

# THE HAULGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

## Involving the difficult to engage – research project in the Haulgh

2006

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The following report is an account of research activity undertaken on behalf of the Haulgh Community Partnership. The focus of the research was to consult with residents in the Haulgh living in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) or similar accommodation – that is rented accommodation that is either privately owned or which have social landlords.

The aim of the project was to effectively consult with this traditionally “hard to engage” population on issues of community safety, local resources & amenities in the Haulgh, in Bolton. In addition, to also assess their perceptions of the role, function and future direction of the Haulgh Community Partnership (HCP), in order to inform the 2006-2009 HCP Business Plan.

The Seedley & Langworthy Trust (SALT) undertook this research project on behalf of the HCP through their Research & Development Consultancy, Social Research & Development (SRD), employing 2 local researchers from within the local area. The researchers conducted a series of face to face interviews with people living locally in HMOs and similar accommodation. The following report is an account of the process undertaken and highlights the resultant key findings and messages from the project.

### 1.1 Purpose of Research

Identified within the research brief for this research project was a need to: - (see Appendix 1)

- Consult with the houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) population in the Haulgh on key community issues
- To gain an insight into their perceptions, experiences & attitudes concerning living in HMOs or similar accommodation
- To assess and indicate their current and potential future involvement in the work of the HCP and community-related activity

### 1.2 Context of Research

The Haulgh represents an area of economic, social and cultural diversity in terms of its population of around 3000 people and its housing in terms of its 1700 households (**Neighbourhood Statistics website**). About 15% of these residents are single adults living in multiple accommodation (HMOs) or similar rented accommodation provided by the private rented and social housing sectors, and in student accommodation on the campus of the University of Bolton (**The Haulgh Community Partnership – Development Plan 2006/07**).

This particular group have been identified traditionally as being particularly difficult to engage with, often experiencing aspects of economic and social exclusion. A previous community profile and auditing exercise conducted in the area highlighted the importance of acknowledging and understanding the needs of HMO tenants in relation to the provision and delivery of local services (**Bolton Bond Board – Haulgh Community Development Project – 2001**).

This research project therefore was particularly relevant considering the importance of a needs-led approach to community participation and involvement which is currently highlighted by the HCP as one of their key strategic drivers for achieving future sustainability. They've highlighted outreach and consultation work as key delivery services to enable and facilitate effective community engagement and development to happen in the area (**The Haulgh Community Partnership – Development Plan 2006/07**).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Community Questionnaire – Living in the Haulgh**

One of the key instruments devised to attempt to try and capture and give insight into the personal experiences of people living in rented accommodation in the Haulgh or the surrounding area was the community questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The researchers administered this questionnaire through face to face interviews with the participants.

The main themed areas from which people answered questions related to:-

- **Environment & Housing** – quality of the local environment & experiences of living in rented accommodation
- **Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour** – perceptions of community safety & suggestions on how to make the area safer from crime & anti-social behaviour
- **Services** – attitudes towards the provision and accessibility of local community resources & amenities
- **Community** – do you feel integrated or isolated? What improvements could be made to benefit the community & HMO population?

### **2.2 Focus Groups – Discussions at the Haulgh Community Partnership (HCP)**

In addition to the community questionnaire, a series of focus group discussion-style questions were developed to allow opportunity for additional qualitative information

to be gathered and analysed (see Appendix 3). An invitation letter was distributed via landlords to tenants in rented accommodation, inviting them to discuss issues and themes with staff from SRD and the HCP relating to the community questionnaire and the future of the HCP and their potential role in it (see Appendix 4). The discussions at the drop-in surgeries centred around the following themes:-

- **Impressions of living in the Haulgh**
- **Perceptions of “community” in the Haulgh**
- **Awareness of the Haulgh Community Partnership (HCP)**
- **Value of the work of the HCP**
- **Representation of issues concerning living in the Haulgh**
- **Future involvement & engagement with the HCP**

