



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Open Doors Pilot Programme

Evaluation report



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1. Executive Summary

The Open Doors programme pilot scheme was commissioned in 2018 to support the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) aim of creating socially and economically stronger and more confident communities.¹ The £420,000 programme brought vacant properties in town centres and high streets back into temporary use for 12 months. It was designed to benefit community groups, landlords and local communities by providing spaces for community groups and charitable organisations to deliver support, whilst saving property costs for landlords and helping to regenerate struggling high streets.

In 2019, MHCLG commissioned IFF Research to conduct an evaluation of the Open Doors pilot, to assess its impact and whether its aims had been achieved. The evaluation included site visits to the five Open Doors sites, management information (MI) collected from community groups using the sites and a counterfactual exercise to determine the experiences of landlords and community groups who had not been part of the programme. Three sites were due to be in use until the end of March 2020, while two sites, which had opened later than the others had had their leases extended until September 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic operations were ceased throughout March and all sites were formally closed on 31st March 2020.

The evaluation found benefits for community groups and landlords. Three of the five landlords who were not part of the Open Doors scheme (interviewed as part of the counterfactual exercise) said their properties were vacant at the time of interview, between December 2019 and February 2020. None of these three landlords were currently receiving rental income and all three were continuing to pay business rates which did not apply to the properties being used for Open Doors, who were exempt for the duration of the programme due to their charitable use. This is evidence that Open Doors had a positive impact on participating landlords which they are unlikely to have benefitted from if they had not been part of the scheme.

Evidence suggests the benefits by far outweighed the costs to participants. The landlords benefitted from the savings on business rates and utility bills, with little or no outgoings. The costs to community groups were negligible, primarily on sundries, parking and travel. The few community groups who had previously paid for spaces had these costs removed while using Open Doors. Although there were clear benefits for direct participants, **there was little evidence of impacts on local communities or businesses.**

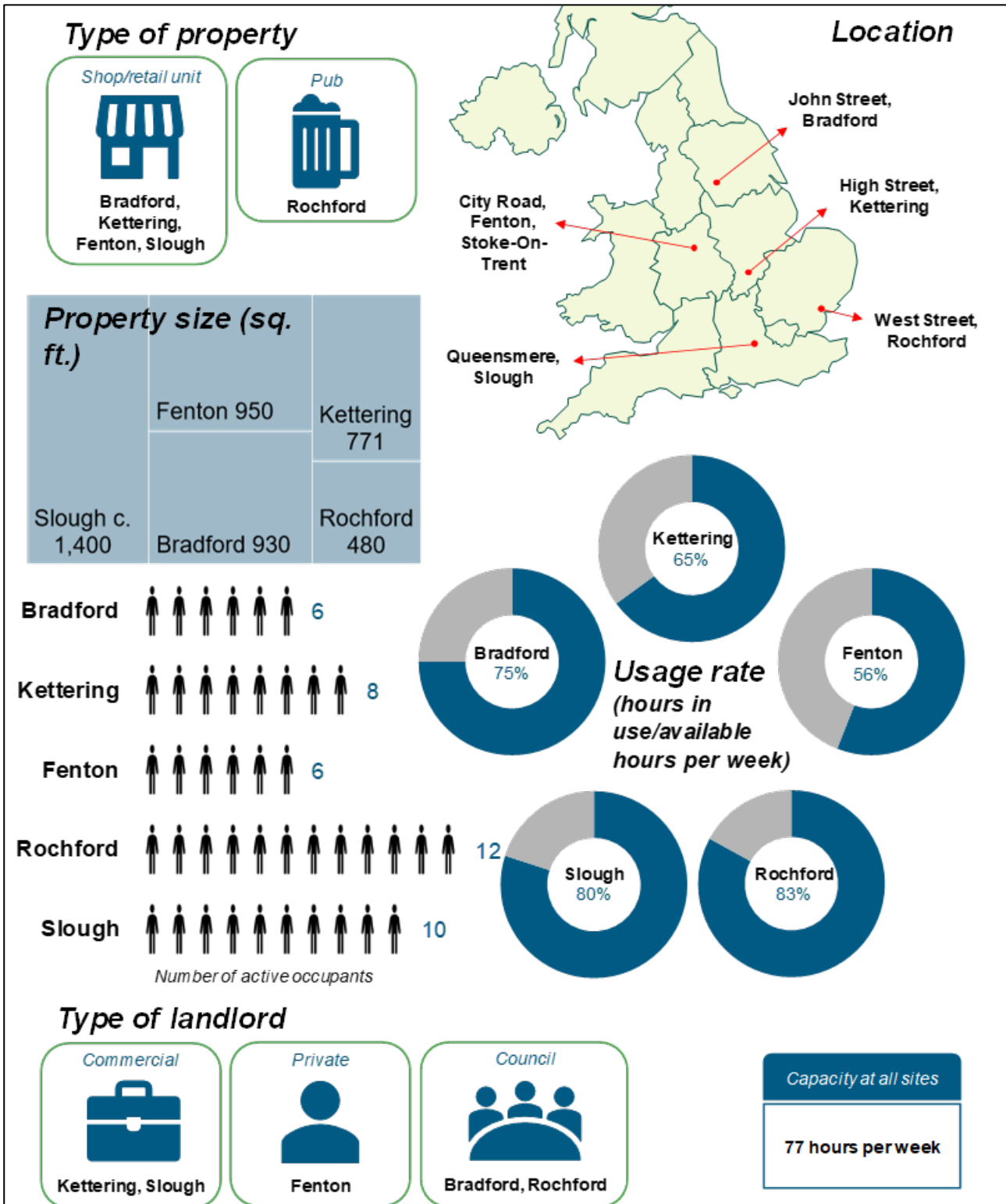
The programme enabled community groups to deliver much-needed services to their users and build socially stronger communities. The enablers of success of the programme included: the low cost of access to the scheme for participants (landlords and community groups); the properties being in central, convenient locations in towns, and; the physical environment of the sites being appropriate for groups' needs. The same factors

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government single departmental plan, MHCLG (June 2019); <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-communities-and-local-government-single-departmental-plan/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government-single-departmental-plan--2>

that enabled groups to better support their service users helped Open Doors build socially stronger communities.

Figure 1.1 A comparison of the five pilot sites in terms of location, property type and size, number of active occupants, capacity and usage rate

Overview of the Open Doors Pilot Sites



Methodology

The evaluation consisted of pilot location case study visits, collecting management information (MI) and counterfactual depth interviews, as well as analysis of data from secondary sources where relevant.

Case study visits were carried out at each of the five pilot locations between November 2019 and March 2020. The aim of the visits was to interview landlords of occupied sites, occupants using the spaces and local businesses in the surrounding area. Several telephone depth interviews were also conducted to allow the views of a range of stakeholders to be captured in the case that individual respondents were unable to participate in an interview on the day of the case study visit.

A short online form was also emailed to occupants in order to collect management information on their use of the Open Doors site, including frequency and duration of use. This was collected twice – once near the start of their tenancy and again towards the end.

The counterfactual exercise explored what happened to similar vacant properties, landlords, and community groups without access to an Open Doors space. This aimed to understand what might have happened in the absence of Open Doors.

Limitations of the research

Designed as a 'light touch' evaluation in proportion to the size of the pilot, the scope of this research was such that not all avenues could be explored to measure the impacts of Open Doors and the processes that enabled or prevented the original aims from being achieved.

The research was only able to cover Open Doors sites while in operation, meaning longer term impacts could not be measured. Fieldwork included those available at the time of case study visits, meaning not all community groups took part in the evaluation. The COVID-19 outbreak prevented interviews with the local community and input from local businesses was limited, making it difficult to determine the full extent of the impacts of Open Doors on the wider community, surrounding businesses and the local economy.

There were also some limitations associated with the counterfactual exercise, including a small pool of unsuccessful landlords from which to recruit, and poor quality or lack of data around the experiences of local businesses.

Background to properties and current use

The five pilot sites were all located in urban areas that had experienced some degree of socioeconomic decline over the past decade. They were facing issues around the closure of local businesses, with a high proportion of vacant properties and low footfall. Landlords were finding it difficult to maximise the rental value of their properties as a result. Before participating in the Open Doors scheme, all the sites had been empty for between 18 months and four years.

The pilot brought these properties back into use for up to a year. Most of the Open Doors occupants were community groups or registered charities. Although the majority were

operating in some capacity prior to Open Doors, a few (3 of 20 interviewed) started activities in the area because of the opportunity the scheme provided them.

Prior to Open Doors these groups often faced difficulties securing appropriate spaces to hold their activities. Groups had typically previously operated out of whatever places were available: ten groups used spaces which they had to book, for example a community hall and a community room in a supermarket; two groups met in public places, one in a coffee shop and one in a pub; five had no access to a public space so used group members' houses, and; two groups were not operating prior to Open Doors. The choice of venue was primarily driven by affordability; groups were typically very restricted financially and any money spent on rent for venues meant less could be directed towards supporting their service users.

The Open Doors sites were being used in a wide variety of ways, ranging from activities designed to support those with specific needs, to all-inclusive activities intended to bring local communities together. The groups provided services to a wide range of individuals, of various ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds.

Getting Involved with Open Doors

Landlords and community groups found out about the scheme through a variety of means, but most commonly word of mouth or, specifically for community groups, on social media.

Landlords noted they were primarily motivated to apply to the scheme for altruistic reasons, namely, to support the local community. The financial aspect also appeared important, as landlords welcomed the break they would get on business rates and utility bills. Additionally, landlords were keen to put their properties back into use and could see the benefit of this for the appearance of the high street and the potential to rent their properties in the future.

Community groups were interested in the scheme because it gave them a space to use rent-free. This was a rare opportunity as most could not afford to pay for an appropriate space so were often using venues that were not considered fit for purpose, such as living rooms or church halls.

Generally, community groups and landlords were satisfied with the application process, mentioning that it was clear, straightforward and often the response from Meanwhile Foundation was timely. That said, some thought more information could have been provided about what would be considered an eligible application, and a few would have liked to receive regular updates on the status of the application.

Impacts and outcomes

The programme clearly enabled community groups to deliver much-needed services to their users, primarily because being able to operate from the Open Doors sites meant they could reach more people. As well as helping to combat social isolation amongst young adults and older people, groups were able to support people of all ages across a multitude

of health, social and educational issues. Community groups were also able to use Open Doors to direct individuals to other local services.

These groups universally agreed that Open Doors had been a positive experience, in terms of both the space available to them and how that enabled them to better support their users. The experience of the community groups who were not part of the pilot was less positive, as they did not have access to the spaces and the associated benefits.

The main factors that enabled Open Doors to support its users were:

- **Cost savings:** Being able to use the space rent-free, meaning costs that otherwise may have been spent on venues could be directed towards the end users;
- **Prime locations:** The sites being in a central locale, meaning they were easily accessible for users, had a raised profile on high streets and increased their sense of belonging or legitimacy, and;
- **Suitable spaces:** The spaces themselves being appropriate for users' needs. Whereas before they may have been limited by venues that were not fit for purpose, Open Doors sites meant groups could carry out their activities and have fewer limits on the number of attendees.

Awareness of the scheme amongst local businesses was often either non-existent, or limited, suggesting that more could have been done to promote Open Doors in the area surrounding the sites and engage local businesses.

The evidence suggests that the Open Doors pilot has contributed to building socially stronger communities. Many groups and service users spoke positively about how the sites had helped foster a sense of community, primarily amongst those who attended sessions held by charities or community groups in the Open Doors sites; this was less apparent in the wider community, with little interaction between local businesses and community groups using Open Doors.

There is less evidence, however, to suggest that the use of the Open Doors spaces has contributed to economically stronger communities. There is only limited evidence of increasing footfall on high streets, and therefore increased custom for local businesses. The general feeling was that for tangible positive outcomes for the local economy the intervention needed to occupy multiple spaces in a single area and to be longer than a 6- to 9-month solution, the time in which the Open Doors sites were operating.

Landlords clearly saw the benefits of meanwhile use, often suggesting that they would be happy for the Open Doors lease to be extended. While landlords primarily talked about the altruistic motivations for applying and the positives the programme had on the community, they clearly also appreciated the financial benefits for themselves. These were primarily the savings on business rates and to a lesser extent, utility bills.

Overall, the Open Doors pilot programme provided positive new uses for empty properties on high streets. This view was shared universally by participating landlords and community groups and by most local businesses.



Figure 1.2 Open Doors Bradford; photo provided by Meanwhile Foundation (Jake Walker)

Open Doors in the future

Almost all community groups would have liked to continue using Open Doors had the opportunity presented itself. While a minority had secured new venues to conduct their activities, the majority had not been able to at the time of interview. Further, there was little evidence to suggest that the groups would be able to take on the spaces independently, after the Open Doors leases come to an end.

Those who had not secured an alternative venue for their activities were often worried where they would operate once the Open Doors lease had expired and for a handful, ceasing their operations was a very real possibility. These groups also shared fears of what the impact of the temporary nature of the scheme would have on their service users. This fear was compounded by the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK in March 2020, with many groups ceasing their activities or beginning to offer them remotely, meaning service users had less support during this time. Meanwhile Foundation had planned to support community groups finding alternative venues to host their activities post-Open Doors, but this was not possible due to the lockdown measures imposed from March 2020, and the long-term closure of community spaces.

Landlords, community groups and local businesses felt that the scheme would benefit from better publicity. Suggested improvements included: maximising knowledge amongst local community groups helping to ensure the spaces were fully utilised; maximising the number of potential users aware of the programme, and; engaging local businesses in the scheme, or at least promoting knowledge of the scheme. However, it is important to recognise the

impact of these strategies from an operational perspective; maximising the number of users would be logistically more challenging, particularly if community groups were unable to accommodate all service users.

There was also appetite for clearer communication of the selection process for both landlords and community groups, who felt this would help them to know whether their space or group was appropriate for the scheme. The criteria for sites and groups, put forward by landlords, is included in the MHCLG prospectus sent to prospective landlords and tenants, suggesting both groups may need to be proactive in seeking out information around the eligibility of their sites.

Community groups cited a range of minor improvements to the spaces themselves. This was most commonly having access to a larger space or having two rooms, where one room could be used for private interactions. However, most issues were remedied promptly by Meanwhile Foundation, such as providing heating and additional seating.

Virtually all community groups and landlords felt the scheme should be rolled out more widely, although the challenges around this must be taken into account (such as funding availability, business rates, and site location). A small minority commented that it was important to locate the sites in smaller towns and villages where access to community services were often more limited. Others felt multiple sites in the same location would augment the benefits of the Open Doors for the local community (by giving more community groups an opportunity to use the site and allowing greater flexibility in terms of use). It is worth noting, however, that more research is needed to ascertain whether smaller towns and villages would have the capacity – in terms of suitable location and demand from residents and prospective community groups – to accommodate an Open Doors space.

A few groups also mentioned that the scheme should try to ensure that the spaces were fully utilised, by a wide range of community groups who could provide support for a wide range of individuals. This could be achieved by enhancing the promotion of each site to the local community and beginning conversations with local businesses to understand their needs and possible uses of the site. This is something that could fall in the remit of the Site Coordinator.

Sharing best practice and common issues was also seen as a way of maximising the value of the scheme to users and community groups alike. This would enable the development of a document highlighting what makes a successful Open Doors site (see Recommendations).



Figure 1.3 Open Doors Bradford, photo provided by Meanwhile Foundation (Caitlin Mogridge)

Recommendations

Evidence from the evaluation indicates that the following actions could be taken to help ensure the scheme is successful if continued in the future, on a larger scale:

1. Clearer communication of application assessment and selection criteria for landlords
2. More scrutiny of the accessibility of sites in the application process
3. Review and revise engagement strategy to help raise awareness of Open Doors amongst local businesses
4. Build a local network of meanwhile use sites that community groups can access after Open Doors leases expire
5. Operate Open Doors in conjunction with other meanwhile use initiatives in the same area
6. Establish Open Doors sites in central areas of towns
7. Continue supplementing business rates of participating landlords
8. Establish an Open Doors 'virtual community' across all sites
9. Flexible lease length

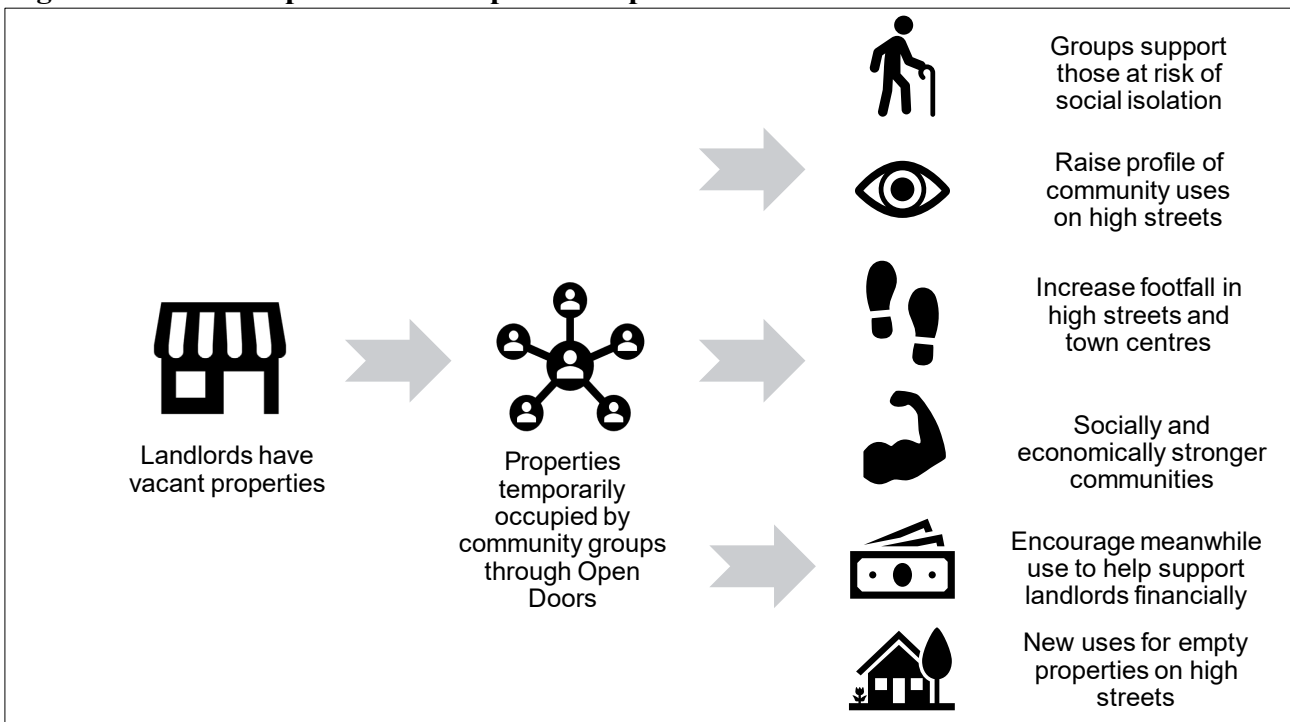
2. Introduction

Background, aims and objectives

The Open Doors pilot programme, funded by Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), was launched 7th November 2018, with properties occupied by community groups from June 2019 until March 2020. The pilot was intended to support the department’s aim of creating socially and economically stronger and more confident communities.² Figure 2.1 below shows how the scheme was intended to work.

