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'Boundary critique' community  
psychology and citizen participation.

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## **Abstract**

In an area of an inner city in the UK, population turnover was high, housing was poor, there were many derelict areas, work was in short supply, school absences were high and facilities in the area had declined.. An area analysis, raised significant issues in relation to crime; education; health and well-being; worklessness; physical environment; local services; and community capacity and cohesion. Within the consultation exercise undertaken as part of the Regeneration plan, crime emerged as the most significant concern for residents.

- 72% of residents rated their area as unsafe and 47% think the area is less safe than it was two years ago;
- Although the area comprises approximately 2.7% of the City population, it comprised 8% of burglaries from dwellings, 8.7% of criminal damage and 14.6% of arson;
- Fear of crime is higher than crime itself;
- Levels of reporting of crime were extremely low.

Work was undertaken with local residents' groups and other stakeholders to explore local peoples experiences of crime, fear of crime and intimidation and agency (especially the police) responses to the reporting of crime.

Barriers and supports to acting as a witness at different stages of the process were identified and these were contextualised in a large amount of local regeneration activity, general perceived lack of confidence in the police; some strong community organisations, but also some insularity and isolation; strong perceptions of 'outsiders'; and a relative lack of involvement of young people in finding solutions for the area.

A participative process was used to identify ways in which a 'cycle of negativity' within the area could be broken. Unanticipated blocks to implementation are explored with reference to the theory and practice of *boundary critique*.

## **Introduction**

In community psychology there is wide agreement that the ecological metaphor is a useful one. This encourages us to do two things. Firstly it encourages us to understand the importance of context for understanding behaviour, experience and change and to develop context interventions in order to facilitate change. Secondly it encourages us to understand the complexity of social situations and social and societal contexts as complex systems - multi-level and multi-dimensional systems.

In some of our previous work we have drawn on the work of soft systems and critical systems methodologies to plan, implement and understand change (Kagan et al., 2003; Midgley et al., 2002; Boyd et al., 2001). Critical systems thinking (CST) is, according to Midgley (1996) based around three themes for debate: critical awareness (examining and re-examining assumptions and the conditions that give rise to them), improvement (taking issues of power into account) and methodological pluralism (using a variety of research methods in theoretically coherent ways and becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses).

In terms of critical awareness, the concept of *boundary critique* is useful. Boundary critique (BC) involves

*Maintaining a stance of critical awareness ... considering the different possible boundaries that might be used in analyses, and taking account of their possible consequences for intervention* (Midgley, Munro and Brown, 1998:467)

In this paper we will take a piece of community psychological action research and explore the use of BC as a means of a) improving community involvement in decision making, and b) an aid to understand how decision making occurred. We will explore the utility of BC is helping us make ethical and critical judgements about our community psychological work.

### ***The action research project***

The problem and location of the project

The project was part of a complex and large regeneration scheme in a City in the north of the UK. 'Heartlands' (population 11,231) is an area which

*...rank(s) amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged areas in the country, suffering from a wide range of problems on a scale that has created deep-seated deprivation and instability.* (Heartlands Delivery Plan, 1999)

Population turnover is high, housing is poor, there are many derelict areas, work is in short supply, school absences are high and facilities in the area are declining. An area analysis<sup>i</sup>, raised significant in relation to crime; education; health and well-being; worklessness; physical environment; local services; and community capacity and cohesion. Within the consultation exercise undertaken as part of the New Deal plan, crime emerged as the most significant concern for residents. These can be summarised as follows<sup>ii</sup>:

- 72% of residents rate their area as unsafe and 47% think the area is less safe than it was two years ago;
- The NDC area comprises approximately 2.7% of the City of Manchester population, but comprises 8% of burglaries from dwellings, 8.7% of criminal damage and 14.6% of arson;
- Fear of crime is higher than crime itself;
- There are high levels of crime that impact on the whole community, such as vandalism, breaking into empty properties, abandoning stolen cars;
- 57% of elderly will not walk in the area after dark and 25% of people feel unsafe at home alone after dark;
- 58% rate the support from the police as fairly or very bad;
- 63% identify lack of police presence as a problem.
- There is a general perception that minor crime is tolerated, leading to a decline in the confidence in enforcement and targeting of the area by criminals living within and outside the area.
- Repeat victimisation is high;
- anti-social and neighbour nuisance are major concerns for many residents;

- 40% have suffered from unreasonable noise in or around their home, and 35% have suffered frequently from abusive language;
- teenagers and young people are felt by 77% to be the main cause of problems;
- racial harassment is not thought to be a problem, although 8% of ethnic minority groups have suffered frequently;

The outcomes planned as a result of the regeneration project, in relation to crime, include the following<sup>iii</sup>:

- residents' confidence in their area will be improved so that the fear of crime becomes the exception not the norm;
- by the end of year 10 there will be a 50% decrease in those classing the area as unsafe and less safe than two years ago;
- a culture of rights balanced by responsibilities will prevail so that criminal and anti-social behaviour is recognised as unacceptable and dealt with as such by residents and agencies;
- by the end of year 10 crime will have been reduced to at or below the City average;
- by the end of year 10 the proportion of those wanting to move out of the area will have been reduced to 20%;
- to reduce those who feel they cannot get involved in their community because they ... find the area unwelcoming or suffer from harassment by 30% by year 3 and 50% by year 10;

A Crime, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour task group is one of six task groups to have been established to oversee developments, and be responsible for delivering the outcomes of the NDC. Each group works closely with other strategic developments (such as Health Action Zone, Education Action Zone and so on). The task group includes Police, Probation Services, and Victim Support. Local residents, voluntary and statutory agencies were asked to submit initial project ideas for funding within the NDC, and which identify sources of matched funding<sup>iv</sup>. In addition, the Crime, Community and Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group was informed by the development and production of the City wide Crime and Disorder Strategy, and a local Crime and Disorder strategy has been developed to mirror the City wide one.

In the short term, plans to increase policing were outlined. In the longer term, a number of crime prevention strategies were identified, along with other measures, the approach being to

*“cut across youth issues, social issues and community capacity building to focus on building confidence and empowerment within the community and changing behaviour, rather than policing/prevention. The outcome of reduced crime will reduce the stress level within the community and improve the general level of well-being”<sup>v</sup>*

At the time of the study, the official documents of the regeneration scheme stated:

*“Many residents are too frightened or intimidated to directly support police action. There is a reluctance to give personal details when reporting incidents let alone police statements. Lack of evidence severely hampers police investigations and perpetrators often escape prosecution. In order to support and encourage witnesses to come*

*forward a project is to be considered which would complement the existing victim support scheme and witness support services provided at court. Such a service would provide an independent service to encourage and support members of the community to provide evidence. Much of the work would be carried out by volunteers in a similar way to the victim support service”*

Thus the over-riding concern as far as witnesses of crime were concerned, was to increase confidence and trust sufficient to enable people to report incidents and act as witnesses. Without this, crime statistics would be unable to report current levels of crime and disorder and would be unable to track improvements and crime reduction. The current levels of reported crime were unusually low, due to this reluctance in reporting.

It was in this context that we were asked to undertake a feasibility study to examine if there is a need for a witness support scheme, in Heartlands, and if so, what form it should take.

The overall brief for the feasibility study was to:

examine if need for a community witness support scheme exists in Heartlands. The study will examine how a project could go beyond existing victim support services by encouraging people to come forward and supporting witnesses at the very earliest stage of witnessing acts of crime, nuisance and disorder, as well as providing a support service for witnesses called to attend magistrates court.

#### Aims

- A. provide independent information about the perceived need for a community witness support scheme in Heartlands;
- B. provide information from the perspectives of different stakeholders in the community about how actual and potential witnesses might best be supported in the future prior to and after reporting crime, nuisance and disorder;
- C. to identify relevant outcomes and performance indicators of a potential community witness support scheme

Specifically, the research aimed to:

1. seek the views of local people about the existing supports and barriers to reporting, and coming forward as witnesses to, crime, nuisance and disorder, and identify options for a community witness support scheme;
1. consult with residents, police and relevant officers from NDC and other voluntary and statutory agencies about the relative advantages of different types of community witness support schemes for Heartlands;
1. identify human resources available, and potential partners for the scheme and their possible contribution to a community witness support scheme;
1. identify ways in which a community witness support scheme might encourage greater participation from residents of Heartlands in the reporting of incidents of crime, nuisance and disorder;
1. identify possible outcomes, outputs and performance indicators of a community witness support scheme over time and to identify monitoring and evaluation options.

MMU Team:

Community psychologist with longstanding interest in and involvement in community safety issues and in the operation of the police in deprived areas of the city; a forensic psychology trainee with an interest in concepts of crime and citizen responsibility; a part time research assistant new to the field but with experience of interviewing families living in deprived areas; a volunteer research assistant, inexperienced in qualitative work and in working in deprived areas.

