

Fitzrovia¹ Neighbourhood Profile

Executive summary

This profile, commissioned by Fitzrovia Community Centre (FCC) aims to provide a summary and an exploration of the demographic and social characteristics of the neighbourhood of Fitzrovia, defined as the area to the west of Great Portland Street to Gower Street, and to the south of Euston Road, to Oxford Street. Its purpose is to support the work of FCC in engaging with the wider community and supporting local cohesion.

Fitzrovia contains a diverse mix of residential, commercial and community buildings; which has led to some tension between the interests of business, developers, and existing residents. Residents and visitors to the area alike appreciate the outdoor spaces, architecture and commercial opportunities Fitzrovia offers – yet our research indicates a clear and growing divide between different sections of the working and resident population. These tensions are exacerbated by a massively varied and in many cases somewhat cramped housing stock and competing claims to an already limited amount of green and public space.

As might be expected from an inner-city area, the population of Fitzrovia is subject to high levels of churn; both in terms of a changing daytime population of workers and tourists and an annually shifting population of students and short term tenants. The consequent lack of ‘shared experience’ has made it difficult for these disparate elements to coalesce around common concerns and aspirations.

Fitzrovia is not a deprived neighbourhood. However, it is an area characterised by contrast – between the character of the area in living memory and in the present day, between the needs of temporary, long and short term residents and those of workers, visitors and business; and between the conspicuous affluence of some residents and commercial presences in opposition to the comparative social exclusion and poverty experienced by others. It is home to a great disparity in wealth and living standards, and significant minorities facing very specific forms of deprivation, with needs that are often at odds with one another. There are two clear pockets of comparative deprivation in the area - the first across the majority of the Westminster side, with the notable exception of the south westernmost portion of the neighbourhood; and the second in the north east of the Camden side of the neighbourhood, around Warren Street.

Fitzrovia is not lacking in nearby opportunities for shopping, socialising, exercising, learning and experiencing culture. However, it lacks in the range of cheap or free services and activities which areas less well served by the private sector and less proximal to central London attractions benefit from. One of the key experiences of the local area is that while

¹ Fitzrovia Community Centre sits in West End ward, Westminster, slightly towards the Western edge of the neighbourhood.

individuals feel a sense of the neighbourhood quite strongly, there is not a feeling that the individuals who live, work learn and play in the area are part of a community which makes up that neighbourhood.

Fitzrovia is also a scene of regular and on-going development. Older residents and community organisations are particularly disadvantaged by changes to the area, which have increased prices for housing and services, changed the constitution of shops and altered the priorities of local funders and development bodies. Over the last 50 years, this has involved a continual commercialisation of the borders of the area, and an increasing level of footfall from commuters, students and visitors alike due to the proximity of universities, rail hubs and attractions. Most recently, this has involved the redevelopment of the former Middlesex hospital site and the construction of a large Crossrail hub at the south of the neighbourhood. In combination with further planned redevelopments of former University College Hospital property and the possible arrival of HS2, Fitzrovia is likely to see continued churn in public space availability and usage in coming years; alongside a significant increase in both residential and commuter levels within the area.

Vital statistics:

- 10,462 residents
- Nearly 3/10 are in college or university education
- 3/10 have an alternative address
- More than 5/10 were born overseas (likely to represent the student population)
- Less than 8/100 are over 65
- Just over 5/10 are male
- Just over 3/10 are Christian, almost 1/10 is Muslim, and levels of reported belief have declined overall
- 4,903 dwellings
- 25 of which are large shared dwellings (i.e. university accommodation), containing almost 2/10 Fitzrovian residents
- Almost ½ households are privately rented, and almost ½ the population live in privately rented accommodation
- 7/10 households are made up of just 1 or 2 people
- 6/50 households are overcrowded (29% under occupied)
- Older people in Fitzrovia are more likely to live independently, without family – at the time of the 2011 Census, 66% and 43% of those aged 65-74 and 75+ respectively were living alone.
- **15,000 businesses** (in and within the immediate vicinity of Fitzrovia)
- Almost 5/10 employ under 10 people
- 7/20 'professional, scientific and technical' or 'information and communication'
- Less than 1/10 retail
- Low deprivation levels
- 3/100 residents are unemployed
- 3/100 residents are long term sick or disabled
- 5/10 of those in employment are managers, directors, senior officials or other professional occupations

This is the situation in which Fitzrovia Community Centre came into being and continues to operate. While for the first two years of its life, FCC focused internally on ensuring that the organisation was legally compliant and offered a model of best practice as a self-sustaining, open access centre – and has been successful in developing a working model involving local workers, volunteers and community figures in collaborative delivery and strategic activities both inside and outside of the centre – the organisation is now moving into a new phase of focused external development, engagement with ‘harder to reach’ and disadvantaged residents and positioning as an outlet for community discussion and voice.

This report suggests that there are three overarching conclusions to be drawn for future activities, both by FCC and by other VCS and commercial organisations within Fitzrovia. These are:

Responses to deprivation and inequality

Numerically, Fitzrovia exhibits low levels of deprivation and limited numbers of long term residents from ethnic minority communities with specialist needs. Overall indicators around wellbeing, employment and quality of living are high, and specialist training, support or advice services found in centres located in deprived areas are unlikely to form a key element of FCC work in the future.

