

RELATIONSHIPS AS RESISTANCE

ROOTS

[WWW.ROOTSPROGRAMME.ORG](http://WWW.ROOTSPROGRAMME.ORG)

# Roots Community Conversation: Stoke

3<sup>rd</sup> October 2025



# Our Voices, Our Vision: A Visual Recap

**We use visual minutes – or graphic illustration – to create a record of the Community Conversation. These combine a mixture of pictures, graphics and text, which we feel are often more easily absorbed, appreciated and understood than using words alone.**

**These illustrated minutes were produced post-event from participants' notes and activity responses and are intended to communicate with a wider audience to challenge, inspire and motivate action and, ultimately, change.**

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

# ROOTS

## STOKE CONVERSATION

"Wonderful ARTISTS + BEAUTIFUL HERITAGE"

"IT'S a FRIENDLY + SUPPORTIVE CITY..."



**Creative**

COMMUNITIES

"STOKE has it's own Unique IDENTITY..."

Key ACTIONS for the FUTURE...

### RESILIENT TOWN CENTRE



CULTURAL EXPERIENCES  
DIVERSE RETAIL + SERVICES  
MORE VISIBLE POLICE PATROLS

### SERVICES FOR CHILDREN + YOUNG PEOPLE



CHILDREN'S CENTRES  
MORE NON-TECH RELATED OPPORTUNITIES  
FREE PLACES FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY  
CULTURE OF RESPECT  
NUTRITIONAL FREE MEALS  
ACCESS TO TECH FOR HOMEWORK

### CULTURE + COMMUNITY

REUSE ABANDONED BUILDINGS FOR SOCIAL OR COMMUNITY PURPOSES

CREATE A DIVERSE NEW CULTURE - NO DISCRIMINATION!



"the BRITISH GOVERNMENT CARES ABOUT STOKE..."

PEOPLE KNOW THAT THE COUNCIL HERE LISTEN TO THEM



"COMMITTED, DEDICATED PEOPLE... WANTING + MAKING CHANGE..."



WITH the Culture + HERITAGE, Everyone HAS a STORY TO TELL...



SCRAP

REIMAGINE



TRANSPORT + INFRASTRUCTURE  
CYCLE PATHS, BUSES, TRAMS, RAIL SERVICE  
REINVOIGORATE CANALS, BETTER PAVEMENTS, LINKS TO LEEK, NEWCASTLE + STOKE



SAFER + BETTER TOWN CENTRE - SPACES -



GEOTHERMAL + SUSTAINABLE ENERGY



NEGATIVE STIGMA OF STOKE



FLYTIPTING



PEOPLE WORKING IN PUBLIC SERVICES that DON'T WANT to BE THERE...



MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING -



COMMUNITY / YOUTH GROUPS + OFFERINGS



AFFORDABLE RATES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES / HIGH STREET



ART + CULTURE SUPPORT

EMPTY BUILDINGS

HOMELESSNESS + BEGGING



BIG WAGES FOR COUNCIL + MULTIPLE JOBS FOR COUNCILLORS



BAD PARKING + PUBLIC TRANSPORT



OPEN DRUG USE + DEALING

KEEP



HERITAGE + CULTURAL ASSETS  
LEMMY STATUE!



POTTERY CULTURE



COMMUNITY SPIRIT, HUBS + MEALS



VIBRANT THIRD SECTOR



FRIENDLY PEOPLE



CHURCHES, MUSEUMS, PUBLIC PARKS



ASHA



YMCA



**In the UK, encouraging informal conversation among local people is vital for stronger, healthier communities.**

**Community Cohesion:** Informal connections build understanding and trust across diverse groups, helping reduce tensions and promote inclusivity.

**Well-being:** Everyday social contact offers emotional support, eases loneliness, and improves mental health – a simple yet powerful public health measure.