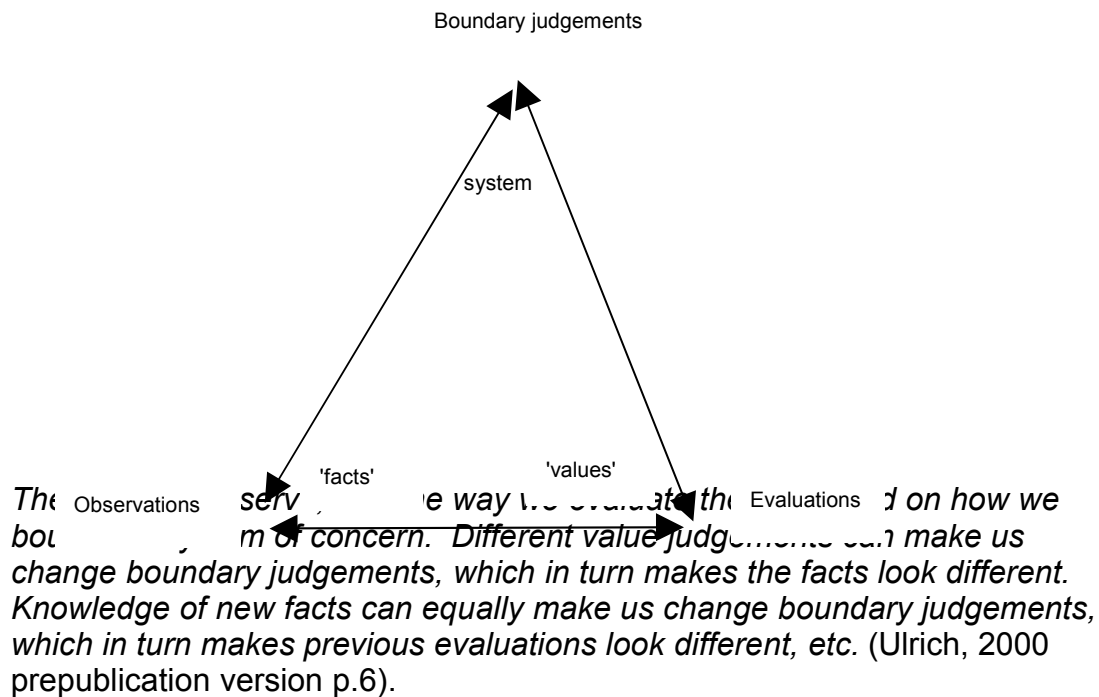
### ***Concept of boundary and boundary critique***

Whilst the theory of BC is used widely in CST three ideas are particularly pertinent here.

Churchman (1970) argues that what is to be included or excluded for any analysis of a situation is a vital consideration. Something that appears to be relevant to overall project improvement (churchman's definition of intervention) given a narrowly defined boundary, may not be seen as relevant at all if the boundaries are pushed out. Thus, he argues, as much information as possible should be 'swept in' to the definition of the intervention.

Ulrich (1983, 2003) extends this argument, and offers a detailed challenge to the idea that the boundaries of any system are given and linked to 'social reality'. Rather, he suggests, they are social or personal constructs that define the limits of knowledge relevant to any particular analysis. From this position, pushing out the boundaries of an analysis, in the context of human systems, also involves pushing the boundaries of who may be considered a decision maker. For Ulrich, boundary judgements and value judgements are intimately linked (see Figure 1). He developed a set of 12 questions (Ulrich, 1983) which can be used heuristically to question what a system currently is and what it ought to be, thus surfacing value judgements underpinning boundary decisions. Importantly in this schema is the notion of legitimacy - who is making what decision and who ought to be.

Figure 1: Interdependence of boundary judgements, observations and evaluations (Ulrich 2000)



Thus, decisions about the setting of boundaries both defines the knowledge considered relevant (as in Churchman) as well as the people who generate that knowledge. In the practice of boundary critique, Ulrich (2000) distinguishes between different settings of BC within an action project:

1. Self -reflective boundary questioning requires us to ask *What are my boundary judgements?*
2. Dialogical boundary questioning requires us to ask *Can we agree on our boundary judgements?*
3. Controversial boundary questioning requires us to ask *Don't you claim too much?*

Midgley (1992), extended the work of Ulrich.

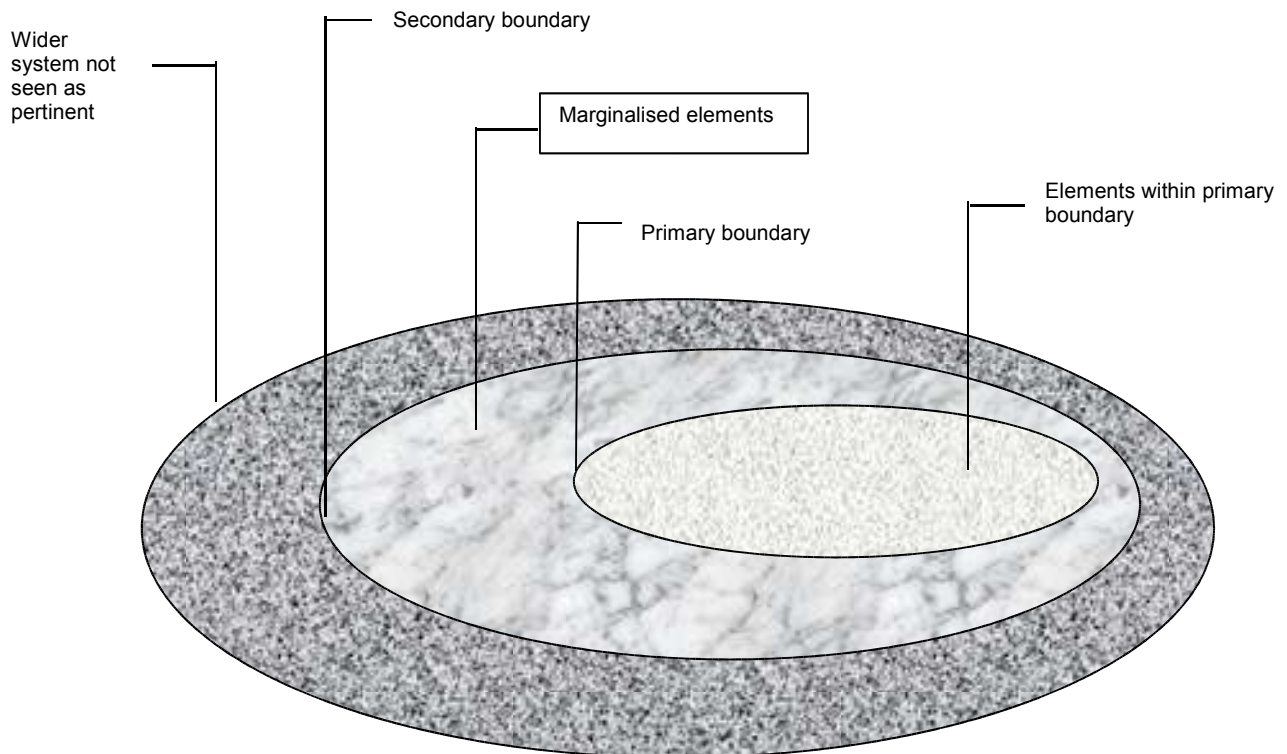
*For both Churchman and Ulrich, the question of what system boundaries are to be used in an analysis is essentially and ethical question because value and boundary judgements are intimately related. Midgley ..(then asks) what happens when there is a conflict between groups of people who have different ethics (values in action) relating to the same issue and then make different boundary judgements? (Midgley, Munro and Brown, 1998: 469)*

Midgley describes how a marginal area exists between a narrow and a wider boundary judgement (see Figure 2). The marginal area contains elements excluded by the narrow (primary) boundary judgement but are included in the wider (secondary) analysis. When two ethical boundary judgements come into conflict, the situation is resolved by the valuing or devaluing of the marginal elements (drawing on anthropological traditions, Midgley calls these sacred - valued or profane - devalued).



