



**Ways of seeing and doing:  
Improving health equity in S. Ribble using  
an appreciative approach**



*'one of the most positive pieces of work that I have been involved in . . .and in the poorest area of the borough. . . .(Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)*

## **1. Context**

This Appreciative Inquiry (AI) took place as a result of converging interests of three organisations:

- The scrutiny committee of S. Ribble District Council wanted to do a review to improve health equity. They recognised the socio-economic diversity of their population, the potential impact that a sense of community can have on health and wellbeing and welcomed a solution focused approach.
- The Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly IDeA) is leading a national programme of developing and promoting good practice to improve health equity, through its Healthy Communities Programme. Recognising that existing practice and models have not delivered enough, they are exploring the value of asset based approaches.
- North West Together We Can (NWTWC) has been encouraging local authorities to use AI in order to improve engagement with communities

South Ribble is in Lancashire. The District Council was constructed from a number of distinct communities in the 1974 local government reorganisation. The area is mostly rural with a number of villages and small towns. The population as a whole is relatively affluent and predominantly white. The inquiry took place in Broadfield, in Leyland, the main town in S.Ribble. The population of Broadfield is in the 10-20% most deprived in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Prior to the creation of Super Output Areas the socio-economic situation of people in Broadfield was masked and hidden from local agencies.

The scrutiny committee identified two connected sets of aims. Firstly to work with Broadfield residents alongside partners who work in the area. Secondly to pilot the Appreciative Inquiry model as part of overview and scrutiny and learn from its application.

In order to maximise the learning from the project interviews took place with key stakeholders and were used to shape this case study. Many of the quotes used in this report are from these interviews.

## **2. Enabling Factors**

The project attracted a lot of interest and support from several senior officers and councillors in S.Ribble, the New Progress Housing Association and over time from other partners including the police and the Primary Care Trust. Councillors and officers were enthusiastic to explore a new way of engaging with their communities:

*'In the past projects have often been led by the Council and people sometimes feel that they are only consulted when the decisions have been made. In many ways this project has turned that approach on its head.'*<sup>i</sup>

The lead person from the Community Association (CA) supported the Inquiry as she could see that this might help to develop the Association. The community engagement team included an arts worker who had developed excellent practice for involving and engaging communities. Local Government Improvement and Development and NWTWC funding and consultancy support

provided the means to test out a new approach in Broadfield and ensured that the review had a high profile.

