their interrelationships are not considered. The consequence of this approach

is that when talking about working with, or engaging with, the community they are actually engaging with multiple individuals. This of course may be the intention, but if social responses are being sought then this will not be effective. Community relationships and structures are not considered and so there is no attempt to make use of or involve these.

### 7.3.2 The traditional-rural community

It has been suggested that a focus on urban and rural communities would be useful for FRM. Research in this area found that “it is clear that there are some key synergies to be built upon between urban and rural policy, and FRM Policy, such that FRM development becomes embedded within the urban and rural agendas” (Twigger-Ross 2005:36). The rural and urban division has also been a key one in the concept of community and the persistence of the idealised rural vision of community has been influential. As earlier chapters showed, it can also form a central part of the community identity and it also has some impact on the resources available to residents after flooding. However rural/urban issues had been given little consideration by those interviewed. Generally flood professionals felt there was little difference between urban and rural communities in relation to FRM and would often find questions relating to this baffling. Even where differences were acknowledged it was felt unimportant, as they would be treated the same way, under the same legislation. The focus was on meeting their obligations to affected individuals.

However a number of flood professionals, in common with some residents, felt that small villages within a rural setting were more likely to have identifiable local communities. These would be places where most people know each other, where there was considerable social interaction and an obvious social structure. The following comment by Bill from the Environment Agency shows not only this conception of rural communities (although he recognises it as a generalisation), but also how this structure would make it easier to work with rural communities. *“I think you’ll find that the rural areas are easier to identify community leaders, they’re fairly stable communities, and they’ll know each other. You know, a small village, everybody knows each other. Where you get bigger issues, I think, is in the big towns ... where you get a lot of, people who don’t know each other do they? You only know your neighbours either side of, you know, and across the road maybe if you’re lucky and they’re all strangers really, and so you don’t get the same sense of community. Or you might not get, I wouldn’t say, it was umm complete”* (Int 26&27).

There was a feeling amongst some flood professionals that rural communities were more likely to possess ‘community spirit’ and therefore be more independent and self-reliant than urban ones. *“I think in urban communities there’s this expectation of ‘I pay my rates therefore you need to do this, A, B and C for me’. I think when you get more to rural they’re used to doing a lot for themselves, they’re used to having a community spirit, working together, helping each other out, shifting rubbish ...”* (Jennifer – EA Leeds). Similarly in North Yorkshire, at both District and County level, there was a belief that rural residents, especially isolated farmers, were more ‘resilient’ and more ‘independent’ (Int 40-43). This recognises that there is a mental element to community, but associates this unproblematically with the rural environment.

These discourses reflect some of those by residents, possessing elements of the ‘rural idyll’. Whilst this perhaps offers a starting point for a common discourse, care needs to be taken to avoid making stereotypical assumptions about all rural communities. An EA/DEFRA report found similar views amongst FRM staff and concluded that this was likely to be unhelpful: “from the interview material it was clear that some stereotypes around the nature of urban and rural areas exist. These could broadly be summarised as ‘friendly nature-loving countryside and anonymous city’. Such stereotyping could be unhelpful with respect to understanding the social impacts of FRM” (Twigger-Ross 2005:36). Whilst in Haylton and Aylesby residents were able to do a great deal for themselves, this was not simply a product of their rural context.

Whilst rurality had a key a role in this, forming a central part of the communal identity, it does not determine the outcome. These rural communities were consciously constructed around a particular vision of rural village life. This had led to their willingness to create and participate in local social structures. There is no reason to assume that similar structures will exist in every rural location or that they will be equally effective in responding collectively to floods. There were some differences between the urban and rural locations but these are more complex than the simple stereotype would suggest. The urban and rural context needs to be understood not simply as different spatial contexts, or distinct bounded spaces, but rather as a complex social construction, where attention is also paid to the mental and spatial aspects.

## **7.4 Institutional Discourses**

The institutional discourses are those where notions of community are largely shaped by institutional requirements or considerations, rather than by the properties of the community itself. According to Cannon, writing about disasters and vulnerability, this “is a

common political-economic phenomenon, where institutions define problems in terms of what their own capacities are meant to be, or the proposed solutions to a problem are defined in terms of what is 'possible' rather than what is really needed" (Cannon 2000:47). These types of discourses were very common amongst the professionals interviewed. The discourses varied to match the requirements and responsibilities of the organisation being represented. Members of Parish Councils and Parish Meetings were the exception, but these are largely run part time, by volunteers who are also residents of that community. They tend to see themselves as members of the community first and officers second and they have few if any official flood responsibilities. Their discourses generally reflected those of residents rather than professionals. Whereas for the other agencies, involvement is almost entirely on a professional basis and they have clearly laid-out duties relating to flooding.

Given the difficult job staff members have, the pressure on resources and the obligation to carry out certain duties, a focus on these institutional requirements is understandable. However like the descriptive discourses they define communities rather narrowly. There were three aspects to the institutional discourses. In the first there is a focus on the responsibilities which the organisation and the staff member are obliged to meet. Responsibility for flooding is divided out in a complex way amongst a range of different organisations and departments, and this may be further subdivided to different posts or staff. Emphasis is placed on meeting their particular responsibilities. In the second aspect, the community is understood in terms of official boundaries. These are often government structures and may relate to areas of responsibility. The third strand sees community as a group of people lacking expert knowledge of flooding.

#### **7.4.1 Communities of responsibility**

The focus here is on those who are, or may be, directly affected by flooding, that is those for whom there is a clear responsibility. The main aim is to fulfil obligations, either to those who have been flooded or those designated as at flood risk. Who this includes may vary depending on the exact responsibilities. The effort is then on defining those who need to be assisted, rather than on the community as a whole. This will usually be those who have been flooded or those designated as at risk of flooding. Those working on flood warnings for example will focus on those deemed to be at risk, whereas those involved in supporting flooded residents will target those actually flooded.

Jennifer of the EA discusses how part of her role is to "*look after communities, look after public awareness ...*" but discussion revealed that this includes only those at flood risk.



Those at risk are identified and then her role involves “*getting the message across about flooding. To go into the communities and kind of be the liaison officer with the public and bring information back*” (Int 21). In public meetings held following a flood event it is those who have been flooded who are targeted, although others are not physically excluded. Currently, at least amongst those interviewed, the focus is largely on meeting the responsibilities to those at flood risk. Consequently when the term community is used it is generally confined to this at risk group.

There are signs that this focus may become even narrower, rather than widening out. The new Floodwise campaign by the EA for example, has in its first year (2009) identified three particularly vulnerable groups or ‘primary audiences’ who will be targeted by the new community engagement officers. These are the elderly and infirm, the socially disadvantaged and parents of children under five. This campaign is a good example of where the term community is used extensively, but largely to mean groups of individuals at risk, rather than a social structure. The focus is on those at risk, especially those deemed most vulnerable and discussion centres on how best to engage this ‘target audience’ (EA 2009b).

This concentration on those at risk and most vulnerable might seem a sensible response; after all it is those people they are trying to help. However this approach not only ignores the assistance that those within the community who are not flooded can offer, it also fails to engage with those community structures and networks that will be needed if there is to be some form of communal, collective response to flooding. Additionally it has the potential to cause division within communities. “Poorly-managed and implemented response and recovery operations, however well intended, can serve to increase feelings of isolation, loss, anger and distrust” (Amlôt and Page 2008:34). There is ample evidence from the flood literature of divisions caused or exacerbated by the handling of post flood resources (Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1995, Tapsell et al. 1999, Tapsell 2000, Tapsell and Tunstall 2001). Whilst this is largely confined to those who have been flooded, it highlights the potential for conflict. The way in which the flood creates two distinct identities, flooded and not-flooded, if handled badly could also create problems.

The technological disaster literature also illustrates the dangers of dividing the community in this way (Freudenberg 1997). For example, a study of the social and psychological impact of a chemical contamination incident of a Cheshire village in the UK found that the separation of the village into different compensation zones exacerbated divisions, and the community was effectively destroyed. Residents felt that it was a neglect of the social aspects of the community that had caused many of the problems. The village social

structure was damaged and “the people of the village went from living in a pleasant close-knit community, to living in a blighted, contaminated, divided community that was disintegrating on a daily basis” (Barnes et al. 2002:2238). The study highlighted how the community-level social impacts need to be taken into consideration when managing this type of incident and the dangers of ignoring this aspect.

In all three fieldwork locations those who had not been flooded gave a great deal of practical and emotional support. Research shows that much of the assistance received, particularly immediately after the incident, is from local residents rather than formal institutions (Cave et al. 2008). This is not surprising given that they are already at the scene of the problem and that floods often make access difficult. Even if FRM does not move in the direction of actually supporting communities it needs to be careful if it is not to divide them. As Maguire and Hagan (2007:18) note, “it is important to identify the potential ‘fracture points’ or social cleavages within a community. From this, it may be possible to predict future breakdowns in social resilience in disasters, and to design preventative initiatives”. However identifying the conscious community and its social structures is not straightforward. Instead, assumptions tend to be made, often considering only the spatial aspects of community. This leads to frequent use of what might be called ‘official boundaries’.

#### **7.4.2 Official boundaries**

FRM is carried out through a number of government departments. A common response when required to work with the community is to perform this through what is deemed the most appropriate government department. This is most commonly at the parish level as this is the lowest and smallest tier of local government and so offers the closest approximation to local community. This is not to say that parishes have a duty to carry out FRM. But that FRM tends to see them as a vehicle for working with communities. For example the Environment Agencies FloodPACT (DVD, video and leaflets), subtitled “Parishes and Communities together”, was developed “as a tool to assist parish councils, and where appropriate community action groups, create their own local flood plans”. This clearly indicates a belief that the parish can play a role in enabling communities to cope with flooding.

The Hampshire Flood Steering Group (2002) similarly produced “Managing Flood Risks – A best practice guide”. The aim of which “is to provide a guide on how parishes can best manage flood risks ...”. As the booklet points out, “Parish and Town Councils are not ‘drainage bodies’ under the legislation and so do not have specific land drainage powers”.

As it goes on to say, they “do however have general powers to assist in their neighbourhood and can be of great assistance to the other authorities in providing a link to the communities”. More recently the Floodwise National Campaign Plan identifies Parish Councils as a potential ‘strategic partner’ (EA 2009b). Similarly some of those interviewed viewed the parish as a vehicle for communicating or engaging with community.

However the relationship between parish and community is not straightforward. There is wide variety in the degree to which different districts around the country are parished (many areas do not have a parish) and in the size of parishes. The size of parishes even within a single district can vary widely. For example, North Somerset's smallest parish has a population of 168, whilst its largest parish has a population of 65,000 (Department for Communities and Local Government 2002:37). Also, given the small scale at which residents defined local community, large parishes of many thousands of residents are unlikely to have much in common with the types of communal structures identified earlier. As earlier chapters showed, the parish may only have a very limited role in community construction. Haylton, where the Parish did play a significant role in the community and in its flood response, was unusual in having a Parish Meeting, whose boundaries coincided with those of the village. Therefore the parish, whilst it may in certain contexts be an effective approach, cannot be assumed to provide the ideal means of engaging the community for the purposes of FRM.

The parish was not necessarily seen by those interviewed as the best way of reaching ‘the community’ but perhaps the only one currently practicable. There is awareness that approaching the community through structures such as the Parish Council is limited but without further resources it was felt this is the best approximation possible. County and District Council officers in North Yorkshire had worked with the EA to try and engage Parish Councils in making flood plans. There had been some interest from parishes but this was not universal and parishes were not obliged to take this up. Officers were aware that this is not an ideal way of working with the community, as Helen says “*It excludes a certain amount of people we’re aware of that ... but that’s the only way in we have at the moment, short of calling the village together, but we don’t have any legislative way of saying you have to do this*” (Helen Int 40-43). Helen feels it is the only practical option currently open to them for accessing the community. Direct engagement with at risk communities is seen to be far beyond their current resources.

This illustrates something of the problem of working only through existing government structures. It has been said that this problem is particularly acute in the UK (compared to

other European countries) where there is little relationship between community and government boundaries, despite some “rhetorical nods to ‘community’” (Frazer 1999:147). Frazer argues that an over-emphasis on efficiency of service provision means that there is little relation to “meaningful social units” such as the village or community (1999:147). This is not to say the Parish Council or Meeting cannot be effective. Rather, that it cannot be simply assumed that the parish will in all circumstances be able to provide the ideal interface between local community and FRM. The way in which residents construct community boundaries, and the social structures within these, may have little in common with the parish structures. As Buckle (1999:26) noted, the “essential point is that we need to recognise that community is not just based on administrative unit ... we must ask whether many units of administration are now so large, geographically and in population, that they do not conform in any sensible way to notions of community or local”.