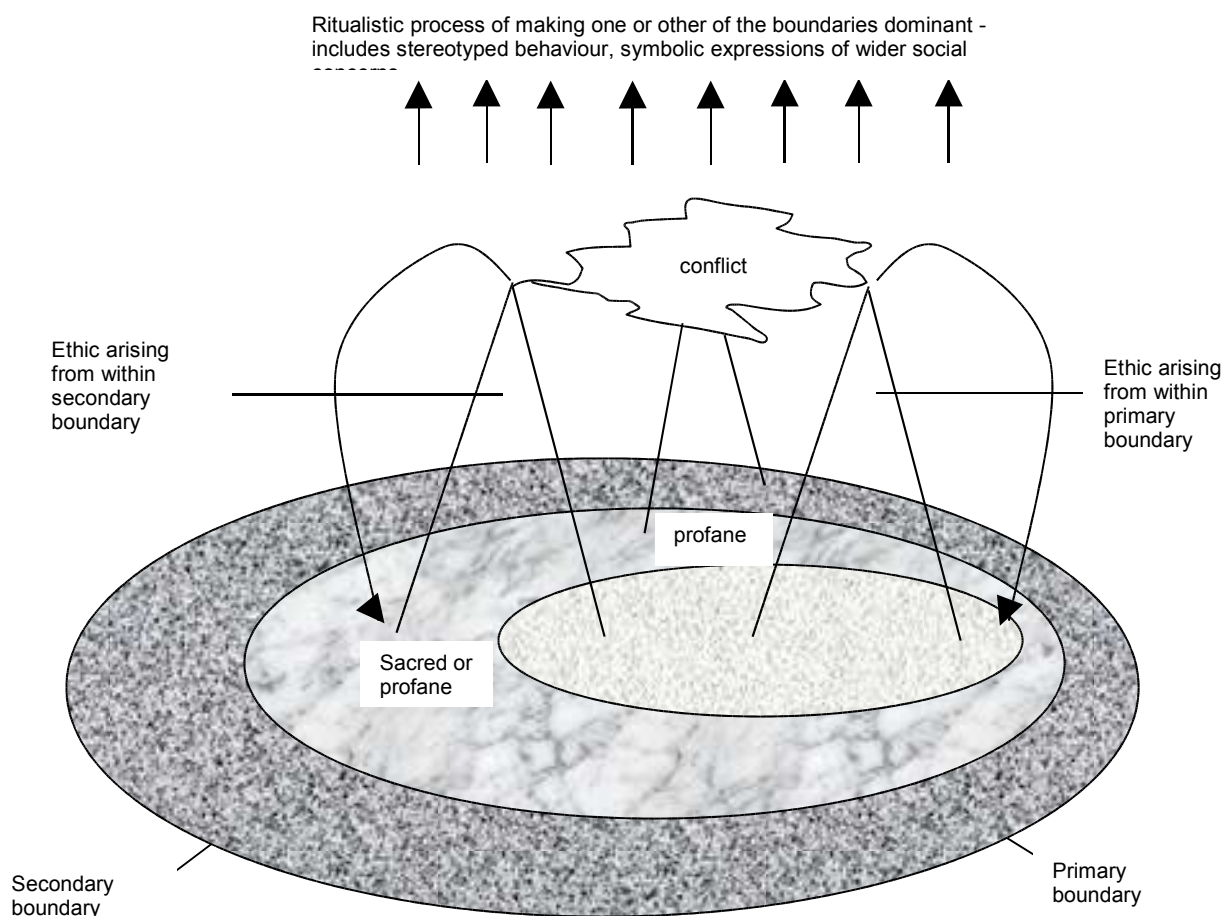
*When marginal elements become prone, the primary boundary and its associated ethic is focused upon and reinforced as the main reference for decision making. People or issues relegated to the margins are disparaged allowing the secondary boundary to be ignored. Conversely when marginal elements are made sacred (and thereby assume a special importance), the secondary boundary and its associated ethic is focused upon and reinforced. (Midgley, Munro and Brown, 1998: 469)*

Figure 2: Marginalisation through the setting of boundaries (after Midgley, Munro and Brown, 1998)



Resolution of boundary disputes, therefore either require compromise and new boundaries agreed (usually through dialogue according to Ulrich) or by one boundary dominating the other. Midgley pursues the anthropological metaphor by suggesting the resolution of boundary disputes will often involve ritualistic - stereotypic behaviour symbolically representing the interests of those who defined the boundary in the first place. Figure 3 shows this process diagrammatically.

**Figure 3 Conflict between boundaries and resolution through ritualistic behaviour (After Midgley et al., 1998)**



So, the relevant aspects of BC for our analysis here are: Concept of boundary; settings for boundary critique; expansion of boundaries; inter-linkage of values and boundary decisions, marginalisation, resolution of boundary conflicts.

We will draw attention to reflective, dialogic and controversial settings of boundary decisions to illustrate the utility of BC for evaluation and intervention.

***Initial stage: agreeing the remit of the project.,***

Prior to our involvement, NDC and the police had undertaken a survey in which people expressed high fear of crime and their vulnerability as witnesses, leading to a reluctance to come forward as a witness. Victim Support ( a national voluntary agency) already provided a witness support service in the Courts and were asked to provide something similar in the community. However, NDC were reluctant to commission a project and instead asked for a further feasibility study.

At this point the major stakeholders were NDC, Police, Victim Support and those residents involved in the network of consultative groups involved in the regeneration project (money is only released to these kinds of regeneration project by the Government on the back of demonstrated consultative mechanisms with local residents). This part of the city had approximately 30

residents' associations identified, which was a very high density compared to other areas. It was unclear whether these were representative groups or not.

Our initial brief was to discuss with these stakeholder groups the need for and type of witness support project. Thus boundary decisions had already been made about who should be involved. There was consensus that there would be no need to trawl more widely for information.

Ethical Dilemma: These groups had all been involved in the initial survey and recommendation to develop a project. If the range of stakeholders involved was not broadened, then the project would be unlikely to be able to come up with anything useful. These groups excluded many other people affected by the crime levels and experiences of acting as witnesses. These included residents not linked to associations (the vast majority in the area), young people and children, people from minority ethnic groups and employers and people working in the area, other projects and agencies operating in the locality (including faith organisations, youth organisations, sports organisations and so on). So, if we were to work with integrity we would have to re-negotiate these boundaries in order to sweep in more people, and so came up with a project design that differed from the initial one to be commissioned, and that would be more complex and take longer - and thus be more expensive.. We considered whether we would go ahead if the boundaries could not be re-negotiated. This involved us asking what the consequences for local people would be if a different team were commissioned to follow the original project brief closely. We decided to keep an open mind and - of course - thought that people would be better off if we undertook the work.

We managed to agree to a broadening of the boundary of those to be involved, as well as a broadening of the methods to be used. We successfully extended the time period by a third but did not manage to procure more resources. So, we ended up with a more complex, slightly longer timescale project to be completed within the same resources.

### Marginalisation

During this process of negotiation, the profane status of some of the stakeholders was emerging. Everyone agreed that workplaces should be involved and that the range of projects and agencies involved should be broadened. There was a high degree of scepticism about involving 'non-active' residents - what would be the point? Thus the views of those residents actively involved in the regeneration process - even if they were not representative or elected, were clearly sacred, and the rest were profane. This view was strongly expressed by the police, weakly expressed by NDS and hardly discernible by VS. However, when it came to youth and children, they were unanimous in their being outside the remit of the study. Scepticism about minority ethnic involvement was expressed by al, as the areas is predominantly white (although with a high population of Irish descent), but no opposition was mounted. We decided to leave negotiation over involving other people other than those initially named in, for example, the police, NDC and VS for late on in the process.

Ethical Dilemma: Ethical decision should we go ahead without involving young people when this is clearly what we should do. We decided that the

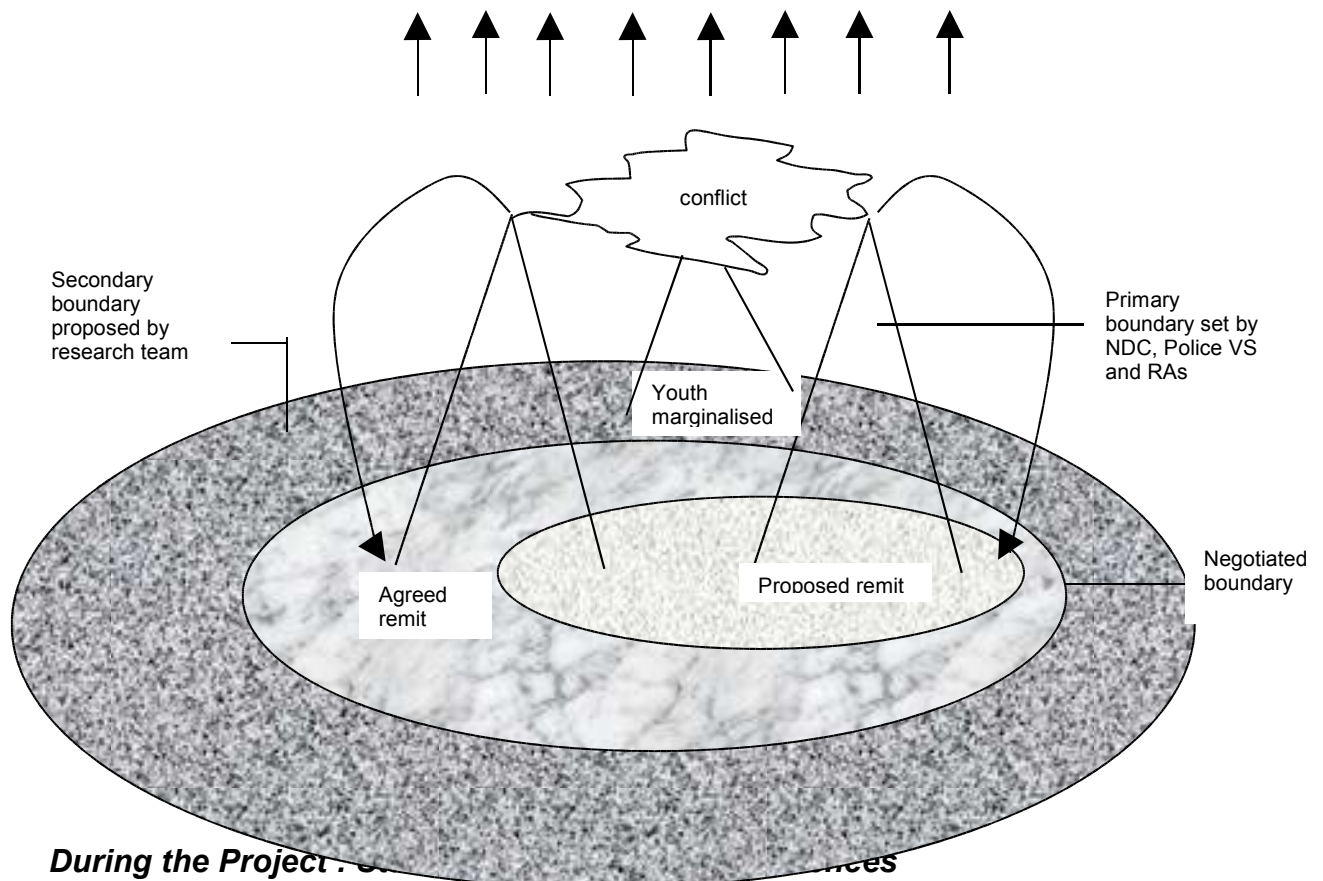
involvement of youth project workers and our own knowledge of young people's issues might be sufficient at this stage to advocate for a youth perspective throughout the project. It quickly became clear to us that there were other potential witness support project providers from outside the area that had a relevant stake in the work. It was agreed to include them in the study, but with a very clear and shared agenda from all concerned which could be summarised as 'in order to collect evidence about what they do so that it can be seen to be inappropriate here'. Even before we started, ritual positioning and posturing was beginning to take place around the potential for conflict. Jokes were made, anecdotes told about the efficacy and intentions of the outsider organisations. We knew nothing about these external organisations, but realised we were beginning to form opinions based on what all the stakeholders were saying. We realised we would need to keep our own boundaries clear if we were not to get caught up in existing agendas and relationships.