### **3. Approach used**

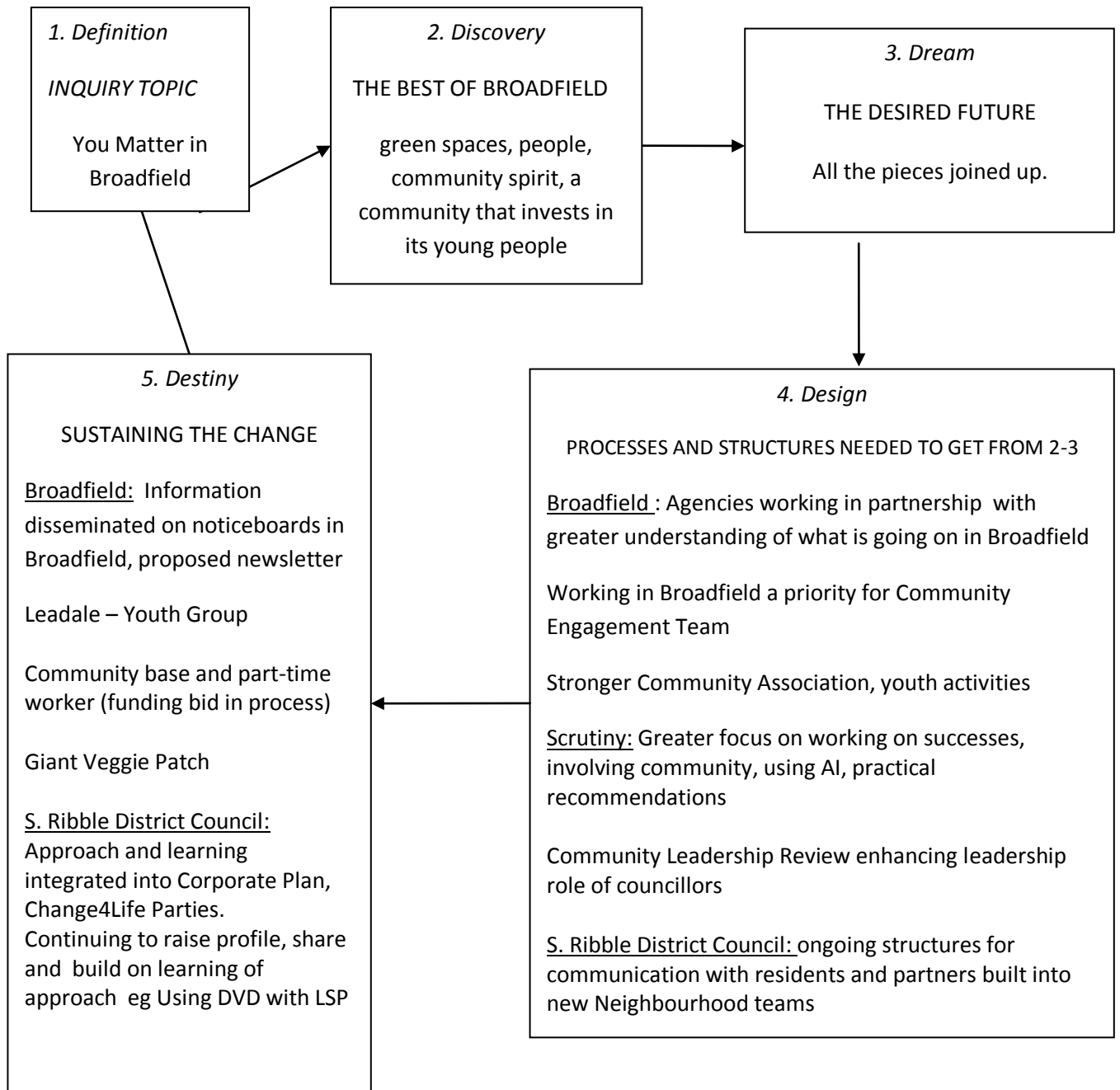
The review involved aspects of both a general asset model approach and Appreciative Inquiry. AI is a whole system approach and involves the community alongside agencies which work in the area. AI generates pride in places and values people's contributions. It is a no blame approach which enables all participants to connect through identifying a shared purpose and communicating in a positive way together.

#### Embracing the values and approach

The following values were enthusiastically embraced in the course of the inquiry:

- the positive mindset - valuing strengths rather than focusing on deficiencies
- identifying what was valued and working in the area and building on that.
- the commitment to involve all the stakeholders in the area to work together to agree solutions
- responsibility would be shared between the community and the organisations which serve them for making the solutions happen

Diagram 1 illustrates the phases of an AI and the key features as they impacted on Broadfield and S.Ribble. Some of the changes have happened as a direct result of the inquiry while others, such as the Giant Veggie Patch and youth activities, have happened alongside the inquiry. Some aspects have been influenced by the inquiry. Although the inquiry focused on Broadfield, the outcomes led to changes for the scrutiny function and the District Council as well. The first three phases are discussed in this section of the report and the two final phases in section 5.



**Diagram 1: The Appreciative cycle**

## Planning and defining

Initial planning included a brief training session which was attended by 17 participants. They were councillors and officers including officers from New Progress Housing. The introduction of AI, built on existing practice:

*In S. Ribble we were already doing a lot of this. Capacity is a massive issue. It is the way we wanted to go, to try it.'* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

In AI inquiry and change are simultaneous as the conversations are part of the change. This began to happen at the initial training, which was conducted as a mini-inquiry. It brought people together to communicate about the things that mattered to them, which they may not have done previously.