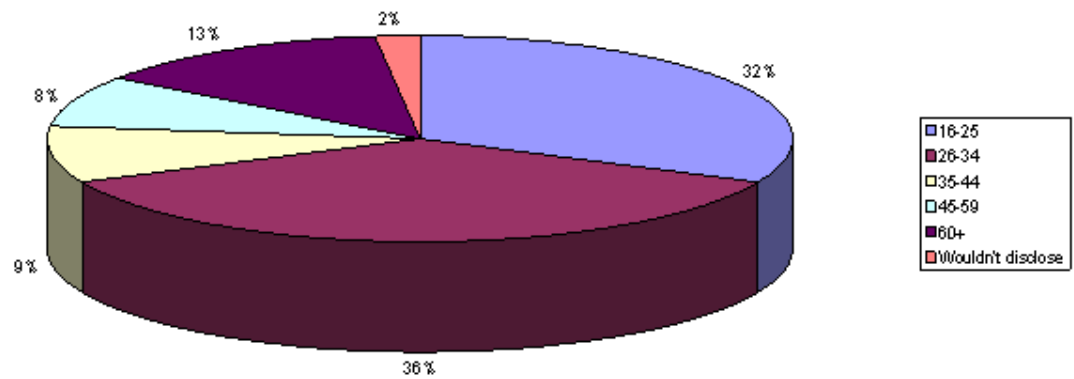
### 3. FINDINGS

A total of 63 people participated in the project through the following methods:-

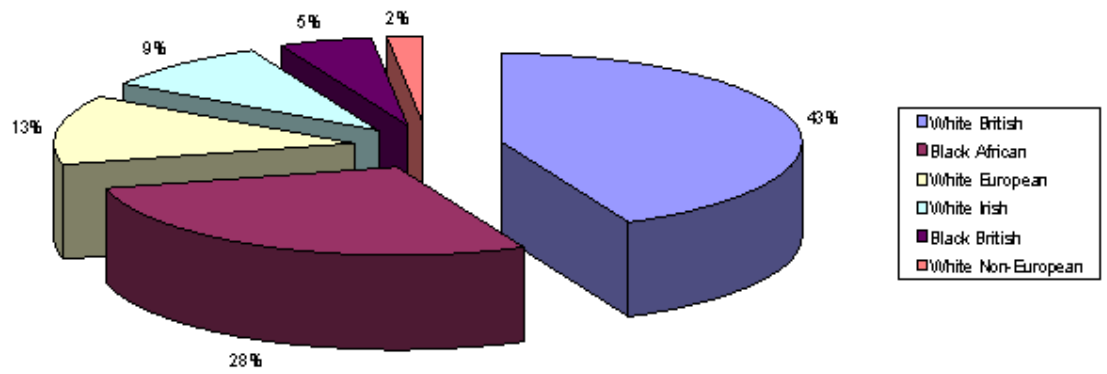
- Community questionnaire (48 people interviewed by 2 local researchers)
- Focus group discussion (15 people attended and participated in discussions at the HCP offices facilitated by staff from the HCP and SRD)