**Boundary dispute**

The first major boundary dispute, then, was in terms of decision making over the remit and involvement in the project. We were able, through dialogue (and the passing of time!) to agree new boundaries for the project (see figure 4).

**Figure 4: sweeping in additional stakeholders and broadening the boundaries**

Dialogic resolution of boundary dispute through discussions and negotiation over the scope and remit of the project, raising ethical dilemmas for the research team and giving insights into some of the stereotyped views and rituals being employed.



When we explored the diverse experiences of different stakeholders, a picture emerged of many different barriers to reporting of incidents (see figure 5). These included barriers linked to: personal fear of retribution based on (actual or reported) threats and intimidation; social relationships, particularly family pressure or social isolation; limited knowledge; or negative experiences of action in the past, particularly due to negative police attitudes and behaviours. Most stakeholders gave credence to these factors as being important, although the police and NDC thought many of the stories we were told were more in the way of urban myths than actual experiences. Somewhat surprisingly (to us) all stakeholders agreed about the negative attitudes and responses of the police to local people.

**Figure 5: barriers and supports to acting as a witness.**

<b>SUPPORTS</b>	<b>BARRIERS</b>
<b>Personal:</b>	<b>Personal:</b>
Courage	Fear of retribution
Being Unknown	Threats and Intimidation
	Victimisation
	Being local
	<b>Social:</b>
<b>Social:</b>	Family Pressure
Good Local Networks	Isolation
Community	<b>Understanding:</b>
representatives	Lack of knowledge
	Lack of purpose
<b>Understanding:</b>	<b>Action:</b>
Seriousness of incident	Negative Police attitudes
Education and	Lack of police response
information	Court Procedures
<b>Action:</b>	
Positive police	
response	
Neighbourhood	
Nuisance Team	
Court Witness Support	
Service	
current likelihood of acting	future likelihood of acting as a
as a witness: barriers	witness: supports outweigh barriers
outweigh supports:	

What enables people to act as a witness?

Courage

*I would always report what I saw and would go to court if necessary.*

*I have always been outspoken - some people would say too impulsive. But I would always speak up. I think. I've never really had to, and I do know of people who have been intimidated. I don't think it would affect me.*

Perception of the Seriousness of the Crime

*If someone is seriously injured or hurt then I would report it. You know, things like vandalism or graffiti, I think are too small to report. ... Where people get hurt it's serious 'cos it can happen again. Street signs are replaceable, and graffiti can be painted over, but a person is not replaceable.*

Good local Networks

*Neighbours support each other - small blocks of people look out for each other.*

Community representatives

*...in our community we let one another know that we are there for each other 'cos a lot of the times people do need to talk about what has happened to them, whether they're victims or witnesses. ... The two elderly ladies .. who were robbed at knife point. They are alone and I ... let them know that if they need anything, you know, that they have support, 'cos they need to know that. For them, ...that is a scary thing to go through*

*(Muggings and burglaries were increasing ... we set up a Homewatch.) We set up neighbour nuisance diaries, and basically recorded what was going on at different spots round the estate. ... (one neighbour) was causing a nuisance to the people next door, just by making a noise in the night, basically ... we'd complained to Neighbourhood Nuisance Team about it and she didn't get her tenancy renewed, so she moved out.*

Being Unknown

*When I see that someone is hurting or causing harm, then I would report it, 'cos I don't want that person to get hurt. I think it is easier to do 'cos they don't know who I am if I report it. ...I can call and say what I see outside (my work) and not have to worry about someone having to threaten me or come after me or my family.*

*I don't mind defending people if I don't need to give my name and address, telephone number and things like that. If I've got to give any of these details then it doesn't happen.*

Positive Police Response

*(the police) were good to us. They were more supportive than I thought they would be. I think they understood our position and even though they encouraged us to report it or make a statement they would not look down on us or think it was stupid of me to not reporting this. 'cos they support me in my not wanting to do it. The police officers came round dressed in normal clothes, you know, without uniform to come and check on me and how things were. And that did mean a lot 'cos you think sometimes that well, to the police, you're just a statistic or another person involved in a crime. But they took the time out to look out for me and that meant a lot.*

#### Neighbourhood Nuisance Team

*(the Neighbourhood Nuisance Team worker) that works for our area, ... he's tackled certain issues that have never been tackled by the police, although they've known about it for years. ... I don't know how he's done it, but he has, and I've got a lot of faith in him....I just hope the police are working with him as much as he's working with them. I just hope it's a partnership, and that they consult.*

*The Neighbourhood Nuisance Team is very good and the idea of nipping anti-social behaviour in the bud is a really good one. For example, a kid kicking a ball repeatedly against someone's wall isn't a crime, it's just annoying. The Neighbourhood Nuisance Team deal with this.*

#### Education and Information

*Our Group has been to Amsterdam to see community schemes, especially Neighbourhood Wardens. Based on shopping areas. Seemed to work, but Wardens said their worst problem was dealing with people riding bicycles on pavements! This was organised by Groundwork.*

*I saw (the police actually doing something) on the Pennywell Estate in Sunderland. It's a 1400 council houses in the middle of that estate and they had a run down community centre ... The first thing they did (with SRB funding) was ... put these two policemen in two houses - not the same policemen, but the police were there. They gave out a number to 'contact us and tell us what's happening in your area'. First week they was there they got one call, but that one call, ... they went out and dealt with the issue that that lady had phoned about, they phoned her back and said 'dah-de-dah'. Nobody knew she had phoned, but she knew when she saw action being taken against that family that she was the one that instigated it. She passed it on to a few of her friends and within 18 months they got that whole estate back, except one major drug dealer. ... Boards were coming off and people were moving back in.*

What hinders people from acting as witness?

### Fear of retribution

*If it involved my family I'd not report it. ... if they were in danger 'cos I had witnessed something and they may get hurt or threatened, I'd not report it. Family comes first. If reporting a crime were to put 'em at risk, then I wouldn't think twice about not reporting it.*

### Actual Threats (verbal, physical)

*...they would come round here and throw rocks at my window, but they stopped doing that 'cos they seen that my windows have those bars on them...if I went outside they would be around the corner, they would say things like 'better watch your back' or 'we're gonna get to you, we're gonna burn your house, we're gonna get your boy'. ... They just hang around the house...they've left a dead rabbit at my door. ... They've made us suffer so much.*

*I've gone out to tell the boys who were throwing rocks (at next door) to stop and I would call the police. What did I get for it? They broke my windows the next day. So what can you do? Nothing. I call the police - they can't do anything anyway.*

*If you stand up to individuals (maybe fear of retribution is more imagined than real). But we're talking about these groups, big groups of lads there, or especially, like you'll get the named families, big names, where they kind of all look after each other. And if you speak up against them they will turn up, they will turn up and will give you problems, there's no two ways about it. I've seen it happen so many times.*

*One night I heard trouble on the front ... a lad had urinated through the door ...the door was kicked in. I ran downstairs, phoned the police, then went outside ranting and raving, swearing and whatever. They threatened that if I went to the police I'd 'have it, me family'll get it, and me house'll get it'. ... When the police arrived I wouldn't give a statement because I was too scared. ... The police woman said 'I could go and pick them up now, but they'd be out in the morning, and it's you that's got to live here' - she was honest!*

### Negative Police Attitude

*There were some youths laying by the plant pots I've got on the shed, so I go out and scream at them and (my husband ) got on the phone to the police right away. ... the next few minutes the police turn up, quite sharp really ... and said 'You know, you ought to put some more barbed wire on' and got in his car. ...Didn't even go to see (the boys who were in the next street). They've even said to us 'Why don't you move?'*

### Lack of Police Response

*When I saw the boys puttin' the car on fire, the first thing I did is help the elderly lady out of the car, then I called the police. You know they*



*are about 50 yards from here and it took them 15 minutes to get here. Those boys did it right in front of the police station and still got away. They had come after the lady 'cos she had reported them to the police a week before and they in turn retaliated, to frighten and threaten her to never do it again ... and it worked. Hell, it frightened me! So you call the police but nothing can be done which is very upsetting and it makes you frustrated.*