*Example: A local authority officer needed a partner in the voluntary sector in order to access funding to progress work on a Giant Veggie Patch. Through conversations, he found someone able and willing to help.*

A planning group, involving the key stakeholders in the area, was convened to identify a positive title for the inquiry. The planning group involved people from the evolving CA and some frontline workers in the area and was chaired by a senior manager. The CA had evolved with the support of New Progress, the local Housing Association that wanted to encourage community activity in Broadfield. A previous community association had disbanded after an unsuccessful attempt at getting a community building for the area. The planning group quickly focused on working with and supporting the development of the community association.

The group decided that the inquiry should be called 'You Matter in Broadfield'. They felt that people did not think that they mattered; the difference they wanted to make was that residents did matter.

The group planned events which were attended by over 60 residents, including children and young people, alongside councillors and officers. The structure of the events drew on what already worked best for community engagement in S.Ribble.

## Discovering what is working and needs to be conserved

AI uses the stories of participants to build a picture of what is already working. By asking people what is working you get a very different picture than if you ask people about their problems. The participants shared stories through painting their best experiences in Broadfield. As Diagram 1 shows, the green spaces, the people, the community spirit and a community that wants to invest in its young people, were common themes. <sup>ii</sup> AI emphasises that these themes give life to the area, need to be maintained and are the strengths that can be built on. Stories were collected both before and as part of the events. The open-ended nature of the topic was appreciated and is illustrated by the point made below by a Councillor on the scrutiny committee on his experience of collecting stories before the events.

*'The best of it was getting the stories. At first people said they could give 15-30 minutes, on average they gave an hour. The interviewees set the agenda which is why they gave more time. They felt valued, that someone was listening.'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

### Dreaming a desired future

Participants then worked on the Dream, identifying the future they would like to create. What they wanted was more of what was already working:

By 2014 we will have joined up all the pieces. People will have faith in the services which will be joined up and respond to needs. Ideas will be treated with respect. Everyone will want to be involved in the community. There will be facilities for all people of all ages to meet together, get to know each other in the ways they want. Broadfield will be beautiful and its residents will be happy with one another and feel safe.

### Getting to the desired future

In July 2009, following the review, the work was taken forward by the Community Engagement Team. By April 2010 work with partners and the Community Association was stronger. Local organisations had a greater understanding of what was going on in Broadfield. Both residents groups and agencies were aware of the assets that can be built on. People were *'talking up the area'*.

*'The system is working together which we did not have 12 months ago'*  
(Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

The CA are organising events for the summer alongside other organisations including the newly formed Leadale youth group. They are writing a bid for New Progress Housing Association Community Investment Fund for a community base and a part-time worker. The Giant Veggie Patch has successfully opened. These developments have been a direct result of the AI.

#### **4. Approach – why did this work?**

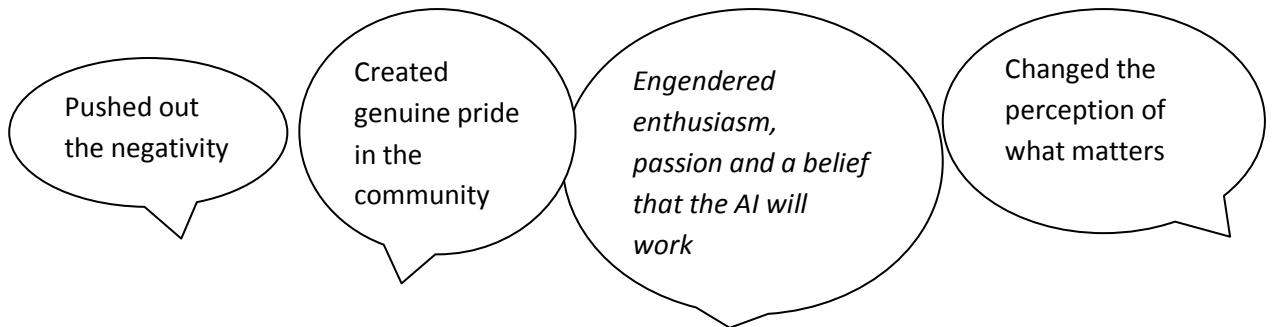
*'It was a simple idea, . . . very uplifting for everybody involved. The workshop had identified a feeling of togetherness and mutual respect'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