**Social Capital:** Informal networks provide practical support – from sharing job leads to organising local events – improving life for individuals and neighbourhoods alike.

**Civic Engagement:** When people feel connected, they're more likely to volunteer, take part in local projects, and help shape community decisions.

**Economic Impact:** Local networks strengthen small businesses and encourage people to shop locally, keeping money in the community.

**Safety and Resilience:** Close-knit areas tend to have lower crime and recover faster from challenges, thanks to trust and mutual support.

**Cultural Exchange:** Informal connections help newcomers feel welcome and enrich community life through shared stories and traditions.

**Encouraging everyday connection across the UK can create more compassionate, resilient and vibrant communities for everyone.**



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# 01



# Introduction

**The Roots Programme CIC is a small but mighty grassroots organisation dedicated to bringing people together across differences. Through dialogue – not debate – we create spaces where people with different lived experiences in the UK can connect, share perspectives, and explore solutions that benefit the whole community.**

In our Roots Community Conversations, participants discuss local challenges from multiple viewpoints, identify common ground, and put forward their own ideas for change. These informal forums are especially valuable for those who may not have time to volunteer or join official groups—but still have important insights to share.

At a time of rising division – from the unequal impacts of the cost of living crisis, to the legacy of Covid-19, to the polarising effects of Brexit and world conflicts – it's more urgent than ever to make space for calm, compassionate conversations that move us forward together.

We believe that community members are the true experts on the places they live. Instead of arguing online or feeling excluded from local decisions, people need accessible ways to be heard and respected – outside of formal processes. Roots doesn't believe it's enough to involve communities only when decisions are already being made. We want local voices to be heard regularly – through grassroots-led conversations where residents can speak freely and be treated as trusted advisors by those in power. We offer simple tools and structures for residents to host ongoing local dialogues– run by the community, for the community. We invite local authorities to recognise and support these conversations as a valuable part of civic life.

Founded by Ruth Ibegbuna, Roots runs national projects to amplify underrepresented voices and strengthen communities. Our Conversations are one way people can influence the future of their neighbourhoods– on their own terms.

**If you'd like to bring Community Conversations to your area  
or learn more, contact [clare@rootsprogramme.org](mailto:clare@rootsprogramme.org)**

# 02 The Conversation

## Stoke chats



### Why Stoke for this Community Conversation?

Stoke, like many post-industrial cities, contains a tension between renewal, heritage and deprivation. While often stigmatised from within and outside, it is also a city of creativity, community resilience, and deep cultural heritage. Participants shared pride in the friendliness of local people, green spaces, culture, and community spirit, while acknowledging the long-term challenges of addiction, poverty, and disconnection.

The city is often unfairly stereotyped as “run down” or “stuck in the past.” By strengthening community ties, residents can collectively challenge these external perceptions and promote a truer story, one of Stoke’s creativity, kindness, and working-class ingenuity. Cohesion gives Stoke the confidence to speak for itself. This Community Conversation was an opportunity for locals to speak candidly, generate ideas for change, and imagine a more hopeful and connected Stoke.

### People who feel part of their community say the benefits include:

Having an opportunity to meet people (45%);

Improving their wellbeing (43%)

Having a greater sense of pride (40%)

Having a positive impact on their local area (36%).

National Lottery Community Research Index – a survey of over 8,000 UK adults designed to find out people’s priorities and aspirations for their local community.

# 03 The Conversation



## **We asked, you answered...**

### **What do you think people who have never been here may think Stoke is like?**

Participants felt that outsiders often see Stoke as old, industrial, and struggling. Common perceptions included that it is 'not a city for young people,' 'run down,' 'cheap,' and 'stuck in the past.' Others noted that people might think of Stoke as a place with addiction issues or poverty, or not know where it is—somewhere between Manchester and Birmingham.

However, many recognised that people might associate it with pottery, culture, and history, or see it as affordable and friendly. While the images in the media may often be bleak, there was a strong desire to change that narrative and celebrate Stoke's true strengths.