*Drug related crime, police stay clear of. For example if a user is beaten up by a dealer, then it's their fault for being a user, so the police wont get involved.*

#### Family Pressure

*My husband didn't want me going (for support), he was absolutely against it. He didn't want me to talk about it to anyone. To him, it was done, just let it go. There is no point going over and over it. See he doesn't understand 'cos I have seen these things and been threatened, intimidated. He's at work so he doesn't understand, that's it.*

#### Reliance on other people

*I call the police if it's serious, but there are other people around that will report it, so I don't report it. I was not the only one that was there (when two elderly ladies were robbed) I didn't make the call, someone else...*

#### Lack of Knowledge - Who and Where to report

*I ignore things that go on - for peace's sake. I wouldn't know who to report things like (bullying of daughter) to anyway.*

#### Being Local

*If I wore a uniform and lived in a different area I would probably stand witness to an awful lot. I go home, my home is here, I can't go anywhere.*

*Young people are unlikely to act as witnesses against other people in the group. There are some who are on the fringes of the group - so they possibly would. But lads who are in the group would never report others from the group. It's like an unwritten code. And fear as well, they have to live in the area.*

#### What's the Point?

*(People don't report) 'cos they've got no faith. What's the point when the police don't do anything?(A man) held a woman and her son at knife point, trying to rob them. managed to do a 999 call and the police took three and a half hours - they couldn't find it in the A-Z. So what's the point, They turned round and said 'Waste of time phoning the police'. Could have been dead.*

*I wouldn't consider reporting what I've seen, or confronting anyone - at £4.25 an hour, I'm not going to risk my neck for it!*

*Yesterday, 4 young lads, the eldest was about 15, 16. Now he might have been old enough to drive, but I don't know. And he spun around this corner, parked outside my front door ... back out, skidded out. And I thought, 'well, if I phone the police, what do I say? 'A car's just skidded in me close?''*

*Last week I witnessed a woman getting mugged by two boys and I didn't report it. I went out to scare them off, but I left it up to the lady. If she wanted to, she could have done, but I didn't. You know 'cos in the past I've reported it and nothing's been done, then I don't see the point in doing again. 'Why go through the hassle?' I think.*

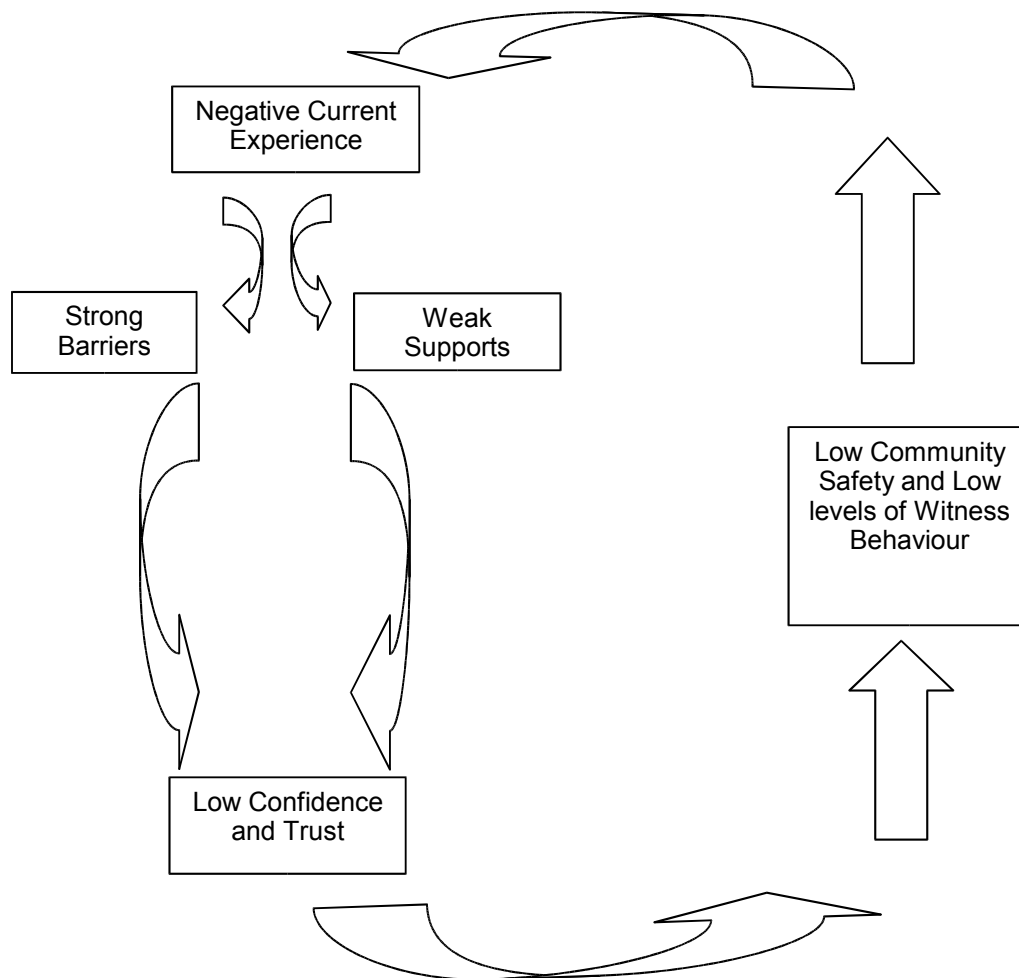
#### Court Procedures

*I was attacked by a guy with a knife, and when I got this Court thing back, they informed that this guy was in Court. I didn't have to go but they gave me his full name and address, and I think my name and address was on there as well. So if he really wanted to he could turn up at my house, you know, and put bricks through window. ... I think there's got to be a big more secrecy. You know, if people are going to stand up in Court, they shouldn't be publishing names and addresses for the perpetrators ... to go around and threaten them.*

*(the) Judicial system constrains people and stops them reporting. Short sentences don't encourage people to report.*

At this stage, there was quite a high degree of consensus about the boundary to the issue. Figure 6 summarises the connection between people's experiences and their feelings of safety and willingness to report crime.

**Figure 6: The initial problem: experience of witnessing crime and of reporting affects confidence and trust in the criminal justice system which influences community safety and witness behaviour which influences experience...**



The context in which people's experiences are based.

Through listening to people and trying to make sense of the different perspectives, or frames through which experiences were being reported, it became clear to us that the wider context of people's lives affected their feelings of safety and willingness to come forward as witnesses. Being caught up in regeneration processes, lack of confidence in the police (and other agencies), and crucially, social identity and the perceptions of in and out-groups, presented both opportunities and threats to improving quality of life for residents. Table 1 summarises the issues raised.

**Table 1: Current Context: Opportunities and threats for the prospects of a witness support scheme**

Aspect of the Context	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Regeneration Policy and Practice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local involvement</li> <li>Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enthusiasm and commitment</li> <li>strong ties in some areas</li> <li>consultation over developments</li> <li>work with private landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>some lack of awareness and involvement</li> <li>participation fatigue</li> <li>empty properties</li> <li>attitudes of landlords</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Confidence in the Police</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>some positive changes seen</li> <li>local officers valued</li> <li>channels of communication open</li> <li>awareness of need for positive results</li> <li>awareness of local differences</li> <li>experience of supporting witnesses in court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>negative attitudes throughout the force</li> <li>lack of change in attitudes in mainstream policing</li> <li>priorities not always shared with residents</li> <li>limited vision of collaborative working</li> <li>perceived double standards</li> <li>lack of knowledge and understanding</li> </ul>
<b>Identity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locality</li> <li>Insider-outsider</li> <li>Seriousness of incidents of crime, nuisance and disorder</li> <li>Youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commitment and enthusiasm for change</li> <li>commitment to the locality</li> <li>some awareness of local differences in confidence</li> <li>strong local networks</li> <li>recognition that each group of residents has its own problems that need to be worked through</li> <li>diversity of views about impact of incidents</li> <li>crimes against the person drive people to report</li> <li>it is recognised that young people want to participate in local improvements</li> <li>energy and commitment of young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>perception that others are better off</li> <li>some areas particularly sparse in terms of facilities</li> <li>some people do not have strong ties</li> <li>reputations spread and fuel negative attitudes</li> <li>some people have ceased to notice incidents</li> <li>the impact of apparently less serious incidents is unknown</li> <li>youth seen as a problem not a solution</li> <li>little inter-generational work</li> <li>limited facilities</li> </ul>

## Regeneration

*I'm losing heart with this regeneration work. I've knocked on so many doors to try and get people involved. There's a general lack of interest and of visible results. Everyone has a strategy for this and a strategy for that, and in the meantime we are going downhill.*

*Lots of community groups are appearing now that there is money to be spent. ... Started off with 10 residents' groups, now have 32, but how many of the 32 will still be here when the Regenerations go away? I mean they're jumping on the bandwagon now, and getting hanging baskets - and I mean hanging baskets, for God's sake, you know what I mean, the streets are bloody falling apart underneath their feet and they've got hanging baskets!*

*Residents are being consulted much more now - but we need to get away from the term 'consulted' - local people need to be involved, not just consulted.*