The key things that contributed to success were :

- the conversations, using a positive or strength based mindset, reframed how issues were thought about
- the connections which emerged within the community, between the community and agencies and between agencies.

### The mindset

AI builds on existing strengths and gives a positive focus to future actions. Stakeholders found it:



Participation in the inquiry and the conversations changed perceptions of role and ways of working from a model where officers and councillors identified problems and developed services to one where they worked together with residents to identify solutions:

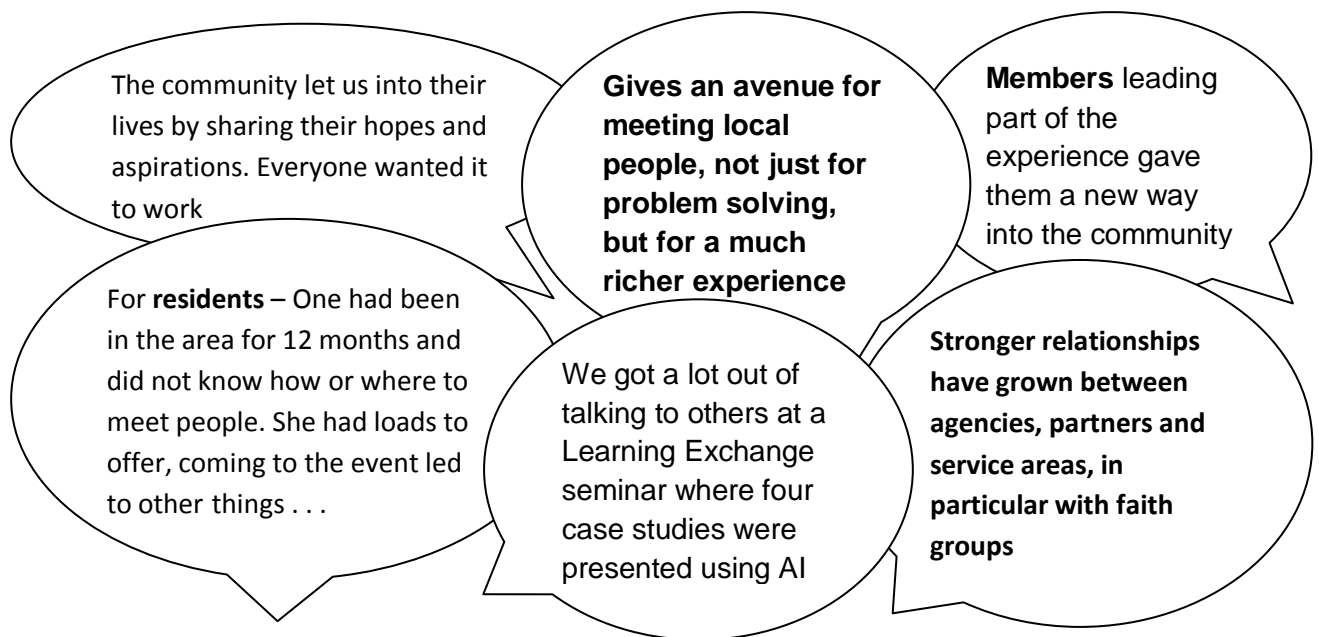
*'Before we used to think about what we can do in communities to identify problems and deliver services. This way we ask the community what they want. What has come out of the inquiry is very different- how do we build on the assets such as the green space? The young people came out with achievable ideas. We would not have thought of the benches as the community did.'* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