### **What are Stoke's real shining qualities?**

Participants described Stoke as friendly, creative, and affordable. The people were repeatedly mentioned as its biggest asset. The city's green spaces, canals, and local food, such as traditional oatcakes and Wright's Pies, were celebrated, along with cultural icons like Lemmy, whose statue was unveiled this year, Robbie Williams, alongside heritage landmarks, and nearby attractions like Alton Towers. There was deep pride in its sports clubs, artistic communities, and the supportive, down-to-earth nature of its residents.

### **What gives people hope for the future of Stoke?**

Many residents spoke with optimism about the energy of young people and the strength of community-led regeneration. Projects like the Longton Pig Walk Parade, local art communities, and well-attended community meals were cited as hopeful signs of progress. People praised the city's cultural heritage, community cohesion, and the dedication of residents and social and voluntary organisations working together for change.

# 04 The Conversation



## Community Views on Identity and Change

While many felt that Stoke's people are open to change, there was frustration with the council's perceived lack of responsiveness. Some said Stoke has a unique identity rooted in the Potteries, while others felt that identity has been lost or is 'out of date.' Participants expressed strong feelings that the British Government has neglected Stoke, with little investment and limited consultation. There was a shared sense that while people want to be heard, local and national systems are not listening, and national systems are not interested when local elected officials try to engage with them on Stoke's behalf.

Some participants commented on the disproportionate number of asylum seekers that are settled in Stoke under the government's dispersal scheme – residents blame goes to the private contractors looking for cheap accommodation. These comments were not in any way discriminatory. Still, they argued that subsequent pressures on services, competition between local authorities and contractors on behalf of the dispersal authorities for accommodation, and the lack of solutions in sight were worsening tensions and conditions for the whole community.

**However, there was a shared concern: support is often reactive rather than preventative.**

The community called for:

- Deeper and more sustained council/community engagement
- Face-to-face engagement – meeting people where they are
- Bringing together young people and their adults to build mutual respect.

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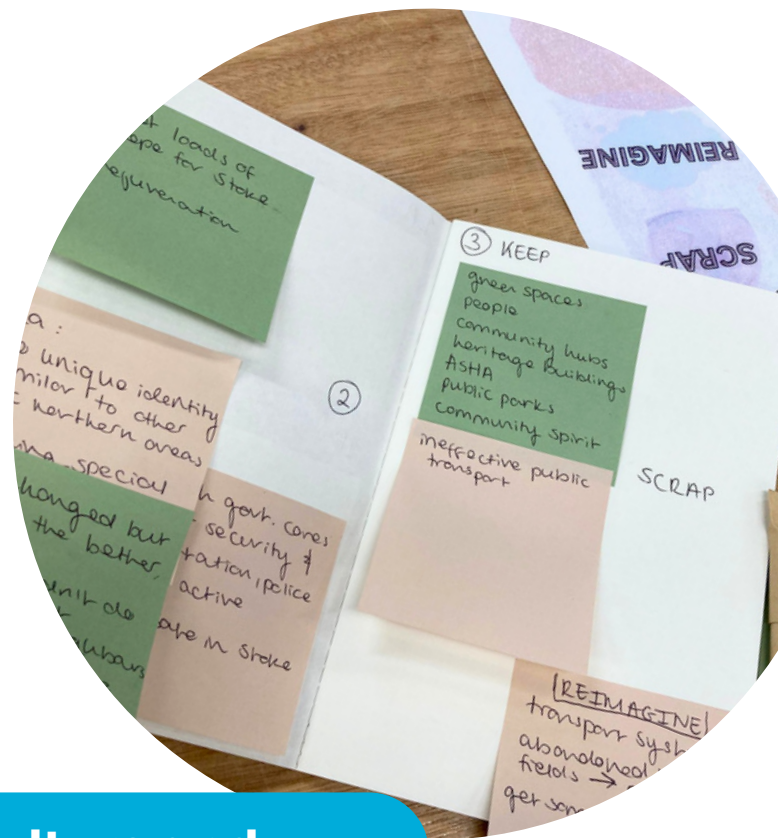


# 05 Keep, Scrap, Reimagine

This session sparked passionate responses. The playful format encouraged people to think creatively and constructively about their community.