#### 3.1 Profile of participants

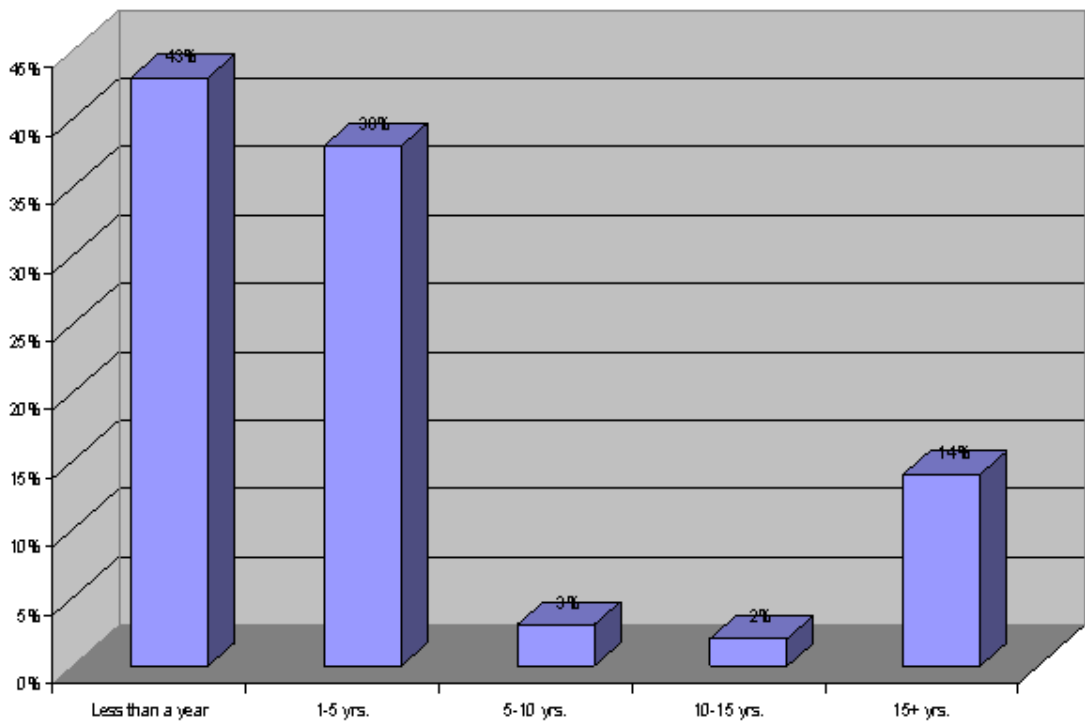
##### Age



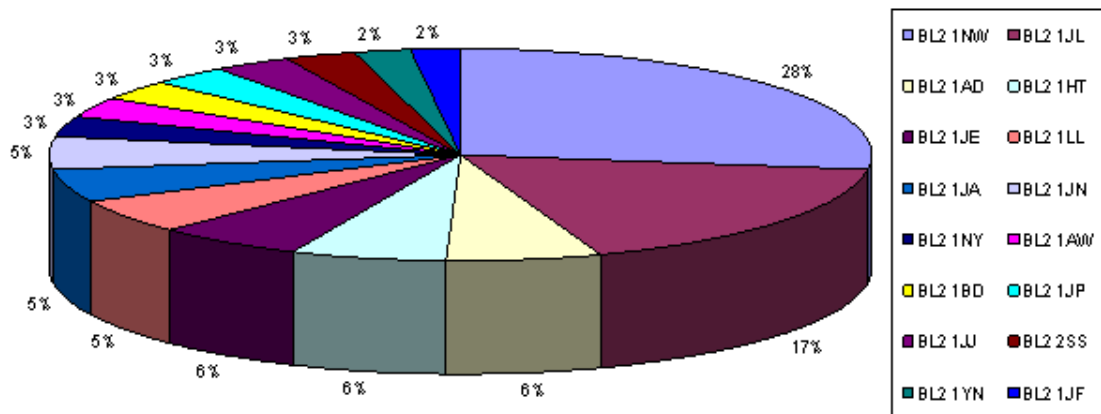
## Ethnicity



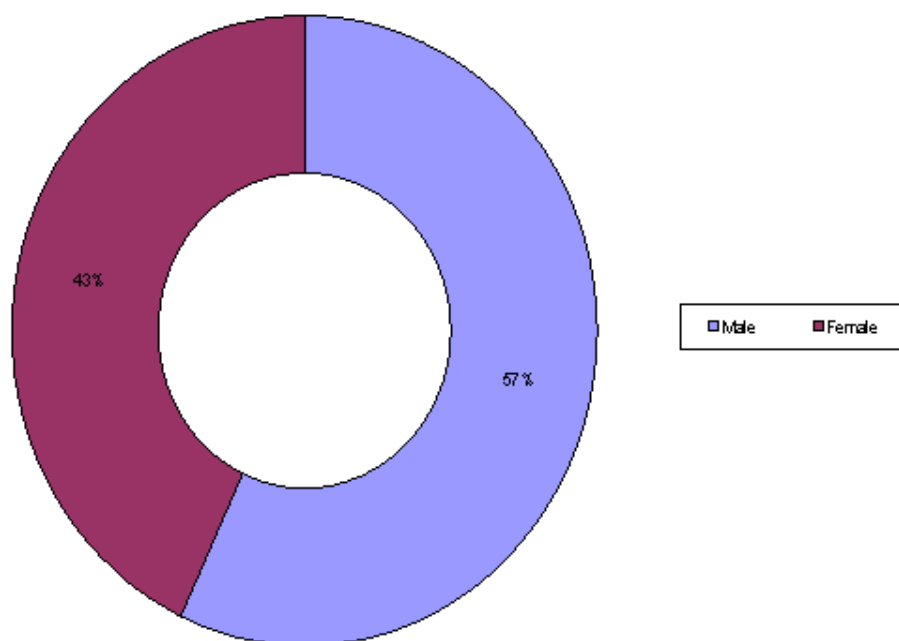
How long have you lived in the Haulgh?