Equally, the model of community provision prevalent as recently as 2008, where centres such as FCC might offer a range of free and subsidised services through grant funding, is neither practicable nor necessary in an area of conspicuous personal and commercial wealth which might be tapped into. However, the lack of a sizeable population facing deprivation does not prevent FCC from engaging in such activities as an element of its work, or hinder an understanding that the low number of individuals with specialist needs may be particularly harshly impacted when residing in an area of comparative wealth and little community sector support provision.

FCC might therefore provide a valuable strand of work, supported by sponsorship, donation, volunteer delivery or other forms of cross-subsidy, to engage with these targeted groups and offer opportunities for them to engage both in targeted work and in the wider centre programme. By engaging with existing statutory and VCS partners, FCC could also fruitfully develop emerging work to host specialist funded services, thus offering a local venue for delivery while also increasing rates of centre hire and further improving relations with both Westminster and Camden local authorities.

Responses to the ‘fractured community’

The fractured nature of the local residential, commercial and service delivery landscape which has led Fitzrovia to be regarded as a ‘neighbourhood without a community’ in some areas offers a challenge and an opportunity to FCC.

While the disparate needs and social groups present across the neighbourhood will make it more complex for the centre to develop individual activities and services of relevance to all, they also offer a chance for the creation of a varied programme of activities, delivered and attended by different groups from across the neighbourhood and beyond, which provides opportunities for the entire community and increases available occasions for social mingling and integration alongside.

Work in this area might involve hosting social and drop in sessions, or providing open areas, alongside scheduled activities, to bring participants and hirers together. It could also involve taking a more active role in the scheduling of sessions and the seeking of additional, complementary activities, in order to bring divergent sections of the community together. In its capacity as a 'community hub', FCC might also look into hosting regular local partnership meetings comprised of a range of residential, commercial and VCS stakeholders to offer an occasion for dialogue about local delivery and need, and to increase the strategic basis for future work.

Community voice, representation and dialogue

Following on from the above, competing local pressures around physical space redevelopment, commercial need and the cost of housing have combined to play a role both in the ongoing division and inequality within the Fitzrovia community and also the relationship of Fitzrovia to other, surrounding areas.

While both Fitzrovia and neighbouring communities have access to a range of amenity societies, residents associations and consultative groups aimed at offering local people a say in their local area, the position of the neighbourhood across local authority and commercial district boundaries, and the fragmentation alluded to above, have combined to leave the area with a lack of unified voice and hence facing a number of barriers to shaping or resisting development. The national Localism agenda has added an additional dimension to this issue by allowing for the establishment of Local Area Forums with limited powers around planning and development in self-defined neighbourhoods. Currently FCC sits in an area claimed by at least three of these proposed forums, all with markedly different ideas as to how Fitzrovia is demarcated and how it might or should develop into the future.

FCC and the wider commercial, resident and voluntary organisations representing the area might usefully come together to establish issues around which joint representation might be feasible, and to negotiate area-wide positions (or at least positions based on valid and inclusive local research) which might be voiced on behalf of the neighbourhood as a whole. This work could extend to identifying differences and conflicts and working together with residents and workers from all sections of the local community to attempt resolution. While this activity would require buy in from a range of bodies, FCC could take a lead by encouraging regular opportunities, both formal and informal – or standalone and tied to existing activities - for individuals and representatives to feed in to local debates and shape the debate.

Recommendations:

- That this report and additional research be discussed together with other delivery organisation, local stakeholders and decision makers to establish a menu of actions which might be taken across services and organisations to support the development of the area.
- FCC has the opportunity to offer services right across the community, and to use income generated by chargeable events and services to support the provision of activities for marginalised members of the community and smaller community groups.
- The centre might also develop its strategic role, both through establishing additional opportunities for sectors to come together to plan and develop local collaborative initiatives, and through increasing the prominence of messages about strategic joint working, resident voice and local representation to position itself as a key channel for community debate and development.
- This report, in combination with the *Fitzrovia Needs Analysis* and *Engagement and Communication plans* also produced by FCC, indicate a number of issues which FCC could be instrumental in tackling – including access to local green and community space, the lack of cultural and social opportunities for less wealthy residents, and the fragmentation of the local community.
- Specific actions which might be taken to engage with target sections of the population include:
 - Cultivation of relationships with neighbourhood officers and residents associations to increase knowledge of local population and reach into it
 - Targeting of under 24s via venues and through contacts to the East of the neighbourhood, to fill an identified gap in the ‘market’ for opportunities relevant to 16-24s
 - Focus on the under 16s population around Westminster LSOA 13D to ensure current youth work activities are accessible across the community
 - Targeting of the ethnic minority populations in the North-east and North-West of the area to increase engagement in current activities and inform/engage with future arts and learning activities
 - Targeting of older people through sheltered housing and other housing providers to increase promotion of the centre to this community