### 7.4.3 Non expert communities

In this discourse the community is understood largely as a group of people lacking expert knowledge of flooding. There is extensive literature on the problematic division between expert and non expert (Arnoldi 2009, Blake 1999, Dunn et al. 2008, Eden 1996, Petts 2006, Renn 2008, Sjöberg 1999). There is also considerable criticism of the ‘information deficit’ model of the public or non expert (Beck 1992, Bickerstaff and Walker 1999, Blake 1999, McCarthy 2004, Petts and Brooks 2006) where the public only need “to be stuffed full of technical details and then they will share the experts’ viewpoint ...” (Beck 1992:58). There is also recognition that acquiring information is not the same as changing behaviour (Bickerstaff and Walker 1999, 2002 Eden 1993, 1996). There are attempts to move beyond this simplistic approach (Petts 2006) but it remains an issue (Bickerstaff and Walker 2005) as this research also illustrates.

This discourse was not as widely employed as the other discourses, as it was only used in a relatively narrow range of specific situations. Jennifer whose role in the EA is in part to “*look after communities*” saw herself as an interpreter, taking information from within the Agency and putting it in a form the community could understand; “... *and then my role is to kind of interpret all that I suppose into plain English really so that the community can understand it*” (Jennifer Int 21). The underlying assumption is that nobody within the community will understand the information. The community are seen as uniformly lacking in ‘expert’ knowledge, with a clear distinction being made between the expert and non expert.

Janice, who joined the EA after other career experiences, was dismayed by the attitude of some within the Agency who made a simple division between themselves as experts and the public as non-experts. *“I went on national training when I first joined the Agency a couple of years ago and I was really shocked by the attitude of the new recruits ... there were a lot of people who were straight out of university and they said ‘why do we have to talk to the public?’ And it’s the old fashioned idea of well we’re the experts, we’ll do this, this is what we’re going to do in your patch but we’re not going to tell you about it”* (Int 47). She also felt that a past focus on technical expertise had led to a lack of ‘people skills’ and insufficient training to engage with the community effectively. *“I don’t think there’s anywhere near enough training for dealing with communities”* (Int 47). However, there is evidence that this situation is changing.

The problem with writing about such a rapidly changing environment is that it is inevitably, in some aspects, almost immediately out of date. The Building Trust with Communities programme is an example of training in ‘people skills’ and community engagement officers have been appointed to help develop better ways of communicating (EA 2009c:ii). Also, a new training package, released summer 2009, is said to be “helping our 2,000 operational delivery staff become more self-assured in how they speak and interact with members of the public” (EA 2009c:iii). Yet despite the rapidly evolving policy context things are slower to change ‘on the ground’. The research found a considerable gap between policy and operational staff at the time of interviewing. However, it is positive that the EA is investing in training in this area.

Where there is a clear separation into expert and non expert this tends to dismiss the potential that resides within the community. Research has demonstrated “[t]here is often significant expertise in the local community that is not fully utilised” (Speller 2005:22). Numerous studies have shown the value of lay or non expert knowledge and the importance of involving this perspective from the outset (Bickerstaff and Walker 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, Blake 1999, Dunn et al. 2008, Eden 1996, Petts 1995, Sjöberg 1999). There were considerable skills and knowledge within the fieldwork communities, not necessarily directly flood-related, but still of value in a flood situation. Interviewees were able to use their existing skills, often developed through their employment, to help themselves and others cope with flooding. The non-expert discourse did assign some types of knowledge to the community but these were rather limited. Residents are understood to have a more detailed first hand local knowledge of the flood event, and this is often ‘gathered’ following a flood. They are also seen to possess first hand knowledge about people within their community, such as who is vulnerable.

Whilst communities may contain this type of 'local knowledge' they may also possess a much wider range of knowledge and skills which can be useful in a flood context. Interviewees utilised a wide range of skills to deal with flooding, collectively as well as individually. For example, Charles in Haylton was able to draw on his work experience as a high level manager, used to negotiation, involved in risk assessments and familiar with dealing with the media, when working on behalf of the village in his role as Chair to the Parish Meeting. In Upbeck in Leeds the Flood Action Group found they were able to draw on a number of skills within residents of the estate. There were those with a technical knowledge of certain aspects of water management, someone had experience with the insurance industry, another experience of following up problems and complaints professionally, all of which proved useful. In both Haylton and Aylesby experience with moving large scale items and the associated equipment enabled local people to carry out much of the clearing up after the floods. As Giddens (1994a:84) notes "[e]xpert' and 'layperson' have to be understood as contextually relative terms". Neither should we assume a simple dichotomy between scientific and lay forms of knowledge, there is considerable variation within as well as between groups (Petts and Brooks 2006).

It proved possible to change the status of a 'non-expert', both in the eyes of the 'experts' and the 'community', as Matthew from the EA in Leeds describes. *"The flood wardens that were present at the meeting, the one's that we've had a longer relationship with, they were all sat at the front and then the sort of wider community came in and the ones that were ... sort of taking issue with some of the things that we were proposing, the wardens themselves were actually answering the questions on our behalf because they're obviously better informed than the wider public"* (Matthew Int 54). These residents had gained knowledge and to a limited extent the status of expert, which brought drawbacks as well as benefits. John the Chair of the Upbeck Flood Action Group found that he was expected to act as a mediator for the agencies and was unhappy with the way people would now complain to him rather than going through official channels.

Members of the National Flood Forum were unusual in that they straddled the expert/non expert divide. Because they have experienced flooding themselves they have been in the position of the 'non expert' residents, yet since joining the NFF they have gained considerable 'expert' knowledge. The shared flood experience, which played a key role in Upbeck's community identity, was also important in empathising and establishing a connection with residents. Janice found that *"because you've got that immediate link with people and you can say, yes I do know what it's like I genuinely do because it happened to me. People do tend to trust you a lot more than an officer of the Environment Agency ..."* (Int 47). Similarly Katherine found *"because I've had experience of flooding myself it's*

*really useful to be able to say to somebody I know just how you feel, this has happened to me too”* (Int 24). This proved useful in Upbeck as NFF staff were accepted and trusted by both ‘sides’ and so could act as an effective liaison between staff and residents, helping residents understand and negotiate their way through the complex division of responsibilities and technical terminology and helping the EA to explain what they are able to do, and to be believed.

## **7.5 Narratives of community in policy and practice**

The discourses employed by those interviewed illustrate the gap that existed between the still developing policy and staff members dealing with ‘communities’. The rather simplistic discourses generally employed by the flood professionals reflect the fact that as yet there has been little attempt to engage with local communities as a way of working. Policy is moving in this direction, and research in this area has been carried out. For example, the EA and DEFRA have jointly published a series of reports as part of the project ‘Managing the Social aspects of Floods’ which includes work on communities, but recognises the need for further research. These have yet to have much impact on working patterns. EA staff were asked if they felt policy changes had changed the way they worked with the community and this was felt to have had either no impact or very little. So although there is evidence of movement, this is likely to take some time to work its way down through the organisation.

By 2009 there was evidence of some change. Continued contact with a staff member responsible for working with Upbeck revealed that they had attended a training session for the Agency’s ‘Building Trust With Communities’ programme and he felt this represented a genuine shift in the way that the EA worked with people. He felt that residents were now much more genuinely involved in the process. This illustrates the way this is very much a changing situation. However to a large extent discourses of community remain confined to the uses described above. In contrast, vulnerability a concept that has been a part of FRM for longer, showed some signs of being understood as a problematic issue and there was some awareness of the difficulty of identifying vulnerability. It clearly takes quite some time for issues engaged with at the research and policy level to become problematised in the field.

The appointment of community engagement officers is positive and addresses some of the issues discussed later in this chapter, particularly those of communication. However, from the literature currently available it appears community is still being largely used to mean groups of individuals or as another term for the public. The only focus on structures is

through strategic partners such as local councils, rather than the more casual social structures through which residents create local social networks. However at the time of writing this is the first year in a five year campaign. “The approach being taken in year one is a **pilot approach** which will be evaluated at the end of the year to ascertain its merits and take forward any learnings into future years of the campaign” (EA 2009b:4 bold in original). The strategic partners may develop to include less formal structures, the Women’s Institute (WI) is one already identified in the plan that may prove to be closer to residents’ constructions of community. Neal and Walters (2008) for example, identify the WI as a key rural social organisation which performed an important role in the development of local social networks.

So the use of the term community may change, but this is uncertain given that the focus of the plan is on the communication and acceptance of risk, rather than engagement and support of local communities as such. The aim is that – “Within five years, 75 per cent of ‘At risk’ individuals, businesses and communities will have accepted their risk of flooding (from ALL sources) and of these 60 per cent will have planned and undertaken action to respond to this flood risk and developed ways to maintain their readiness to cope, reducing the impact that floods have on them” (2009b:8). This ‘acceptance’ of risk is a necessary precursor to communal action. Given the reluctance to accept responsibility discussed in section 6.7.3 this move from ‘acceptance’ to action is likely to be difficult. If some of those responses to flood risk are to be social collective responses, as other policy literature seems to suggest, then a more complex understanding of local community will be invaluable.

## **7.6 Fragmented responsibilities, communication and blame**

If local communities and flood professionals are to work together in order to deal with flooding then the relationship between the two needs consideration. The following section examines the relationship between residents and those flood professionals who had worked with them. This is to a large extent based on the findings from Upbeck, as there was considerable contact between residents and staff, which due to the repeat flooding was sustained over a number of years. In contrast regarding Aylesby and Haylton there was little contact between the two groups. The relationship in Upbeck proved difficult, although in the longer term beneficial.

The complex division of flood risk responsibility across different organisations proved to be a key factor which caused difficulties for the relationship between professionals and residents; in particular it made communication difficult, which then exacerbated problems



of mistrust. Bringing together the complex but largely informal structures of the community with a range of complex organisations with differing structures proved challenging. If residents are to take on some form of collective responsibility it is difficult to see where within the largely informal social structures discussed earlier this responsibility might be placed. The involvement of the Environment Agency and City Council with Upbeck Flood Action Group illustrates one strategy to achieve this and allows an examination of some advantages and disadvantages of this approach. The final section considers the issue of responsibility in relation to the less formal responses seen in earlier chapters.

### **7.6.1 The fragmentation of Flood Risk Management**

The division of flood risk responsibility is very complex, being divided amongst a wide range of different organisations, a number of which have been discussed here. Yet this only represents a small percentage, as many lie outside the immediate concerns of the research. The difficulties of providing an effective coordinated response have been recognised for a number of years and the Civil Contingencies Act in 2004, along with other measures has seen steps towards better coordination. However, as the Pitt review made clear, this remains an issue and further measures are being taken to improve this, for example through the draft Flood and Water Management Bill (2009) for England and Wales. Much of this lies beyond the scope of this research, what is considered here is the difficulty that this fragmentation of responsibility poses for the greater inclusion of local communities in the FRM process. The participatory process has already been shown to be problematic, even where the division of responsibilities is arguably less complex (Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Blake 1999, Petts and Brooks 2006).

The division of FRM between organisations posed a number of difficulties for the relationship between themselves and the community. Flood professionals interviewed were divided on whether the separating out of FRM responsibility was problematic, although all recognised it was difficult for residents. Some felt most problems had been largely solved through recent efforts at closer working (at least in their areas), although these efforts would have to continue. On the other hand others were outspoken in their criticism of this division. It could certainly cause confusion for residents and Richard found that *“in the end, often the people we get coming through to us they’re really irate because they’ve been passed from pillar to post for the last half hour, trying to phone somebody who will acknowledge that it’s something they are interested in”* (Int 17).

This is echoed by the Pitt review which suggests that this remains an ongoing problem. “Inaction on local flooding is exacerbated by unclear ownership and responsibilities. Many of the people affected by the events of summer 2007 did not know who to turn to and their problems were passed from one organisation to another” (Pitt 2008:xvii). Residents, particularly those in Upbeck in Leeds, felt that organisations were denying their responsibilities, hiding behind this complexity and blaming each other. *“They had a public meeting ... some time ago, where all the agencies went to explain why it wasn’t their fault. That were the sole reason for doing it, for them to tell you it was nothing to do with them ...”* (Int 18 John). As they were often unaware exactly where responsibilities did lie for different aspects residents could be left feeling helpless. Similar results have been found with floods elsewhere, with the authorities being seen by residents as “reluctant to accept responsibility for the flooding” (Tapsell and Tunstall 2001:v).