post codes



Gender



### 3.1 Community Questionnaire

The following results are taken from 48 completed and returned questionnaires.

#### 1. Environment & Housing

1.1 90% agreed & 10% disagreed their rented property is in good condition

1.2 94% agreed & 6% disagreed their relationship with their landlord is good

1.3 79% agreed & 21% disagreed the area is clean & well cared for

1.4 88% agreed & 12% disagreed about recommending accommodation to someone else in the Haulgh

1.5 79% agreed & 21% disagreed that people in the Haulgh look after their environment

1.6 What people **like** about the Haulgh

(in particular)

- Location – close to town/city centres
- Environment – clean & attractive (green areas & river)
- Provision & access to local services (shops etc.....)

(Dislike)

- Crime & Anti-social behaviour
- Prostitution

■ **1.7 Best** things about living in a flat:

- Safety/security
- Neighbours/friends
- Cost
- Privacy
- **Worst**
- Noise
- Loneliness
- Limited space

#### 2. Community safety & anti-social behaviour

■ **2.1** 90% agreed & 10% disagreed to feeling safe in the Haulgh

■ **2.2** 56% agreed & 44% disagreed with having felt unsafe or threatened at sometime in the Haulgh

■ **2.3** 73% agreed & 27% disagreed that people respect each other in the Haulgh

■ **2.4** 69% agreed & 31% disagreed that they'd never experienced racial abuse in the Haulgh

- **2.5** 77% agreed & 23% disagreed that drug use creates problems in the Haulgh
- **2.6** 65% agreed & 35% disagreed that the area is well policed & that they have confidence in them
- **2.7** What can be done to make the Haulgh safer from crime & anti-social behaviour?
  - Greater police presence
  - Greater responsibility shown by everyone to report incidents
  - Greater control of crime, drug & prostitution related activity

### **3. Services**

- **3.1** 94% agreed & 6% disagreed that there is good access to health services locally
- **3.2** 71% agreed & 29% disagreed there are enough shops for everyday needs
- **3.3** 94% agreed & 6% either disagreed or didn't know whether the bus service is good
- **3.4** 79% agreed & 21% disagreed that there is good local provision of services (shops etc..)
- **3.5** 40% agreed & 60% disagreed that there is something for all ages in the Haulgh
- **3.6** 77% agreed & 23% disagreed that advice & information is easily accessible

### **4. Community**

- **4.1** 65% agreed & 35% disagreed that it is easy to get to know your neighbours here
- **4.2** 65% agreed & 35% disagreed there is a sense of community in the area
- **4.3** 52% agreed & 48% disagreed it is difficult getting to know people when you live in a flat
- **4.4** 42% agreed & 58% either disagreed or didn't know/answer that many people are lonely & have nowhere to go
- **4.5** What would you like to see improved **to benefit the community in general:**

- More leisure/recreational facilities & activities (parks, play areas.....)
- Greater security – to reduce crime & drug-related activity
- **For people living in flats:**
- Communal/social meeting place
- Quality of accommodation

### **3.3 Focus group discussions**

The findings from the discussions with participants at the drop-in surgeries at the HCP's offices are summarised below:-

