

# Notes to report from interviews 2016

## About the area

The area is characterised by its diversity and the different waves of people moving to the area. It is described as having changed a lot over the last 30 years, “it has changed slowly but it was always in a state of flux.”

It is perceived as a well-functioning area, with people getting along.

Narborough Road is described as a local road with customers mainly coming from the nearby area. However, the road is also one of the main entrance roads to Leicester, so it benefits from people passing through doing their shopping on their way to or from the city. This allows more niche shops on the road.

The road and residential area is described as transient with both a group of long-term traders and residents and a more mobile group. This area is described as being a place where people come to live and when they do better, they tend to move on. Furthermore, there is a high proportion of students. Many residential houses are student accommodation but a high number of these became vacant as De Montfort built student accommodation providing accommodation to a more transient population. People have mixed feelings about the high number of students. For some they create a lot of noise in the evening, for others they are their income.

The residential neighbourhood is described differently by the traders on the street. The neighbourhood is described as “super diverse” with 48 different languages spoken. However, the majority of the residential population is English and a mix of Eastern Europeans<sup>1</sup> compared to the demographic of traders, which is more diverse. The neighbourhood is described as being young with mainly families and students, with the median age lower than 26 (data from 2011 Census data).

One organisation explained the neighbourhood as “buzzing” and an “interesting place to be involved in. But underneath there is a lot of poverty.”

## Getting people together / notes on community

The street has a “light-touch neighbourliness” amongst traders, who do not have a formal network but speak to each other when something happens. One trader noted it as “glimmers of organisation”. When asked to join us for a meeting some commented that they did not think traders would get together and mentioned people “only turn up when there is something pressing” or “when they think something is wrong”. Despite a sense of neighbourliness many also feel that there is no community amongst traders and say they do not have any contact with other traders on the road. However, some feel that it would be beneficial for them to have a closer network and share experiences with other traders on the road. Some mention that there are networks between people within certain communities (e.g. the eastern Europeans, Kurds etc.). But during our interviews we found that the networks are more complex than being within a single community. For example an eastern European supermarket is managed by the Kurdish Iraqis with Polish people working behind the till and the building is owned by Gujarati Hindus.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://westcotes.localstats.co.uk/census-demographics/england/east-midlands/leicester/westcotes>

## Problems faced by traders

Issues that come up often, when speaking to traders are:

**Lack of network between traders makes it difficult to get people together and share information about what is going on.** A stronger network could support a stronger voice for traders addressing issues to the council. But it is difficult to get people together because many cannot leave their shop to go to meetings. Language is furthermore mentioned as a barrier for communication.

**Parking often comes up as an issue in the area but people have mixed opinions about this.** The council has introduced a parking scheme, which restricts parking on the road to an hour and after that payment is required. This is to help residents living in the area to have priority parking on the street. Some think it has been a good thing as the street is less congested. Others, often restaurants, cafes and corner shops, feel it has negatively impacted on their businesses because people tend to come by car and some customers have to park for a longer period than the restricted time period.

**Burglaries are mentioned as a reoccurring issue for traders and many talk about how police do not take any action when they report burglaries.** They experience professional burglars coming in stealing for a couple of 100 pounds, and when they report it with video evidence the police say they do not have resources to deal with it. One commented that better communication between traders with, for example, a phone chain, could warn people about burglaries on the street and function as a sort of neighbourhood watch.

**There are issues with bins and rats.** Bins and the area being untidy came up as a problem when speaking to traders. People both comment on the commercial bins being an eyesore and making it difficult to get around because the only place for them is on the pavement. Others note that the bins are often too full and trash (paper and packaging) fly around on the street. Traders mentioned that there is a problem with rats in the area, which people link to the bins on the streets, and that this causes hygiene issues for many of the shops.

**There is smoke issues caused by barbecues from restaurants.** A few note that sometimes the street is filled with smoke from especially some of the restaurants.