This programme was designed to help bring properties in high streets and town centres that would otherwise remain vacant into ‘meanwhile use’ for up to 12 months. The project aimed to maintain public use of each property, through making them accessible to local community groups and charitable organisations. It also aimed to help increase footfall in and around the streets where the Open Doors properties were located.

Figure 2.1 Intended process and impacts of Open Doors



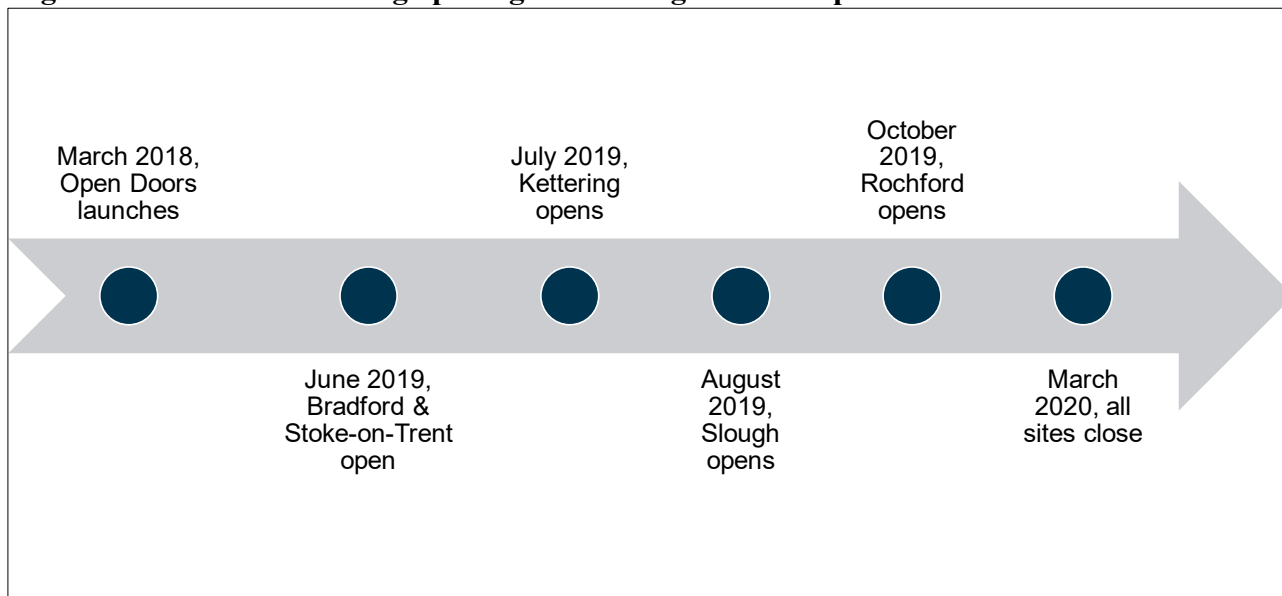
The Open Doors pilot was managed by the Meanwhile Foundation, a charitable organisation dedicated to supporting the use of vacant property for economic and social development purposes.³ They worked with landlords and community groups at the five properties over the refurbishment and ongoing management of the premises.

² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government single departmental plan, MHCLG (June 2019); <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-communities-and-local-government-single-departmental-plan/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government-single-departmental-plan--2#create-strong-communities-socially-economically-and-a-sense-of-place>

³ Meanwhile Foundation Website; <https://www.meanwhile.org.uk/>

The project repurposed one vacant property in each of the five pilot areas: Slough, Fenton (Stoke-on-Trent), Kettering, Bradford and Rochford. Due to a range of circumstances, the properties were not all opened at the same time, meaning some sites were granted an extension to run beyond the end of March 2020 to ensure they were able to operate for as close to 12 months as possible. However, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, all properties were closed by 24th March 2020.

Figure 2.2. Timeline showing opening and closing dates of Open Doors sites



As set out in the application criteria for landlords, the intention was that the sites would be made available for a period of 12 months, although shorter periods would be considered. Four of the five sites signed a 12-month lease, while the Rochford site signed an initial 6-month lease, later extending that by a further six months. Landlords were expected to honour this lease and not terminate it prematurely.

Properties were available for community groups to use rent free throughout the Open Doors pilot period. Landlords did not receive any rental payments during this time; however, the scheme covered the business rates and utility bills of the property, taking these costs away from the landlords and community groups. Specifically, sites were eligible for an 80% exemption on business rates owing to the Meanwhile Foundation's status as a charity, while the remaining 20% was covered by the Open Doors funding. In comparison, if non-participating landlords had leased their properties to charities, they would have still been required to pay 20% of business rates. On the other hand, empty properties can receive an exemption for three months – something that participating landlords may have missed out on whilst taking part in the scheme. It is worth noting that the Government is currently undertaking a review of business rates in the UK, so the system and the rates themselves may change in the future; it is not yet clear how this may affect business rates under the Open Doors scheme.

It should also be noted that through their engagement with Meanwhile Foundation, local authorities played an important role in ensuring the pilot was possible.

As well as this, funding of up to £25,000 for the regeneration of the property to make it suitable for use was available under the scheme. Properties were selected on the basis

that the £25,000 budgeted would be enough to cover any set-up and closing-down fees and remediation. While some landlords chose to renovate to improve the condition of their property and therefore to qualify for selection, they were not expected to pay for regeneration under the scheme. For community groups taking part, use of the property was provided rent-free.

Landlords and community groups who hoped to participate in the pilot were required to fill out an application form detailing their intended use of the space and the potential benefits doing so could bring to their organisation and their eligibility for the programme was assessed against a range of criteria.

The pilot was intended to support community groups who needed premises for several hours a day but were unable to take on a full lease, or who struggled to pay rents on town centre premises. The occupants were able to use the space for anywhere between one day and one year, and the spaces were occupied on a rolling basis so multiple groups could use the space at different times.

Bringing a space in to use meant introducing new furniture, fittings and design to make the sites more relaxed, inviting and accessible to potential users while adhering to planning guidelines in a flexible way i.e. use of vinyl on windows to attract the attention of passers-by without causing change to the structure.

Being able to use a newly furnished space rent free - the furniture, design and branding was crucial element of the project - was also intended to provide cost savings to groups and landlords.

For landlords, it aimed to bring about long-term benefits. Any refurbishments made to the property under the scheme would make it fit for purpose as a commercial property, while providing savings in terms of business rates and insurance when the property was occupied.

The programme also intended to help regenerate struggling high streets by bringing empty properties back into use, increasing footfall and bringing life back into an area.

Specifically, the project aimed to achieve the following:

- Support community groups to deliver much-needed services to young adults and older people who are at greater risk of suffering from loneliness;
- Raise the profile of community uses on high streets;
- Increase footfall in high streets and town centres;
- Help to build socially and economically stronger communities;
- Encourage meanwhile use to help support landlords struggling to cover business rates, utility bills and other costs;

- Provide new uses for empty properties on high streets.

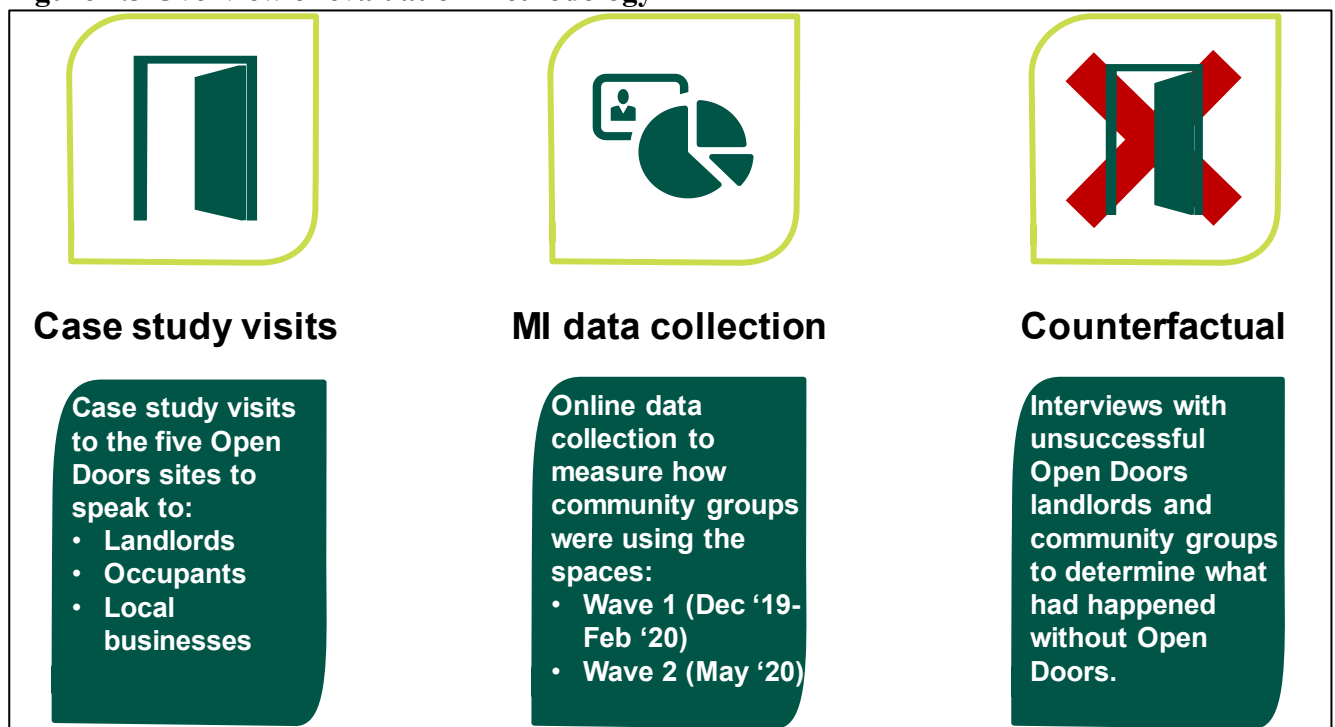
In 2019, MHCLG commissioned IFF Research to conduct an evaluation of the Open Doors pilot programme, to assess whether the aims of the pilot had been achieved.

The evaluation also aims to understand the immediate impacts for the participants involved, including lessons learned about the processes which led to these impacts. This will help MHCLG to understand if this type of intervention is suitable for use on a wider scale.

Methodology

The evaluation consisted of pilot location case study visits, collecting management information (MI) from community groups and counterfactual depth interviews, as well as analysis of data from secondary sources where relevant. Figure 2.3 below gives an overview of the methodology employed.

Figure 2.3 Overview of evaluation methodology



Case study visits

Case study visits were carried out at each of the five pilot locations between November 2019 and March 2020; Bradford, Fenton (Stoke-on-Trent), Kettering, Rochford and Slough. These case study visits consisted of in-depth, face-to-face interviews with representatives from across three stakeholder groups:

- The landlord of the property used for Open Doors (or the organisation who applied for the programme on behalf of the landlord);

- Occupants using the site, such as community groups or charities;
- Local businesses in the vicinity of the pilot properties.

The timing of the case study visits was purposefully chosen such that occupants of the space had had time to settle in, in so far as they were delivering activities, but were still able to recall any initial views they had on the application and set-up period. In addition, all face-to-face fieldwork was completed before 24th March 2020 when Government restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic were put in place.

Several telephone depth interviews were also conducted to allow the views of a range of stakeholders to be captured in the case that individual respondents were unable to participate in an interview on the day of the case study visit.

The duration of the interviews was between 40 minutes to one hour for the landlord and occupants of the site, and shorter for local businesses at 10 to 20 minutes. Where telephone interviews were conducted, they took place at around the same time as the site visit for the relevant pilot location.

Case study visits at each pilot location consisted of between six to ten depth interviews in total; one landlord interview, three to five occupant interviews, and two to four local business interviews.

Contact details for participating landlords and organisations were passed on with permission by the Meanwhile Foundation to IFF, who then arranged interviews with individuals directly. Local businesses were not recruited in advance, rather on the day of the visit and in-person. However, they were sent advance communications informing them of the evaluation.

Management information

A short management information (MI) online form was emailed to occupants in order to collect information on their use of the Open Doors site, including frequency and duration of use.

Prior to launch, a small-scale trial run was carried out in mid-November 2019 to assess how effectively the MI form was working and to test for any potential changes. Three occupants participated in the trial run and only very minor amends were made as a result of the feedback.

The MI form was sent to each occupant twice; initially a month or two into their tenancy (either in November 2019 or January 2020, depending on the occupant's start date) and again towards the end of their tenancy in May 2020. The form that was disseminated in May asked community groups about how they used the spaces in mid-late March, in the few weeks before they closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In total, 29 respondents completed the first wave of the MI form, including those who provided data during the trial run, while 20 completed it in the second wave. Figure 2.4 below shows the number of completes for each pilot location, across the two waves.

Figure 1.4 Number of completed MI forms per pilot location for Waves 1 & 2



Counterfactual

As stated in the Magenta Book, “Key to being able to demonstrate that a particular policy was responsible for an outcome is to identify what would have occurred if the policy had not been implemented and compare this to the measured outcomes after the intervention”.⁴ Along with case study visits to the Open Doors sites, a counterfactual exercise was conducted to understand what had happened to similar vacant properties, landlords, and community groups without access to an Open Doors space. This helped to assess the impact of the Open Doors pilot programme.

Sites were selected from the pool of landlord applicants who were not involved in the pilot, to understand what might have happened at their properties during the time period that Open Doors was running. Selection of the sites was based on the following criteria:

- similarity to the treatment group in terms of local area, type of property and duration of vacancy;

⁴ *Quality in impact evaluation: understanding the effects of policy from other influences (supplementary Magenta Book guidance)*, HM Treasury, Department for Energy & Climate Change, Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs (December, 2012); https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190984/Magenta_Book_quality_in_policy_impact_evaluation_QPIE_.pdf

- sites that narrowly missed out being included in the pilot; and;
- sites that were not too close to a pilot site, such as on the same street, to minimise the effects of 'pollution'.

The stakeholder groups interviewed were the same as those interviewed for the case study visits:

- the landlord of, or the applicant for, the property itself;
- potential occupants, such as community groups or charities, and;
- local businesses in the vicinity of the properties.

The duration of the interviews was 30 to 45 minutes for the landlord and occupant interviews and 15 to 20 for local businesses.

Counterfactual interviews were completed with five non-participating landlords from Bradford, Gloucester, Leeds, Weston-Super-Mare and Willesden, three unsuccessful community groups in Bradford, Fenton and Rochford and one local business close to a vacant property in London.

Like for the case studies, the contact details of unsuccessful landlords and organisations were passed on with permission by the Meanwhile Foundation to IFF, who then arranged interviews directly with respondents. Local businesses were not recruited in advance.

Limitations of the evaluation

Designed as a 'light touch' evaluation in proportion to the size of the pilot, the scope of this research was such that not all avenues could be explored to measure the impacts of Open Doors and the processes that enabled or prevented the original aims from being achieved. The following limitations should therefore be acknowledged when interpreting the findings:

- The research was conducted while the Open Doors sites were in operation, meaning longer term impacts could not be measured.
- It was not possible to conduct interviews with all community groups who took part. 20 interviews were conducted in total across the five sites.
- The case study visits included a handful of interviews with local businesses at each site – 16 interviews took place across the 5 sites. While this provided valuable qualitative evidence for the evaluation, it did not allow the full extent of the impacts of Open Doors on surrounding businesses and the local economy to be determined.
- Although the evaluation research intended to capture the views of the local community towards the Open Doors programme, this was not possible. The intention had been to interview passers-by in the streets surrounding the Open Doors sites to determine awareness of the programme and measure any impacts on the community. However, the COVID-19 outbreak prevented this strand of the research from taking place.