- **1. Impressions of living in the Haulgh**
- **Likes:** location, provision & accessibility of local services & familiarity & convenience of the area
- **Dislikes:** rubbish & litter, isolation & crime & anti-social behaviour
- **2. Perceptions of “community” in the Haulgh**
- Limited sense of community
- Fragmented communities
- Decision to disconnect/isolate themselves from the community
- **3. Awareness of the Haulgh Community Partnership (HCP)**
- Generally good awareness of HCP in terms of its location
- Not as clear however its on role & function
- More publicity needed to raise its awareness & convey its function
- **4. Value of the work of the HCP**
- Plays an important role within & for the community
- Definite need for a community-focused organisation within & for the community of the Haulgh
- **5. Representation of issues concerning living in the Haulgh**
- Important to have views represented at a strategic level
- Good to know HCP is there if you need them
- Difficult sometimes feeling like you have a “voice” in rented accommodation
- **6. Future involvement & engagement with the HCP**
- Depends on what expectation/level of commitment is
- Informal relationship more suitable & realistic
- Difficult to combine with current commitments

## 4. DISCUSSION

### **Gaining an insight into perceptions, experiences & attitudes towards living in the Haulgh – assessing the responses from the community questionnaire & focus group discussions**

On the theme of **Environment & Housing** from the community questionnaire, most participants generally appeared satisfied with the quality of their accommodation, considered they had positive relationships with their landlords and would recommend accommodation to someone else in the Haulgh. In relation to environmental issues, people generally thought the area to be clean, well cared for and looked after by its residents.

This view however, contrasted with the findings from the focus group discussions where respondents identified rubbish and litter as being one of the things they disliked about living in the area. The most popular aspects of living in the Haulgh, identified largely through the community questionnaire and reinforced through the focus groups was its **location** – in terms of its proximity to both the town and city centres for participants working and studying, and the provision and accessibility of **local services and amenities**.

The preference towards location being a major positive aspect of life in the Haulgh is revealing, because it appears to reflect the changing and contrasting social and economic characteristics of people now living in rented accommodation in the area compared to previous community profiles. These previous profiles characterised the HMO/rented population as being mainly white, male and unemployed (**Casey, 2001**).

This changing demographic of the rented population in the Haulgh is also further highlighted by a more diverse ethnic composition, where just over half (57%) of the participants were from a “non-white” British background. These changing characteristics of the local tenant living in the Haulgh seem to reflect the transition and improvement the area has undergone through the hard-work and dedication that a number of agencies have shown in bringing more desirable tenants into rented properties in the area.

In relation to **Community safety & anti-social behaviour**, the majority of respondents generally agreed to feeling safe in the Haulgh, but just over half (56%) did state to having felt unsafe or threatened at sometime. This also seemed the case in the discussions at the HCP offices, where participants referred to a change in “atmosphere” and “culture” in the evenings and at week-ends, where the “threat” of personal safety or anti-social behaviour became more of an issue.

As one participant, a student at the nearby university commented:-

“In the day-time you get the feeling the area’s quite friendly, family orientated but in the evenings, (and especially at weekends) the culture changes. It becomes more hostile, less friendly”.

He also mentioned that some of his student friends have been attacked and harassed in the past and that there was a general reluctance amongst him and his friends to visit or pass through the Haulgh at those times.

A female participant also expressed her concerns with regards to the pressures faced by young people in the area:-

“Young people, say 13-18 have such a hard life. The area is dominated by males in their 20’s that ‘run Castle St. and the Haulgh’. To stay in favour with them they do things like never report assault etc.... It’s a vile spider’s web all in all. Most of the young people who aren’t class A drug dealing have been in trouble for something. They just get sucked into it all”.

To what extent this “culture change” is actually real or perceived and reflects the wider community view is difficult to establish - due to the relatively small sample size, but it does seem through these conversations that people as a result, feel more concerned about their own personal safety and less inclined to feel part of the community.

The implications therefore for people living in HMO/rented accommodation, having already identified loneliness through the community questionnaire as a key negative aspect of living in HMOs/flats is that there is then a danger of them feeling even more isolated and less integrated into the community.

