

RELATIONSHIPS AS RESISTANCE

ROOTS

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Roots Community Conversation: Lowestoft

21st June 2023

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01 Introduction

The Roots Programme CIC is a grassroots organisation dedicated to bringing together people who have different experiences of life in the UK, to connect through dialogue rather than debate.



Founded by Ruth Ibegbuna, Roots runs several projects across different age groups. Through our Roots Community Conversations, we engage the voices of residents in towns and cities around the UK to think about the place they live and consider what they may want it's future to look like – especially including those who do not usually participate formally in local affairs.

Roots recognises that communities have capacity, knowledge and resources to make a real difference to where they live. This space provides them with informal opportunities to discuss ideas for action. As inclusive conversations, participants are encouraged to listen and connect with those who may also have differing ideas and experiences to their own.

Through these Conversations, residents are able to choose the topics that they specifically want to feed back on to elected representatives, in a way that is comfortable for them.

Whilst participants raise concerns and challenges from differing points of view, these conversations also allow participants to discover areas of common ground such as a shared care for their local area. This enables participants to feel more connected to one another, giving them a greater sense of belonging within their local communities.

As we have seen over the last few years, events such as Covid19 and the cost of living crisis affect us disproportionately, whilst political campaigns such as Brexit can have significant polarising effects on our communities. We wish to come together, hear from a broader section of society, to find new ways of doing things that will benefit the whole community.

We believe that community members are experts on their local areas and have valuable insights and ideas to share, which can be surfaced through curious and compassionate conversation. We believe that individual local voices should be heard regularly, through informal grassroots forums and respected as trusted advisors by those we elect.

Roots can support regular, ongoing local conversations, managed by residents and for residents, with the simple structure and guidelines that we have designed. We encourage local authorities to embrace the value of ongoing dialogue with the community.

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02 Overview

The main take-aways

- Lowestoft is full of informal micro-communities that care very much about their road or area and pull together.
- The North and South communities can often feel disconnected and separate.
- Young people either have too few options for positive activities or not enough signposts to them.
- Cross-generational projects, such as time-banking, could help join the dots with older teens and older people lacking meaningful connection and activities.
- Increased and ongoing communication between residents, elected officials and businesses would be welcomed.
- First Light Festival increased the already strong sense of pride in the town felt by residents and shows us how many people are willing to volunteer or engage.
- Lowestoft needs to consider whether events are affordable and accessible to its residents.
- Our MP is active in the area and we do feel he cares.
- Our schools are working well together.



03 The Conversation

Lowestoft chats

Why Lowestoft for this Community Conversation?

Our Relationships Lead, Clare Richardson was born and bred in East Anglia, with work and family based in and around Lowestoft.

Lowestoft has often been seen as rundown and has had a negative image in the region, however, it has recently been lauded in the national news as an up and coming destination. Independent shops are popping up around Kirkley and the High Street and the community have been coming out in greater numbers than ever to volunteer to support the First Light Festival.

A town with a rich history of fishing, boat-building, manufacture and tourism it also now is a centre for the oil and gas industries. Lowestoft is drawn in two, North and South, as the Waveney River journeys into Oulton Broad, Lake Lothing and out to the harbour. Ness Point in Lowestoft North is the UK's most Easterly point.

Government statistics show differences of up to 7 years in life expectancy across the wards in Lowestoft. As a town, it has a crime rate 33% higher than the regional average, yet these broad statistics don't tell the complete story of a community which is already coming together to improve their home town across so very many lines and with so many different initiatives.

There is so much in the way of regeneration underway in Lowestoft at present, with the third crossing progressing slowly, the ongoing works along the seafront, fresh life breathed into the old Post Office building and the expansion of The Seagull Theatre and the revamps at The Marina Theatre.

With this beautiful and complex picture of Lowestoft, all of the highlighted prevailing issues and challenges, this was an opportunity to come together as residents and equals to deliberate, share different perspectives together to consider what is needed for the town's future that would serve everyone.

In 2021/22, 27% of respondents either definitely or tended to agree that they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is similar to 2020/21. This figure has not varied much over the last 8 years since data collection began.

27%

04 The Conversation

We asked, Lowestoft answered...

What do you imagine people in the UK who haven't been here might think of the town ?

Some comments:

Sometimes it can be a little bit of a negative viewpoint of Lowestoft because it's been seen as quite rundown.