- The relatively small scale and the mainly qualitative nature of the evaluation meant that measuring impacts on footfall and the strength of communities (economically and socially) was based on evidence from interviews rather than quantitative measures.
- Secondary data provided to aid the evaluation, while helpful for context about the local areas, did not enable analysis of impacts of the scheme as no sources had been published after the Open Doors sites opened.
- The evaluation did not involve research with stakeholders working in policy at the MHCLG, Meanwhile Foundation staff or relevant staff at local authorities where the sites were based (except an interview with Rochford council, who applied for the scheme on behalf of a private landlord). Therefore, the report does not comment on strategic decisions made in the design and management of the programme nor any impact that the scheme has had on local authorities in terms of business rates.
- There were some limitations associated with the counterfactual exercise. Firstly, there was only a small pool of unsuccessful landlords from which to recruit, meaning the original sampling design could not be properly carried through. Secondly, the poor quality of data collected from an interview with a local business to one of the counterfactual sites and the difficulties recruiting further local business meant that these interviews were not an effective evaluation tool. As such, the remaining interviews intended for these businesses were conducted with community groups who had applied for Open Doors but did not ultimately use the spaces.

This report

This report presents findings from the five case study visits, MI data and counterfactual interviews. Where relevant, secondary data sources have also been analysed and used to inform this evaluation. In doing so, it aims to determine the extent to which the pilot achieved the objectives set out above and its suitability to be commissioned on a wider scale in other communities across the country. It will also be used by the department to inform future policy on regenerating high streets including work undertaken by the High Streets Task Force.

The report will provide an initial overview of the five pilot sites, including their background and history and current use, before exploring the application process and the outcomes and impacts associated with the scheme for successful landlords and organisations. These will also be examined from the perspective of the unsuccessful applicants. Finally, there will be a discussion of Open Doors in the future, followed by recommendations for rolling the scheme out on a wider basis.

It should be noted that evaluation reports on participants' (landlords, community groups and local businesses) understanding and experience of Open Doors, who are typically not fully aware of the underlying context of the programme.

Further research

The Meanwhile Foundation, who have played a significant role in assisting with the evaluation, will also be reviewing the scheme and conducting their own research examining additional elements of the scheme.

To determine the wider impacts of the project, particularly from a financial point of view, it may be prudent to conduct research amongst the local authorities of the areas of the Open Doors site. Specifically, understanding the impact on the local authorities' business rates from offering the business rates relief through the pilot would be useful. Further, a cost-benefit analysis of the pilot would prove beneficial in providing an indicator of its 'value for money'.

3. Background to properties

Open Doors properties and the surrounding area

This section explores the background and history of the properties repurposed for the Open Doors pilot programme, through findings from the case study visits and secondary data supplied by the Meanwhile Foundation.

Background and history

As per the scope of the Open Doors pilot programme, the five pilot sites were all located in urban areas that had experienced some degree of socioeconomic decline over the past decade. They were facing issues around the closure of local businesses, with a high proportion of vacant properties and low footfall. Landlords were finding it difficult to maximise the rental value of their properties as a result.

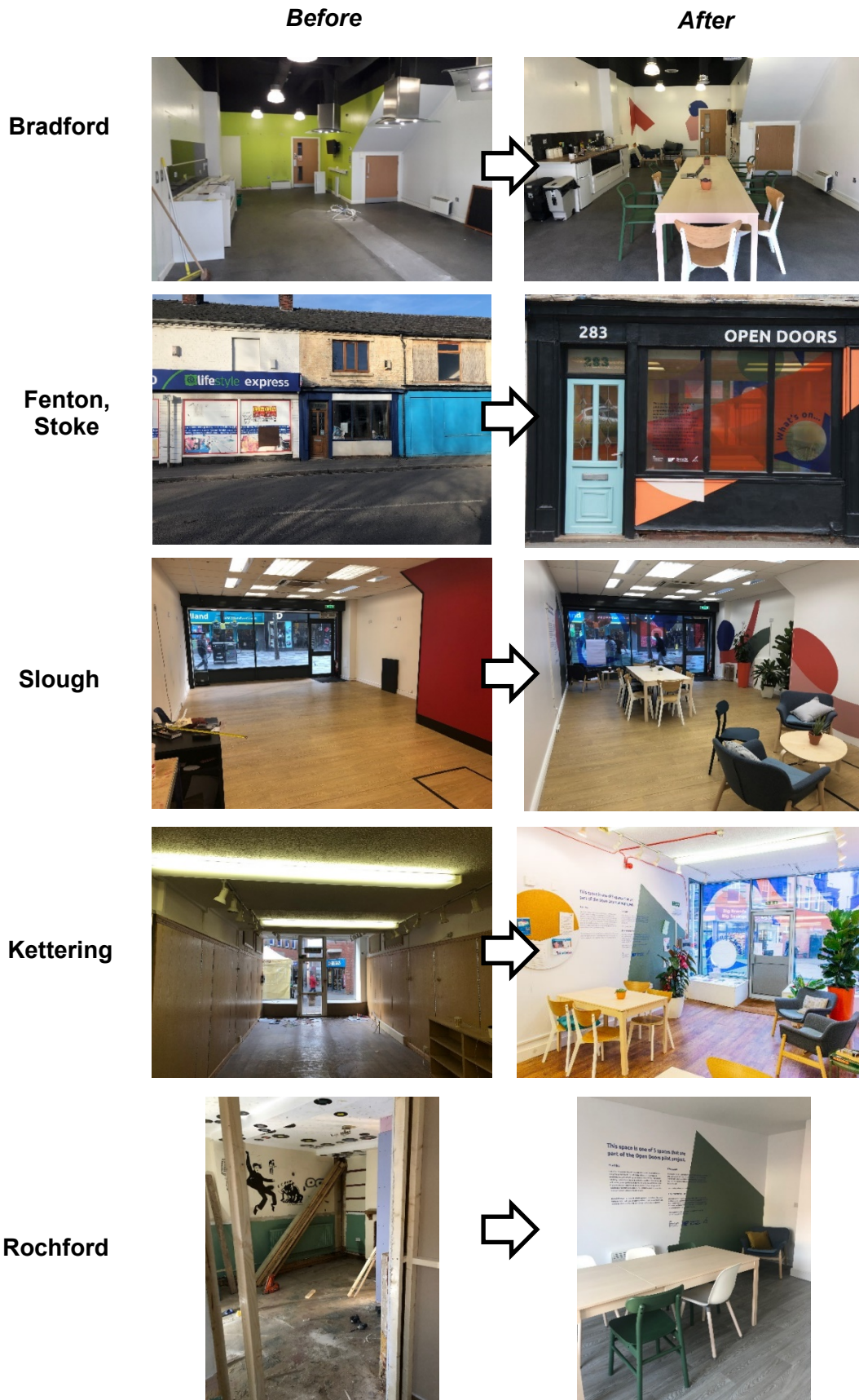
The five sites were situated on high streets, in town or city centres or in the suburbs. They were predominantly surrounded by commercial properties, although some were situated near housing as well. The existing businesses in these areas were typically lower budget or discount retailers such as convenience stores, charity shops or 'pound shops'. Recent businesses that had closed in these areas tended to be well-known high street brands and supermarkets (e.g. Marks and Spencer, Morrisons).

The properties had previously been used for either retail, hospitality or community purposes, although they had been vacant for between 18 months and four years prior to being repurposed for use as an Open Doors space. Landlords had sometimes experienced negative financial impacts whilst the properties were empty (e.g. paying business rates but receiving no return from rental income).

To make them fit for purpose as an Open Doors venue, landlords renovated their properties. The extent of renovations required varied, depending on how the property was previously used and the current state it was in. The renovations were fairly substantial at the Rochford, Fenton and Kettering sites and relatively minor at the Slough and Bradford sites. Having to renovate properties did not deter the landlords' applications as there was an acknowledgement that they needed to be of a certain standard to be considered for Open Doors. It was also the case that these renovations would have been necessary regardless, as the properties would have needed to be renovated to be put on the rental market and participating in Open Doors prompted landlords to carry them out sooner.

Figure 3.1 below shows the properties before and after they were renovated for Open Doors purposes. Further details about each property can be found in Annex A.

Figure 3.1 photograph of each site before and after being renovated for Open Doors; photos provided by Meanwhile Foundation



Counterfactual properties

This section provides an overview of the counterfactual properties. These are sites that applied to be part of the Open Doors pilot but were not included in the scheme. The findings presented here are taken from interviews with the landlord or property manager of each of the five properties.

Background and history

Like the Open Doors properties in the pilot, all five counterfactual properties (not included in the pilot) had previously been used for commercial purposes such as retail and office space. Landlords and property managers had struggled recently to achieve maximum rental value on the properties due to socioeconomic downturn in the local area combined with the changing face of the high street.

While two of these landlords had managed to find suitable tenants since applying to be part of the Open Doors pilot programme – one of these only temporarily over Christmas - the remaining three remained empty and were not, at the time of interview, being used in any way. In each of these cases, it was evident that certain barriers were hindering the landlord's ability to market the property effectively, such as the location of the site or difficulties obtaining planning permission. All the properties had also required renovations to some degree, with varying levels of success in the extent to which landlords were able to carry these out.

Further details for each counterfactual property can be found in Annex A.

4. Getting involved with Open Doors

This chapter of the report focuses on landlords' and community groups' experience of getting involved in Open Doors. For each group, it covers their:

- Awareness of the programme;
- Motivations for being involved, and;
- Experience of the application process.

Landlords submitted tenders Open Doors for sites they deemed suitable for the programme. These sites were assessed on six principal categories:

1. **Location** – high street or town centre property
2. **Compliance** – equipped with property infrastructure (e.g. fire alarm and emergency light system) that complies with industry standards
3. **Internet connectivity** – FTTC with anticipated internet speed of 60-80mps
4. **Setup costs** – no significant remedial work needed (e.g. structural work, rewiring, large-scale clearance)
5. **Ease of operation** – spaces that are simple to operate and minimise risk to the end user (e.g. multiple entry/exit points, multiple floors, shared spaces are not ideal)
6. **Size** – ideally below 1000sqft

In the 'Application to the programme' sub-chapter, we explore landlords' views on the selection criteria for the property and why they thought their application was, or was not, successful.

Landlords

Awareness of programme

Landlords became aware of Open Doors through a variety of means. While most encountered the programme in a work capacity, the specific source differed. A few heard about Open Doors through colleagues, another through their property managing agent and others through government communications (e.g. email notifications and alerts).

Other landlords' routes into the programme were more incidental. One discovered Open Doors through a local art collective they had collaborated with previously, an offshoot of which became an occupant of the site. Another landlord came across it in the national press. Only one landlord was directly approached by the government to make an application.

Landlords' initial reactions to the programme were consistently to note how the programme was aligned to existing plans they had to use vacant properties; some were keen to apply to the programme as a means of testing the viability of a meanwhile-use approach.

"We thought it was a great fit [for our business]. It was a freehold, the high-street was really struggling; we had all the statistics to back it up in the application."

Participating landlord

Motivation for involvement in programme

Landlords' motivations for applying to the programme were expressed in two broad ways: philanthropy and personal gain. Most were motivated in both directions, although more had philanthropic intentions.

Philanthropic motivations included a desire to 'give back' to the community, principally through the role Open Doors could play in regenerating local spaces. All landlords cited this, with many pinpointing the value of a community space for attracting people to the high street. They recognised the benefits to the local economy (i.e. the spend of community groups and end-users), footfall, and inspiring nearby commercial units to invest in their vacant properties. They were also keenly aware of the value of putting vacant properties into use for the overall appearance of the high street. These themes suggest landlords recognise the value of Open Doors for struggling high streets.

"[Our main motivation was] tackling the vacant property issue... the thought being that if at least one of these buildings sitting the market square looks like it's coming back into use, perhaps it gives confidence to landlords and developers of other buildings to invest in their property. Perhaps it [the Open Doors property] will bring people back into town and they might go into the cafe, they might go into the shop."

Participating landlord

In addition, landlords recognised the benefit of the programme for the community groups using the space, with many citing how the Open Doors programme would give these groups a semi-permanent home. A few landlords had long-standing relationships with groups in their area, so knew the importance of these spaces for groups looking to establish themselves.

Landlords also recognised the ways they would benefit from the programme. These benefits were twofold: financial and reputational. Landlords considering the financial benefits of participating in the programme cited the expense of business rates on vacant properties; the prospect of removing this cost was attractive. Additionally, landlords were keen to put their properties back into use and could see the benefit of this for the healthy appearance of the local area and the potential to rent their properties in the future. As such, they also mentioned the benefits of renovating the property from the perspective of resale value and future tenancy (either the community groups using the space during the Open Doors period, or otherwise).

From a reputational perspective, landlords mentioned how they were keen to show they were contributing to a social good. For these landlords, the opportunity to promote their organisation and show it in a positive light was attractive. They also discussed that being

local, and having a stake in the community, was important for their longevity in the local area.

In summary, for most landlords, the chance to support a good cause while simultaneously benefitting financially and reputationally was appealing.

“My client wanted to give back to the high-street, and we'd struggled to let the unit for more than two years.”

Participating landlord

Application to programme

Landlords applied for the programme by filling out an application form. In the form, they were required to provide detail about the local area and the property itself. Specifically, this included a description of the property, size of the space, length and reasons for vacancy, health and safety details and rateable value, amongst other things. The application form can be found in Annex E.

Most landlords did not have any concerns about the programme prior to applying to Open Doors. For those that did, eligibility criteria – such as the location or suitability of their chosen site – and their status as a landlord (where they did not own the site) were of primary concern. A few other landlords were concerned about the use of the site, including which groups would be given access (e.g. reluctance to support political or religious groups, although these were not eligible in the pilot) and the condition the site would be left in. Only one landlord voiced concerns about the legacy of the programme and its long-term sustainability.

Owing principally to the obstacles associated with preparing each site for community group use (site renovations, tenancy agreement, legal contracts), the application process was longer for landlords than community groups. Irrespective of this, most were complimentary about the application process, including those not ultimately selected for the programme. They were positive about the application form, the interview process and the support offered by Meanwhile Foundation if they had queries about the application.

A common theme across responses was how straightforward the application form was to fill out. Many compared it favourably to other similar forms, and others touched upon how well it was laid out and easy to understand.

There were, however, some criticisms of the process. Although most viewed the brevity of the form as an asset, a few were less positive; they felt limited by it and suggested a lack of detail would not allow Meanwhile Foundation to make informed decisions when awarding leases. This perspective was offered only by unsuccessful landlords.

A few landlords also cited the timing of the application (which fell around Christmas 2018) as an issue, particularly if submitting the application demanded internal discussion and collaboration. For these landlords, submitting the application in time was a challenge. This appeared to be a common issue, cited by both successful and unsuccessful landlords.

Additionally, one landlord felt that the application process could be made more effective if landlords were able to apply to the programme in partnership with community groups.

Although this view was not widely shared, the existing relationship between some landlords and community groups alluded to earlier in this chapter highlights this as a potential mechanism for applying to the programme.

“It had very much felt as if a civil servant had had a vision, and they didn't budge from this. We thought it'd make sense to apply with a tenant who had a ready-made use for the space, but this didn't fit with their model.”

Participating landlord

Site selection criteria

Sites were scored out of five on each of the above measures and discounted if they did not meet all of them. In the interviews with unsuccessful landlords, it became clear that they were often unsure about why their application had been rejected. Indeed, most felt an improvement could have been made around the quality of the feedback given by Meanwhile Foundation. They inferred they were rejected for a variety of reasons, including the location of the site, the prospective use of it by community groups (office use, rather than wider community centre space), and the extent of remedial work needed, but were ultimately unsure how they could improve their chances of success if they were to apply again.

“At the point where we found out we hadn't been successful we were offered the opportunity to get feedback, but the feedback felt really meaningless. The phrase we got back was ‘there were only a small number of groups put through’ which didn't tell us anything.”

Non-participating landlord

Further to this, unsuccessful landlords felt the application process would have benefited from more defined selection criteria in future. They called for greater transparency from Meanwhile Foundation on how decisions for awarding leases were made. This is explored further in the recommendations section.

Community groups

Awareness of programme

Community groups discovered the programme in two principal ways: through the media and word of mouth (the latter being the most common means).

Of the handful of community groups that discovered Open Doors through the media, most had seen it advertised through social media posts, evidencing the value of these networking platforms to grassroots organisations. Others discovered it through web searches – either intentionally searching for opportunities like Open Doors or not. A few community groups found out about the programme through the local and national press.

Of the majority that heard about the programme through word of mouth, the specific source varied. While some heard about Open Doors through colleagues within their community group or the wider social enterprise community, most did so through their local

council, highlighting the close relationship between community-driven organisations and local government for sharing news and opportunities.

Echoing landlords' sentiments, a handful of community groups spontaneously talked about the value of the programme and that it was something they'd been looking for a long time. These responses from landlords and community groups show the appetite for a scheme of this nature in different parts of the UK.

"I was very interested because I always wanted to run that kind of community project, but what was stopping me was the cost of venue. Wherever I wanted to go... I had to pay in advance. It [Open Doors] did sound ideal."