This seemed to be the case particularly with participants who were relatively new to the area and who are non-white British. This view however was also echoed by a participant of white British origin who’s lived in the Haulgh for over 20 years and expressed feeling increasingly isolated and vulnerable.

On the topic of **services**, the majority felt there was good access to health and other services locally, (shops etc....) and that advice and information is generally easily accessible. One aspect that people didn’t universally agree on was there being adequate provision of services and facilities, (in particular leisure & recreational) for all age groups in the Haulgh and suggested that more of these services and facilities would improve the area and benefit the community as a whole, in particular, for children and young people. This could also benefit the HMO/rented population who identified through the community questionnaire a desire to have more of a communal/social meeting place.

The HCP could possibly play a future role in delivering some of this work if they decide and are successful in developing a more comprehensive set of centre-based services, as outlined as a possible preferred option in the **Haulgh Community Partnership Development Plan 2006/07**. Offering the HMO/rented population more opportunities to meet and interact with each other and the wider community could provide the stimulus for greater engagement to occur.

With regards to the issues around **community**, there appeared to be a general consensus through the community questionnaire that there is some sense of community in the area. When this theme was explored through the focus group

discussions however, there appeared to be a slightly different, less positive narrative about the perceptions of community in the Haulgh.

One comment that came through the focus group discussions was that people in the Haulgh generally make a conscious decision to disengage and isolate themselves from community activity. A similar view stated that, ‘people seem reluctant to get directly involved’. This hesitance and reluctance to get involved was reflected in part through the discussions on the theme of future involvement and engagement with the HCP (to be discussed shortly). As one participant in the focus groups commented;

“I don’t really feel part of this community. I don’t perceive the Haulgh as my community as I don’t have any family or friends here. I just use it as a base for work”.

Another respondent revealed having a limited sense of awareness of people living in the Haulgh outside his immediate neighbours. This view appears to reflect and also determine people’s perceptions of a sense of community on both a collective and individual level. The surprising finding from this appearing to be that even some of the respondents who’ve lived in the Haulgh for a relatively long period of time (5+ years), feel to a certain extent, isolated and detached from their community.

What the focus group discussions revealed in relation to the HCP was a general awareness, appreciation, need and desire to be represented and to engage with a community-based organisation like the HCP. There was generally a good awareness of the HCP shown in terms of its location but slightly less of an understanding of its role and function. For some of the participants this research project represented their first interaction with the HCP.

It was also suggested through these discussions that more publicity was needed amongst the HMO/rented population to raise awareness and therefore value the role of the HCP. As one respondent commented;

“Not too sure what the HCP is about doesn’t appear to have much visibility”.

The most interesting comment here is this perceived lack of visibility of the HCP within the Haulgh community and its implications for engagement with the HMO/rented population. Although respondents commented on being aware of some of the marketing materials used by the HCP such as the regular newsletter, it would appear that this has limited impact in attracting and then fully engaging them. Most of the current engagement with these participants appears to be based on an informal relationship or association with a member(s) of the HCP.

On the issue of the value of the work of the HCP, the focus groups revealed generally an appreciation of the organisation’s work and an apparent need for a community-focused organisation based within and for the community of the Haulgh. In terms of value, one respondent commented;

“The HCP plays an important role in supporting and advising local people”.

On the subject of need, another respondent commented;

“People are more remote these days – they need connecting and bringing together. That’s why there’s a definite need for a community organisation – the HCP is the only one in the area that does what it does”.

There was however, also a desire expressed by one participant to see the HCP become even more inclusive and representative of the changing “face” of the Haulgh community in particular, for those living in HMO’s/rented accommodation. On the issue of representation, the focus group participants generally showed a willingness to have their views represented possibly, as one respondent suggested, through a tenant’s forum or a tenant representative engaging with the HCP.

Finally, on the issue of future involvement and engagement with the HCP – most participants expressed a certain degree of willingness matched with caution, in terms of becoming more involved with the work of the HCP in the future. The major determining factors for them here appearing to be the level of expectation and commitment required for them to get involved.