Residents felt that if they could bring together the different organisations involved, so that they all met with the community at the same time, then this would prevent this denial or shifting of responsibility. (Whilst the responsibilities of each organisation are clearly set out, these are usually dependent on the cause of the flood, which is not always clear). Katherine of the NFF found that if representatives of the organisations could be physically brought together with residents they then became more helpful and more likely to offer assistance, whereas separately they would deny responsibility. However *“the mechanisms for actually bringing them together don’t, on the whole exist ... So it actually needs somebody like a strong group of residents, saying this is outrageous, sit down and talk to us, we’ve got to sort it out, stop telling us that you’re not responsible”* (Int 24). So this coming together to meet residents is entirely discretionary, even though organisations are obliged to work together and coordinate their responses. Residents feel such collective meetings are helpful and that it gives them greater agency but organisations can be reluctant to face groups of angry flooded sufferers.

In Upbeck the Flood Action Group fought to bring the organisations together, despite initial resistance. *“At first they told us that there would be no way, their words to me, Yorkshire Water and the Environmental Agency and well, the Council as well really, land and drainage, said that there was no way that they would go in one room together. So I said well if you think that I’m going to have a meeting with each of you separately so that you can each blame the other and then wait until I go and get the other ones to answer your questions, then you’re grossly mistaken. There will be a meeting and you will be there”* (John Int 4). John is particularly outspoken in his belief that the organisations will use the division of tasks to deny their responsibilities but it was a commonly held view amongst Upbeck interviewees.

### 7.6.2 Communication problems

One of the major difficulties in the relationship between the community and the organisations was communication, and the division of responsibility exacerbated this problem. Problems of communication existed at all levels. It was found within organisations and within the community, but also between different organisations or departments and between organisations and the local community. These problems largely stemmed from differing expectations. In Chapter 4 it was seen how the Flood Action Group committee had problems communicating with the rest of the estate. This was due to different expectations on how this would be carried out and a lack of social structures through which information could be carried.

Similar problems attended communication between the Flood Action Group, the Environment Agency and the City Council. These organisations sent out information when they felt they had news to convey, whilst the committee expected to be kept regularly informed. The lack of structures to effectively disseminate this information also meant that it did not always even reach all of the committee or the rest of the estate. However as the relationship progressed and an understanding of the local social structures was gained, strategies to overcome these difficulties were developed. Some communication problems were again encountered later in the process and an independent community consultation specialist was engaged to help overcome these issues. This had led to the setting up of the task group which, as the previous chapter indicated, improved communication and widened participation.

Sustained contact with this particular community, training and independent expertise has helped to make this a successful relationship. Similar projects in other locations support the finding here that whilst working with communities is beneficial it is not a quick and easy solution. In Carlisle, Glyn Vaughan EA Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager for the NW Region, North Area noted that '[o]ne of the ... biggest successes is the way partners have worked with Carlisle's communities'. However, he also acknowledged that "it takes huge time and energy, but the benefits more than outweigh those costs" (EA 2009c:7). Starting with a better understanding of community structures may make this process a quicker and easier one for those in a similar situation in the future.

Difficulties of communication and a lack of transparency, whether intentional or not, was often interpreted as a sign of guilt which led to mistrust. When the Upbeck Flood Action Group tried to identify the causes of their flooding they found that a lack of communication between organisations made progress difficult. *"I think one thing that's become very apparent from, not just the experiences we've had, but from going to these*

*meetings when I've had chance sometimes, is that organisations are not communicating with each other... And because they're not communicating with each other, that's then leaving pitfalls and causing problems and there are people like us who just want answers and keep coming across barriers. And when you come across barriers, you, in your head, think well someone's trying to hide something then. You know why can't they just be honest?"* (Anna Int 3). A lack of openness by any organisations was interpreted as guilt.

John is unequivocal in his belief that lack of transparency and engagement is a sign of guilt. Yorkshire Water had chosen to have little contact with the Upbeck Flood Action Group and this had led to continued mistrust and a belief that they were largely to blame for the floods. *"The only time I've ever met the guy from the water board, I said to him the reason, you know, when you say you're not going to speak to anybody, that's guilt. You know that you're the cause and you daren't be there because you know that when you answer the questions it'll be obvious that it's your fault"* (John Int 60). This mistrust was still present in 2008, four years after the first flood, whereas with both the EA and City Council a good working relationship had been developed and a certain level of trust built up. This supports the EA's view that, although at times difficult, engagement does lead to a better working relationship (EA 2004). This is a view also supported by research into participatory approaches (Bickerstaff and Walker 2005, Eden 1996, Petts 1995, 2006, Petts and Leach 2000).

The issue of responsibility and blame was expressed differently in the urban and rural locations. There was a strong feeling amongst residents in Upbeck that something should be done by the relevant authorities to prevent the flooding and this was the main focus of the Flood Action Group. In the rural locations the flooding was largely seen as an exceptional weather event, and there was little blame placed on the authorities. Some of this difference may be attributed to the different types of flood event. Leeds has suffered from multiple flooding whilst the villages have only had the one extreme event. However the urban environment is a highly managed one, which consists largely of human constructions such as buildings, drains, roads, etc. Residents expected that management to extend to flooding *"you just assume that the powers that be have got everything under control and they've stuff in place for this, but they obviously haven't done"* (Ian Int 55&56). Flooding was understood as a failure of this management, for example by the Water Authorities, the Local Council or the Environment Agency. In the urban environment the problem and the solution are seen to lie within the human and managed arena.

In the rural areas flooding was more likely to be understood as at least partly a problem of the natural environment. Where the problem is seen to lie, then, defines who is seen as responsible. This could also explain the feeling by some flood professionals that rural residents were more independent and resilient than urban ones who expected more to be done for them. This is an area that would need further research to clarify the relationship between rural and urban environments, types and frequency of flooding and the questions of responsibility and blame. Residents after their first flood experience had little awareness of the legal responsibilities of the organisations involved. The repeat flooding in Upbeck, Leeds led residents to find out much more about the whole FRM process, which included who was responsible for what. However, as the following section discusses, residents often felt much more should be provided than was available.

### **7.6.3 The gap between expectation and provision**

Flood professionals may have little awareness of community structures, but similarly residents have little understanding of organisations' responsibilities. Residents had little awareness of what the organisations were legally obliged to do for them, however expectations were often unrealistically high. The division of responsibility meant that not only before an event were people unaware of who could do what, even after an event residents were often unaware of the work that had been carried out by different departments or organisations. This uncertainty could add to the feeling that little had been done for them. The exception to this was uniformed services such as police and fire officers who were highly visible. Even where residents were unclear about what these officers had been able to do they were full of praise. This is in stark contrast to other organisations which are often criticised for doing too little.

This finding was confirmed by an EA staff member. *"The fire brigade they're always the heroes aren't they? I mean we've been to public meetings and you get spat at and all sorts and the fire brigade turn up and they get around of applause. But what have they actually really done, they've not stopped it flooding have they? But they've done their best and they've been seen trying to help"* (Int 54). This combination of uncertainty of responsibilities and lack of awareness of work carried out becomes problematic when flood risk managers are attempting to work with the community. Residents were largely, at least initially, mistrustful of the authorities and as the EA officer describes, sometimes overtly hostile.

There is also a gap between the types of assistance residents' value and what organisations offer. In the aftermath of flooding residents placed a high value on practical assistance;

those officials who were present, but appeared not to offer this, were criticised. Again this strains the relationship between the community and the residents. Residents appreciated those *“who got stuck in”* and gave straightforward practical assistance rather than sympathy. As Susan in Haylton explained *“we don’t want people coming here saying oh how awful it was and all this lot, you only want people who are practically going to do something”* (Int 44 &45). In the immediate post recovery stage in addition to practical assistance, residents wanted guidance and information, rather than being asked their opinions. *“I remember them sitting on the stage telling us that we’re here to listen to your views, what do you want us to do? When you’ve been flooded, you know, obviously you want them to tell you what they are going to do, not ‘what can we do?’”* (Anna Int 3). Those who were felt to be merely making a token appearance were seen as intrusive and unwelcome.

The authorities in Upbeck, Leeds were criticised following the first flood for a lack of response. Rachel describes the anger when they came more rapidly after the second flood but appeared self satisfied with their response. *“Second time, they appeared like that, hey presto. They all appeared, some of them were very smug, some of them nearly got laid out because of the smugness. Well you should have seen the residents, they were so angry”* (Int 2). As they were unable to offer practical help Rachel felt their presence was unhelpful. *“When you have a crisis and the water is now subsiding, there’s nothing can be done, nothing. Not for me personally, obviously for older people, the fire brigade can come round and help them out of their houses and things like that. But what can Council officials do, stand there and give it a bit of lip service. There’s fuck all they can say. People from the EA what can they do? Nothing”* (Int 2). Rachel was more extreme in her response but many placed a similar value on those who offered observable, practical assistance. If the community and flood professionals are to work together then this gap in expectation will need to be managed.

#### **7.6.4 Developing trust and effective communication**

The Upbeck Flood Action Group was the vehicle through which the EA and the City Council worked with the residents of the Upbeck estate. For those interviewed this was a new way of working but one that was found to be useful. This approach had a number of advantages over the more usual strategy of either public meetings or contacting all individuals. However the group’s problems in representing and communicating with all of the estate, discussed in earlier chapters, caused concerns for those attempting to work with the community, through the group. Richard from the Land Drainage Department, for

example was uncertain about how well information sent to the group was being disseminated to the rest of the community.

Despite the initial anger and mistrust the Flood Action Group felt for all flood related authorities, working through the Flood Action Group was felt to be useful by members of the EA and the City Council. Richard from the Land Drainage Department felt it had been *“very useful because it’s given a focus to their views ... it’s also enabled ourselves and the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water to more carefully explain to a smaller group of people exactly the issues, and to take them into our confidence, show them the drawings or whatever is relevant, you just couldn’t do it with a large meeting”* (Int 17). Similarly Andrew found that a meeting with a small group of people could be useful, and that they were able to convey more detailed information in this kind of setting, although this wouldn’t replace wider meetings (Int 12&13). Engaging with this local structure (and not just individuals), whilst at times problematic, proved beneficial; it provided a focus for contact, and the smaller numbers involved could be advantageous.

Trust was a key issue, raised by all involved. The initial relationships between residents and professionals was characterised by mistrust. Over time this was improved and sufficient trust was developed to enable an effective working relationship. However as Rachel’s comment makes clear this trust is hard to win. *“Yes, Richard, he’s lovely. He is working more for us really, he’s sort of pretty much on our side, **but you never trust anyone really**”* (Int 2). This supports the extensive research in other areas which suggests that trust is central in the relationship between ‘officials/experts’ and ‘locals/lay people’ (Bickerstaff and Walker 1999, 2002, 2008, Dunn et al. 2008, Petts and Brooks 2006) *“Public trust and confidence in decision makers, and decision and regulatory processes, lie at the heart of the changing relationship between science and society”* (Petts and Brooks 2006:1048). Natural Hazards research also suggests that trust in organisations is an important factor. For example, people’s willingness to take responsibility and prepare for ‘natural hazards’ is increased if formal agencies are perceived as trustworthy (Paton 2008) (See also section 6.7.3). Research into flood warnings also found that trust in those communicating the warning was important to how risk communications were received (Cave et al. 2008).

Matthew of the EA recognises this: *“Well its trust isn’t it. You’ve got to build up trust”* (Int 54). By 2008 this trust had been established and John (Chair of the flood action group), who was initially very critical and sceptical, could say *“the Environment Agency has been very helpful, yes, particularly the staff down there ...”* and similarly of a City Council staff member *“he’s been really helpful ...”* (Int 60 DD). The Flood Action Group have

moved from an antagonistic relationship, campaigning against the authorities, to the point where John and others felt that they were working together; *“the agencies that we were fighting are actually on our side now, you know like land Drainage, the Environment Agency ...”* (Int 60).