Participating community group

Motivation for involvement in programme

Community groups were motivated to apply to the programme for a range of reasons. Often, they were specific to the circumstances (e.g. financial or stage of development) of that group. Most groups had more than one motivation.

The most common factor, cited by most community groups, was the location of the site. For these community groups, being in the heart of the local community was critical. A central location was key for raising the profile of the group and maximising their 'reach' amongst their target audience. This suggests the existing selection criteria around site location benefits community groups greatly.

"It was just very exciting that... that there's a space that was rent free and looked very nice... and well known in terms of the fact you can describe it as opposite Wilkinson's and everybody who's ever been to the town centre knows what opposite Wilkinson's means."

Participating community group

The other principal motivation for community groups applying to the programme was financial. Many groups existed in an improvised way prior to Open Doors, for instance meeting in members' homes or at shared community spaces (e.g. pubs). Others paid for the use of local community spaces, such as community centres. The rent-free aspect of Open Doors enabled these groups to devote a greater proportion of their funding to their activities, illustrating how the programme has supported community groups to deliver services to their users. The financial aspect for community groups is discussed further in the 'outcomes and impacts' section.

Community groups saw the space as an opportunity to grow their business and play a bigger role in their local community. The location, the removal of rent payments and the regular use of the site were all reasons they were able to do this.

"Everybody was really excited, just because it felt like something really different to anything we'd done before. Something on a bigger scale, because the space is bigger than these things, and also because the time slot was bigger."

Participating community group

Application to programme

Roughly half of community groups had concerns about applying to the programme. Concerns centred around the logistics of operating in the space and the success of their application. For those concerned about the logistics of using the space, a prominent issue was security of the site and related safeguarding issues, mentioned by roughly half of the groups concerned about applying to the programme. These community groups were worried about sharing the site with other community groups and existing site users (if the entrance to the site was shared with other commercial units), particularly if their end-users were vulnerable. Other logistical concerns included the time slots in which they would be able to use the site, whether the community group had enough volunteers to run their sessions, and insurance for the site.

The groups concerned about the success of their application felt other groups might be more experienced (and were therefore more likely to be accepted), or that their idea might not suit the goals of the programme. These groups were ultimately concerned about competition for spaces and the scope of the programme suggesting the remit of Open Doors could be made clearer to prospective community groups.

Community groups were near-universally positive about the application process itself. From the initial application form to the site visit, community groups repeatedly reported how the application process was straightforward and smooth. They were generally complimentary about Meanwhile Foundation's role in the process, from the way they addressed queries, to their interest in the community groups' activities. One community group mentioned that the application process had been beneficial for developing their ideas about the purpose of the group and its aims.

"It was an easy process I must say... Meanwhile Foundation were really helpful."

Participating community group

The length of time each application took varied, often dependent on the number of applications to each site or the time it took to ready each site for use. For a handful of groups, applications took a matter of weeks to resolve, but a similar proportion reported that it took a couple of months. A couple of community groups reported that they had assumed they had been unsuccessful in their application because they had not heard from Meanwhile Foundation in a few months.

"The application process took a few months. I completely forgot about it as I had not heard anything, but when I did it all went really quickly. I'm not sure why there was such a long wait."

Participating community group

There were other minor criticisms of the application process, including the sometimes-slow response from Meanwhile Foundation to clarifying questions. Additionally, a couple of groups felt the application process, particularly the interview, could have been more in-depth, and focused on the outcomes of their community groups' work, but was more about the practicalities of using the space.

Community groups that did not end up using the Open Doors spaces withdrew their application for different reasons. It was either the timeframe of the space being available (i.e. the space not being ready for a group to use in time), their access to the property (one group wanted their own space, but understood why it was shared) or the timeslots available to them when their application had been accepted (it did not suit what they wanted to use the space for). These groups felt greater communication about when the space would be ready for use, and flexibility around use of the space, was needed but none were deterred from making a future application.

For successful community group applicants, understanding their relationship with the landlord is important to understanding how the relationships forged through Open Doors have developed and may be sustained in future. This is particularly important if community groups are able to generate income to rent the property from the landlord, or if the landlord has multiple properties that they can offer for meanwhile use. Most community groups, however, did not interact with the landlord of the site. If they encountered any problems or needed to alter the space to facilitate their use of the site, they contacted Meanwhile Foundation, who were accommodating and willing to help. Groups seemed happy with this arrangement.

"We're in constant email communication [with Meanwhile Foundation]. They held a meeting for everyone to meet one another, [it's an] easy going relationship... They agreed for us to have longer sessions and agreed on [a] coffee morning."

Participating community group

Relationships tended to already exist between the minority of community groups that had been in contact with the landlord of the site. Community groups in this situation were positive about the landlords' involvement in the scheme, citing their flexibility around opening and closing times of the space and their ongoing willingness to collaborate for events put on in the local community.

"He's supported us already. We've got a good working relationship, and this [Open Doors] means it's a bit more embedded... We've actually put in a bid to host a Christmas event at the town hall."

Participating community group

5. How the sites are currently being used

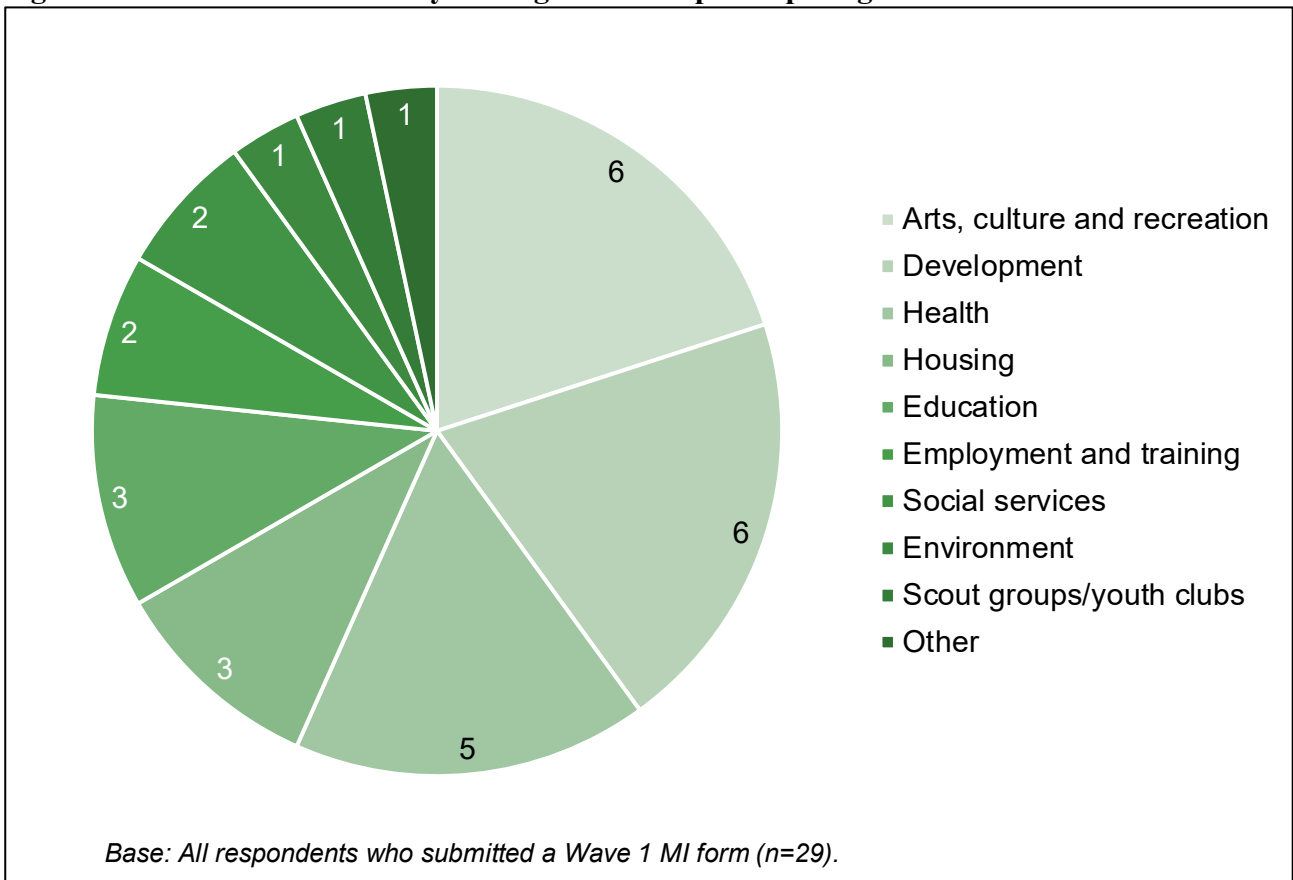
This chapter looks at use of the five sites during their time as Open Doors spaces, including an overview of the characteristics of the occupants using them and an exploration of how the sites were used.

Types of community group

Most of the Open Doors occupants were community groups or registered charities, while a smaller number were social enterprises or community interest companies (CICs).

The main area of activity of these organisations varied. As shown in Figure 5.1 below, in the Wave 1 data collection the most common area of activity was arts, culture and recreation (6 organisations). Equally common were development activities e.g. community outreach, social change, improving public wellbeing (6), followed by health (5), housing (3), education (3), employment and training (2), social services (2), environment (1) and scout groups or youth clubs (1). One group identified their activities as 'Other' – they provided support to the voluntary sector.

Figure 5.1 Main areas of activity for organisations participating in Wave 1



The case study visits provided further insight into the different sectors occupants were involved in, as outlined in the examples below:

- Organisations involved in **arts, culture and recreation** covered activities such as political education, amateur dramatics (e.g. improvisation) and culturally themed events for ethnic minorities.
- **Development** included groups concerned with community engagement, social change and life skills.
- Those offering **health** services were focussed on wellbeing/mental health, addiction recovery, adults with learning difficulties, dementia support, chronic pain support and holistic therapy.
- In terms of **education**, the main activities provided were through playgroups for children across a range of ages and involving parents or guardians too.
- **Housing** organisations offered mortgage/financial advice and homelessness support.
- **Employment and training** included a career network for neurodiverse women in the creative industries.
- A **youth club** that taught young people to engage with technology creatively.
- And organisations providing **social services** included preventative support services for families and domestic abuse support for women.

The case study visits showed that the size of organisations using the Open Doors spaces was wide-ranging. From single volunteers offering a specific service to larger organisations with a few core team members running open events for wider groups of individuals on a drop-in basis. As such, it was evident that for larger organisations it was sometimes difficult to ascertain the exact number of members they had, as it was changing often depending on the groups' circumstances and the extent to which members joined on a temporary or permanent basis.

History of community groups

Similarly, the groups' varied in terms of how long they had been operating for since inception. While a small minority had been operating for less than a year (with a minority using the Open Doors pilot programme as a steppingstone to setting-up their initiative), others were already well-established in their respective communities having been operating for up to 20 years. Some of these long-running groups had been operating for a period prior to their official inception; for example, under a slightly different guise or more informal set-up.

The case study visits also showed that the types of places groups had used to conduct their activities prior to Open Doors were extremely diverse. Commonly used were local halls, places of worship (e.g. a room in a church or Hindu temple), libraries and members' houses. Other types of places used in the past by occupants included units on an industrial site, parks, businesses, leisure centres, community rooms (e.g. in a

supermarket), cafes/pubs and at home. More specialised locations were required by a minority of groups, such as recording studios, GP practices, sports clubs and nurseries.

In addition, a few groups that had been set-up immediately prior to the Open Doors pilot programme, specifically to take advantage of what they considered to be the unique opportunity the programme presented, noted they had not needed to use any other spaces to conduct their activities.

Challenges experienced in finding spaces

The individuals interviewed as part of the case study visits mentioned certain challenges that were associated with finding a suitable space in which to conduct their groups' activities. Affordability was frequently raised as an issue. As community groups and charities relying heavily on donations, they often struggled financially and the more money that was spent on paying rent, the less funding was available for the groups' activities. For example, an ethnicity-based group with cultural aims from Slough, who had been operating for over ten years, often had to hold events at members' houses due to the unaffordability of local spaces. This was impractical and it hindered their ability to conduct their activities in the way that they wanted to.

In addition, available and affordable spaces were often poorly equipped or unsuitable. A chronic pain support group from Kettering held their sessions in coffee shops. However, these were not felt to be appropriate because they were generally noisy and lacked the privacy required for talking to users about sensitive issues. A few of these spaces often lacked essential facilities, such as toilets and kitchens.

Groups also mentioned that these alternative spaces were inconveniently located. They may have been outside of the town or city centre and far away from the community the groups intended to serve. One group in Fenton that held events encouraging community involvement with social development aims was unable to find a space near accommodation for attendees who were travelling in order to attend.

Another challenge raised by groups working with vulnerable individuals, such as domestic abuse survivors or recovering addicts, was finding a space where attendees felt safe. This requirement somewhat limited the range of spaces that they could use.

Finally, a lack of long-term security tended to be a challenge experienced by many groups, but especially those that were still in their set-up and development phase. The absence of a space for regular use and uncertainty on the matter from week-to-week hindered planning and made it difficult for these groups to establish an identity. In contrast, the well-established groups participating in the pilot programme were more likely to use multiple sites (in addition to the Open Doors space) and therefore they did not experience the same issue.

“When you don't have a space and don't have any money, you have to keep working to find the next environment to work in and then getting everyone together; it's just a lot of labour, and it's really stressful.”

Participating community group

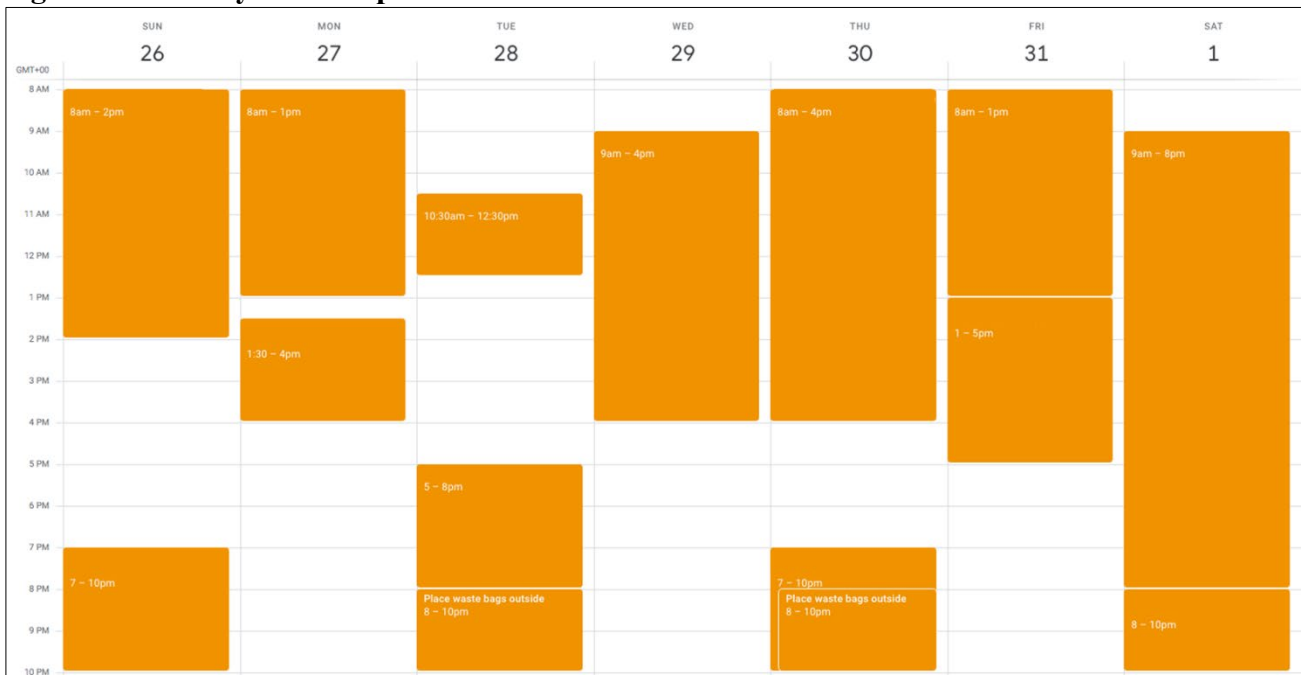
How the sites were used

This section explores how organisations used the spaces. The following criteria which community groups had to meet and abide by in order to use the space:

- they were all required to have a community-focused or site-specific proposal of use;
- they had to have public liability insurance;
- they were not permitted to promote any specific political or religious views in order to be able to make use of the space.
- they were not permitted to sell alcohol at the site;
- they must work with local project assistants who managed the programme for Meanwhile Foundation at each site;
- they must leave the space in the same condition in which they found it after each use, and;
- they must follow the guidance on responsible use set out by Meanwhile Foundation and must report any issue to space managers.

Figure 5.2 below shows a weekly timetable from one of the sites, which were implemented to ensure manage the timetabling of the space and maximise use. These timetables were hosted online so were easily accessible to groups and were managed by the space manager for each site.