#### Housing Policies

*Near us was a derelict warehouse. The police were called lots of times. The local police told us we must report everything we see. So at the weekend we rang up and reported lads in there making lots of noise. They said 'Are you seriously reporting a building? Don't be silly, I've got better things to do than listen to you reporting a building.' That night the warehouse was burnt down, the fire brigade came and the building was said to be unsafe.*

*There's one house he (private landlord) owns ... and its got planning permission for 2 flats. (When he was refused planning permission for multiple occupancy) he's really annoyed ... and he's losing money after he's bought the property. And to wind up (a local resident) he's saying 'I'm opening it up, I'm putting 10 in each flat, and if you don't like it, sell your property. ... (the resident) went down to the planning at the Town Hall and they said 'Well, he owns the property. If he wants to put large families in one flat and another large family in another one, then that's his choice.' (The resident said) 'Well I've got a good mind to burn the house down, with me in it, 'cos I can't take any more'. And the reaction from the planning department is 'You might be headlines today, but you're only tomorrow's chip paper, so it don't matter what you do'.*

#### Lack of Confidence in the Police

*The thing is, with such a low police presence, there's no confidence for anyone to come forward and say 'I've seen this' or 'I've seen that' 'cos there's no support behind them and they know that there can be retaliation on them. And it's very, very frightening....they say...*

*'What do you want me to do about it?'; 'What do you expect if you live round here, why don't you move out?'. There is a common view that the police view the area as consisting of either criminals or victims of crime, and that it is thus less deserving of the same kind of service as other areas.*

*Police say: 'We try not to do what other agencies do: working with young people is the job of the Youth Service'. This is not usually what is meant by inter-disciplinary or partnership approaches.*

#### The Perception that other districts are better off

*I got accused the other day of, the words were 'you've shifted all your shit out of Greenwood and it's in Copvale and Harley now'. So I went and made enquiries to see if there had been movement of people from our area which would account for what they were saying. ...one family had moved from the whole of Greenwood ... and they wanted to go and live near relations.*

*It feels like Greenwood and Copvale have lots of plans in the pipeline, but there is nothing for Harley. ... We need a community centre ... the*

*Council has given a house, a... a small terraced house to be our community house. feels like we're being treated as second class citizens. There is no library. Harley market is a joke - a dirty, filthy dilapidated hole. Without a car people are stuck and have to shop in Kwik Save or die!*

#### Perception of 'outsiders'

*They'll go to (another member of the residents' association) not necessarily me. I've only been here 6 years. I'm a new-comer. They trust (her), she was born and bred here.*

*Last week, for instance. A group of women with Irish accents all come in together and scatter round the shop. I can't watch them all at once. ... a young girl (was) putting stuff over her head into an open rucksack - just filling it up. ... It's worse when travellers that still travel visit those who're settled. Then everyone keeps out of the way.*

#### Perceptions of perpetrators of crime, nuisance and disorder.

*Problems are caused by people, mostly 'out of their faces' and with no respect for anyone. ... It's street robbery and acts of violence (mostly late at night). ... It's not gang stuff - if it were it would be easy to deal with. It's just scum bags working on their own, thieving all over.*

*Gangs are a problem and lead to real fear. Stories also cause feelings of intimidation - even when people may be harmless - so need to be constantly cautious.*

*I go into that area blinkered, and come out blinkered. I don't want to see anything, I prefer not to see anything. I would only worry about it if I did see it. Like last night with the noise, you know I wouldn't dream of phoning the police, because that to me is an everyday occurrence.*

*I think for example, if someone has stole a car from a showroom that is insured, where nobody has got hurt, apart from the fact that everyone has to pay higher premiums, or if they rob a bank, that doesn't bother me. What does bother me is treating children, old people, people trying to make a living, people trying to survive their lives, you know, average people everyday who have their car stolen, or they are physically assaulted or harmed in some way, or they get intimidated in some way. Getting their windows broken, and being scared and more scared. They become afraid. You know it doesn't particularly concern me when multi-national corporations or large corporation or large shops get ripped off 'cos they have structures to protect them - it isn't directed towards an individual who has been intimidated or physically harmed. It's those that are powerless to do anything or weak - they shouldn't have to be put through that.*

*It's a culture that's dead against the law abiding way of life'.*

#### Youth

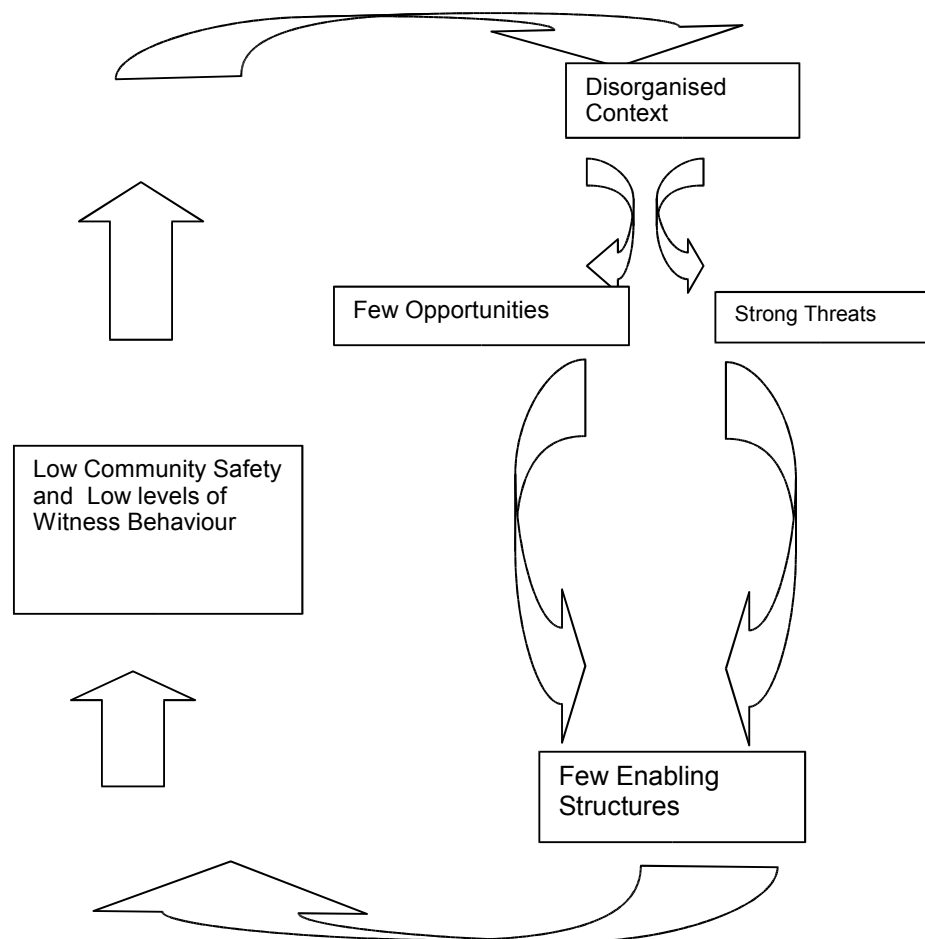
*Young people were involved in consultation days, about what to do with the money. They mainly asked for cheap things - a place to go, a wall they can bounce balls against. We were absolutely gob smacked*

*when the money was announced. Most was to be spent on crime, getting rid of crime, some on housing, you know what I mean, but mostly it was on crime. And these kids are victims as well as being perpetrators aren't they?*

*There are no facilities in the area. Cart Street School was like a community centre, the whole community revolved around it - but it was knocked down. The area was decimated.*

Thus, when we explored the context of people's lives, different stakeholders used different frames through which to describe their experiences, and picture emerged of a lack of community cohesion and organisation characterised by strong in group and out group perceptions (figure 7) which influenced their feelings of safety and willingness to report crime.