Both the local community and the EA are complex structures and the development of trust was based partly on an understanding of those structures. However, within this individual relationships were important and there were key persons, on both sides, who were central to the process. The trust developed by residents resided to a large extent in known individuals rather than the organisation as such. The following example clearly highlights the importance of the personal relationship. Matthew describes how John, not recognising him starts abusing him and the EA, but stops and is immediately friendly when realising who it is. *“I saw John and I’d just got back from my holiday, I’d just been to Cuba and I had a cracking sun tan and he didn’t recognise me and he was giving me loads of shit was John, and he said do you work for the Environment Agency? I said John it’s me, and he goes, oh Matthew, oh hi, do you want to come in for a cup of tea?”* (Int 54). This almost comical switch from hurling abuse to offering a cup of tea takes place when Matthew is recognised and ceases to be an anonymous representative of the EA. Whilst Matthew had over time developed a good relationship with John, this did not mean that John trusted the EA as an organisation.

The individuals who work with communities play a crucial role in the development of that relationship, but they are not understood to represent the entire organisation in a straightforward way. John for example separates the person from the organisation and in this way he is able to develop a good working relationship with individuals whilst still campaigning against particular organisations to achieve flood defences. His position is that *“it’s not a personal thing between you and whoever’s in that department, like me and Richard or me and Phillip from the EA or Matthew, it’s not a personal thing between you and them, it’s between that agency and your aims. And that’s where the battle is ... it’s purely and simply your department that I’m fighting, not you as a person”* (Int 60). Therefore a good relationship can be developed with a particular individual whilst still campaigning against a particular organisation or department.

John also makes the distinction between the individual’s actions and motives and the organisations, so that they can be understood to be ‘on your side’ despite being employed by an ‘enemy agency’. *“You can get them to help you fight the agencies, because they will tell you as much as they dare, and you can read in between the lines sometimes what they’re telling you, and if you get them on your side they’ll point you in the right*



*direction*” (Int 60 DD). In this situation, where so much emphasis is placed on the relationship with the individual, choosing suitable staff members with the appropriate time and skills is crucial, a finding supported by Agency research (Speller 2005). However development of a good working relationship with particular individuals cannot be assumed to mean approval of the organisation and its aims.

In Upbeck, where the EA and the City Council were working together with the community to develop strategies to cope with flooding, good relationships were developed over time. Those who became trusted had spent a considerable time within the community and developed good face-to-face relationships with residents. This was not an easy task, and staff members had to cope with considerable hostility and criticism. They were able to largely overcome the initial mistrust and maintained good lines of communication. A good working relationship relies on effective communication and trust. These in turn are reliant on an understanding of each others structures, responsibilities, processes and expectations. Within this, key individuals are important and the personal relationships developed are essential to the process. This would suggest that the allocation of those roles, and the support and training given to those individuals whose task it is to work with communities, is given serious consideration. This has also been shown to be important in other areas of environmental concern (Petts 2006).

## **7.7 The implications for supporting social responses**

The issues discussed above are very much those of developing a formal response. These formal responses are very different though to the more widespread casual and organised responses discussed in the previous chapter. To support or enhance these types of response will require, at least in some aspects, a different approach. Those directing FRM policies will need to consider what types of response they want to encourage and support. Then based on an understanding of community processes and investigations of individual communities an informed decision can be made on how best to involve particular communities. This will not necessarily be straightforward given the informal nature of many local community structures, which are largely based around leisure activities. As Day (2006:240) noted when talking more generally about the relationship between government structures and local communities: there is “a major disjunction between the ill-defined, fluid and contested nature of ‘community’ and the relatively well organized, codified sphere of government”. It must also be remembered that there is no reason to believe that residents will unquestioningly accept this risk role that the state wishes to place on them.

Research into participatory approaches for other environmental concerns has also highlighted the importance of the local context in understanding 'lay knowledge' and risk responses. This understanding is key in developing a good relationship between the 'expert' and the 'public'. For example Bickerstaff and Walker found that their research "stressed the central role of the local and social context in understanding how people make sense of air pollution and thus recognise risk" (Bickerstaff and Walker 2001:143). They proposed the concept of 'localisation' to explain how environmental issues "are made sense of or localised in the physical, social and cultural context in which individuals live, work and interact with others" (Bickerstaff and Walker 2001:143).

As Petts and Brooks (2006:1047) note numerous empirical studies have illustrated this contextualisation of lay knowledge. This has led to the recognition that there is a need for sensitivity to local diversity and community involvement (Bickerstaff and Walker 2001). This needs to be a 'genuine involvement' which includes defining and addressing the problem to reach a shared understanding (Petts 2006, Petts and Brooks 2000, Petts and Leach 2000). It is important that neither understanding is accepted uncritically. The "assumption that local communities are uninformed and 'emotional' about environmental hazards has been frequently challenged ... At the same time, though, it is important to avoid the romanticisation and homogenisation of the 'lay local' (Dunn et al. 2008:708). "The challenge, then, is to develop a successful 'interface' for dialogue and debate where 'expert' and 'non expert' environmental knowledges are given appropriate credit" (Dunn et al. 2008:710)

If local communities are to be involved in FRM in some way then the aims of this need to be made much clearer. Are communities to become active participants in the FRM process, working with Agencies and being expected to take on responsibilities preparing for and responding to floods? For example one suggestion from Pitt is an increase in community flood defence schemes (Pitt 2008). Or is the aim to find a way of supporting or enhancing those more informal activities that already take place? Very different solutions will be required depending on the desired outcome. In some situations, such as Haylton, more formal structures may already be present which can be harnessed. It is difficult to see where, in the more casual structures such as those in Aylesby where responsibility might be placed. If people are asked to take communal action then who is responsible to ensure this happens and how are they to be held accountable? Even within the more formalised structures of the Upbeck Flood Action Group accountability and democracy proved problematic. However persistence proved that the problems could be overcome. Starting with a better knowledge of community processes and some knowledge of the potential problems, this should be an easier process.

It may be that different strategies are adopted in different locations and circumstances. However it is important to be clearer on what is desired. It is not enough to simply expect communities to do more for themselves. Neither is it realistic to expect all communities to respond in the same way or be able to equally effectively deal with flooding. As research for the European project research FLOODsite recognised, communities may be very varied and this needs to be considered when working with those communities. “Generalisations are risky and may possibly lead to disaster” (De Marchi et al. 2007: vi). As Bickerstaff and Walker (2001:143) argue risks “are constructed and contextualised within, and in relation to, the immediate locale” so that the social and contextual dimensions are of fundamental importance. Conscious communities will be very diverse and only present in particular circumstances. It is important therefore to consider the likely response in each location, as the previous chapter suggested. Strategies can then be tailored, so that they are suitable for both the desired outcome and the particular community.

### **7.7.1 Some suggestions for practice**

Whilst it is not possible to provide detailed suggestions on how local communities may be supported some broad outlines are given below. These are practical suggestions based on the research findings. The time devoted to these will vary depending on available resources. Where flood risk is high and impacts severe (priority situations) then more resources are likely to be available, as for example in Upbeck in Leeds. This will allow a more thorough investigation into the community structures so that a more extensive and tailored solution may be offered to their support. Key to providing support of any kind is evaluating the individual community rather than making assumptions. It will then be possible to tap into and support existing community structures.

Figure 4 on the following page summarises the key factors in understanding a local community and guidance based on these. This is followed by a discussion of some of these suggestions. A more detailed guidance, useful in priority situations where more resources are available, is provided in Appendix 4.

**Figure 4** – Table summarising community characteristics and support interventions

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Guide to identification</b>	<b>Support Required</b>
<b>Context</b>		
Boundary	Question residents to find their definition of the community boundaries	Work within and support existing boundaries rather than impose external definitions
Isolation	May be physical and/or social	Isolation can strengthen identity but reduce access to resources
Identity	Where present the source of a shared identity may vary considerably	Where absent difficult to create but flooding can provide a shared identity
<b>Social Structures</b>		
Absent	No places for locals to go and know they will meet other residents from within the community boundaries.	Extensive support needed to create communal response, street wide response may be easier to achieve
Casual	Shop, pub, park etc.	May need help to organise
Organised	Planned groups and events	May need help connecting groups
Institutional	Councils, churches, schools etc.	Ideal where well supported by local people and coincides with community boundaries
<b>Network Patterns</b>		
Sparse	Few local networks	Extensive support needed, may be easier to focus on street scale
Clustered	Isolated groups of networks	Intervention needed to connect clusters
Dense	Many, interconnected networks	Little support needed, ensure all groups included.
<b>Community Responses</b>		
Unstructured	Spontaneous, one to one offers of help	Needs extensive support to achieve community wide response, less support needed to create street wide efforts
Structured	Organised and collective	Access local groups to offer support
Formal	Specifically set up for flooding	Ensure regular communication strategy, ensure genuine participation

It is important to identify and utilise the informal as well as more formal social structures and networks. Informal structures are likely to play a key part in many local communities. Whilst the more formal, traditional community structures, such as Parish Councils, schools or churches may be important this cannot be taken for granted. Some examples of more informal structures or groups include: local shops, bus shelters, pubs, parks, sports groups, local history groups, book clubs, whist drives and walking groups (there are many more possibilities). All of these groups help create networks which can be used to disseminate flood information and provide support during and after flooding.

The research found that communications between ‘professionals’ and the ‘community’ were problematic, with there being a mismatch between expectation and provision. Communication strategies need to be more creative, use multiple methods and take advantage of existing communication routes. As well as using local groups to disseminate information, strategic locations can be used to display information. This may be an existing site such as a notice board but it is important to be aware that this may be underused. Ideal are locations which are regularly used by local people, this may include for example local shops, pubs, village halls, particular roads, parks or bus shelters. The use of multiple sites will ensure more people are reached. Regular communication is especially important where a relationship has been established with a community, especially if there is ongoing work such as the building of flood defences. The frequency and format should be agreed between all involved, a regular newsletter is one possibility. It is important to keep people informed and involved even when there is no new information.

The local network patterns shape the flow of information and the extent of support offered. Dense interlinked networks will need little additional support but it will be necessary to ensure all groups are involved to avoid causing tensions. Where networks form isolated clusters then help can be provided to create links between the clusters. Enhancing the network in this way will improve communication and ability of residents to work together. One way to do this might be to hold a meeting to bring together key people for each network, to introduce them to one another and to raise flooding issues. If local networks are largely absent and resources insufficient to support the development of a community wide group then efforts may be better focused at the street scale. The research showed that this was the largest scale at which networks and support could operate without any sort of local meeting points.

## 7.8 Conclusions

Examining the use and understandings of community from the flood professionals' perspective, it is clear that there is little engagement with local community as a complex concept. Uses tend to be confined to simple labelling or be shaped by the responsibilities of the institutions rather than the properties of the communities. These discourses of community lead to a focus on unconnected groups of individuals rather than the social and mental structures which may connect people within a particular place. This approach may be adequate for some purposes but it will not enable flood professionals to understand or support social responses to flooding, or to understand the impact flooding may have on local social structures.

In the move to a Flood Risk Management approach, policy in the UK and elsewhere continues to develop in a way that claims to make communities a central part of the process. However there is little evidence of this being based on an understanding of the complexity of communities. Recent initiatives such as the flood awareness campaign FLOODwise still use the term community as though it is straightforward and evident. This is exacerbated by the time taken for policy formulations to reach those staff working 'on the ground'. So that the signs of some complexity being acknowledged at the highest levels, such as in policy research, show little signs of filtering through the organisation as a whole.

The division of FRM responsibilities between many different organisations makes it difficult for community members to understand and to navigate the many complex structures. Difficulties of communication between these groups then exacerbate the problems of mistrust by residents towards the authorities. Similarly it is not straightforward for the rigid and formalised structures of institutions such as the Environment Agency and City Council to engage with the more informal, fluid and messy structures that make up local conscious communities. If the move from flood defence to Flood Risk Management is not merely to be "a covert means of shifting responsibility and costs from government onto local people" (Buckle, Marsh and Smale 2003:87) then this will have to be tackled.

If flood professionals hope to involve local people in some form of collective social response and support the efforts that local people make during and after a flood it is residents' constructions of local community with which they will need to engage. The term may be used in other ways for other purposes, for example organising local economic resources may well need to take place at a larger scale. But if social impacts and responses are to be involved in the FRM process, and if harm to social structures is to be avoided,

then it is the complex intersections of the conscious community that need to be understood. This means accepting not only the varied constructions but also its possible absence.