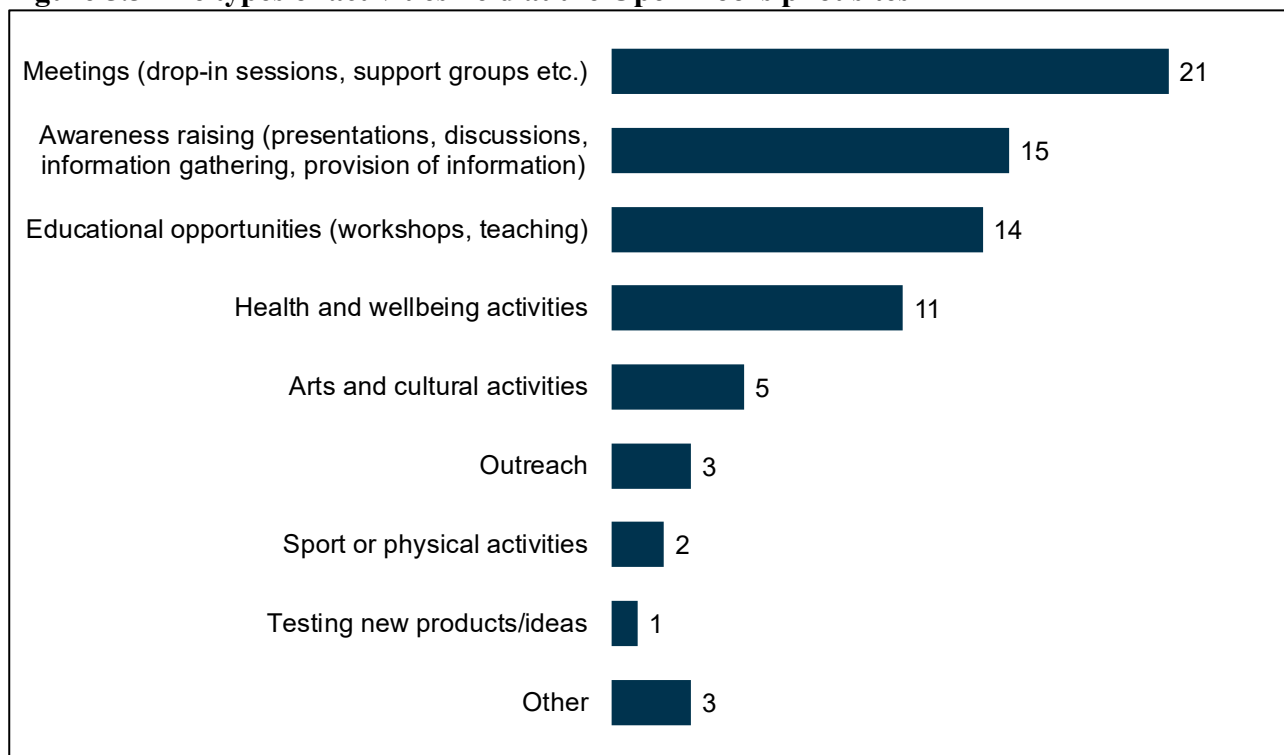
Figure 5.2 Weekly online Open Doors timetable



The groups using the Open Doors spaces conducted various types of activities at the sites. Data collected from Wave 1 of the MI form shows that the majority held meetings

(21), such as drop-in sessions or support groups, and awareness-raising activities (15), such as presentations, discussions or information events. As well as this, just under half of the groups surveyed said they provided educational opportunities (14), such as workshops or teaching, and health and wellbeing activities (11). A smaller number conducted arts and cultural activities (5), outreach (3), sport or physical activities (2) and new product or idea testing (1). One group chose 'Other' and specified an activity not already listed - consulting with the public on specific issues related to the aims of the group.

Figure 5.3 The types of activities held at the Open Doors pilot sites



As well as conducting arts and cultural activities, arts, culture and recreation groups tended to provide other kinds of activities as well, with half of them providing educational opportunities and a third health and wellbeing activities. The types of activities offered also varied in a similar way for health groups – in fact, they were more likely to hold general meetings, such as drop-in sessions or support groups, than specific health and wellbeing activities, such as physical therapy. This explains why meetings and awareness raising were the most common activities, despite arts and health groups being common. Development groups covered a spectrum of sectors, and therefore most frequently carried out more generic kinds of activities, namely awareness raising, meetings and educational opportunities.

Note that the layout of some of the spaces meant that organisations holding sports or other recreational activities could not always be accepted onto the scheme.

The case study visits provided further detail on types of activities groups were conducting. For example, a community group based in Fenton invited nurseries to take part in playgroups where children designed and made decorations with the aim of getting them out of the nursery and into the wider world and to experience new environments. Another group in Rochford, centred around creative wellbeing, ran pop-in sessions that enabled

community residents to get involved in visual arts, based on a different theme each week, in order to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Some groups also provided free tea, coffee and lunch.

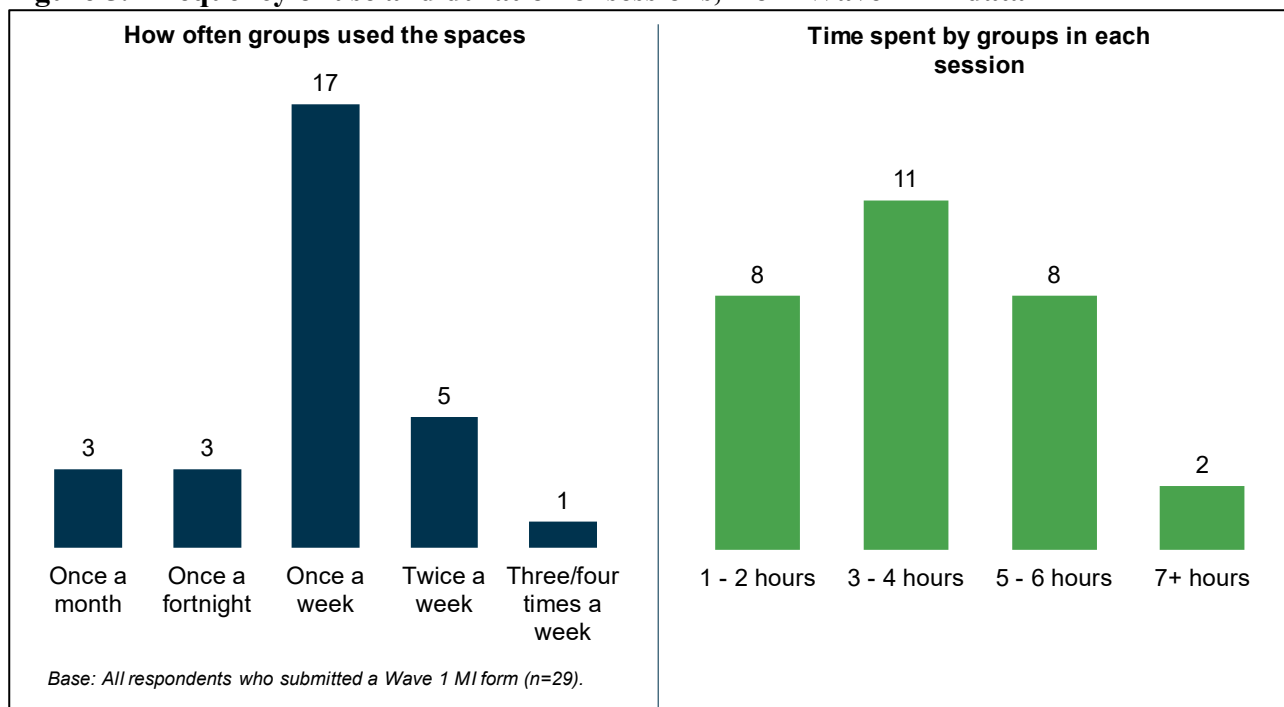
Activities held by groups differed in terms of how flexible and open they were. For example, some groups emphasised that they allowed members of the public to just drop-in to their sessions, such as a family support charity in Slough who ran playgroups at the space, while a few others provided a structured course or regime that attendees must be signed up to in advance in order to join. Those who ran a structured course did so due to the nature of their activities. For example, a domestic abuse support charity in Bradford ran a 12-week course involving therapy groups and other support. Sometimes use of the Open Doors site allowed groups to change how they offered activities in terms of openness and flexibility.

Groups were asked through the MI form to provide information on how often they used the space and how long for. Wave 1 data shows that, in terms of the frequency of use, most groups used the space once a week (17), while around one-fifth used it twice a week (5), one-tenth once a fortnight (3) and once a month (3) and one group used it three to four times a week.

Each site had a capacity of 77 hours per week. Data supplied by Meanwhile Foundation for February 2020, the last full month the sites were in operation, shows that the sites were in operation from between 56% and 83% of these 77 hours: Rochford was in use for 83%; Slough for 80%; Bradford for 75%; Kettering for 65%, and; Fenton for 56%.

In terms of the duration of use per session, groups most commonly spent between three and four hours in the space (11), while eight groups spent between one and two hours and a further eight between five and six hours. Less than one-in-ten held sessions of seven or more hours (2).

Figure 5.4 frequency of use and duration of sessions, from Wave 1 MI data



The number of attendees at activities in Wave 1 held by groups ranged from a minimum of two up to a maximum of 30, with the average number of attendees being 11. In addition:

- 13 groups received mostly regular attendees;
- 6 received mostly new attendees;
- 10 received a mix or about equal proportions of regular and new attendees.

Wave 2 results showed that similar numbers of groups were receiving mostly regular or new attendees, or a mix, in comparison to Wave 1. Of the 21 who provided data in Wave 2, 8 received mostly regular attendees, 3 mostly new attendees and 10 a mix or about equal proportions of regular and new attendees.

The total number of attendees per group, i.e. the number of people that had attended at least one session held by each group at the Open Doors space, ranged from seven to 290, while the average number was 44. The site with the highest average number of overall attendees was Rochford (65), while Bradford and Fenton had the least (both 25). Kettering and Slough fell in between, with 40 and 42 respectively.

Note that due to very low base sizes, results from the MI form should be treated as indicative only.

It is also worth noting that there were certain operational factors common to all the sites, in terms of how they were used on a day-to-day basis. Organisations using the sites worked closely with local project assistants from the Meanwhile Foundation, who acted as a dedicated point of contact for any logistical or practical issues. They also arranged the timetabling of the sessions. In order to ensure the sites worked well as shared spaces, user groups were asked to leave them in the same way they found them, e.g. by removing any rubbish and taking with them any items they had used in their sessions.

Demographics of Open Doors attendees

Figure 5.5 to Figure 5.7 below shows MI demographic information, collected from community groups, for both Waves. While certain groups targeted certain demographics, the data shows that groups catered for a variety of genders, ages and ethnicities. Indeed, the response option 'a mix of gender/age/ethnicity' was the most common for each characteristic, at each wave.

There was some variation in the demographics by site, perhaps reflecting the profile of residents in those areas, particularly in terms of ethnicity. For example, in Wave 1 of the data collection, five of seven groups using the Slough site said their attendees were from 'a mix of different ethnic groups', consistent with 2011 census data which showed 40% of the population in Slough were Asian or Asian British and 36% White British.⁵ Conversely, four of five groups in Kettering said their attendees were 'mostly white'. This largely

⁵ Slough 2011 census data: <http://www.slough.gov.uk/council/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/ethnicity.aspx>

reflects the ethnic profile of the town: 2011 Census data showed Kettering had a 94% White population.⁶

Figure 2.5 Main gender of attendees as reported by organisations

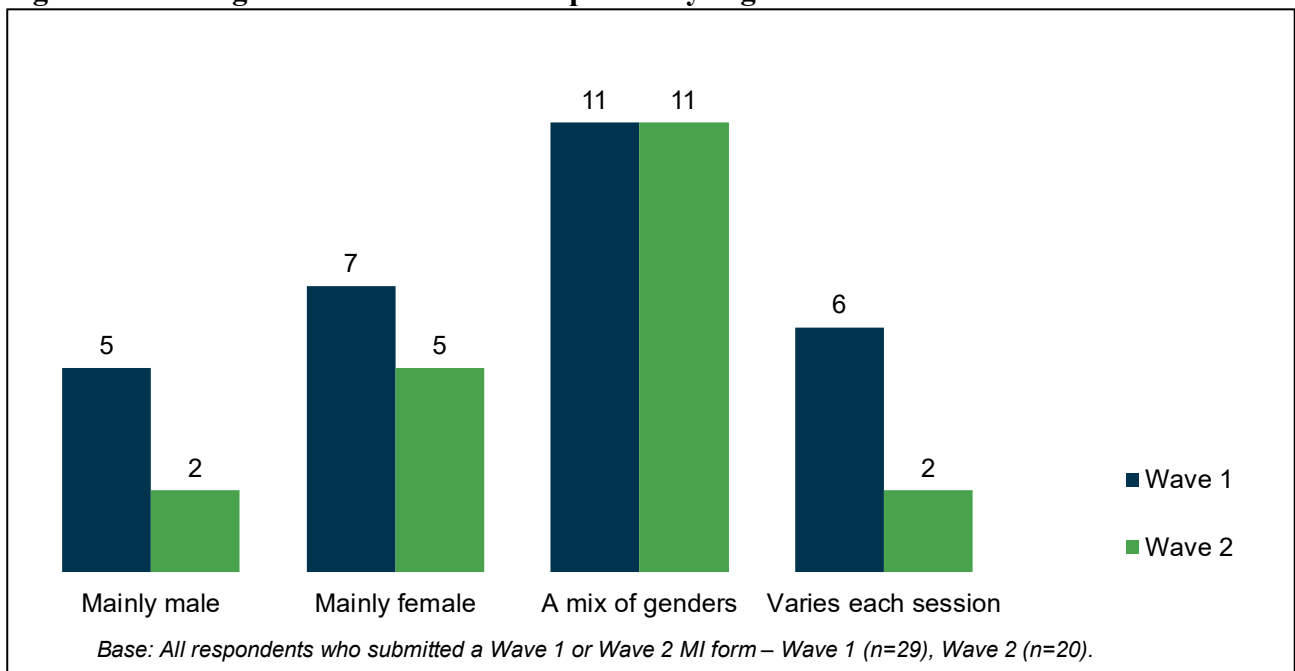
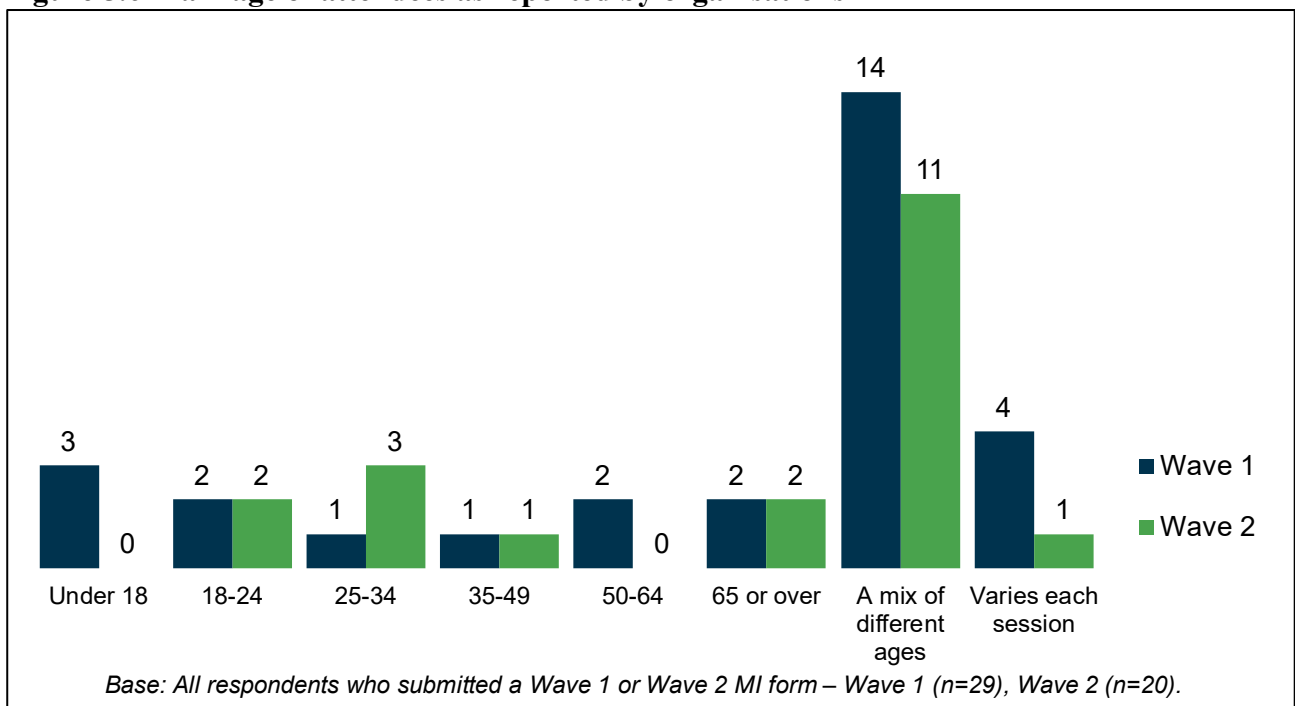
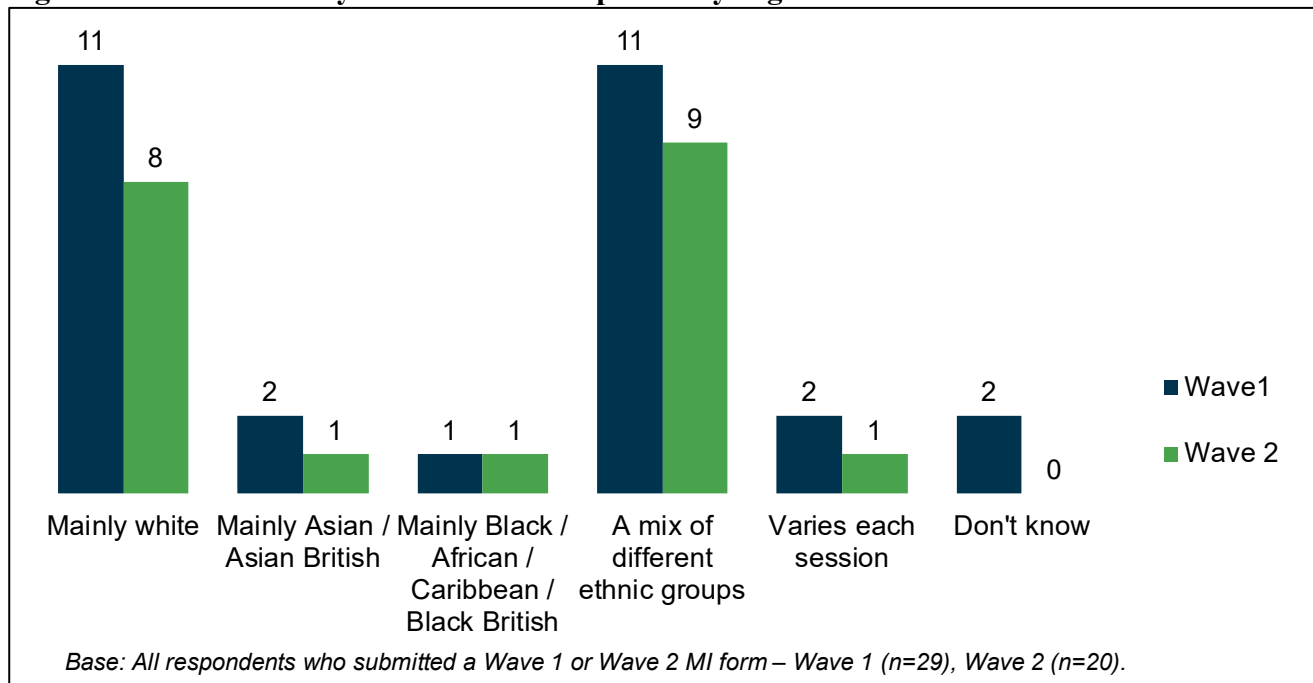