**Figure 7 Perceptions of the context in which people live and its impact on community safety and witness reporting.**

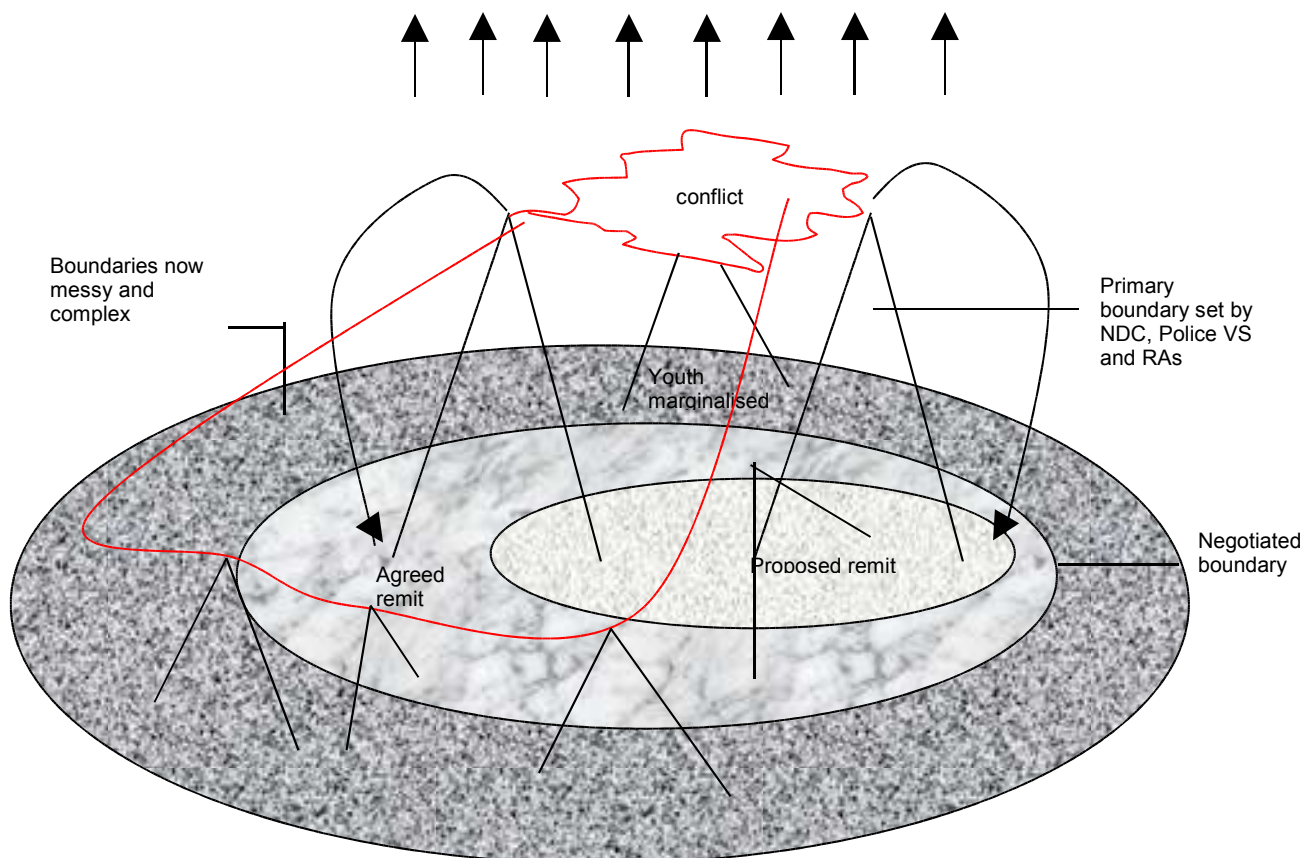


When we reflected in terms of boundaries, we were able now to conceptualise a much messier and complex boundary picture (Figure 8). More groups had been identified as marginal (youth, Irish families, other ethnic minority groups) and the potential for conflict – indeed actual sites of conflict- were much broader. We hoped to be able to use the decision

making stage of the project to facilitate conflict resolution between groups and help marginalised groups become part of the legitimate decision making in the area.

**Figure 8: Complex boundary issues, broadening the space for conflict**

The different perceptions of the context of peoples lives made the boundary of the issues more complex and the potential for conflict much broader.



So, the situation had become more complex and it was clear that a simple witness support scheme, as envisaged at the start would not on its own resolve the problems identified. Furthermore new groups of marginalised stakeholders had been identified – Irish families and other minority ethnic groups.

### ***Decision making***

The next stage of the work was to combine all the findings and identify options for a project. Eight options were identified and all those who had participated in the study were invited to discuss them and identify the most likely to be successful. This was, then, a decision making stage. We had wanted to have groups of mixed stakeholder groups, in order to begin to facilitate open discussion about the different ways in which residents' life experiences were perceived, and to surface agendas as to who should own



and resolve the problems. However, the police and NDC were very keen to meet separate from the other groups and to involve senior staff.

Ethical dilemma: Should we agree to meet with the groups separately. If we did not, the project would go no further and we had felt we had an obligation to those residents who were living in fear and to those who had expressed their views, to try and ensure as much consideration to developing support as possible. So we agreed to go ahead with single stakeholder groups and to explicitly represent other stakeholder groups (including those marginalised throughout the study, , especially youth and now Irish families and other ethnic groups).

We used a facilitative process which presented, pictorially, different options and who would stand to gain most and lose most with each option. Through this process, which included iterative presentations of issues (those issues raised by the first group were included in discussion by the second and both sets in discussion by the third and so on). An adapted critical heuristic process, identifying what is and what ought to be (see Ulrich, ) over a range of considerations was used in order to maintain visibility of the boundary issues. A final option was agreed by all groups and it was decided to present a recommendation to the Crime, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group to go ahead an improvement the collectively agreed and designed project – one which would combine support for witnesses with community development in order to strengthen community organisation and cohesion and move from a cycle of reluctance (Figure 9) to a cycle of determination (Figure 10).

Figure 9: The cycle of reluctance to come forward and proceed as a witness: the current situation

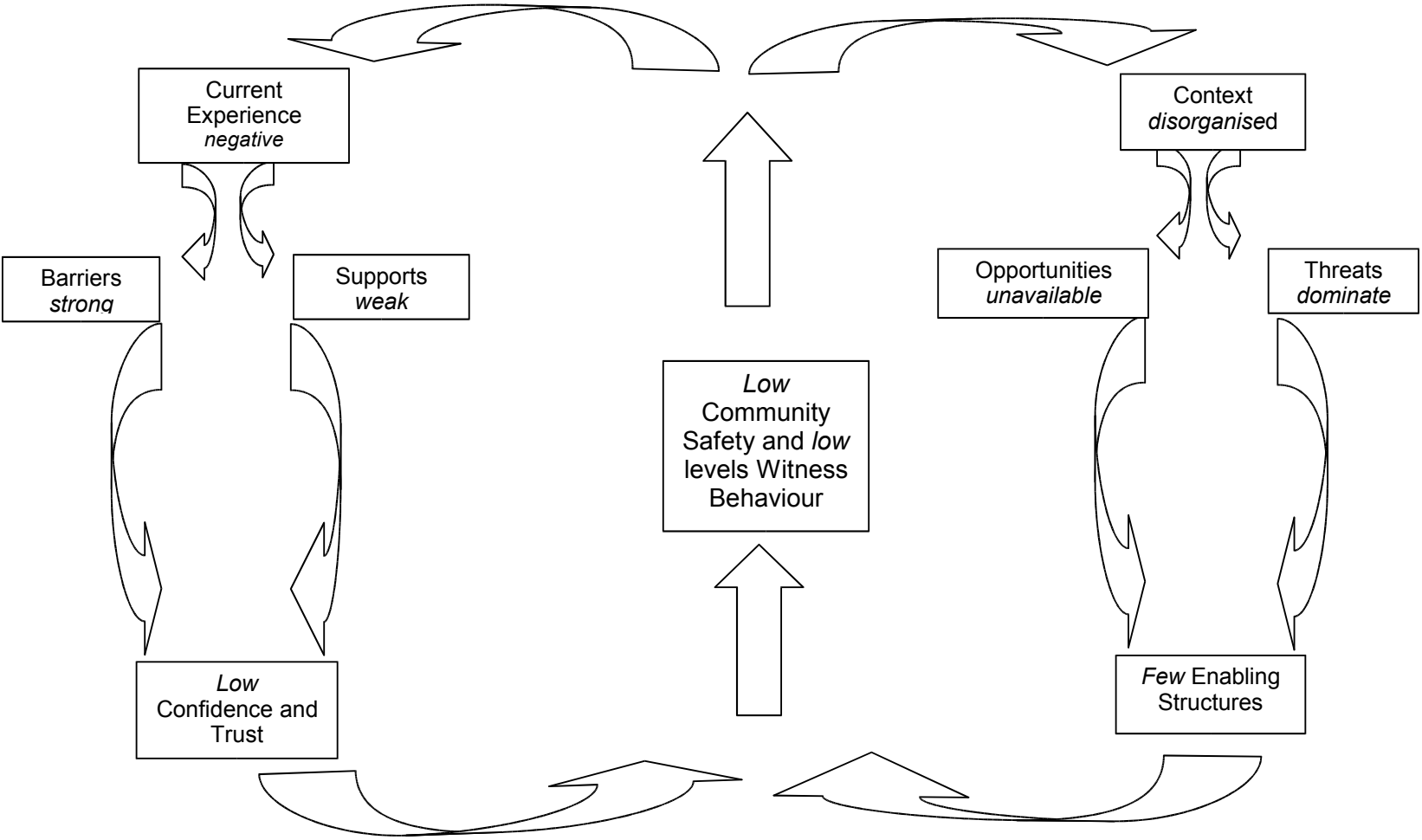
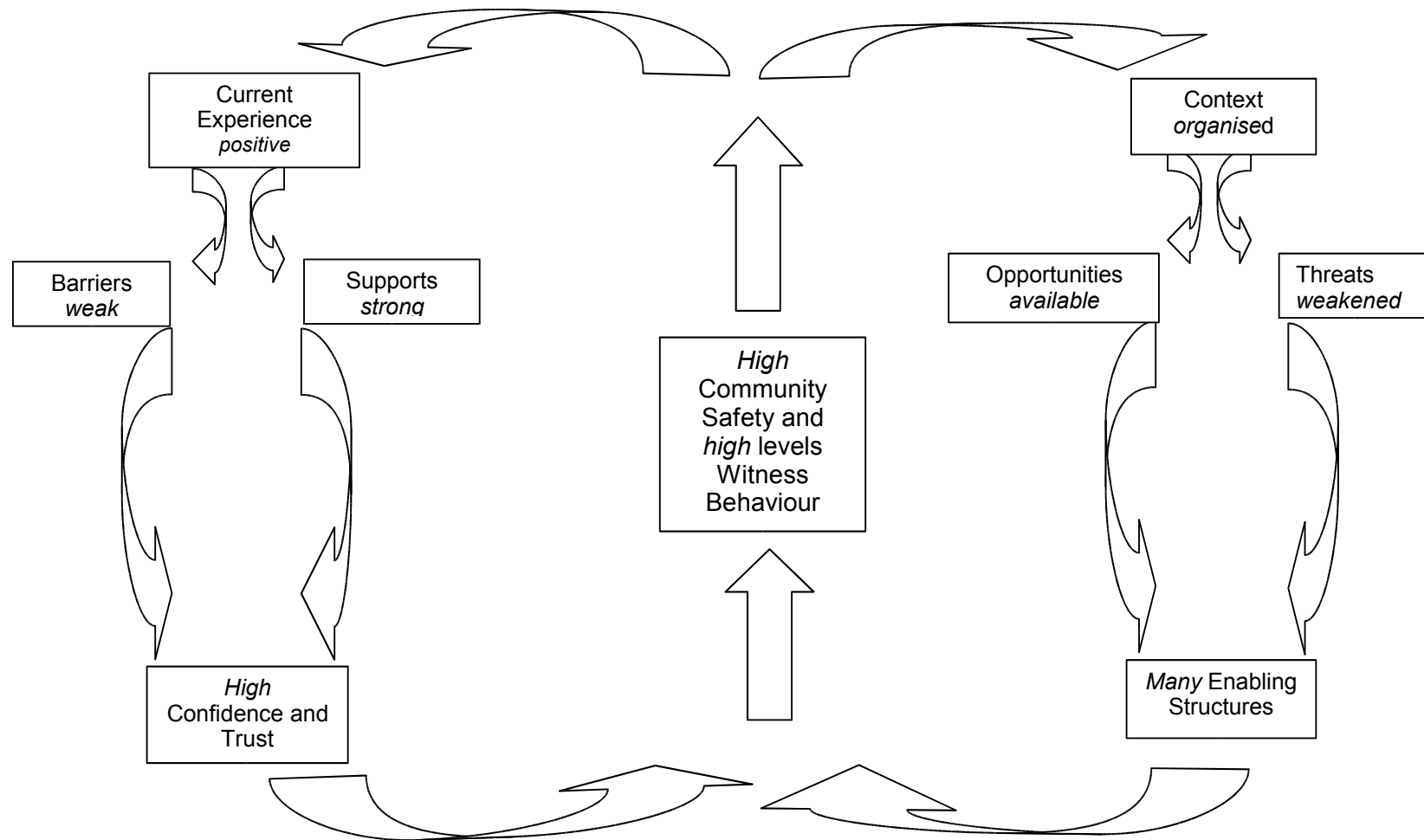