Neither is local community necessarily always positive and beneficial to all. As the research illustrated the local identity has to be contested and this may lead to conflict. As Cannon (2000:49) points out it, is entirely possible for the capabilities of one group to be exercised at the expense of another, and 'communities' are not necessarily benign and positive in their composition. Unrealistic expectations of the local community are likely to arise when two popular assumptions are made about community: one that the people within a certain externally imposed boundary constitute a community, and two that people within this area will have something in common and will willingly come together and help one another.

Flood professionals need to move beyond these assumptions. Whilst people are usually willing to help one another in a crisis situation, their ability to do so is constrained by the local structures and networks. The boundaries of the community may not be apparent to outsiders, and may have little relation to 'official' imposed boundaries. It cannot simply be expected that there will be a pre-existing community, in a suitable form, waiting to be engaged in the FRM process. There is however potential to develop a communal response from the understanding of community as people willing to help one another.

If local communities are to become central in the FRM process and local people are to be expected to be responsible for some form of communal response, then a shared understanding, based on the messy complexities of the term needs to be reached. Not the common sense, idealised and unexamined notions that are currently widely used. This will take time and effort, it is not a cheap and easy solution, but the evidence suggests that this will be worthwhile. Community involvement offers potential but it requires knowledge and commitment if this is to be achieved.

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## Chapter 8 – Conclusions

### 8.1 Introduction

In this the final chapter we return to the questions and themes outlined at the start of the thesis. The aim is to examine the findings at a broader level, connecting across chapters, and considering what this means in the context of the literature examined in the first chapter. The research set out to address three specific questions concerning social responses to flooding in the UK. This is an area of flood research where there has as yet been little work. Within the newer vulnerability approach, which brings a social science approach to floods and other disasters, the focus to date has largely been on individuals, households or particular at risk groups. The first part of this chapter returns to these three questions, drawing together the findings discussed earlier. They have been answered in detail in the earlier chapters, but the aim at this point is to provide a broad overview. The research confirmed the limited evidence from earlier work which suggested that flood has significant impacts on local communities and suggested the processes through which this takes place. The research questions are followed by consideration of the implications for policy and then in terms of the vulnerability literature.

Through addressing these questions the research also aimed to extend the knowledge of the wider theoretical question of the construction of local community. Whilst there is an extensive community literature to draw on, its relative neglect in recent years, and the changing nature of the relationship between the local and the global, has meant that the nature and processes of local community are uncertain. Therefore in order to address questions of how local communities respond to flooding, it was essential to explore the concept of local community itself. The concept of the conscious community was suggested as a way to explain interviewees' experience of local community. A model of community was proposed which incorporates the mental, spatial and social elements, which are rarely considered together. How this has advanced the extensive community literature and where this fits with current thoughts on the future of local community are considered next. Finally, some of the limitations of the research are discussed along with possibilities for future research to develop the ideas proposed in this thesis.

### 8.2 Returning to the research questions

- a. **How do constructions of local community, and the ways in which they are experienced in a specific locality, allow or constrain local residents' ability to respond collectively to flooding?**



The research has shown that to understand residents' ability to come together to respond to flooding it is necessary to examine not only the existing social networks but also the underlying shared identity and the ways in which locality is constructed. Interviewees experienced local community when the spatial, social and mental elements came together, that is at the intersection of the three circles on figures 1 and 2. This occurred when there was an attachment to the locality, a shared local identity and the presence of dense, localised networks. These spatial, mental and social elements interact in order to produce a particular experience of local community which can be very varied. The social networks, where present, are perhaps the most visible sign of community, but their patterning, extent and use are very dependent on the shared identity which forms the basis of community and the local spatial context.

All three elements of local community have become more reflexive and it is suggested that if local community is to be experienced, it must be consciously constructed. This is not to say residents are always conscious of community, but that its creation involves reflexivity and conscious efforts. This conscious element is most apparent in the creation of local networks. Interviewees' lives were often spatially dispersed, both daily and over the life course. Residents of the same location may meet only rarely and have little in common, unlike the multiplex communities of the past where inhabitants were expected to meet frequently and in a variety of roles. In order to create the types of local networks they envisaged, residents had to create suitable local structures themselves, which would enable local people to meet and so allow networks to develop. Different strategies and structures were adopted to achieve this.

Three types of structure were identified: casual, organised and institutional and there was also a fourth category of absent. The balance between these types of meeting point shaped the network patterns. These in turn formed the basis of collective responses to flooding. As the following discussion of each location illustrates, whilst network patterns will limit the types of response possible, this is also influenced by the role envisaged for those networks and the spatial context in which they operate.

In the very small and isolated village of Aylesby casual structures had been sufficient to allow dense networks to develop and a strong village identity to form. News of the flood spread quickly through the village, and there was a rapid village-wide response. Everybody really did know everybody else in this small community and those in need were quickly identified. There was also a level of trust which allowed a communal sharing of resources. Whilst the village came together effectively to cope with flooding, the informal basis on

which this worked offered little immediate potential for a more formalised future flood response.

In contrast, Haylton's wide range of organised structures and the presence of an active Parish Meeting which formed part of the community structures, had led them to consider setting up their own formal response to future flooding. After consideration this was not pursued but existing structures would have made implementation quite straightforward. The idea of belonging through participation, together with a culture of villagers helping one another, alongside extensive networks, meant they were ideally placed to respond collectively to the flooding. Residents felt their community had been effective in their efforts to help themselves and this reinforced their communal identity.

Upbeck illustrated how residents will help one another in a crisis even where social relations are few and poorly developed. However in this situation assistance was very spatially limited (usually confined to the street of residence), and remained as one to one or household offers of assistance, rather than being collective. The development of local structures brought about by repeat flooding, enabled more widespread and collective responses to develop. Together with external organisations a formalised response was developed. This shows that local structures and networks can be developed to achieve a local community response but this took considerable efforts over a number of years and the process was given considerable impetus through the frequent re-flooding.

**b. What effect does flooding have on local social networks and the way these relate to the local area and ideas of community?**

The flooding changed all three local communities in varying ways. Flooding had a significant impact on community because it operates on all three aspects: the spatial, mental and social. Floods tend to impact at a local level, affecting groups of residents, heightening awareness of the local environment and often isolating residents from the wider world for a time. In these circumstances people become much more aware of their environment and feel a sense of shared fate. Local people are often then forced to rely on one another, either reinforcing or creating a shared identity. This brings residents into contact with one another, illustrates the benefits of acting together, and provides a shared experience around which relationships can develop.

The impact of the floods was most dramatic in Upbeck, where local community was seen to be absent prior to the floods. Despite the relative immobility of many residents, and an

attachment to East Leeds there was an absence of a shared identity and community networks within the area identified as the potential local community. The flood led to a marked increase in estate wide networks, appreciated by all those interviewed. However, due to the lack of local social structures these networks were most concentrated within the street of residence. A sense of community developed around these new social contacts and the newly created flood identity. A key factor in the community development was the creation of the Upbeck Flood Action Group. This was not straightforward as there were conflicts over the right to be identified as the group's leader, which were eventually resolved through the division into two groups. The ability of the Flood Action Group to represent the Upbeck community as a whole remained problematical. Despite this the group remained central to the process of community construction in Upbeck.

The two rural locations differed from Upbeck in that they already had pre-existing networks and effective social structures. The changes to the community were therefore largely qualitative rather than quantitative. In this situation the flood tended to reinforce the existing community rather than change it dramatically. In Aylesby it was felt to demonstrate a previously untested village unity and ability to act together and villagers were impressed by how well the village came together. In Haylton it was felt to demonstrate a previously known quality of the village, but villager's appreciation of this was heightened by the flood experience. In both villages relationships were deepened rather than newly created and the communal identity was strengthened. In all three locations the attachment was closest between those whose homes had been flooded. The traumatic experience provided a shared bond which was felt to be unique.

Whilst the overall impacts in the three fieldwork locations were positive, it is not suggested that this will always be the outcome; there exists ample evidence of post flood and other disaster conflicts (Barnes et al. 2002, Fordham and Ketteridge 1995, Tapsell et al. 1999). These conflicts have arisen where the initial shared flood identity and sense of unity becomes divided in some way, often over the division of post flood resources. For example, when divisions are created between the insured and the uninsured (Fordham 1998), owner occupiers and council tenants (Tapsell et al. 1999), or those offered different levels of compensation (Barnes et al. 2002). The local community has then become divided around these issues, rather than united by their locality and flood experience. This research has also highlighted the potential dangers of the division between the flooded and the non-flooded. So whilst flooding has the potential to bring people together and strengthen a sense of local community, this cannot be taken for granted.

**c. How do professional discourses of community shape their expectations of local social response to flooding? What are the similarities and differences with residents' conceptualisations and responses?**

The discourses of local community amongst those whose role it was to work with the community tended to be confined to simple labelling or to be defined by their responsibilities to the community. As in many of the policy documents, community is given little consideration, the assumption being that it is straightforward and transparent rather than complex and negotiated. Little thought was given to social structures and how these might be supported. The professionals tended to engage with multiple individuals rather than social structures. The exception to this was in Upbeck. Whilst they started from the position just stated, long term contact had led to engagement with the community and the complexity of its social structures. This together with training from the EA had led to a greater appreciation of the need to move beyond these rather basic usages.

There was generally a considerable gap between residents' and official discourses. One of the difficulties of local community (but also one of its strengths) is its ability to have so many different meanings (Day 2006). If, as recent policy seems to suggest, local people are to be 'empowered' and 'supported' to help themselves and if they are to become more involved in the FRM process, then a shared understanding will need to be reached. This understanding will need to recognise that the relationship between locality and community is complex, that a shared identity if present may be constructed in multiple ways, and which engages with the existing local social structures and networks. The local community does offer the potential, in certain circumstances, to provide an effective basis for collective flood response. If FRM professionals wish to support or be involved in this process then it will need to be based on shared understandings and the messy complexity of conscious communities.

The research also explored the ongoing relationship between Upbeck residents and flood professionals over a number of years. The complex division of FRM between several organisations was found to cause problems for this relationship. It was complicated for residents to navigate and problems of communication between organisations were treated with suspicion. In a situation characterised by an initial mistrust, this complexity, combined with difficulties of communication, made the residents trust difficult to gain. This trust and understanding is going to be essential if flood professionals and communities are to work together. The professionals will need to understand the

complexities of local communities and in turn residents will need assistance to negotiate the complexities of FRM. Relationships with key individuals were found to be crucial in this process, and it is particular individuals that came to be trusted rather than organisations as a whole.

### **8.2.1 Wider Policy Implications**

The findings have some implications for the involvement of communities in FRM and the call that communities should do more for themselves. Policy in this area is still developing and although communities and collective activity are clearly implicated it is as yet unclear exactly what is to be expected of local communities. Before detailed suggestions can be made on how communities may be supported, work will be needed to clarify what is to be expected of communities. Some considerations and suggestions were made in Chapter 7, based on this research. However it was never the intention of the research to provide a complete solution to FRM's engagement with local communities. Rather, by providing knowledge on the construction of local communities and their response to flood, more informed strategies can be developed.

The research confirmed findings from research with other environmental risks that the shifting of responsibility onto the public is problematic and that citizens are ambivalent about this new role in their relation to state (Blake 1999, Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002). The relationship existing between local people and 'flood professionals' supports previous findings on 'community engagement' or 'public participation'. The research has again highlighted the need for transparency, clear communications and skilled staff with the time and resources to build trust with local people (EA 2004, Petts 2006, Petts and Leach 2000, Speller 2005). Trust was shown to be a key factor, and the complex division of flood responsibility made this trust especially difficult to establish. The barriers between 'expert and 'lay' knowledge need to be broken down so that a shared understanding can be reached, trust developed and the communities full potential appreciated.

Where the research differs from previous work is in its focus on understanding local community structures, and the processes underpinning collective action. It was suggested that conscious communities will be very variable, and therefore effective support will need to be based on an investigation of each particular community. It is not possible to assume either the presence of local community or the form that this will take. It was therefore suggested that in each location the context, local social structures and network patterns are investigated, which will allow some understanding of likely flood responses and the

possibilities for collective action. Previous risk research has supported this view, stressing the need to pay attention to the local context and local diversity to understand environmental risk (Bickerstaff and Walker 2001). As Blake (1999: 274) argues we “must pay more critical attention to the meanings of ‘local’, ‘public’, ‘community’ and ‘participation’ in different circumstances”. This information can then be used to support or encourage a local response.