There have been a couple of articles in the guardian which have been very positive so if you were looking for a holiday home maybe in Lowestoft it would be a destination which I know is worrying some of the people in the community because we don't want it to become a holiday home destination.

If you're young you tend to see there is sort of like no opportunity.

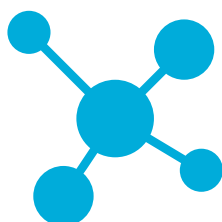
I feel like there's been less coverage of deprivation recently I feel like the positives, like the history of Lowestoft are being told more often in the press.

I think sometimes when people get off the train and they they get that sort of first impression and it is not always a great impression and I think it could be so much better.

The town currently seems to be doing a lot better and I think that's because it's so close to the beaches and there's a lot of small independent businesses that are opened up there and it just that seems to be on the up.

You've got that divide of the north and the South and the north side of town I think is quite neglected at the moment and a lot of things are closing down and there doesn't seem to be that regeneration happening on this side of town as much as it is on the South side I'd like to I guess I'd like to see a little bit more happening this side 'cause there's so much potential.

I think that that it is a bit of a worry that it could turn into sort of a Cornwall situation where you've got all these holiday homes and actually then that really it has a huge toll on the town itself.



05 The Conversation

We asked, Lowestoft answered...

what are the real unique shining qualities that lowest off house that the rest of the country should know about?

The High Street has got a micro community that cares so passionately about their road.

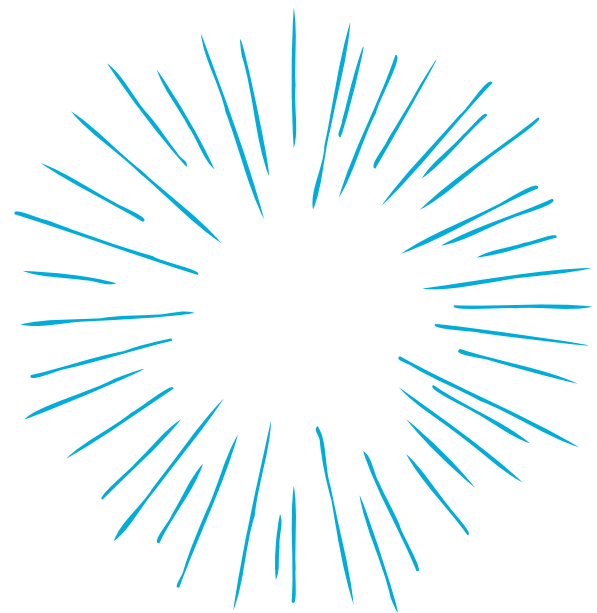
I don't know if it's unique I doubt very much it's unique to Lowestoft but they do pull together here.

We're setting up time banking so basically that is going to help us access these smaller communities because we can sign them up as a community to do some work and share some time through the time bank.

The greatest asset we have is our people and our people are big hearted, they're caring – yes from the outside it might seem they whinge but whenever we have a disaster they are there without thinking and they open their hearts and their minds and everything else.

You've got some amazing buildings here as well when you walk even further you know further than we are at the Marina you keep kind of going northwards there's some amazing looking buildings.

I speak to holidaymakers a lot on the beach every morning and they make a very great deal of it being a lovely place to come and holiday, great beaches, great community, very slow pace.



06 Actions

We asked, Lowestoft answered...

What actions right now could change the future of Lowestoft?

There needs to be something that brings the South and the North together.

Opportunities, and signposting to them, for the youth of Lowestoft.

I think if we could change tomorrow I think would have really great effects on the Lowestoft is if we got our big companies to sponsor projects within the company for their social responsibility. We've got a lot of big firms that come in, they have a huge amount of money and they don't give us anything – they say they're going to and often they don't.

If we could all come together once every couple of months and amplify our voices and set out a bunch of projects to pitch and we could go after these people but more than just their base level of corporate responsibility and ask them to do something meaningful they might actually be able to mentor in various ways.

Make sure that town events are financially accessible to residents.