It appeared that *'a positive attitude turns things round.'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

### A way to connect

*'There is a fine line between connection and disconnection and they are both cycles. Disconnection is negative, fear takes over and people withdraw and become like ostriches. We saw in July that people can be brought together, the kids are willing to share. There is enough there to switch the switch.'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

The AI enabled all sorts of people to connect, for there to be a depth of connection and for new roles and relationships to evolve. Connections were not only important within South Ribble but the opportunity to meet others using AI in other areas was also appreciated.



**Diagram 2: Quotes illustrating new connections, roles and relationships which emerged**

## **5. Outcomes and benefits**

Attractions of the AI were the powerful stories and conversations it produced and it is the information and actions from these which are described in this section.

The outcomes have been sustained and taken forward in a myriad of ways; through councillors changing the way they perform their community leadership roles and officers working with new mindsets and approaches. The Broadfield Community Association has grown and continues to be supported by the local authority Community Engagement team and Progress Housing and the Director of Regeneration and Healthy Communities is encouraging the use of asset based approaches in S.Ribble and working alongside other initiatives in Lancashire and the Region.

### For Broadfield

The stories revealed that there was a lot going on in the area that officers and councillors did not know about :

*‘People are pursuing a whole host of different things. There is loads going on, a strong PTA, scouts and guides, the Giant Veggie patch, older people activities ‘ (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)*

The inquiry also brought to light assets in terms of the residents and their abilities:



*'the number of people going about doing good work in their community and contributing to making the community vibrant and thriving'*(Senior Officer, New Progress Housing Trust- March 2010)

A few weeks after the July event ;

*'The Community Association organised a picnic and it rained on the day. In a few hours people had sorted out a function room and there was everyone with juggling, circus acts, having a laugh.'* (Senior Officer, New Progress Housing Trust - March 2010)

The inquiry showed how

*'natural community leaders came forward and engaged in a positive way'* (Senior Officer, New Progress Housing Trust- March 2010)

Residents have come forward to join the Community Association which now has a programme of forthcoming events and is developing a bid for a community base and a part-time worker. In response to requests by the community the police and the Housing Association have funded three noticeboards which are being sited where the community have requested them.

There is now a sense that there are people and organisations that are happy to engage in conversations that are set up in a comfortable, accessible, community-led way, where they feel listened to. The area committee is looking at ways of working which might be more relevant and attractive to people in the community. Ideas include the style of meetings as the inquiry showed that people were more likely to come to events that were informal and fun.