One way the HCP could assist in this process, as suggested by the focus group participants, is for the HCP to do more awareness raising activity to encourage people to get more involved with its work but also to outline more clearly their expectations and anticipated levels of commitment.

Although a more informal, “arms-length” involvement and relationship with the HCP appears to be a more preferred and realistic option for respondents currently, it can’t be the only method in which the HCP tries to recruit and engage with the wider Haulgh community in the future. More outreach and development work will no doubt be required in the future to sustain interest and involvement of new and existing members of the HCP.

There does now appear to be some evidence to suggest that the HMO/rented population in the Haulgh do want to engage more effectively with their community and particular, the HCP. The key challenges therefore for the HCP will be how to translate this “arms-length” interest and potential involvement into more community-driven, needs-led engagement. These are key challenges that face many community-based organisations when dealing with hard to engage groups.

## **5. KEY MESSAGES**

The project has allowed an opportunity to give more of an insight towards the HMO/rented population's perceptions, experiences and attitudes towards living in the Haulgh.

The participants consulted in this project appear to reflect the changing demographic of the HMO/rented population in the Haulgh in terms of greater social, economic and ethnic diversity. These changes in the HMO/rented population could provide an ideal opportunity to improve future involvement and engagement with them as there did appear to be some evidence to suggest a willingness on their behalf to want to engage more effectively with their community and particular, the HCP.

Findings from the community questionnaire revealed a general satisfaction with living in the Haulgh in relation to issues around Environment & Housing, Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour, Local Services & Facilities and the Community.

Focus group discussions however revealed some concerns over issues relating to Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour that run the risk of making people in HMOs/flats feel even more isolated and integrated into the community. Participants expressed a desire to have more of a communal/social meeting place to possibly reduce these perceptions of isolation and vulnerability. The HCP could possibly assist in this process in the future if they decide to go forward with developing a more comprehensive set of centre-based services.

In relation to issues concerning the work of the HCP, what the focus group discussions revealed was a general awareness, appreciation, need and desire to be represented and to engage with a community-based organisation like the HCP. A greater range of awareness-raising materials and activities would appear to be needed in the future as although participants commented on being aware of some of the current marketing materials, it would appear that they have limited impact in attracting and then fully engaging them.

More targeted awareness raising activities hosted through and by the HCP might encourage more of the HMO/rented population to get more involved. A more clearly defined role for involvement and engagement such as an ambassador or community champion could allow for a clearer mechanism in which these residents could begin to engage more effectively with their community and translate this "arms-length" interest and potential involvement into more sustained community-driven, needs-led engagement.

## **SOURCES**

The following are acknowledged as key source material for the production of this report:-

- Report to the Haulgh Steering Group : Rionach Casey, Bolton Bond Board, 2001
- The Haulgh Community Partnership – Development Plan – 2006/07
- [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/AreaProfile](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/AreaProfile)

## **Appendix 1 – Research Brief**

### **The Haulgh Community Partnership**

#### **Involving the Difficult to Engage**

Aim: to consult with up to 100 residents in “hard-to-engage” categories on issues of community safety and local resources in The Haulgh, Bolton, to inform the 2006-2009 Business Plan of the Haulgh Community Partnership.