Figure 5.6 Main age of attendees as reported by organisations



⁶ Kettering 2011 census data: <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-admin.php?adm2id=e07000153>

Figure 5.7 Main ethnicity of attendees as reported by organisations



Summary of pilot sites

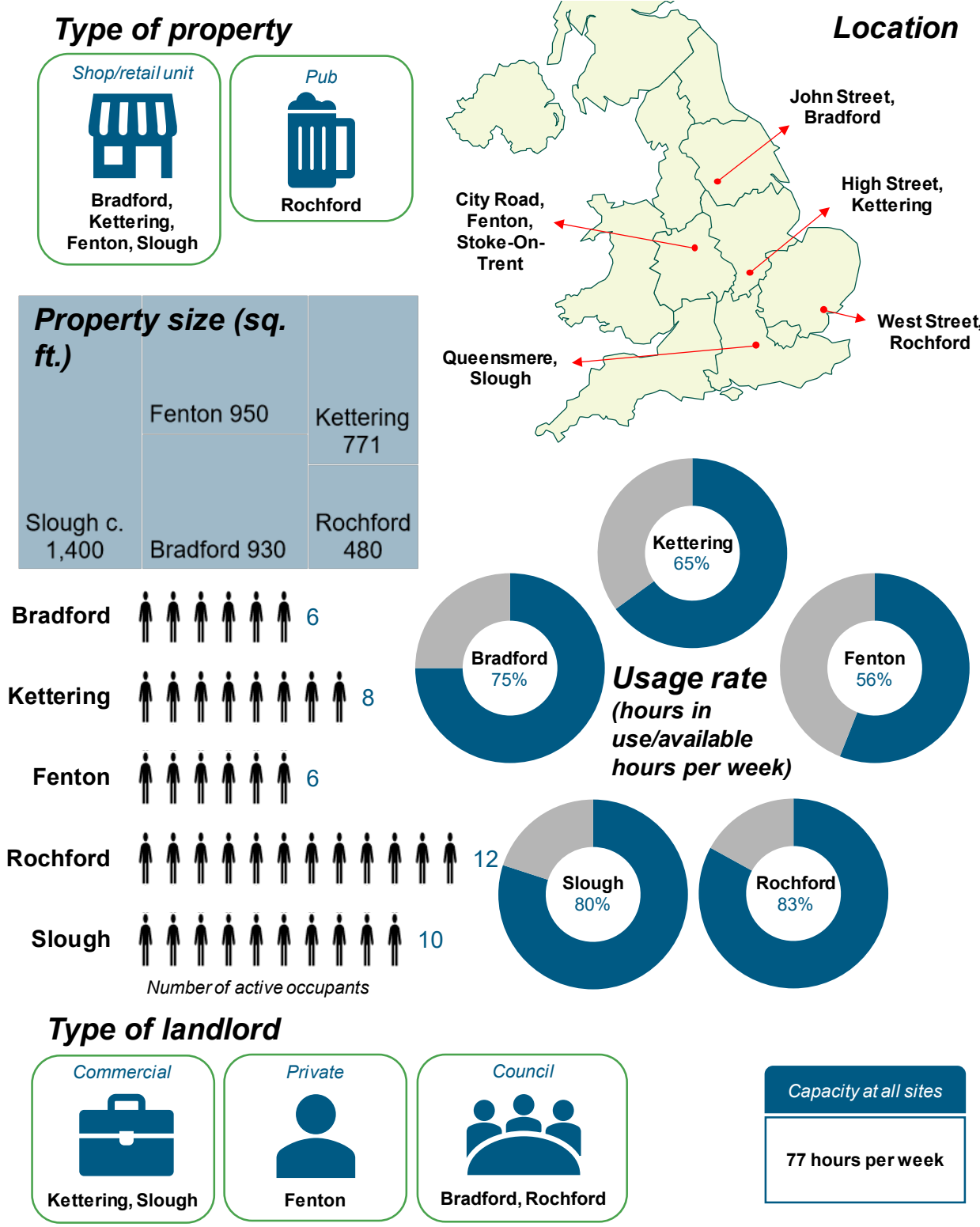
Figure 5.8 overleaf provides a comparison of the five pilot sites. It shows that the landlords of the properties fell into three broad categories; private, public and commercial.

As of February 2020, the number of active community groups occupying each site varied between six and twelve groups (occupants numbers changed throughout the course of the lease, as they dropped out or as new ones joined). In addition, usage rates varied between sites quite a bit, with the highest in Rochford with 83%. Rochford also had the highest number of active occupants (12). The lowest usage rate was 56% and this was in Fenton.

In addition to having the highest usage rate and number of occupants, Rochford was also the smallest property at 480ft² spread over three units. It was formerly a pub, while all other sites were retail units. The largest site was in Slough (1,400ft²).

Figure 5.8 A comparison of the five pilot sites in terms of location, property type and size, number of active occupants, capacity and usage rate

Overview of the Open Doors Pilot Sites



6. Outcomes and impacts

This chapter discusses the outcomes and impacts of the Open Doors pilot scheme, measured against its six original aims:

- Support community groups to deliver much needed services to young adults and older people who are greater risk of suffering from loneliness;
- Raise the profile of community uses on high streets;
- Increase footfall in high streets and town centres;
- Help to build socially and economically stronger communities;
- Encourage meanwhile use to help support landlords struggling to cover business rates, utility bills and other costs; and
- Provide new uses for empty properties on high streets.

The factors that enabled or prevented each aim to be achieved during the pilot are discussed under each aim, where applicable.

Key findings

The programme clearly enabled community groups to deliver much-needed services to their users, primarily because being able to operate from the Open Doors sites meant they could reach more people. As well as helping to combat social isolation amongst young adults and older people, groups were able to support people of all ages across a multitude of health, social and educational issues. Community groups were also able to use Open Doors to direct individuals to other local services.

These groups universally agreed that Open Doors had been a positive experience, in terms of both the space available to them and how that enabled them to better support their users. The experience of the community groups who were not part of the pilot was less positive, as they did not have access to the spaces and the associated benefits.

The main factors that enabled Open Doors to support its users were:

- **Cost savings:** Being able to use the space rent-free, meaning costs that otherwise may have been spent on venues could be directed towards the end users;
- **Prime locations:** The sites being in a central locale, meaning they were easily accessible for users, had a raised profile on high streets and increased their sense of belonging or legitimacy, and;
- **Suitable spaces:** The spaces themselves being appropriate for users' needs. Whereas before they may have been limited by venues that were not fit for purpose, Open Doors sites meant groups could carry out their activities and have fewer limits on the number of attendees.

Awareness of the scheme amongst local businesses was often either non-existent, or limited, suggesting that more could have been done to promote Open Doors in the area surrounding the sites and engage local businesses.

The evidence suggests that the Open Doors pilot has contributed to building socially stronger communities. Many groups and service users spoke positively about how the sites had helped foster a sense of community, primarily amongst those who attended sessions held by charities or community groups in the Open Doors sites; this was less apparent in the wider community, with little interaction between local businesses and community groups using Open Doors.

There is less evidence, however, to suggest that the use of the Open Doors spaces has contributed to economically stronger communities. There is only limited evidence of increasing footfall on high streets, and therefore increased custom for local businesses. The general feeling was that for tangible positive outcomes for the local economy the intervention needed to occupy multiple spaces in a single area and to be longer than a 6- to 9-month solution, the time in which the Open Doors sites were operating.

Landlords clearly saw the benefits of meanwhile use, often suggesting that they would be happy for the Open Doors lease to be extended. While landlords primarily talked about the altruistic motivations for applying and the positives the programme had on the community, they clearly also appreciated the financial benefits for themselves. These were primarily the savings on business rates and to a lesser extent, utility bills.

Overall, the Open Doors pilot programme provided positive new uses for empty properties on high streets. This view was shared universally by participating landlords and community groups and by most local businesses.

Figure 6.1 Queensmere, Slough; photo provided by Meanwhile Foundation (Mike Massaro)



Support community groups to deliver much needed services to young adults and older people who are greater risk of suffering from loneliness

The benefits to community groups' service users by accessing Open Doors spaces was evidenced clearly across all five sites, helping to alleviate loneliness of those at risk as well as providing other social and educational benefits.

Use of the sites enabled many community groups to conduct activities and deliver services on a scale that they would not have been able to do without access to an Open Doors space. This meant that they were able to provide services to a larger number and a wider variety of service users. The groups using the sites consisted of a mixture between established groups and organisations who were using the space to expand their activities, and new groups who had formed because of the opportunity they saw in Open Doors. For both, it meant an increase in services for end users.

"Well it's been encouraging... our membership has soared, and I would say it's been a positive, you know, a positive boost to our activities and organisation."

Participating community group

Because of the activities conducted by groups using Open Doors, service users were often able to access services that were not previously available to them; typically, this was because there had been no similar service in the local area prior to Open Doors. For example, one group using the Slough site noted that the benefits to the service users were felt particularly keenly when users had no alternative services to access.

"Every week... people will just say the most amazing things to me, you know, 'I don't know where I would have gone this morning if I hadn't come here'."

Participating community group

In some cases, use of the sites meant that groups were able to access individuals they had previously not been able to support. For example, a dementia support group using the Rochford site commented that before they had access to Open Doors, there were some local dementia sufferers who refused to let carers or support workers inside their homes so could not receive the support they needed. Now they could access the Open Doors site, they were coming there for support.

While community groups typically operated for a specific reason, reducing social isolation was an almost universal by-product of activities being conducted at Open Doors. For many groups, this was simply because the site gave people a space to interact with one another which they previously had not been able to access. For example, this was the case for a group who offered support for homeless people in Kettering, which gave them a place to come for some food, tea, coffee and to interact with others in a safe place. Another example of this was the Slough site providing a space for one group to put on activities for anyone in the community.

"It's somewhere warm and safe, a place for people to meet and talk to other people... it's a chance for people to be themselves... They can't go to coffee shops because it's too expensive and they feel uncomfortable."

Participating community group

Landlords were also positive about the benefits of Open Doors for service users. One landlord commented that while there was a community spirit and ideas about how to bring people together prior to Open Doors, this was not always possible to implement due to the lack of appropriate venues. This landlord thought Open Doors had enabled these ideas to become a reality. Similarly, another landlord mentioned that by encouraging people who would have otherwise been at home alone to get out into the community, it had provided mental health benefits.

"Giving these ideas a home is something that doesn't happen very often."

Participating landlord

It is clear that while the Open Doors sites helped young adults and older people, the groups using the sites provided benefits to a broader demographic. In addition to the Kettering group supporting homeless people, there were various groups who did not necessarily have a specific target audience, beyond the 'local community', so aimed to engage people across the demographic spectrum. For example, a group working in Slough aiming to engage the local community through dancing and sporting activities; a group in Kettering centred around creative wellbeing, and; a community development group in Fenton.

Further to the specific aim of supporting young adults and older people, the wide range of activities conducted by groups using the sites means that educational, health and other social benefits have been apparent for groups of all ages. Through Open Doors, many groups have been able to increase the provision of targeted services. Examples of this include providing a learning environment for children, as has been the case for a group each at the Fenton and Slough sites; a foodbank operating out of the Kettering site, and; a group using the Rochford site to teach people of all ages a wide range of skills, such as cookery.

"They can try something new, get new skills and be hands on."

Participating community group

"Helps to stop loneliness for people with chronic pain as there's not many groups for them to join, but this gives them somewhere to go and people to talk to who know how they feel."

Participating community group

Open Doors sites providing for a range of age groups is also evident in the MI data. For example, in the first Wave of MI collection, 14 of 29 groups who provided information on the ages of attendees said that a 'mix of different ages' attended their groups. A further 5 of 29 mainly had those aged 24 or under mainly attending their sessions and 4 of 29 primarily provided for those aged 50 (2 between 50-64 and 2 65+). Results from the

second wave of MI show a similar story, with 12/21 reporting attendees of a 'mix of different ages'.

As well as enabling community groups to directly support their users, an indirect benefit of Open Doors has been the opportunity to signpost users towards other relevant services. Acknowledging that they are unable to support all needs of their attendees, community groups mentioned that they were able to direct people to services that can help people with specific needs or issues. In a few cases, groups signposted to other groups who were also using the Open Doors sites, and a few noted how some individuals attended multiple groups at the same site.

"It's just started conversations and provided them with opportunities to signpost people to help they might need."

Participating community group

The benefits that have been evident from community groups using Open Doors spaces becomes more apparent when examining the counterfactual alternative. One of the community groups who withdrew their application upon learning that the space would have to be shared with others, had been looking for a space for service users to access in the daytime. Whilst they had since secured a space, it was being refurbished at the time of interview, meaning there had been a period of time when they were only able to provide an evening service.

A second group interviewed as part of the counterfactual, who applied to use the Bradford site, had been looking for a drop-in space in a central location for their service users. However, without access to the space they had not been able to offer this and instead had continued with 'borrowed' spaces in cafes and GP surgeries. This group suggested that access to a central space would have enabled the group to function better, enabling them to hold activities efficiently and provide a better quality of service.

"A shopfront would have been useful... we haven't taken anything on to replace the [Open Doors] space."

Non-participating community group

What factors enabled community groups to support those in need?

The factors that have enabled community groups to provide much-needed support to their service users broadly fall into three categories: absence of costs; location; and the physical environment of the sites themselves.

Open Doors is relatively cost-free for community groups

Typically, community groups had little or no budget to rent spaces as they were often self-funded.

For a few groups (3 of 20), who had no budget to hire a space, rental costs had prevented them from operating at all or from operating in the area where the Open Doors site was situated – having a rent-free space therefore was the primary reason these groups were able to operate.

For groups who already operated from a space in the local area, a lack of funds often meant they were unable to pay rent or could only afford to pay a low amount. Five of the twenty groups interviewed indicated that they had paid for spaces to conduct their activities prior to Open Doors. These groups, who could only afford small fees, acknowledged that the cost of renting the spaces was an issue and meant their options for spaces were limited and the spaces used were not necessarily fit for purpose. One example of this is a therapy group who had previously paid £15 an hour for a space in a library but found this unsuitable for the nature of sessions they conducted. Another group operating from the Rochford site had only previously been able to meet once a month as they could not afford to rent a space more frequently; they now met weekly at Open Doors. Further, the choice of spaces for groups who could not afford to pay any rent was even more limited. For example, a group using the Rochford site had previously held meetings in members' living rooms, which was not only unsuitable in terms of facilities but also limited the number of attendees. Another group, who provided support for recovering substance abusers in Kettering, relied on a room in a church because of a lack of funding to rent a space elsewhere. However, they felt that judgements were made by some churchgoers and church staff against the service users, which had made some of them feel uncomfortable and possibly less likely to attend the session.

“Some of the facilities and venues that are used by community groups, by the very nature they don't have the funds to pay high costs, some of the accommodation is not of the best quality... to have somewhere in the city centre that was a decent quality, safe, clean space was a bonus for them.”

Participating landlord

The absence of rental fees and other property costs meant that funds could often be redirected to help upscale groups' activities or to reinvest into their organisations, which ultimately benefitted their end users. For example, the savings on rent made by one group in Rochford were allocated to the development of a larger site to be used after the Open Doors pilot, where they could operate on a larger scale. Further, through savings on rent, a group in Slough aiming to bring people together through improvisation drama were able to spend this money on things they had not previously been able to afford, notably a professional actor.