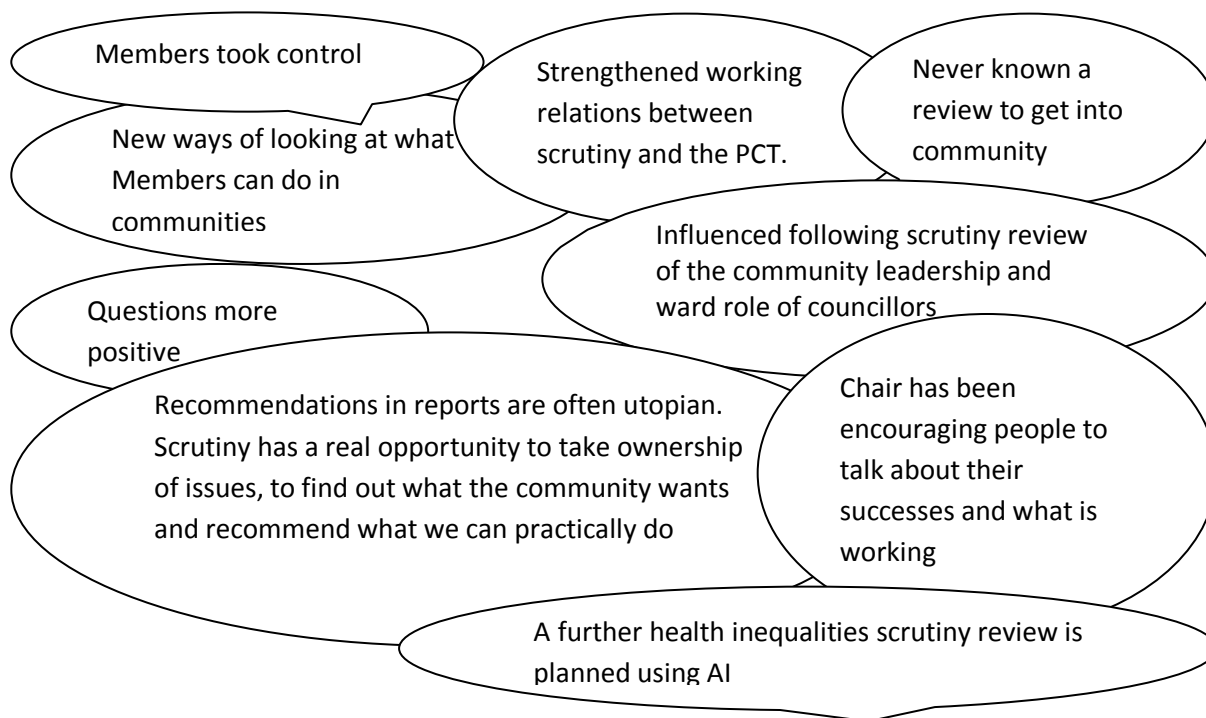
To enable the shared dreams to be realised and sustained it will be important that the design of the new Neighbourhood Teams enables conversations and dialogue to be ongoing and that they accord with the community's timescale and are on their topics.

#### *For scrutiny as a method for engaging communities in reviewing services*

The inquiry raised the profile of scrutiny and has led to significant changes in the way the scrutiny committee functions. These are illustrated by the quotes in Diagram 3 and below:

*'The inquiry influenced the next scrutiny review subject and orientation. It has been a vehicle for the community leadership role of the council. In the past we have been inward looking, see officers making things happen, looking at problems not what we can do. It made us look at our role re-community engagement.'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

As the quotes in Diagram 3 show, changes have included, the role of members of scrutiny committees, relationships with other organisations, how scrutiny reviews are carried out and the subject of future reviews.



**Diagram 3: Quotes illustrating Outcomes and Benefits for Scrutiny**

For local authority and partnership work in South Ribble

- For individuals

Individuals mentioned that the impact of involvement in the inquiry was ‘uplifting.’

*‘It has given me a boost, renewed my impetus, given me a more optimistic outlook. It has given me goals, focus and direction... I am not a dreamy person but I need dreams’*  
(Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

*‘Usually I respond to phone calls and problems which can drag you down. Getting people out of their silos and working together positively shows the day job in a different light’*  
(Senior Officer- South Ribble Council - March 2010)

- New roles and relationships

The inquiry influenced some individuals to reassess what they do.

*‘I need to connect more, rather than focusing on reading and understanding reports. It will be more enjoyable.’* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

It also changed relationships with partners

*‘It has changed how I talk with people in the NHS’* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

*‘Bringing partners together is breaking the cycle of blame.’* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

And the way officers and councillors want to work with communities

*'Let the community lead and we provide the support' (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)*

- For Councillors

Councillors found out more about Council assets, for example arts-based community work. There is now enthusiasm from Elected Members from different parties about using AI methods for engaging communities and a way of working with communities to prioritise and shape services. This has been taken forward in the following scrutiny review of the community leadership and ward role of Councillors. Some Councillors recognise that it is crucial that the work in Broadfield is further developed and learned from, before further roll-out.

- For services and the way council does business....

The council approached market traders in a different way; asking them what they wanted *'and achieved outstanding positive reaction'* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010). Market traders are now working with the council on a market development plan.