#### **Background**

1. The Haulgh is a distinct neighbourhood on the edge of Bolton Town Centre, with about 1500 households and 3000 plus residents. It is very diverse in its architecture and social composition. It houses one of the oldest buildings in Bolton (Haulgh Hall-pre Tudor), Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian properties, and modern properties from all decades of the Twentieth Century. The Haulgh has long been an area of transition with successive waves of migrants including Ukrainians (post 1945), Irish, and Gujerati Asians. Quite recently there has been the temporary settlement of asylum seekers, which has now given way to the more permanent settlement of refugees (particularly from Africa) and economic migrants from Eastern Europe.
2. The social characteristics of the area are best described by reference to the two super-output areas it falls within. One is ranked in the top 7% of deprived SOAs measured by the Standard Index of Deprivation. The other lies in the top 47%. Within the former are a number of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs-circa 50) which are privately owned, or which have social landlords. The population within these properties largely comprises single males. The private sector has housed some of the Borough’s most difficult to place residents, who have often had a history of anti-social behaviour, and who have contributed in the past to the areas reputation as a distribution centre for Class A drugs, and as a North west centre of prostitution linked to drug use. Also within this SOA lives most of the Haulgh’s Asian population (about 20% plus of the total population).
3. The Haulgh Community Partnership was set up in 2001 as a community response to the worsening situation within the area, with numbers of dilapidated properties, and many public incidents of criminality and anti-social behaviour. Supported particularly by St Vincent’s Housing association, the Partnership attempted to draw attention to the deterioration of the area and the threat it posed to its residents. There was a general lack of commitment from BMBC and GMP until the murder of two prostitutes in late 2001 and summer 2002. There is now a multi agency group looking at key issues in The Haulgh. although it lies within the East Bolton regeneration Area (SRB 6), it has not figured as a priority area being largely private sector housing. There has been some ad hoc alley-gating, and a local Victorian “pocket-park” has been transformed from a “no-go” area to a decent community amenity maintained partly by a Haulgh in Bloom sub group of the Partnership.

4. As part of the Partnership development process consultation is regularly held with the community. In 2005 a focus group of activists, sketched out the key elements of a new three-year plan which was then put to all members (around 100 strong ) and backed up by on-street interviews. The Asian community, both young and old, was consulted in two separate exercises. The one group that was consistently under-represented was the HMO population. It is recognised that this is a difficult to reach and difficult to engage group, but it still represents about 10% of the population.
5. The Partnership would now like to commission a targeted piece of action research, involving this group. It would like to see up to 80 individuals interviewed representing a cross-section of this population, together with a small number of focus groups on specific themes. The questions are largely about community resources and amenities, perceptions of community safety. Copies of previous questionnaires and reports will be made available. This will include a seminal piece of work conducted in the area in 2001 by the Bolton Bond Board, which records the views of many in this target group.

Dave Morgan  
3 February 2006

**Appendix 2 – Community Questionnaire (to insert)**

**Appendix 3 - Copy of Focus Group Questions**

**What is it like living in the Haulgh?**

- **What do you like/dislike?**

**Do you feel a sense of community in the Haulgh?**

- **Do you feel part of the community?**

**Have you heard of the Haulgh Community Partnership?**

- **Can you explain its role/purpose?**

**What value do you place on the work of the HCP?**

**Would you like to have your views on issues concerning living in the Haulgh represented by the HCP?**

**Would you like to become more involved with the work of the HCP?**

- **Why?**
- **How?**

**Any additional comments**

## Appendix 4 – Copy of Resident Invitation Letter to Attend Drop-In Surgeries at HCP

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### SRD CONSULTANCY ON BEHALF OF THE HAULGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (HCP)

Dear Resident

**Help us to help you, and get a £10 Morrison's voucher for your efforts.**

The Haulgh Community Partnership was set up in 2001 to help improve the area, and make it a better and safer place to live. The HCP has run many events and open meetings, but it is always difficult to get the views of residents who live in **flats or bed sits**. The HCP really needs to know what **you** think of the area, and in return SRD Consultancy will give you a £10 shopping voucher.

If you can attend one of our drop-in surgeries on **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May, at 61B Bradford Street**, and give us your views, SRD will give you a £10 shopping voucher. This will take no more than 30 minutes. Let us know if you are coming by filling in the tear-off slip below and returning it to **61B Bradford Street**, or just phone Sally on **01204 481893** between 10am to 12.00 noon.

Thank you for your help.

Martin Halton  
SRD Consultancy



.....  
**Please return to the Haulgh Community Partnership, 61B Bradford Street, Bolton or telephone 01204 481893 between 10.00am and 12.00 noon. I will attend the residents' surgery on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May at the following time (please tick):-**

Time	10am & 12.00	12.00&2.00pm	2.00 & 4.00pm	4.00 & 6.00pm
Tick ✓				

Name:

Post Code:

Tel no.:

