

WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD? RESEARCH NOTES

From Wikipedia:

A **neighbourhood** is a geographically localised community within a larger city, town, suburb or rural area. Neighbourhoods are often social communities with considerable face-to-face interaction among members. Researchers have not agreed on an exact definition, but the following may serve as a starting point: "Neighbourhood is generally defined spatially as a specific geographic area and functionally as a set of social networks. Neighbourhoods, then, are the spatial units in which face-to-face social interactions occur—the personal settings and situations where residents seek to realise common values, socialise youth, and maintain effective social control." (Schuck, Amie and Dennis Rosenbuam 2006 "Promoting Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods: What Research Tells Us about Intervention." The Aspen Institute)

Neighbourhoods have several advantages as areas for policy analysis as well as an arena for social action:

1. Neighbourhoods are common, and perhaps close to universal, since most people in urbanised areas would probably consider themselves to be living in one.
2. Neighbourhoods are convenient, and always accessible, since you are already in your neighbourhood when you walk out your door.
3. Successful neighbourhood action frequently requires little specialised technical skill, and often little or no money. Action may call for an investment of time, but material costs are often low.
4. With neighbourhood action, compared to activity on larger scales, results are more likely to be visible and quickly forthcoming. The streets are cleaner; the crosswalk is painted; the trees are planted; the festival draws a crowd.
5. Visible and swift results are indicators of success; and since success is reinforcing, the probability of subsequent neighbourhood action is increased.
6. Because neighbourhood action usually involves others, such actions create or strengthen connections and relationships with other neighbours, leading in turn to a variety of potentially positive effects, often hard to predict.
7. Over and above these community advantages, neighbourhood activity may simply be enjoyable and fun for those taking part; and can often tighten security for those partaking in neighbourhood watch communities.

But in addition to these benefits, considerable research indicates that strong and cohesive neighbourhoods and communities are linked—quite possibly causally linked—to decreases in crime, better outcomes for children, and improved physical and mental health. The social support that a strong neighbourhood may provide can serve as a buffer against various forms of adversity.

In his work "Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes", Robert Ellickson studies various interactions between members of neighbourhoods and communities to show how societal norms create order within a small group of people. He argues that, in a small community or neighbourhood, many rules and disputes can be settled without a central governing body simply by the interactions within these communities (Ellickson, Robert (1994). *Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes*)

An excellent overview from the Young Foundation:

<https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/How-can-neighbourhoods-be-understood-and-defined-August-2010.pdf>

A good academic overview:

http://www.infed.org/community/neighbourhoods_and_regeneration.htm

From these few references, it seems that discussion of 'Neighbourhood Well Being' gravitates around local empowerment and adequacy of investment, but that there is a clear physical environmental link too. Whilst Neighbourhood Planning is in itself a form of local empowerment, it can also facilitate the delivery of some of the key elements of good neighbourhoods: access to services and facilities, a physical structure that promotes neighbourliness, ease of maintenance, community safety, and good design.

A conceptual statement to guide the NDP policies could therefore be as follows:

Access to Facilities

- ✓ Essential every-day facilities and services (eg Shop, café, post-box) within 5 to 10 minutes walking distance
- ✓ Health, educational, financial (ATM) and well-being facilities accessible on foot/bike or short bus trip.
- ✓ Formal gathering places such as community halls within 20 minutes walking distance
- ✓ Cycle routes and parking spaces
- ✓ Clear signage
- ✓ Disabled Parking spaces
- ✓ Adequate disabled access

Environment

- ✓ Informal gathering and play spaces within the public realm
- ✓ Small open performance spaces
- ✓ Public wifi
- ✓ Seating
- ✓ Trees and planting
- ✓ Urban allotment opportunities
- ✓ Simple recycling facilities

Maintenance and Cleansing

- ✓ Well maintained buildings and street scene furniture
- ✓ Clean and visible playspaces
- ✓ Excellent street cleansing
- ✓ Minimal dereliction, underutilised and under maintained spaces and places
- ✓ Good air quality

Community Safety

- ✓ ' Design out crime' - good visibility, no isolated spaces,
- ✓ Balance activities which may be crime generators such as bars, night time uses, restaurants and entertainment venues in terms of scale, size and local context
- ✓ CCTV as necessary,
- ✓ Well defined and purposeful open spaces.

Design

- ✓ Human Scale – walkable, eye-level, tactile, pleasant smelling, quiet.
- ✓ Distinctive and unified design that gives a 'sense of place'
- ✓ Use of colour and texture to give definition
- ✓ Respecting scale, height, volume, site coverage and distance from and effect upon, adjacent buildings;
- ✓ Equality Act 2010 (DDA) compliant
- ✓ Community Spirit
- ✓ Spaces that support good 'Social Capital' - networks that people are involved in and engaged with others in informal, social activities; membership of groups and associations