Given the difficulties of engaging residents in flood mitigation activities (Harries 2007) and the problems caused by the narrow focus on floods of the Upbeck community it may be worth considering engaging communities in a broader range of activities than simply those related to flooding. If a wide range of problems or issues are included, then a clearer benefit may be seen than if focusing on one type of event only. Research by Marsh, Buckle and Smale (2004:2) supports this, they found that local people had a broad appreciation of risk and vulnerability where the “traditional natural hazards were not ignored or devalued but were put into a hierarchy of risks confronting the community”. This was “significant because it indicates that risk awareness and risk reduction programmes implemented by agencies may not be accurately targeted at local priorities and may therefore fail in their efforts to engage local people whose “risk attention” was elsewhere” (Marsh, Buckle and Smale 2004:2). As they point out “day-to-day life usually takes precedence over spectacular but infrequent events” (Buckle, Marsh and Smale 2003). Research by Winkworth et al. (2009) looking at communities following bushfires in Australia indicates that engaging with community in a broader way than has been traditional is also beneficial for the relationship between government and community. (See Appendix 3 for suggestions).

One reason for the appeal of community to government is its apparent naturalness which makes it appear to be an ideal site for the exercise of governmental strategies, needing only minor adjustments to make it suitable for governments’ desired ends (Ilcan and Basok 2004:131). It does also offer the promise of a ‘third way’ lying somewhere between the individual and the state (Giddens 1998). In the general move to seek to devolve responsibility downwards (Arnoldi 2009, Beck 1992, Bickerstaff, Simmons and Pidgeon 2008, Bickerstaff and Walker 2002, O’Malley 2004) the local community, as we saw earlier, is often seen as the ideal location or vehicle for this responsibility. The expectations placed on community seem to implicitly assume a traditional model of community. In this model the local community is expected to act together for the common good (Day 2006, Delanty 2003). As Day (2006:235) notes “[c]ommunities are treated as agents, able to assume responsibility, define objectives, and act to meet them”. Appeals by policy for communities to act together and help themselves appear very reasonable from

the perspective of the traditional vision of the tight-knit, self supporting, largely independent local community, which arises from the community lost discourse. However it seems much less plausible in the looser structures found by the research, which are voluntary and largely based around leisure activities. These appear less suited to taking on communal responsibility than the apparently more independent communities of the past, although in certain circumstances this remains possible.

### **8.2.2 The vulnerability perspective**

Over the last twenty or so years of the vulnerability perspective a great deal has been discovered about flooding from a social viewpoint to add to the more established and extensive knowledge of the physical and technical aspects. It is now clear that to understand and mitigate the impacts of flooding it is necessary to look to those affected and to the societies within which they are situated. Work has shown that vulnerability is constructed by society (Blaikie et al. 1994, Canon 2000, Enarson and Morrow 1998, Fordham 1998, Hewitt 1997, Wisner et al. 2004) and that impacts extend far beyond the obvious physical damage (Fordham 1998, Fordham and Ketteridge 1998, Tapsell, Tunstall and Wilson 2003, Tapsell et al. 1999). This research supports and confirms the frequent reports that local people help one another, and that communities are somehow changed in this process. It has provided some insights into how this takes place and added to this literature in a number of ways.

The research focus was on the as yet largely unexamined area of social relationships, exploring both how these may be utilised in response to floods and also how they come to be changed by the flood experience. It was innovative in a number of respects. Rather than staying within the confines of the vulnerability literature it drew on the extensive pre-existing community literature which exists within social science, much of it from the fields of sociology and anthropology but also some within geography. This allows the findings and experience from one area to be brought to bear on another. The advantages of this have been pointed out by others looking to the future of disaster research. As Quarantelli (2005:354) notes, there “are many theoretical models and frameworks in the social sciences. However, disaster researchers have explicitly used very few of them ...”. He suggests that “disaster scholars should start applying theoretical notions that have shown their value and usefulness in other areas ...” (Quarantelli 2005:358).

There were also benefits in the research having such a long timescale. This allowed returns to the estate of Upbeck over a number of years, to follow a community as it coped with repeat flooding and to explore the development of a Flood Action Group and its ongoing

relationship with the EA and other flood professionals. This is rare in this type of research which tends to be characterised by a visit or series of visits within a very limited time scale or what has been referred to as “one shot data collection” (Medd et al. 2007). The question of time was also addressed in a rather different way. It has been argued that disaster research has rarely considered the role of changing social conditions. “The world is currently undergoing a massive transformation in its social life ... as far as we can see few in the disaster area are incorporating them into their research designs” (Quarantelli 2005:349). This research has engaged with local community and its transformation through changing conceptions of local and global, looking at how older discourses continue to shape conceptions of community, but also where they fail to adequately capture current experiences.

The findings illustrated the types and extent of help that residents offered one another during and following flooding. They were able to show the factors that influenced the extent of this, the types of help offered, and why in some circumstances it is likely to become more organised and collective and why in others it remains largely one to one. It also explored the potential difficulties of placing responsibility within the community and showed the types of structure which more readily lend themselves to developing a formal flood response. A diagram was used to illustrate the factors which influence flood responses. This illustrated the context, social structures, and network patterns in each location, showing how together these shape the communal flood response. A pathway was suggested which can be used to help predict the likely flood responses of a particular community. This information could then be used to supplement, support or enhance these responses.

The research also examined the changes that flooding brought about in the three communities and explained the basis for these. Whilst it has long been recognised that communities are changed by flooding, the therapeutic and corrosive communities being well established in the literature, the mechanisms for this were unclear (Flint and Luloff 2005). Flooding was found to impact on the spatial, mental and social aspects of community, which perhaps explains why even relatively minor floods can have such a significant affect on local community. It heightens awareness of the locality, reinforces or creates a local identity, and provides opportunities for local people to meet one another and to act together. This may be rare in a mobile society and can have a considerable impact where this may seldom happen in ‘normal’ circumstances. Local community has to be consciously constructed and flooding heightens the consciousness of both locality and community and its benefits.



### 8.3 The Conscious Community

To answer the research questions above it has been necessary to consider the concept of the local community. Despite being hotly debated for more than 200 years, the decline of community studies and despair with the concept means that recent empirical studies are few, and this research aimed to partly fill this gap. Whilst issues such as globalisation and its affects on places and communities are widely discussed and theorised, they have rarely been the subject of systematic empirical examination (Charles and Davies 2005, Savage et al. 2005). However a number of authors have made a strong case for studies of communities. As Savage et al. (2005:1) note “local case studies, if not conceived as studies of fixed and bounded communities, but as studies of sites from which forms of mobility as well as fixity can be empirically observed, are vitally necessary for elaborating the nature of contemporary social change”. Similarly Crow argues such studies of local community “have the capacity to show that social change does not unfold in the deterministic fashion in which abstract theories like those of industrialization ... and globalization are open to being read” (2002:8 para 4.2). Therefore the study of specific communities does not just tell us something about those communities but also about the wider processes operating through them.

The most recent approach to the concept of community has reconceptualised it as a mental structure. This approach has been adopted here but some of the criticisms that it has neglected the social and the spatial are addressed. To date, the literature has taken as its focus one particular aspect, often to the neglect of one or other of the aspects. For example, the early work started by sociologists in the 1800's took as its focus the spatial, in this conception the locality and the community were synonymous. But in this approach the role of space was assumed, and a rather deterministic relationship implicit. Within this social networks were studied, but mental aspects given little consideration. With the change in focus to network approaches, popular during the 1950s and 60s in Britain, space went from deterministically shaping networks to having very little role, again mental aspects received little attention. Finally with the move to a mental approach in the 1980s, the 'symbolic' or 'imagined' elements have received scrutiny but this has been to the neglect of the social relations and again the role of space is given little attention. In contrast what has emerged from the research is the interconnection of these elements and how one aspect cannot be understood without consideration of the others.

In the traditional view of community, which continues to shape expectations of local community, the sense of belonging, the shared identity and the networks coexisted together because the residents were essentially trapped within the community, bound together by immobility and economic need. It was the space within which their lives were

conducted, their 'community of fate' (Pahl 2005). This is no longer the case, if it ever truly was, and as Wellman (2002) and others have shown networks have become much more diffuse, lives more spatially dispersed, and community can exist at a whole range of scales. "The individual is not tied to only one community but may have multiple and overlapping bonds ..." (Delanty 2003:188). Residents are no longer dependent upon the local community, support and a sense of belonging is available from a variety of other sources. This has not meant however that the local has become irrelevant to people's lives or that local networks are no longer possible. Rather this relationship has become much more reflexive, local communities as residents envisage them, no longer appear to arise naturally simply from residing within the community. Where desired, they must be constructed, symbolically and socially, by residents themselves.

Interviewees retained a number of elements of the traditional community discourse in their understanding of community. The continuing association of local community with face-to-face networks led to it being defined at a small scale. Where this differed from the traditional conception was in the boundaries, which were very porous. The local community was no longer seen as a bounded container for people's lives, rather it had become a central access point. This view is much better reflected by the social construction of space, as a unique intersection of social relations at a whole range of scales (Massey 2005), rather than as something natural and given, a neutral container for social relations (Hubbard et al. 2002). Residents were active participants in the construction of their attachment, rather than passive recipients of a local identity in which they had no say.

The concept of the conscious community is suggested by this research as a means to explain the flood responses and changes found and to better understand local community. In the concept of the 'conscious community' local community must be actively constructed by residents. It was only experienced when all three aspects; the social, spatial and mental, were understood to be present. That is, there was an attachment or sense of belonging to the locality; residents felt a shared, place-based identity and dense localised networks existed within the community boundaries. These could be constructed in different ways, so that conscious communities, if they are present at all, may take very different forms.

The context in which this research has taken place is one of increasing concern for both the loss of locality and related to this the loss of community. The value of the local and people's attachment to it is seen as under threat by the forces of globalisation (Bauman 2001, Massey 2005, Savage et al. 2005). Yet a sense of belonging or attachment to place, to the locality, remained important to the majority of interviewees. Again this has become a more complex and reflexive relationship which could be constructed in a number of ways

and at different scales. It was not reliant on immobility within the community, although familiarity with an area or an historical connection could be an important element of some individuals' attachment and become part of the communal identity. For others this played no role and attachment was constructed through participation in local social structures and identification with the local community.

Attachment to the locality could also occur outside of the experience of community. The aspects of local community, once assumed to be indivisible, are now released from their spatial confines and so can operate separately and at different scales. All three aspects will not necessarily be present; they can exist separately of one another. This meant that residents could experience characteristics once assumed to be a property of local community, such as place belonging, in spite of the absence of local community. For example, in Upbeck prior to the floods they felt an attachment to the place without experiencing localised 'community networks' or a shared identity.

The notion of the conscious community aims to capture the reflexivity and the way in which conscious efforts must be made to create local identities and locally-based structures at a time when the tendency is towards mobility, a diffusion of networks and complex multiple identities. The findings support the suggestion that social relations are becoming more reflexive and less tied to the locality. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001:35) note "social relationships and social networks now have to be individually chosen; social ties, too, are becoming *reflexive*, so that they have to be established, maintained and constantly renewed by individuals" (*italics in original*). Yet this research demonstrates that this does not mean that the local relationships and local identities were no longer important, as is sometimes suggested. Rather their value is highlighted by the efforts residents were prepared to put into their construction and maintenance. The research was able to illustrate how residents set about this and the conditions under which local community was experienced.

## **8.4 Current limitations and future research**

Like any research this has its limitations and raises as many questions as it answers. Many of these issues were addressed in Chapter 2 on methodology however some are more appropriately considered here. The following section considers these and makes some suggestions for further research based on issues raised by this study. Research such as this, that is broad in scope bringing together various areas, is inevitably open to being accused of a lack of attention to particular aspects. The community literature is extensive

and complex and this is brought together with aspects of the flood/disaster literature. In gaining breadth there is inevitably a loss of depth, in at least some areas.

The concept of community also seems to touch on many other large subjects, such as globalisation, post/modernisation, risk, social capital, family relations, rural and urban, each of which can only be given relatively limited attention despite their extensive literature and complexity. There is a trade off between breadth and depth. The gains to be made in choosing breadth outweighed the loss of some detail, especially as this particular area of research is relatively new. In later research as knowledge advances then it may become more suitable to focus on particular aspects shown to be important.