Both councillors and officers are keen for the lessons from the Broadfield inquiry to be utilised more broadly; some are more cautious than others:

*'I don't feel that we have built up a relationship with the Broadfield community. We have taken over and led again. **We must persist in getting it right before taking it elsewhere.** (my emphasis) It is easy to get distracted which has happened to some extent by the Veggie Patch, where we were offered £50k to make it happen.'* (Councillor- South Ribble Council - March 2010)

This recognition that while being committed to the concept of community led activity, it is easy to take over again is important. There is more work to be done in Broadfield to build the relationship with the community and to maintain it. It makes sense to be aware of what has been achieved and what still needs to be achieved in Broadfield in relation to thinking about transferability to other areas. Learning from the inquiry has already informed the Corporate Plan, the design of new neighbourhood teams, continuing work in Broadfield and the Community Leadership Review.

*'I think the work in Broadfield will inform how we engage with communities and our structures and processes will reflect this'* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

*'We are asking how can the new neighbourhood teams keep the conversations going and influence how areas are shaped? In our corporate plan we want to expand this to be how we do things in other areas of the borough'* (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

Sports Development are developing Change 4 Life Parties with S.Ribble Council with support from the LSP and Central Lancashire PCT . Change 4 Life Parties are based on the Tupperware party idea. They will be for women; their purpose to get across wellbeing messages. The parties will be held in the homes of women who are socially active in their communities. They will invite women they

know. Hosts will get incentives and take the work forward as they want. They will work with a Sports Development Officer to develop health messages and receive some training.

Some people are keen to see the learning inform future communication, promotional materials and messages, participatory budgeting and rolled out to other areas as a way of communities and agencies communicating and working together. A DVD<sup>iii</sup> has been produced about the inquiry which is being used to develop further awareness of the inquiry and approach for example with the Local Strategic Partnership.

#### For ways of working to improve Health Equity

The IDeA was keen for an asset model to be used because the Agency wanted to encourage different practice in the face of disappointing progress nationally to improve health equity. There were times during the process of this work when some people in S. Ribble questioned the relationship of community participation to health, while others were quite clear of the link and importance of cohesive and influential communities to health. This concurs with NICE Guidelines<sup>iv</sup>. Moreover, the recently published Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010 (The Marmot Review) supports the case that health equity requires action on the social determinants of health and failure to do this will have an immense economic cost. The review's nine key messages are broader than specific health issues and include:

*'Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local level. This can only happen by empowering individuals and local communities.'*<sup>v</sup>

A beauty of AI is how it reframes 'deprived' communities:

*'it was an opportunity to see how things could be done differently. We did identify the area because of its deprivation but we quickly moved on. The residents did not see themselves as deprived. They were people to work with who wanted to give; it is something we are doing together.'* (Senior Officer- South Ribble Council - March 2010)

AI puts the focus on the resilience of people who are daily challenged by least health opportunity. It makes them part of the expert team, essential in identifying solutions and making them happen. It identifies the barriers that need designing out if health equities are to be addressed and it enables people to see what can be done:

*It enabled me to connect with groups. There is lots that can be done to improve life expectancy. There are people with leadership potential which I hope will be developed. Partners are signing up to it. We are breaking the cycle of blame. There are funding streams which could be available. We have got a lot out of it. Councillors deal with negatives all the time.'* (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

## **6. Conclusion**

The AI enabled participants to see and do things differently. Several Councillors, officers and local people have found it motivating and energising. They discovered or saw assets rather than deficits and found new ways of engaging which led to new ways of doing or working. This included sharing stories of success, having conversations about the future they want to create and redesigning processes and structures to make that future happen and to sustain it. Developing a relationship with residents in Broadfield is work in progress and the pressure for agencies to try to take the lead

needs to resisted. The new neighbourhood teams could be a good vehicle for developing new types of relationships with other neighbourhoods as well which should ensure that the full potential of the inquiry is realised. Over time strengthening communities and their influence on local services will impact on health.