## KEEP

- Lemmy statue
- Heritage and cultural assets
- Potteries and tourism
- Pottery kilns
- Oatcakes
- Churches
- Music, theatre, and the arts
- Vibrant third sector
- Friendly people
- Museums
- Community meals
- Community hubs
- ASHA
- Public parks
- YMCA
- Community spirit

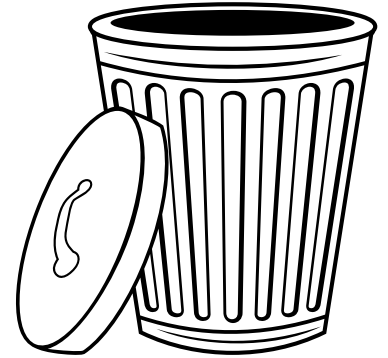


“With the culture and history, everyone here has a story.”

# 06 Keep, Scrap, Reimagine

## SCRAP

- Empty buildings;
- Bail hostels in the community
- Open drug dealing
- People aggressively begging
- Homelessness
- Councillors with multiple jobs
- High council wages
- Negative stigma
- Bad parking along narrow streets
- Nostalgia holding us back
- Ineffective public transport
- Fly-tipping
- The rise in monkey dust use
- Lack of pride in the city centre
- Discrimination – we need to work towards co-living together



“

**The ‘city centre’ doesn’t live up to expectations. Go back to six towns. Call it Hanley!**

”

# 07 Keep, Scrap, Reimagine

## REIMAGINE

- Transport – better bus routes, cycle paths, and even trams
- Reimagine Etruscan Square
- Reinvigorate canals
- Reuse old freight lines
- Connect Stoke with Leek and Newcastle
- Develop sustainable energy solutions
- Recreate youth clubs
- Truly affordable housing and social housing in empty buildings
- Safer Hanley city centre
- More nightlife and culture
- Support for small businesses
- Public theatre at Berryhill Fields
- Street art
- Community and churches working together.
- Ensure the pavements are fit to walk on



“

**Rebuild the  
community  
(brick by brick)  
and give them  
ownership**

”

# 08 Actions

## Community Priorities for a More Connected, Inclusive, and Vibrant Stoke.



Participants proposed both practical and visionary actions to make Stoke more connected, fair, and hopeful. Many ideas focused on reusing existing spaces, supporting young people, and ensuring that local voices are heard in decision-making.

### Resilience, Respect, Support and Empowerment

- Strengthen the resilience of the town centre.
- **Assemble and self-lead more conversations like this!**
- Create a centre that offers cultural experiences, offers rates that encourage diverse retail, and includes essential services.
- Free places for children to play, and bring back Children's Centres.
- Reuse abandoned buildings for community or social purposes.
- Foster a diverse new culture with no discrimination.
- **Develop non-tech, community opportunities for young people.**
- Promote a culture of respect and safety among youth.
- Ensure all families have access to digital tools for education.
- Provide free, nutritional meals for children.
- Increase visible police patrols and community safety measures.
- **Get more people along to the community meal.**

“

**There are committed and dedicated people here wanting, and making, change.**

”

# 09 We thank you for your support of our programme!



## Acknowledgements

Thanks to:

### Our **participants and contributors**

Our colleagues, Penny, Lynne and Cath from **All The Small Things CIC** for being **engaged, active partners and co-facilitators** and for everything they already do in support of their community

Ruth Ibegbuna for the **concept**

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RELATIONSHIPS AS RESISTANCE



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