“Financially it's helping us put money back into our service users, not just at a business level.”

Participating community group

“There are also financial savings because any money they would be spending on rent is directed at service users instead e.g. by helping them afford travel.”

Participating community group

Evidence provided through the management information form indicates that any additional costs incurred by groups using the Open Doors spaces were negligible for most. When information was collected by groups within the first month or two of them using the site, only six of 29 groups reported incurring extra costs, which consisted of parking fees, milk for teas and coffees and expenses for volunteers. Of these six groups, five reported that these costs were 'completely acceptable'. A similar picture emerged from the data collected after the sites had closed, which asked about groups' use of the site in late March. Seven of 20 groups had incurred costs, again mainly from parking and milk, but also bringing equipment needed for activities and to 'commission community partners to support physical activity'. Of these seven, four thought these costs were 'completely acceptable', one thought they were 'acceptable' and two thought they were neither acceptable nor unacceptable. This supports the hypothesis that community groups benefitted financially from being involved in Open Doors.

Open Doors is situated in a central location

Another factor enabling community groups to provide services to those in need was the central location of the Open Doors sites. This meant that the sites were easy to reach for service users, many of whom relied on public transport to get to the sites. A space in a central location was highly desirable and something which groups had clearly struggled with securing previously. In addition to the sites being easy to access, their location also meant that visits to Open Doors could be combined with other activities, such as shopping and eating, adding to the convenience factor at the sites.

"The location is really important as it is accessible for everyone, with lots of places around it."

Participating community group

Indeed, 15 of the 20 community groups interviewed commented on the importance of the location of the Open Doors sites. The majority of these explicitly commented on the convenience and accessibility of having a space in a central location, while a few commented on how the site was favourably located in comparison to their previous space. It is notable that three of the five groups who did not comment on the location were based at the Fenton site, which was considered by a few groups to be less favourably located, as noted in Chapter 3. This further suggests that the location of the sites contributes towards their perceived success. It is important to note, that this does not mean the sites need to be located centrally in a large town or a city.

The spaces were appropriate for groups' needs

Many groups commented on the size, layout and facilities of the space being appropriate for their needs. The groups mostly felt that the spaces were of a good size, were accessible and had appropriate facilities. Groups often mentioned that the size of the

space meant more people could attend. This allowed them to support more people. The sites that had more than one room were particularly popular with community groups; they often found it useful to have a secondary room that could be used for private conversations and one-to-one support. Where a second room was not available, for example in Kettering, groups used wooden screens to separate areas of the room off for private conversations; while the groups were content with this as a compromise, they felt it would have been preferable to have a separate room.

Many groups also commented on the safety of the Open Doors spaces, which was particularly important for those who provided services for children. The fact that spaces were self-contained and doors could be locked was vital for these groups to ensure that safeguarding measures could be implemented at the site.

A few groups and their users appreciated the relaxed and informal setting of the Open Doors sites, which they felt was preferable to more formal settings such as GP surgeries or libraries. The dementia support group using the Rochford site noted how important this was:

"I think it gives people a massive opportunity to come in and hopefully feel relaxed... To be able to go to somewhere that maybe looks familiar or doesn't look intimidating."

Participating community group

Figure 6.2 West Street, Rochford; photo provided by Meanwhile Foundation (Caitlin Mogridge)



Raise the profile of community uses on high streets

Overall, there was a sense that the location of Open Doors spaces, on high streets and town centres, helped community groups to raise their profile, to give them more of a local presence, and to promote their activities. That said, interviews with local businesses suggested that local awareness of the programme and the activities taking place at the sites was low among this audience.

Most groups had embraced social media as a form of promoting themselves, particularly Facebook. Groups often had their own accounts where they could advertise their activities or engage with local community pages online. Beyond this, however, means of advertisement were limited. In general, there was a sense among community groups that increased awareness of their activities would help them to access and support more individuals.

Many groups spoke positively about the impact of having a space in a central location; these groups typically felt that the heightened visibility resulted in more awareness and interest in their group and the causes they supported, which for some led to increased attendance at their sessions in the Open Doors sites. One group who used the Slough site mentioned that having the space helped them recruit more volunteers.

“At the end of the day it's mental health, it's dementia and there's still a stigma attached to that. The more we can be in a public space and visible, the more it'll become normalised.”

Participating community group

Many groups mentioned that they often had people stopping outside the Open Doors space to read about the activities taking place there or coming into the space to ask what the space was used for, out of curiosity. Some groups also mentioned that the open days held at each site to promote awareness had been useful in this respect, leading to curious passers-by enquiring about the groups and their activities. A group using the Slough space took advantage of the passers-by on the high street to put a banner outside the shop which encouraged people to come in.

“The fact that it's in a prominent place on the square which has a fair amount of people going past means people stick their head in the window to see what's going on.”

Participating community group

While the increase in activities or support for the groups was not always directly attributable to the location of the site, there was still a sense that the location increased awareness of the groups' activities in a way that would have not been the case had they been using a different, less visible space.

In addition to increased awareness and participation in community groups' activities, a handful of groups mentioned that having a presence in these locations improved their reputation and gave them a sense of legitimacy they had not had previously. One group using the Bradford site, which aimed to engage young people with technology in a creative way, had previously relied on space in a church in a less central part of the city. They felt

that having an 'attractive' space in the middle of the city brought a reputational benefit to the group. Another mentioned that the space gave them a sense of stability that they had struggled to achieve in previous spaces and gave them confidence to plan activities further in advance.

“As a community group that did stuff when it could... it was always at threat in terms of funding... This gives us a sense of stability, and we can meet and carry on planning.”

Participating community group

Counterfactual interviews with community groups who had not participated in Open Doors indicate that they had not benefitted from the type of exposure experienced by Open Doors users. A group who had applied to be part of the Bradford pilot, who were partly motivated to apply for the scheme because they thought it would be beneficial for their visibility, felt that having an Open Doors space would have *“extended our reach slightly”*. Similarly, an arts-focused group who had applied to use the Rochford space, felt access to the space would have given them a central location in the middle of Rochford and would have made people aware that the space could be used for arts and events.

While a number of community groups felt that having access to the Open Doors space was beneficial to their organisations and their service users, there was a sense amongst local business that more could have been done to promote the space and the activities that went on there, both by Open Doors and the community groups themselves. In general, local businesses had had little engagement with the groups who used Open Doors and knowledge of the scheme and the groups that used the space was limited.

Awareness among local businesses ranged from a vague idea of what happened at the space to having no idea what was done there at all. Some businesses were aware that the sites were used for charitable causes and occasionally had knowledge of specific groups that used the spaces. Some local businesses mentioned that they would have welcomed more information about the space. A charity shop opposite the Rochford space mentioned that one of the groups had dropped flyers into the shop because they thought the demographic of their customers may benefit from their service. While this had happened on occasion, this appeared to be the exception rather than the norm.

A few of the local businesses had attended open days out of curiosity, but typically there had been little interaction since. While a few mentioned receiving post for the groups, for example in Kettering, they were still not particularly knowledgeable about what happened at the Open Doors sites.

Generally, there was a sense that local businesses would have liked to have been made more aware of Open Doors because they liked to be informed about what was happening in their local area. However, a few suggested that they may have had an interest in becoming involved with Open Doors had they been more aware of it. For example, an animal shelter charity shop close to the Kettering site suggested that had they known about the site they may have explored the possibility of how they could have used the site to benefit the local community, potentially by providing drop-in sessions for homeless people and their dogs or providing food for the dogs.

A few also suggested that more local knowledge about the space would have generated more interest which could have led to benefits for the local community.

"No one knows about it, as there's been no advertising, they will need to advertise more and use closed up places to place their adverts, then they will get more people involved, as it's a really good idea."

Local business

Help to build socially and economically stronger communities

The evidence suggests that the Open Doors pilot has contributed to building socially stronger communities, particularly for users of the sites. There is less evidence to suggest that the use of the Open Doors spaces have contributed to economically stronger communities; this can be attributed to the small scale of the intervention and the short time frame in which Open Doors operated.

Socially stronger communities

According to the MHCLG's strategy to strengthen communities and the nation, a socially strong community is one "built on a combination of people, place and local pride".⁷ In terms of 'people', this is people knowing their neighbours and participating in local life. In terms of 'place', this is a quality environment with local amenities and strong local institutions. Thirdly, 'local pride' comes from "this connection between people and place and generates a shared sense of belonging and local identity."

Enabling community groups to engage with and support the community has contributed to socially stronger communities in the pilot areas. This outcome is evident when considering the 'community' as the users of the Open Doors space but less so when considering the 'community' as all local residents.

There was a real sense from the case study interviews with community groups and landlords that bringing people together in a central space had been beneficial to the people using the Open Doors spaces. This was particularly evident if they were suffering from social isolation or were vulnerable and lacked the requisite support prior to Open Doors. Multiple groups commented on how a 'sense of community' had been fostered at the spaces; a few mentioned how it brought together different groups of people who would not normally interact.

This was not only in terms of service users meeting each other, but with community groups interacting with each other and building relationships. This interaction meant they were able to refer individuals to other groups using the space and to other local services and

⁷ *By deeds and their results: How we will strengthen our communities and nation*, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (July, 2019); https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819477/MHCLG_Communities_Framework_Accessible.pdf

facilities, which therefore contributed to a sense that Open Doors was helping to develop a better support network for the local community.

"I want the community to benefit. That's my main aim. I think this is the ideal place for that."

Participating community group

"It feels like you are part of something bigger, even though you don't personally know all of the other people."

Participating community group

A handful of groups also pointed out that the sharing of facilities and sundries contributed to this sense of community at the spaces, commenting that this was markedly different to how groups shared spaces prior to Open Doors. A few groups mentioned how people would leave their milk and biscuits for other groups, rather than label them or take them away with them.

"I think it really feels like a community hub because people leave stuff in the fridge and say whoever's in tomorrow can have it... everything there's communal."

Participating community group

While the benefits to the wider community have been less apparent than the benefits to those directly involved with Open Doors, many still felt the wider community had benefitted from the pilot. This is most apparent in the few groups who had built links with other organisations or businesses in the community. For example, an improvisation group using the Slough space had developed links with local pubs and other amateur dramatics groups. In addition, there were a few instances where the community group directly attributed their activities to a decrease in antisocial behaviour in the local area. A group in Kettering who provided a place for homeless people to meet in the daytimes had been told by police that, since they had been operating the group from Open Doors, they had noticed a decrease in issues with homeless people in the local area.

"It's not just my group but it's a wide-ranging benefit that this has actually produced."

Participating community group

Although less tangible, it was also common for landlords and community groups to comment on how use of the sites fostered a sense of community spirit beyond the Open Doors attendees. A few of these groups spoke about locals being more aware and engaged with what was happening in their local communities. For example, a group using the Slough site noted an increased awareness of goings on in the community and an enhanced community cohesion.

"The atmosphere definitely improved because of it... and it brought nicer people who probably weren't using the town centre so much into the town. And I say nicer, I mean, decent people who probably were sitting at home, not terribly happy. You

could see it almost brought a joy to their lives, in a way. It actually achieved quite a lot... and it's still doing."

Participating landlord

While community groups and landlords were typically positive about the social benefits to the local community, local businesses had seen little to suggest that the use of the spaces had contributed to a stronger sense of community. This indicates that the primary community building had occurred within the sphere of Open Doors groups and users, rather than with those who were close to the Open Doors sites. Despite anecdotal evidence of a sense of community from landlords and community groups, evidence from local businesses indicates that more could have been done to engage businesses in the local area, as discussed under the previous aim. This may have led to more engagement with nearby businesses and therefore more of a sense of community amongst business owners/workers and community groups. Indeed, one community group said that while they use the nearby pubs and shops, there was not a sense of 'joining up' with these businesses.⁸

A few local businesses at the Kettering site raised concerns about a detrimental social impact the site had had on the local area. These businesses had noted an increase in what they saw as antisocial behaviour on the high street directly outside and next to the Open Doors site. One business commented on people congregating outside the shop and using their doorway as shelter from the rain. The other business, who was situated directly next to the Open Doors space, mentioned fighting in the street and one service user kicking the shop's front window.

"Now I have people arguing in the street and fighting and things... every single day... yesterday a girl was littering and a guy for no reason just kicked my window."

Local business

"I think if they're having meetings just keep them indoors, it almost looks like people are hanging outside of this open space as if it was a pub, but it's not."

Local business

Although disappointed with this behaviour, these businesses were keen to stress that this only occurred when one or two of the groups were using the space and were broadly supportive of the aims of Open Doors. One did, however, mention that they would have preferred Open Doors to be located further away from their business.

"It's great to have a place like that but maybe the location itself it not the best because there are so many surrounding businesses."

Local business

⁸ It was not possible during the evaluation to capture the views of the local community towards the Open Doors programme. The intention had been to interview passers-by in the street within close proximity to the Open Doors sites to determine awareness of the programme and any impacts on the community, however the COVID-19 outbreak meant that this was not possible.

A small minority of local businesses also mentioned how rubbish bags were often left outside the sites, sometimes for days at a time, which contributed to the 'run-down' perception of the high street. These businesses did think, however, that this issue was easily rectifiable.

Referring to how the MHCLG determines a 'strong community', the evidence shows that the Open Doors scheme has contributed both towards this. In terms of 'place', the Open Doors sites contribute towards the quality of the local environment by providing an accessible community space where people can come together. In doing so, this contributes towards 'people' by providing a space where people can take part in local life. While 'local pride' is harder to measure, there was certainly a feeling from a number of groups and landlords that the use of the sites contributed towards a sense of local pride.

Economically stronger communities

The evaluation sought to measure the impact the programme had on the economic strength of the local community by determining whether local businesses had noticed an increase in footfall in the local area and an increase in custom as a result of the sites being used by Open Doors. Whilst there are various other ways of measuring economic strength of a community, these were not possible given the limited nature of the evaluation.

The economic benefits of the Open Doors pilot are less evident than the social benefits but are not altogether absent. Many local businesses felt unable to comment on any impact the use of the sites had had on the local economy; often these were businesses who were not in the immediate vicinity of Open Doors (i.e. not opposite or directly adjacent to the site).⁹ However, a few businesses, typically those very close to the Open Doors site, did mention that it had had some impact on the local economy. These businesses were supportive of the schemes aims to help rejuvenate high streets that had been suffering from reduced custom and high vacancy rates. So, while they could see little evidence of it so far, they thought that in time and on a larger scale this type of intervention could help the economy.

There was a sense from local businesses that being close to an occupied property was preferable to a vacant property as it prevented further deterioration of the high street. These businesses thought that Open Doors at least maintained the current level of high streets and helped to halt their decline, if not doing much to boost the local economy. For example, a local business in Rochford who had not noticed an impact on the local economy from the Open Doors site did mention that at least it would help arrest the decline of the local area.

"The idea that just because people are having a meeting over there [at Open Doors] it'll generate more people around the square who will spend more money... I can't see it at the moment. But I guess if you didn't do something with it it'd go the other way. Perhaps by having that they're we're treading water and we're keeping the area good, so you could put that down as a tick."

Local business

⁹ The limited nature of the research with local businesses (16 interviews across the 5 sites) meant the full extent of impacts of Open Doors on surrounding businesses could not be determined.

That said, the landlord of the property at Rochford felt the Open Doors site was contributing to a wider revival of Rochford town centre, along with other vacant properties being occupied – an old supermarket was being turned into a gym and an old bank was being taken over by a pharmacy – and felt that this was adding to a sense of confidence in the local economy.

Unfortunately, the businesses local to the Kettering site who had commented on the antisocial behaviour of a minority of service users and the rubbish bins being left outside, felt that this had, or could have in the future, a detrimental impact on their businesses. One of these businesses felt that it was intimidating their customers and putting people off visiting the shop; this business had a direct competitor in the town centre and worried that they were losing custom to their competitor who was situated further away from the Open Doors site. Another business worried about the rubbish left outside the site affecting perceptions of their organisation:

“The cleaner just puts the bins out and they're there until we leave at the end of the day... it just looks awful, when we have managers and clients coming to see us it looks very unprofessional.”

Local business

What factors enabled or prevented the building of socially and economically stronger communities?

The same factors that enabled groups to better support their service users helped Open Doors build socially stronger communities. These were: free access for community groups, the central location, and the physical environment of the spaces themselves, which are discussed earlier in this chapter.

However, the lack of knowledge about Open Doors and low interaction between the community groups who use the space and the local community contributed to a disconnect with local businesses. Therefore, in the future it may be beneficial to encourage engagement with these businesses. Evidence suggests that they are generally supportive of the aims of Open Doors as they recognise that with fewer vacant properties it is more likely that the local economy will be strong, which is beneficial to their businesses.

In terms of the local economy, the general feeling was that the intervention was too small a scale and too short a timeframe to have much of an impact, often because there were numerous vacant properties on the high street or local area. In these cases, businesses had the impression that a coordinated effort to bring multiple properties back into use in the same area would be required to really have an impact on the local economy. Further, many noted that the intervention would have to last longer than the 6-9 months that the Open Doors sites were operating for if the economy was to benefit, as the properties would be vacant again once the Open Doors lease expired.¹⁰

¹⁰ Measuring the impact of the local economy based on a small number of interviews with local businesses (16 interviews across the five sites) highlights a limitation in the scope of the evaluation, as it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions based on this number of interviews.