The Marmot review stresses that empowerment of individuals and communities are crucial to address health equity. Both the Marmot Review<sup>vi</sup> and the recent Local Government Improvement and Development publication on asset approaches, A Glass Half Full, also emphasise that :

*'Community assets can only have a mitigating effect on the structural and social determinants of ill-health and inequality'*<sup>vii</sup>

Differentials in the social determinants of health, including housing, income and employment impact on health equity and a whole system approach which addresses these differentials continues to be essential. Agencies with the support of their communities addressing the social determinants of health should reduce the enormous economic cost of rising health inequity.<sup>viii</sup>

The Inquiry has provided a basis for progress on a number of policy areas including the previous government's White Paper on Empowerment, the Big Society initiative and the implications of the Marmot Review. It is *'the beginning of a positive journey together.'* Learning continues and outcomes and benefits should become more apparent over time in Broadfield in particular, and South Ribble as a whole, as engagement and activity are strengthened.

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#### **Acknowledgements and contact details**

The report was written by Judith Emanuel in May 2010 who was commissioned to facilitate this work by the IDEA (now Local Government Improvement Agency) and North West Together We Can. The success of the inquiry was due to all the residents, officers and councillors in S.Ribble who had the courage to take part in the inquiry and gave so much. Special thanks to Darren Cranshaw and his team and the scrutiny committee and Broadfield councillors in S.Ribble and to Trevor Hopkins and Jane Foot at the IDEa and Eve Davidson and Elizabeth Wood from North West Together We Can for all their support.

To contact Judith, see [www.judithemanuel.co.uk](http://www.judithemanuel.co.uk)

For more information about North West Together We Can see [www.nwtwc.org.uk](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk) or ring **0161 218 1789**. In 2011 they will be publishing Judith Emanuel and Clodhna Mulhern, Working together with local solutions: a story of using Appreciative Inquiry in the North West.

The Healthy Communities Programme at the Local Government Improvement Agency published, A glass half full: how an asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/18410498> in April 2010 which outlines asset approaches and their potential.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Councillor Mary Robinson, Chair of Scrutiny Review in S. Ribble District Council (2009) Broadfield: You Matter! Report

<sup>ii</sup> Themes from stories included:

**People take great pleasure from the environment and take responsibility**

*Woman's story* - coming home to the green, the trees, the quiet – a heavenly picture

*Children's stories* – talked about the freedom and gave a picture of independence, several mentioned being able to walk on their own to fun days at the swimming pool on Saturdays

*Officers story*

Unable to organise children's involvement in a litter pick because assessment identified too many risks, children organised a litter pick themselves as part of a wider clean up day.

**Residents care about one another**

*Older man's story* - Children playing on the green, a safe area for children to play, children enjoying themselves. Not being told what they can't do.

*Younger person* – A young woman wants an alternative place to Tesco's to skateboard because her grandmother finds it threatening.

*A local clergyman's story* concerned a young people's group where he found that if 'you gave respect – it was returned.'

**Services**

Stories showed how services are appreciated when they are seen to listen, people feel heard and they get a fast response. The police and school were particularly praised.

<sup>iii</sup> Copies of the DVD are available from the Community Engagement Team, South Ribble Borough Council, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland, Lancs. PR25 1DH Tel: 01772 625304  
email: [community@southribble.gov.uk](mailto:community@southribble.gov.uk)

<sup>iv</sup> National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (2008) Public Health Guidance 9 : Community engagement to improve <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/PH009Guidance.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Marmot (2010) Fair Society Healthy Lives. Final Report and Executive Summary

<sup>vi</sup> Another key message from the review is '*Health inequalities result from social inequalities. Action on health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health*' Marmot (2010)

<sup>vii</sup> A glass half full: how an asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing IDeA (2010)  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/18410498>

<sup>viii</sup> See also Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government', IDeA (2010)