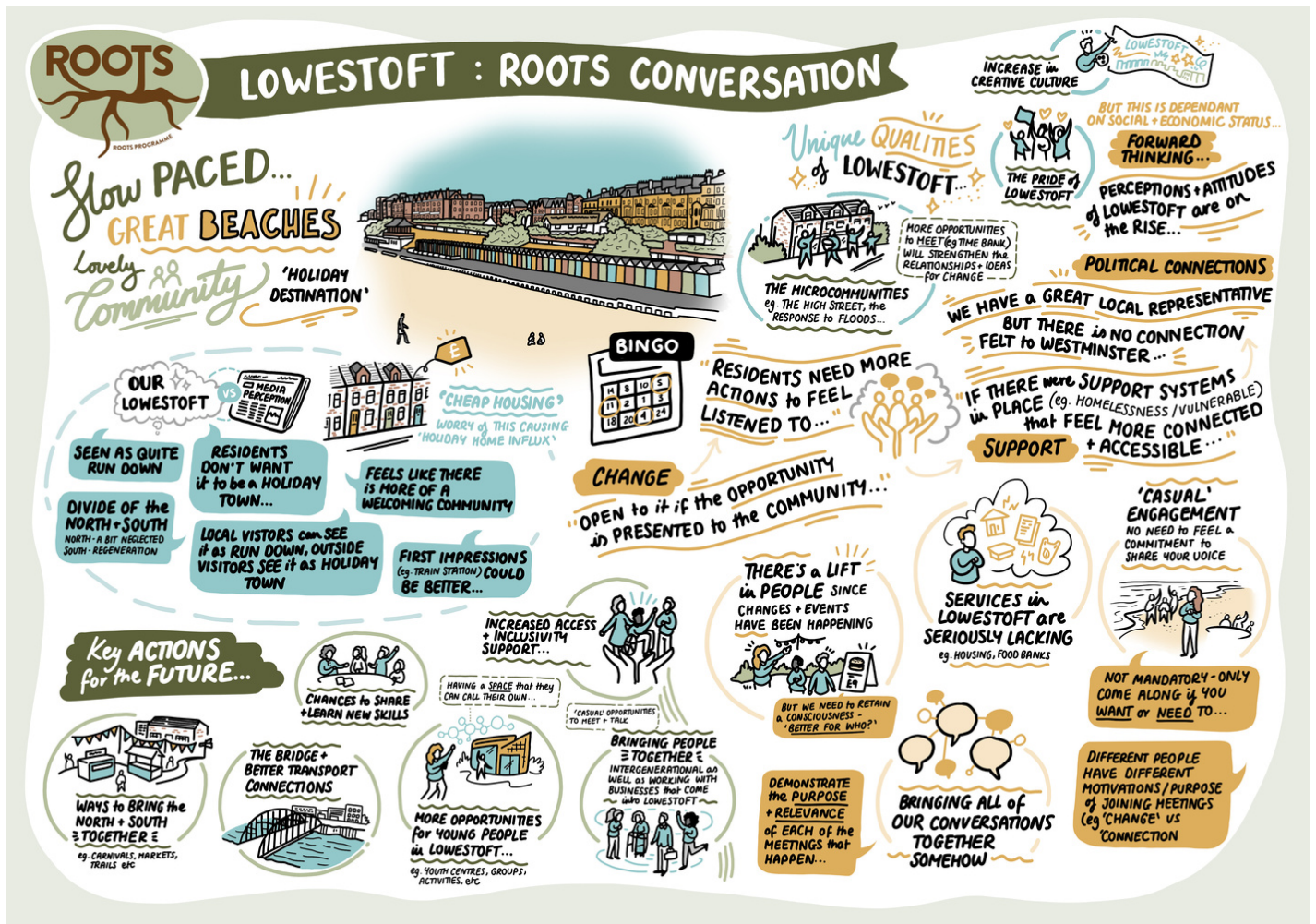
A bit more support especially for really young families and especially for lone parents.

More opportunities for cross-generational connection.

We can start developing these conversations and make them bigger for Lowestoft 'cause everything everybody said is right and there's so much more to say.



07 The illustrated minutes



It was produced post-event and is intended to be used to communicate with a wider audience to challenge, inspire and motivate change.

These visual minutes present a good overview of the tone, themes and activities across the Conversation

Roots welcomed a friendly group of individuals into the online community conversation. Participants included newer residents, as well as long-time residents. The atmosphere was one of great warmth and passion for the place they have chosen to reside in. Conversations were compassionate and insightful and residents allowed one another to be heard at length. Participants voiced their enjoyment of the process of participating in this informal way and Roots mooted the idea of regular Community Conversations being something that participants could be supported to integrate into their calendars regularly, a purposefully informal, compassionate space in which to compare ideas and share opportunities to connect, as equals.

08 We thank you for your support of our programme

Acknowledgements

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