Figure 10: The cycle of determination: a potential future situation



A final report of the feasibility study including the different and final option for implementation was written and circulated before the Crime, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour task group meeting.

At the meeting (attended by residents' representatives, people from agencies, NDC, and chaired by a Police Superintendent) we presented the report and the recommendation. All present at the meeting had been involved in the research and had participated in the decision making over options.

There was very little discussion, but one residents' representative spoke vociferously about the levels of fear being so high that any project was premature, until such time as the police better controlled levels of crime.

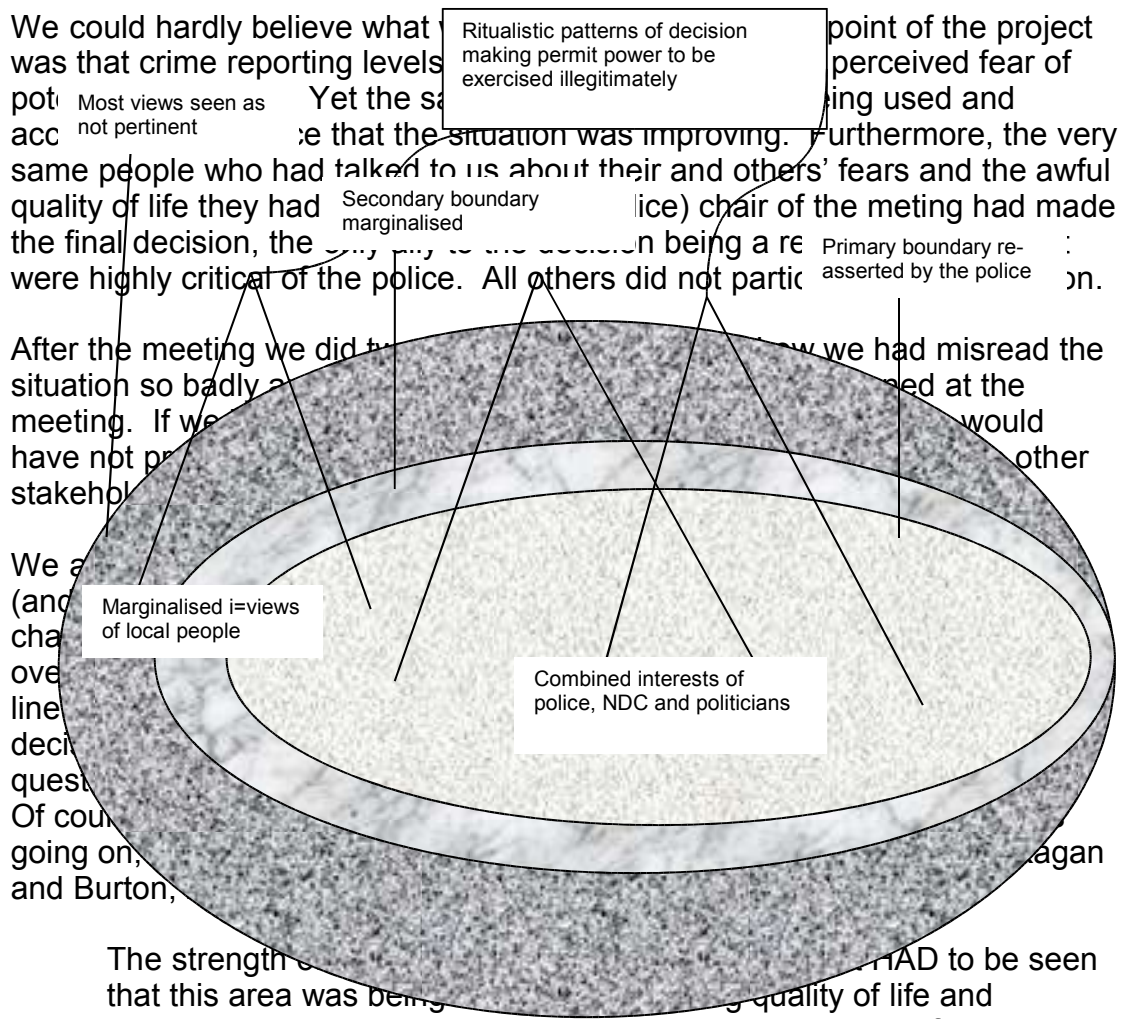
Boundary dilemma: we were very uncomfortable at the way the meeting was going. We were not legitimate decision makers at this group. We had to consider to what extent should we intervene. And why did it matter to us what the outcome was. We decided to argue for the absent stakeholders whose interests would be begun to be met if a new project were introduced, but to do this carefully so as not to be seen to be trying to influence a process which would affect others, and not us.

With what can only be said to be ineffective chairing of the discussion, the Chair moved quickly to suggest a deferment of a decision pending the next item on the agenda. There was no opposition.

The next two items on the agenda were: a) a report from the police showing that reported crime statistics had dropped over the last month and thus crime was being controlled and a further fear of crime audit was to take place in 4 months time; b) discussion about the forthcoming international sporting event which was of great political value to the area. There was no reconsideration of the witness support project, and residents and agencies discussed with themselves their delight at the way crime was being tackled.

Figure 11 Illustrates the boundaries around illegitimate power in decision making

**Figure 11: Re-asserted boundaries for non-legitimate use of power in final decision making**



The strength of the project HAD to be seen that this area was being... quality of life and reducing crime prior to the sporting event, worth millions of pounds to the city;

the stranglehold of the Police and NDC hegemonic bloc, which was strong and had remained influential, despite lots of participative and consultative processes and rhetoric about resident led change through regeneration; and

the difficulty of getting out of ritualistic ways of resolving decisions (in this case the patterns and culture of the Crime, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour task group, and our reluctance to influence strongly how decisions were made).

Victim Support were furious, so were all the other stakeholders. We were stunned. Two years later (after the sporting event was safely over) a community conferencing project was initiated (Emanuel, 2004), directly stemming from the work we did. The city has the highest number of anti social behaviour orders issued in the country. Youth and ethnic minority groups are still considered to be 'hard to reach' groups in the area. The material condition

of the area has improved, and we may just be beginning another piece of work about barriers to employment and self employment in the area which has 36% literacy and 46% numeracy levels at the levels of 11 year olds.....

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<sup>iii</sup> Beacons for a Brighter Future (1999) *New Deal for Communities: Delivery Plan* Heartlands, Heartlands City Council p.42, 46

<sup>iv</sup> Beacons for a Brighter Future (1999) *New Deal for Communities: Delivery Plan* Heartlands, Heartlands City Council p. 49

<sup>v</sup> Beacons for a Brighter Future (1999) *New Deal for Communities: Delivery Plan* Heartlands, Heartlands City Council p.53