**It is difficult to find legal advice and get support when problems come up.** One trader recently experienced a car driving into his shop front. He noted that it is difficult to find information about insurance and get support from the council to deal with issues like this. He felt that the local MP, Council, or Trade Union (federation for small businesses) do not listen to local traders. Instead he seeks advice from a column in the trade magazine *Convenience Store* and uses the local newspaper to share information.

**There is a fear of what Brexit will mean for traders on the road.** Some fear losing costumers and trade connections due to Britain leaving the EU.

## What has been/is currently being done in the area

There are currently ward meetings that take place every two [or three] months. But the few traders attending these meetings are also residents in the area. They describe how traders in general do not attend ward meetings.

There is an informal traders association run by one of the long-established shop proprietors. The TA mainly consists of a Facebook page. The lead proprietor tries to go into new shops when they open up and get them to connect with the TA Facebook page, but not everyone interested in this or is on Facebook.

In the late 90s the street was part of the renunciation scheme and won the city challenge. This was often mentioned as something that impacted on the street positively, an example of which is the development of the nearby Bede Park.

Traders have previously come together to protest against large chains coming in because they fear it will make business more difficult for local traders. They protested against the big Tesco, which opened up down the road. They managed to “fight off” Safeway and the football club, which wanted to build a new stadium nearby.

The council had funds up for investment in the area. A survey was made to ask people about what they would like changed and people mentioned they wanted a sense of identity and recognition. The textile and shoe industry was the foundation of the area and this was used for decoration on new West-end posters and when the bridge was renovated two-and-a-half years ago. The council further initiated a design guide for local shop fronts with a 50:50 match funding scheme for traders who wanted to refurbish their shop fronts. But not many used this initiative, some explained they had just done their shop front up or they could not afford it. Others were very positive about the scheme. Additionally the council has put up extra lighting on selected spots, because people wanted it to feel more safe and they have added more cycle parking. They found that only 50% of residents living in the area have access to vehicles. Instead people come to the area either by foot or bike.

## Moving forward - what can be done

The points below are from conversations with traders and organisations in the area.

- There is currently a Westcotes Traders Association. However, it is not widely known and at the moment mainly works as a Facebook-page. It could be supported by setting up a website or sharing more information about the Facebook page and how this can be accessed. Collecting contact information could support sharing information and/or create an email or phone chain. For the research we have currently collected contact information from 40 traders, which will be passed on to the Traders Association.
- Noticeboards in the streets or allocated spaces for information sharing could help getting information out to traders and residents. At the moment people use the Library or the Tin Drum Bookshop to get information about what is going on in the area.
- Getting more people to join the Traders Association and set up a more formal structure could take off workload and responsibility from the two who are mainly doing the work at the moment. A stronger traders' network could empower traders voice in political discussions.
- One trader mentioned how sharing experiences and local knowledge would be useful. This could be done through regular meetings, potentially organised by the trader association, where issues at the road can be discussed.
- Set up a weekly or monthly drop-in surgery run voluntarily by traders or the traders association, e.g. for an hour every Friday at the LCiL community centre where people can come around if they have problems or questions, need support, or just want to network. A couple noted that they would like a central place to get legal advice, advice on insurance, licenses (music license, parking, what people are allowed to sell etc.) and more. It was important for some that it was not only an online source but also a place people can call or drop in.
- Understanding different cultures in the area - one trader mentioned that embracing the multicultural community could support a sense of local identity. He suggested “celebrating” the different national and cultural days, with e.g. a special discount for cultural days or activities for special days or traditions, such as a big street festival.

- Produce a flyer/map for where to park such as the one which is being done on Braunstone Gate (by Sustrans)<sup>2</sup>. This could to inform residents, visitors and traders about rules, prices and where to park.
- De Montfort University do work in the local community. They currently do academic advice services at the LCiL but has no link with local traders and businesses. The University run a “Business work”-programme where students volunteer to support local businesses. At the moment this project focuses on the centre of Leicester, but a contact person from the University says the project would be interested in also reaching out to small businesses on Narborough Road.

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<sup>2</sup> This could also be a useful resource: [http://en.parkopedia.co.uk/free/braunstone\\_gate/parking/](http://en.parkopedia.co.uk/free/braunstone_gate/parking/)