The research has examined residents' constructions and this has led to a focus on the small scale at which they defined their local community. This scale of community and its associated social networks are going to be important for understanding and supporting local, collective responses to flooding. However this does not mean that community at other scales is not of relevance for FRM. For example, some types of resources are likely to be accessed at a wider scale than that defined by residents as local community. Future research could examine wider notions of community and how this interrelates with the smaller scale of community considered here. For example, some types of conscious community may be better placed to access local resources available at a wider scale.

The research proposed that the pre flood community structures provide the best guide to flood responses and post flood changes. It is these structures and their response to flood that have been explored. However under very severe flood conditions the local community may be so damaged that the pre existing community structures offer little guide to communal response, because the structures of community are effectively destroyed. There is therefore a limit at which the model may cease to effectively predict flood impacts. Further research can help determine at what point this may occur, and what models can then be used to understand social changes.

Like any qualitative research this is necessarily based on comparatively few interviewees and only three locations were examined. But the concept of the conscious community and the suggested model which has been developed from looking at these particular communities can be used in other communities and in other contexts. As a newly developed concept it remains to be tested and extended in different situations to explore the scope of its usefulness and further refine it.

The research focus has largely been on predominately white, working or middle class residents. This does of course exclude important segments of the population. However the aim of the research was to look at what might be considered the mainstream rather than the more marginal. Geographers have in the past “come under criticism for their tendency to focus on, and often to appropriate, the experiences of ‘others’ rather than to examine privileged and often powerful identities ...” (Valentine 2001:4). It is the hegemonic that is examined here, but this is not to say more marginal experiences of community should not be studied in the future.

There is for example evidence to suggest that those who might position themselves within the ‘Asian community’ may have a different experience of local community response to and recovery from flood (Tapsell et al. 1999, Tapsell 2000). The model of community put forward by this research can be used to examine this and other more marginal groups. It is likely that it is the shared identity element of community that will be most affected and how this impacts on constructions of local community and local networks can be explored using the concept of the conscious community.

There are a number of other factors or contexts which could be pursued within the conscious community framework to see their impact upon local community and their response to flooding. For example, there was some evidence that ‘class’ and/or socioeconomic status and the associated expectations of family and mobility will impact on community construction. It is also likely to influence access to resources, both within and outside of the local community, which will be significant in coping with flooding. Age may also be a factor. Teenagers for example were more present on the street which could make them vulnerable, and the elderly in isolated rural situations were disadvantaged once they could not drive. Given the concern for vulnerable groups and the impacts of social deprivation in relation to flooding this could be important (Walker et al. 2006).

Mobility is also an issue that would benefit from further exploration. It was found that certain types of community structure could overcome any potentially negative impacts of flooding, however none of the locations studied demonstrated very high mobility. What happens to local community in areas with a rapidly changing population such as some inner city areas or student areas? The construction of rural and urban was shown to play a role, particularly the vision of the rural community. It would be worth exploring how these notions of urban and rural relate to community in other settings along the urban/rural continuum in further comparative work. For example what happens to the rural vision in larger, less isolated villages with a more mobile population?

Gender was not found to be a particularly significant factor in the fieldwork locations. There was some evidence to suggest that an increase in working mothers may leave women, the traditional community makers, with less time available for this role. Given the evidence of gendered responses to flooding (Enarson and Morrow 1997, 1998; Fordham and Ketteridge 1998) and greater impacts on women from changes in community following flooding (Fordham 1998), future research should remain sensitive to the likelihood of at least some aspects of community construction and response being gendered.

In this research the three locations initially had no experience of flooding and no warning systems in place. Therefore a lot of the research focused on immediate response to the flood and the recovery period, although in Upbeck it was later possible to study the preparation period. Different types of flood impact at different rates and allow different response times. It would be interesting to see how those communities with more warning respond. The extent of the flood and the previous experience of flooding are also likely to have some impact on communal responses and these variables could be explored. A further issue is what happens to the relationship between the community and the flood professionals, when they attempt to intervene at this early stage?

The research also suggested that the issue of responsibility was one that would benefit from further research. Where residents see flood responsibility to lie was found to influence where blame was placed and their willingness to take action. It would be worth investigating where flood responsibility is placed, why it is assigned in this way, and how this impacts on residents' willingness to take preventative action and their relationship with the flood professionals. There was, for example, some evidence to suggest that in urban areas responsibility may be more likely to be seen to reside in 'authorities' than it was in rural areas. There was also some suggestion that the frequency and type of flood may have an impact on the question of blame. What exactly is the link between accepting responsibility and taking action? Under what circumstances will residents feel/accept responsibility for flooding? When is a collective responsibility possible?

Whilst flooding has provided the focus for this research, this model could perhaps be used to help understand communal responses for other types of emergency such as earthquakes or bushfires. It may also be useful for other types or scales of community. Even in non local communities there will be mental, social and spatial aspects, but what these constitute will vary and the relative importance of each will change. So, for example, even in communities of national or global reach space still plays a role in shaping the other elements which needs to be explored. The social, spatial, mental model of intersecting

circles could provide the basis for exploring these issues and their precise contents adapted for different types of community.

What seems clear is that local community will remain an important issue for the foreseeable future. The concept of community may have been declared dead and useless more than once, but it refuses to co-operate and go away. Local community remained important to interviewees and for many it provided the basis of both practical and emotional support as they coped with flooding and its consequences. For others the 'silver lining' following their difficult flood experiences was the development of local community. It is probable that even more will be asked of 'local communities' in the future, as flooding looks likely to increase and policy changes suggest that communities must do more for themselves. The concept of the conscious community offers a way to understand local community construction and its social structures. This will make it possible to predict likely collective flood responses, and so offers the potential to support and enhance residents efforts to come together to help themselves.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Tables of interviewee characteristics

#### a. Urban residents key characteristics

Age Bracket	Gender	Marital Status	Children	Occupation	Home ownership	Residence in current address
30's	Female	Married	2	Admin.	Owned	10 years
30's	Female	Partner	0	Business Owner	Owned	15 months
20's	Female	Single	0	Teacher	Owned	3 years
50's	Male	Married	2	Manager	Owned	27 years
40's	Female	Married	1	Admin.	Owned	17 years
30's	Male	Married	2	Fitter	Owned	10 years
30's	Female	Married	2	Retail	Owned	10 years
30's	Female	Married	2	Telephonist	Owned	5 years
30's	Male	Married	2	Engineer	Owned	5 years
40's	Female	Partner	1	Admin.	Owned	22 years
70's	Male	Married	1	Retired	Owned	22 years
40's	Male	Married	2	Retail	Owned	12 years
60's	Female	Married	4	Nurse	Owned	44 years
70's	Male	Married	4	Retired	Owned	44 years
30's	Female	Married	2	Child minder	Owned	9 years
30's	Male	Married	2	Sales	Owned	9 years
Teens	Male	Single	0	IT	Parents Own	7 years
50's	Male	Divorced	1	Printer	Owned	5 years



## b. Rural residents key characteristics

Age Bracket	Gender	Marital Status	Children	Occupation	Home ownership	Residence in current address
60's	Male	Widowed	5	Business Owner	Owned	6 years
40's	Female	Married	2	Business Owner	Rented	6 years
30's	Male	Married	2	Business Owner	Rented	6 years
40's	Female	Married	2	Business Owner	Rented	8 years
40's	Male	Married	2	Business Owner	Rented	8 years
Declined	Male	Married	2	Retail	Rented	6 years
80's	Female	Single	0	Retired	Rented	20 years
50's	Male	Divorced	1	Self-employed	Rented	5 years
30's	Female	Married	0	Animal worker	Rented	12 years
50's	Male	Married	1	Minister	Unknown	2 years
80's	Male	Married	1	Farmer	Owned	74 years
60's	Female	Married	0	Retail	Owned	38 years
60's	Male	Married	3	Retired Doctor	Owned	23 years
50's	Female	Married	3	Business Owner	Owned	23 years
70's	Male	Married	2	Retired Scientist	Owned	15 years
60's	Female	Married	2	Retired teacher	Owned	15 years
60's	Male	Married	3	Retired Business Owner	Owned	23 years
60's	Female	Married	3	Retired Business Owner	Owned	23 years
70's	Male	Widowed	4	Business Owner	Owned	28 years
70's	Female	Married	2	Academic	Owned	13 years
70's	Male	Married	2	Retired Architect	Owned	13 years
60's	Male	Married	0	Retired Manager	Owned	20 years

### c. Professional interviewee key characteristics

Organisation	Team/Position	Responsibilities	Fieldwork Community Contact
Environment Agency	Asset System Management Team	Prioritisation and justification of the maintenance of water courses and assets on them	Some contact with the public via queries. Had contact with Upbeck FAG.
Environment Agency	Flood Risk Mapping and Data Management Team	Looks after the flood map	Deals with individual queries. Had contact with Upbeck FAG.
Environment Agency	Flood Risk Management Team	Key liaison with FAG and involved in assessing flood defence scheme for Upbeck	Extensive ongoing contact with Upbeck FAG
Environment Agency	Flood Risk Mapping & Data Management Team	Duty officer during flood event. Represented EA at flood surgery.	On duty at time of flood. Attended flood surgery after event.
Environment Agency	Flood Incident Management Team	To look after communities and professional partners - focus on flood warnings	Limited contact with Upbeck FAG. Aware of colleagues work with them.
Environment Agency	Flood Incident Management Team	Communications role	Attended flood surgery
Environment Agency	Flood Incident Management	Team Leader. Responsible for a number of initiatives to improve ability to work with the public.	Took decision to offer assistance although not legally obligated
County Council	Emergency Planning Officer	Supports County Council during flood and acts as point of contact	Visited flooded residents
County Council	Major Incident Response Team	Supports people after traumatic incidents	Visited flooded residents
District Council	Property Services Manager	Responsibility for Emergency Planning	Decision making, little direct contact.
District Council	Buildings Control Manager	Duty officer at time of flooding	Visited flooded residents
City Council	Land Drainage (Senior position)	Department carries out the functions of the Council as the land drainage Authority	Considerable involvement with residents and Upbeck FAG.
City Council	Principal Emergency Planning Officer	Managing emergency planning team	Attended flood surgery and visited flooded locations
National Flood Forum	Senior employee	Wide range of responsibilities assisting flooded individuals and groups.	Very limited contact with interviewees but extensive experience of FAGs and flood issues.
National Flood Forum	Senior employee	Wide range of responsibilities assisting flooded individuals and groups.	Some contact with interviewees and extensive experience of FAGs and flood issues.

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## **Appendix 2 – Acorn Classifications for fieldwork locations**

ACORN groups the entire UK population into 5 categories, 17 groups and 56 types. The predominant type for each of the fieldwork locations are listed below. These are a guide only to the main types of people believed to live in these locations, based on postcode. “This is a description of the type of neighbourhood to which this postcode has been matched, it is not a description of the postcode. The overview describes characteristics frequently found in these neighbourhoods. Since most postcodes include a mix of people we don't expect everyone there will fit the description perfectly” (UpMyStreet 2010). These types are included to help provide a picture of the fieldwork areas. They seem to confirm the information found through interviewing.

(See - <http://www.caci.co.uk/ACORN/whatis.asp> The new Acorn user guide lists the various types. Postcodes can be looked up at - [www.upmystreet.com](http://www.upmystreet.com))

### **Farming Communities (Aylesby, N. Yorkshire)**

These communities are found in some of the most rural areas of Britain, where the economy is underpinned by agriculture.

People tend to be between 45 and 65, with older children, many of whom have left home. Whilst their household incomes are modest, they live in large detached houses and farms. They need access to cars given their location, and owning more than two cars is the norm.

They do not have a great deal of spare money for financial investments, but will invest modest amounts in a broad range of products. They are also happy to use credit cards, but are not high spenders.

Nearly one in five people are agricultural workers, and as might be expected with agricultural employment, for many their working day is very long. Nearly 30% work over 49 hours per week.

Their spare time is limited, but they are interested in wildlife and the environment and enjoy hobbies such as gardening and hiking. They do not go out socially very often and they appear to rely on the telephone for social contact as well as business, as their bills are very high. Again, given the year-round demands of the agricultural business, these people do not go on many holidays and will often just fit in trips within the UK and Ireland.

They rely on TV and radio for news, but when they do read papers they tend to prefer the Daily and Sunday Telegraph.

There is a strong presence of Farming Communities in the Scottish Islands, Shropshire, Cumbria and the South West of England.

### **Villages with Wealthy Commuters (Haylton, N. Yorkshire)**

This type comprises wealthy people living in rural villages, predominantly in the shire counties of England. Given the rural nature of these areas, there is some agricultural employment but most residents are affluent, well educated professional people employed in senior managerial positions. There is also more working from home in this type.

Residents tend to be older, aged 45 plus, with fewer children and more retired people. Housing is spacious, with four or more bedrooms, mostly detached and at the upper end of the property price ladder. Reflecting the older age profile, more properties are owned outright than being bought on a mortgage.

Car ownership is high with more people commuting by car than by rail. Two or more cars per household is common, with high value cars being the norm.

These are financially astute householders, with high levels of ownership of stocks and shares, unit trusts and guaranteed income bonds. The Internet is used to research and purchase financial products as well as cars, holidays and other products.

Leisure interests include walking, bird watching, the fine arts, antiques, classical music and the opera. Membership of the National Trust is also popular.

Favoured newspapers tend to be the Telegraph, The Times and Financial Times.

This type is found throughout the shire counties, especially in Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire as well as in Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex.

### **Established Home Owning Workers (Upbeck, Leeds)**

These traditional blue-collar neighbourhoods contain predominantly married couples, families with older children and some empty nesters.

Formal educational qualifications are below average. People tend to work in routine occupations in manufacturing and retail, in a mixture of skilled, semi-skilled and manual jobs. Family incomes are average, and the main income is often supplemented by female part-time working.

Smaller semi-detached houses, usually with two or three bedrooms, are most common and account for two thirds of the housing stock in this type. Half of householders are buying their property on a mortgage with another third owning outright.

Most households have access to a car but usually a smaller, inexpensive model, possibly bought second hand.

These people are likely to take one main holiday a year, probably a packaged holiday to the Mediterranean or a camping or caravanning holiday in the UK.

Watching TV is a popular leisure activity, as is going to the cinema and sometimes bingo. Doing the football pools, gardening and visiting the pub are also common. Tabloid newspapers are favoured reading, and many listen to Radio 2.

This type is found in Wolverhampton, Dudley, Darlington, Stoke, Rotherham and Mansfield.

## **Appendix 3 – Parish Meetings and Parish Councils**

**The following is taken from information provided by Eden District Council.**

Parishes are the smallest areas of civil administration in England. They are administered by either parish councils or parish meetings.

### **Parish Councils**

Parish Councils are required to hold at least four meetings each year which are open to the public, one of which must be an Annual Meeting of the full Council. Parish Councils have certain powers and responsibilities under statute including, for example, the maintenance of community buildings. They usually employ a Parish Clerk and/or other staff to carry out these duties. They also have power to raise money (a 'precept') through the local Council Tax and have a duty to provide accounts.

### **Parish Meetings**

Parish Meetings must assemble annually on some day between 1 March and 1 June and on one other occasion during the year. Their meetings are open to the public but only the registered electors for the Parish are permitted to speak and vote on any proposal. A Parish Meeting is not a corporate body and is therefore unable to own property or sue or be sued. Generally speaking it is not a local authority and its powers are not as wide as those of a Parish Council.

<http://www.freewebs.com/mallerstang/parishmeeting.htm> [Accessed 12th Sept 2007]

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## **The following is taken from: Guidance on community governance reviews**

April 2008, Department for Communities and Local Government, The Electoral Commission.

48. Parish and town councils vary enormously in size, activities and circumstances, representing populations ranging from less than 100 (small rural hamlets) to up to 70,000 (large shire towns – Weston-Super-Mare Town Council being the largest). The majority of them are small; around 80% represent populations of less than 2,500. Small parishes with no parish council can be grouped with neighbouring parishes under a common parish council (see paragraphs 112 to 115). p17-18

85. Under the Local Government Act 1972 all parishes, whether or not they have a parish council, must have a parish meeting. In many parishes the requirement to have a parish meeting takes the form of at least one annual meeting, or more often several meetings during each year, organised (where one exists) by the parish council or if not by the parish meeting itself. The parish meeting of a parish consists of the local government electors for the parish, and as such local electors are invited to attend these meetings. Parish meetings have a number of functions, powers and rights of notification and consultation. The trustees of a parish meeting hold property and act on its behalf. Depending on the number of local Government electors in the parish, there are different rules about whether or not a parish council must be created for the parish, or whether it is discretionary. p25

87. Section 94 of the 2007 Act applies in relation to these recommendations. It places principal councils under a duty to create parish councils in parishes which have 1000 electors or more. In parishes with 151 to 999 electors the principal council may recommend the creation of either a parish council or a parish meeting. In parishes with 150 or fewer electors principal councils are unable to create a parish council and therefore parish meetings must be created. The aim of these thresholds is to extend the more direct participatory form of governance provided by parish meetings to a larger numbers of electors. Equally, the thresholds help to ensure that both the population of a new parish for which a council is to be established is of sufficient size to justify its establishment and also that local people are adequately represented. p. 25

Available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/743628.pdf>

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## **Appendix 4 - Considerations for involving local communities in the FRM process**

### **Introduction**

Local communities may vary considerably, with very different ‘philosophy’s’ and very different local structures. Therefore to be effective in working with and supporting a community the essential first step is to understand that particular local community. The following is a guide to assessing the social structure of a local community and the likely community response to flooding. (Figure 1 on p xiv illustrates how the various factors discussed below combined in the field work locations to give particular flood responses).

There are also suggestions made regarding communicating with the community and how to avoid some potential pitfalls. This guide cannot hope to provide a complete solution to all issues related to working with the community and it is intended to provide additional information to existing guidelines. It is designed to be used alongside guides to engaging with the public, such as the Environment Agency’s guide for staff, ‘Working with Others - Building Trust with Communities’ (2004). The suggestions below aim to provide a succinct overview, in a single location, of suggestions arising from the research findings.

It is recognised that some of the steps outlined below may be difficult for those without a social science background. Where necessary it is suggested additional support be sought, contracting a local university is one possibility. Other studies have suggested that early qualitative research by academics into the community could be beneficial and prevent problems (Barnes et al. 2002). Whilst having an initial cost this could save time and money later. Another possibility is the approach taken in Upbeck, where they enlisted an independent community consultation specialist to help facilitate their relationship with the local community.

If this is not possible then the types of information that are suggested below are probably best gathered by meeting and talking to local people, either individually or in small groups. These types of information can be difficult to gather via written postal surveys and surveys need expert input to be effective. It will be necessary to consider carefully the types of topic to be covered beforehand and to take comprehensive notes or to record the meeting (with the permission of those present). However it should be borne in mind that transcribing from recordings into the written word can be very time consuming. It is important to make sure that all sections of the community are represented and not just a dominant viewpoint.



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## Step 1 – Understanding the community

### Consider the context in which communal flood responses will take place?

1. Identify residents' designation of the boundaries of local community (need to question residents)
2. Consider how clearly the residents boundaries of community are drawn and the level of isolation (May be physical and/or social isolation)
3. Is there a strong communal identity? Is this based on ideas of participation or something else? (e.g. ethnicity, religion, shared experience, rural ideal)
4. Is there much movement of population, what impact does this have on the community? (Information may be gathered from residents, census data or estate agents).

### Identify the local social structures (within the community identified above)

There are three main ways in which residents within the small area usually defined as local community can meet to form community networks. To create networks within the area considered as local community these meeting points need to be used largely by community members, so that the networks being created are within this boundary. The balance of the types of meeting point will then influence the types of network patterns produced and indicate how much support is required to create a collective flood response. There is also a fourth category below, where meeting points that perform in this way are largely absent.

**Absent** – there are no places which enable community members to recognise other community members and develop networks with them. In the absence of such structures spatial features such as street layout can play a key role in shaping encounters. In this situation even low mobility can damage fragile local networks.

**Casual** – where networks are formed through casual unplanned encounters. For example a local shop, pub or park may work in this way (but their presence is not enough to indicate they serve this function). Such meeting points may not be immediately apparent to outsiders.

**Organised** – where community members meet one another through regular, planned meetings at groups and events which are largely aimed at the local community. These may be centred on a communal building such as a village hall or church. However the presence of the building does not guarantee its use in this way. These types of meeting points require considerable time and commitment from the community members. Such groups may be willing to take on a flood role.

**Institutional** – where networks are formed through institutions such as schools, religious organisations or Parish Councils. Whilst these types of institutions may once have played a key role in the community this can longer be assumed. Institutional structures are most likely to play an important role in the community when their boundaries coincide with the community boundaries.

### **Identify local network patterns**

These patterns arise from the local social structures which allow their creation but they are also influenced by the context in which they take place. Therefore the types of meeting point must be considered in their context to fully understand the local network structures and the patterns of networks produced. There are three patterns of networks. The ability to respond collectively to flooding is very dependent on the extent and interconnection of existing networks. The more dense and interconnected the networks the greater the potential for effective community-wide collective action. Three main patterns are identified, these are not discrete categories but rather form a continuum.

**Sparse** – where there are few opportunities to meet then local community networks tend to be sparse and based around the residence. Street scale spatial features become a key factor in this context. Networks very rarely extend beyond street level. These types of networks offer limited scope for collective action, which unsupported tends to extend to street scale at most.

**Clustered** – clusters of networks can form around certain features such as cul-de-sacs or certain social structures such as a local group or church. Flooding can lead to an increase in cluster size. Clustered networks offer opportunities for limited collective action but are not ideal for community-wide collective action as there are few inter-linkages between the clusters. Support to create these inter-linkages would be beneficial for a community wide response.

**Dense and interconnected** – where networks are numerous and well connected across the local community. This will often indicate a range of meeting points are present. Community members will know the majority of their community's inhabitants. The potential for community wide action is good.

**Assess the suitability of existing structures to create a more formal flood response and consider the support this will require**

Organised and, in particular, institutional meeting points more readily lend themselves to creating formal solutions, where they already form an integral part of the local community. Casual or absent structures will require much more support. Some questions to consider of existing groups are: can they accurately represent all of the community, do they have robust and transparent leadership structures, how do they communicate with the community as a whole, are they accountable to the community?

**Step 2 – Communicating with the community**

Good communication is essential to an effective working relationship, yet the research showed communication to be challenging, not just between the community and flood professionals but within the community and between various different organisations and departments involved in Flood Risk Management. The section below suggests strategies to avoid the problems highlighted by the research.

1. Agree a communication strategy, so that all involved receive regular, predictable updates, even when there is no new information to convey.
2. Choose carefully who is to represent your organisation/s and work with the community. Residents are often initially angry and trust is built up with known individuals over time. This person or persons will need to have both the 'people' skills and the resources to commit long term to the project.
3. Remember that flood responsibility is divided out in a very complex way and residents may not be aware of how this works, or what they can expect from each organisation.
4. Consider if it is possible to provide a single point of contact for community members, which could give advice or least help find information on ALL aspects of flooding? Ideally this would include not just the traditional flood management

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issues but also advice on wider concerns such as dealing with insurance, choosing builders, finding temporary accommodation, restoring damaged items etc. In some situations it may be beneficial to bring in an independent person who can be trusted by both residents and professionals.

5. Following flooding residents appreciate those who come and 'get stuck in', that is those who offer immediate practical assistance. Being present whilst appearing to do nothing can lead to accusations of 'paying lip service' only. However not being present can lead to accusations of not caring.
6. It is necessary to find a tactful way of letting residents know what has been done for them. The division of responsibility is complex and people are often unaware of what assistance has taken place. However care needs to be taken as this can easily appear boastful and insensitive. If a communication strategy has been set up then this information could be part of a regular update.
7. Ensure that communication makes use of local community structures, such as local groups or meeting points, but also that all individuals are reached.

### **Step 3 – Avoid potential problems**

1. Identify existing or potential divisions within the community and consider how best to work with and minimise these. Following flooding the distinction between those who have been flooded and those who have not, if handled badly, could become divisive. Previous research has found that the distribution of support such as money from fundraising can easily cause conflict. So the strategy for allocating such resources should be carefully considered.
2. Ensure fair representation of the community. One or two committed or outspoken individuals tend to dominate flood groups. It is necessary to ensure that the community as a whole is informed and can take part. People may initially appear uninterested and it is tempting to ignore them. However if contentious decisions are taken at a later date this can cause problems and lead to acrimony and accusations of undemocratic behaviour.

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