"It's a temporary lease for less than a year, letting of one unit won't change anything... it doesn't have any last effects, but it has been useful [for the community]."

Participating landlord

Figure 6.3 Open Doors Kettering; photo provided by Meanwhile Foundation (Mike Massaro)



Increase footfall in high streets and town centres

While it is evident that use of the Open Doors space brought more people to the area than would have come if the space had been vacant, the extent to which this has contributed towards the strength of the local economy is less evident, with mixed views emerging.

Some landlords, community groups and local businesses did feel that Open Doors had directly led to an increase in footfall in the surrounding area, although this was limited. One example is the landlord of the Bradford site directly attributing an increase in footfall in the local area to the use of the Open Doors site, commenting that it had brought more people to the area than there would have been had the unit remained empty.

The impacts observed from this perceived increase in footfall are primarily the financial benefits for the local economy. Interviews with local businesses indicated that a few had noted an increase in custom as a result of being close to the Open Doors site, when compared to when the property had been vacant. For example, a newsagent close to the Kettering site noted how service users and those running the sites would buy items from

their shop, while a café close to the Rochford site had benefitted from service users coming in whilst they were in the vicinity for Open Doors.

"A few of them are my customers, they come and buy cigarettes, which is fine... not massively but some."

Local business

While there is certainly some anecdotal evidence to suggest that Open Doors has increased footfall in the local areas, there is also acknowledgement that the scale of the intervention is small. The local businesses who commented on increased custom spoke in modest terms; none had experienced a drastic increase in business. Further, as with the earlier discussion on building economically stronger communities, many local businesses did not feel that Open Doors had contributed towards an increased footfall in high streets and town centres.

The evidence therefore indicates that while Open Doors has had some impact on increasing footfall in the local areas and therefore helping to boost the local economy, the intervention at its current scale is unlikely to result in drastically improved outcomes for the local economy.¹¹

Encourage meanwhile use to help support landlords struggling to cover business rates, utility bills and other costs

The Open Doors scheme aimed to support struggling landlords by providing relief on their business rates, utility rates and other costs they incurred through their property. As noted in chapter three, the five properties used for Open Doors had been vacant for between 18 months and four years prior to being occupied for the programme. The landlords had struggled to find tenants for these properties during this period and had incurred the costs of business rates and utility bills whilst simultaneously receiving no rental income.

The landlords whose properties were involved in Open Doors spoke in positive terms about the project. They appreciated both the financial benefits for themselves in having a property occupied and the wider benefits for the community. More broadly, both participating landlords and those who were not part of the pilot were encouraging about meanwhile use as a concept and of how it could help them financially. Indeed, the

¹¹ Interviews with members of the local community would have provided a larger evidence base to determine the extent to which footfall has increased as a result of Open Doors, but these interviews were not possible due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

landlords were generally happy for Open Doors to continue occupying their space after the initial lease expired, in the short to medium term.

Typically, the landlords who partook in Open Doors primarily spoke about the positives of the project in terms of the social benefits to the community. While they were generally less forthcoming about the financial benefits of the scheme for themselves, this was apparent, and welcome, nonetheless. The landlords of the Bradford and Kettering sites both mentioned the financial savings made as a positive of the scheme; savings were primarily on business rates but also utility bills, which they did not pay for the duration of their 12 months leases. While the landlord for the Slough property was keen to emphasise that the main benefits of the programme are the positive impact it has had on the local community, they also welcomed the savings made on business rates.

The financial aspect was less relevant for the Rochford site; the local council, who are currently looking after the property on behalf of a private developer, had applied for the scheme as part of a bid to help bring vacant properties back into use in the area, so were less concerned with the financial benefits for the landlord. That said, they did acknowledge that the landlord themselves would appreciate the break on business rates.

“There’s a slight gain of revenue... when the property is occupied, we lose that cost [on business rates], but the biggest things for us is having people using it.”

Participating landlord

“It [Open Doors] meant no rental costs obviously which was positive.”

Participating landlord

While savings had been made for landlords on business rates and utility bills these benefits had been somewhat offset by the renovation costs incurred by landlords to get their properties to a standard for Open Doors. As discussed in Chapter 3, the landlords who incurred these costs were happy to make the renovations, generally acknowledging that the improvement works would have had to take place at some point, so did not necessarily see this as a negative aspect of the scheme. However, it does mean that the positive financial impact of being involved in Open Doors was more minor than if the renovations were funded through the scheme. While there was £25,000 available for the renovation of each property so that it was able to be used by Open Doors, this was intended for aesthetic works such as paintworks and Open Doors branding, rather than more essential renovations.

The financial benefits of having the space occupied by Open Doors are made clearer when comparing with the counterfactual properties. These five landlords reported that over the duration of Open Doors their financial experience of owning the property had been to some extent negative. The main reason for this was not receiving any rental income, which would not have been different had they been involved in Open Doors. However, business rates were an issue for a few of these landlords. For one, based in Weston-Super-Mare, they noted that having to continue paying business rates was a financial burden. Another, a landlord of a property in Bradford commented that while their property was a listed building so they did not incur business rates themselves, an occupier would have done so,

meaning it was harder to attract tenants. Being a part of Open Doors would have negated the need to search for a new tenant.

Provide new uses for empty properties on high streets

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that the Open Doors pilot provides positive new uses for empty properties on high streets. This view was shared universally by participating landlords and community groups and by most local businesses. Further, the fact that the counterfactual properties mostly remained vacant indicates that the scheme has been successful in increasing the number of empty properties being used. The properties used for Open Doors would have likely remained vacant without the Open Doors intervention.

While generally seen as positive, many commented that in order to see a real change in the local communities and economy, the intervention would need to happen on a larger scale. Town centres used as part of the pilot typically had multiple vacant properties in proximity, so while Open Doors provided new uses for properties, it was only a small solution relative to the problem. An occupied property was preferable to a vacant property, socially and economically, but the general feeling was that this would not drastically change the area.

7. Open Doors in the future

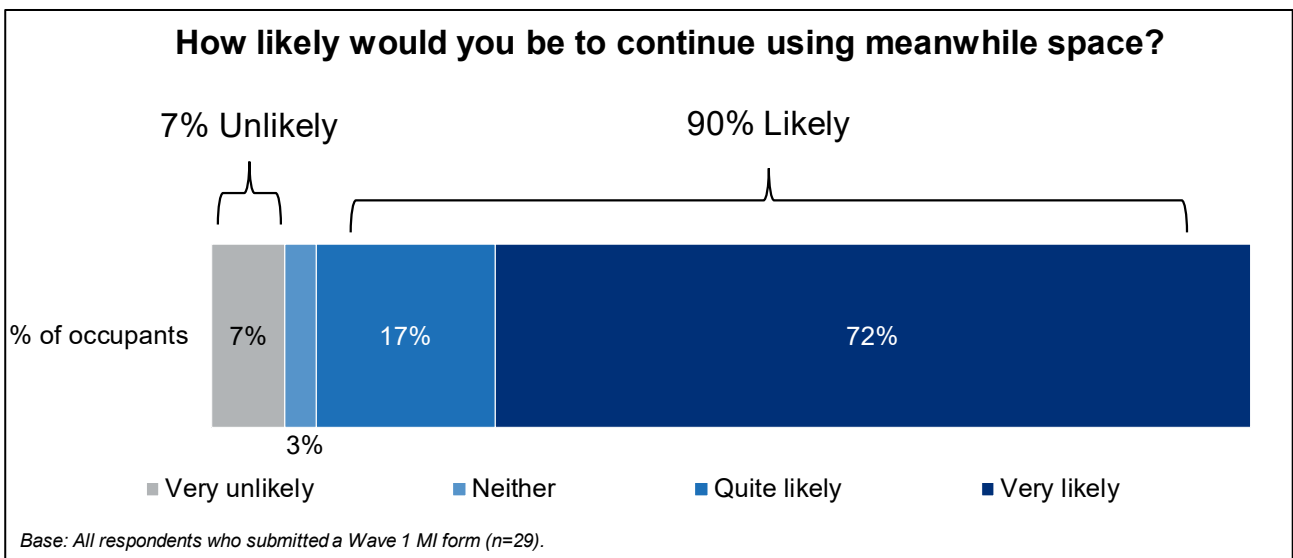
This chapter looks at the future of Open Doors, from improvements that could be made to the programme to its capacity to be rolled out more widely across the UK.

It also covers community groups' and landlords' plans for when the Open Doors lease ends. It looks at community groups' decisions around continuing to run their activities and finding alternative spaces for their activities, including the impact of Covid-19. For landlords, the focus is on their use of the properties after Open Doors.

Community groups' plans for the future

Community groups had consistent plans for the future - the majority had a desire to stay in the space. Data collected from the MI form shows that almost all would continue to use the spaces if Open Doors was to be extended; in Wave 1, when groups were relatively new to the sites, almost three-quarters (21 of 29) said this would be 'very likely' and a further five said 'quite likely', only two thought it unlikely that they would consider using the space (see Figure 1). Similarly, in Wave 2, around two-thirds (13 of 20) said it would be 'very likely' they would continue, and three more said 'quite likely'; again, only two said it would be unlikely.

Figure 7.1 Likelihood of community groups continuing to use the meanwhile space if the lease was to be extended (Wave 1)



A couple of community groups were optimistic that they would be able to continue using the space through their relationship with the landlord, but others were fearful of where they would go once their Open Doors lease ended. Plans to house groups in alternative venues after Open Doors were beginning to formalise, but the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has led to uncertainty over the availability of community spaces. Groups wanting to stay in the space cited the impact the space had had on their ability to support their end-users

and expand their offer as a group. There was a feeling that the programme had given them a sense of momentum they wanted to capitalise on.

"For our service users that continuity [of being able to use the same space every week] is one of the most important things."

Participating community group

"It is worrying as they have built a community but then will have to stop as have nowhere else to hold the groups."

Participating community group

If they were unable to remain at the Open Doors site, most (14 of the 20 successful community groups) would seek an alternative space to host their events and activities; a minority would go back to how they operated previously (from rent-free public spaces, such as pubs, to low-cost community centres). Only a few (3 of the 20) community groups had firm alternatives in place, reinforcing the precarity of most groups' situation. Indeed, there was little evidence to suggest that the programme had enabled the groups to generate enough income to take on the spaces independently after the Open Doors leases come to an end. Community groups did not offer suggestions of alternative means of funding these spaces, but Meanwhile Foundation plan to investigate this issue further as part of their own research and development aims.

There were a few groups that reported they would likely disappear if no viable alternative presented itself. These were principally groups that had formed as a result of Open Doors or were reliant on regular funding, such as charities that apply to Arts Councils to fund their activities.

Linked to the above, groups who did not have suitable alternative venues in place for after Open Doors or groups who thought they would be unable to operate once the space was closed feared for the impact on their service users. While very positive about the impact on users during Open Doors, they worried that the ending of the pilot would result in a reduction of activities and therefore less support for service users in need.

Impacts of Coronavirus

The second wave of the MI form captured community groups' views on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. In general groups activities fall into two categories; those who have had to cease all operations and those who have been able to carry on their activities remotely, over teleconferencing, telephone and email.

Those who have ceased operations entirely tend to be those who deal with vulnerable people who need to be shielded, so even social distanced interaction has not been possible.

"We have had to temporarily close our service as [it is] difficult to run our sessions at a social distance and we work with vulnerable people with learning and/or physical disabilities of which many are shielding. Also, both of our staff who run this project need to shield either themselves or a family member."

Participating community group

Amongst those who had continued their activities remotely, to some degree, there was a sense that it was a good solution under the circumstances but face to face interaction was preferable. While a few mentioned that remote interaction had helped users cope with the stress of isolation themselves, a few commented that their users did not have access to the internet so could not benefit from this and were as such fearful about increasing social isolation. One group also mentioned that attendance was lower when conducting activities remotely, with only 'core' members attending.

"I have been using Zoom to hold online meetings, but a lot of my group do not have access to the internet. This has left them completely isolated from support and has affected their mental health and confidence."

Participating community group

There was a general expectation that this situation would continue for the foreseeable future, meaning on the whole groups were able to access and support fewer of their service users due to the outbreak of the pandemic.

Landlords' plans for use of properties

Landlords were unanimous that their properties would be put back on the market if the meanwhile leases were not extended. While they acknowledged this meant they would start paying business rates again and it left the future of the site uncertain, landlords felt this was the most viable option, particularly as their market value was enhanced since the spaces had been renovated.

One landlord did, however, suggest they would look to follow the Open Doors format and operate something similar with community groups to benefit the local community, although they did not confirm whether this would be a rent-free arrangement. These findings suggest that, for most landlords, the altruistic motivations for participating in the programme may be secondary to their need to maintain their income.

All the landlords were happy to use meanwhile occupancy in the future and would be happy for the site to be used for its current purpose if the lease, and its associated benefits (reduced business rates and paid-for utilities), was extended. There was some recognition extending the lease was preferable for landlords, insofar as it would guarantee the immediate future of the site.

"While it's great to see the Open Doors project continuing for the next few months it would be very interesting to have meaningful conversations behind the scenes to help us deliver what might come next."

Participating landlord

"If one of those organisations [community groups] gets funding to rent the space, so they can establish themselves for one or two years, then that's perfect, because that would secure the future of the organisation and the building... even if all the groups chip in a little bit."

Participating landlord

Improvements to Open Doors

Landlords and community groups suggested several improvements that could be made to the Open Doors programme.

Both landlords and community groups felt better publicity of the programme was needed to encourage applications from prospective landlords and occupants. For instance, respondents knew of community groups, local to the sites, that were not aware the programme existed. There was also some evidence from conversations with local businesses that an appetite for making use of vacant properties exists in the local community, but due to lack of publicity, they were not aware the site existed, or what it could be used for.

“We only found out about it by chance and we’re quite a large organisation. We wouldn’t have come across it naturally, so I’m not sure how well it was promoted.”

Participating landlord

“It’s hard to explain to people as it’s such a new idea, maybe do more events and hand out flyers so people can explain it to other people to help simplify it.”

Participating landlord

Other landlords cited greater flexibility around the application process, either through enabling consortium bidding (i.e. landlords applying to the programme in partnership with community groups), reversing the application mechanism (community groups expressing their interest first), or by extending the scope of ‘community groups’ to encompass sports club and for-profit businesses. They felt this would make the programme more efficient and sustainable in the long term, by generating more applications from local groups and expanding the remit of Open Doors.

Additional improvements cited by community groups centred around two related issues: the management and adaptability of the space. Groups citing the management of the space tended to focus on maximising its use. They either felt more groups, or that a greater variety of groups, could be using the space on a day-to-day basis. These groups felt more could be done to plug gaps in the timetable for use of the space.

“They could make it more vibrant with more going on during the day. There’s not a lot of people here – only me on a Monday – would be more successful with more going on, but a really positive experience.”

Participating community group

Although community groups were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of Open Doors, a number mentioned ways in which the physical space could have been more appropriate; these suggestions covered both issues with the infrastructure that were inherent to the space, and minor issues that would have made use of the space more comfortable. In terms of improvements to the physical space, groups cited variously: better access to toilets (including better disabled access), having a separate room, having more chairs, heating and door locks, amongst other things. Another issue mentioned by a few

groups was ensuring that there was ample low-cost parking available within proximity of the sites.

While groups praised how quickly Meanwhile Foundation responded to requests for things that could reasonably be provided, such as heaters and extra chairs, and were happy to accept the limitations of the spaces, comments around disabled access highlight the importance of discussions between community groups and Meanwhile Foundation at the outset, to ensure spaces are suitable for community groups and their activities. It may also suggest that the selection criteria around the layout of the properties may need to be reviewed, if some community groups need more space to operate in. It is important to note, however, that larger spaces would have implications for the budget of the project and landlords may be less willing to supply larger spaces as this would mean a greater sacrifice on their potential renting income.

"People have approached me to use the space, and I have to tell them we haven't got that [a wheelchair accessible space] here."

Participating community group

Advice for rolling Open Doors out more widely

Community groups and landlords gave advice for rolling out the programme on a larger scale. Virtually all felt the programme should be extended, and a handful of these felt the location of the site was most important for maximising the benefit local communities. For these groups, smaller towns and villages should be the focus of the scheme, as these are the places in the UK that do not receive as much investment and therefore suffer most with empty high streets. Indeed, both landlords and community groups felt the scheme would need multiple sites in the same city to see real change.

"I think for me the benefit of that place is the location and the fact that it is a satellite town of a bigger town, which generally miss out across the board. Those are the areas where we see the most social isolation and the most difficulty in getting people to engage in services. That's what I think is the most valuable part of it."

Participating community group

It is worth noting, however, that more research is needed to ascertain whether villages would have the capacity – in terms of suitable location and demand from residents and prospective community groups – to accommodate an Open Doors space. Villages would also be less suited to the multi-site approach due to their relative size.

A few groups felt that, going forwards, ensuring the groups using the space do not overlap too much in terms of their remit was important, both for enhancing the value of the programme to the local community, and making the spaces more vibrant places to be. They felt this could be achieved through targeted marketing of the programme. On the other hand, other community groups have previously suggested to Meanwhile Foundation that community groups' work would be more impactful if they were doing similar activities, suggesting the blend of groups' activities is something to explore if the scheme is rolled out more widely.

A couple of community groups also felt the sites on the pilot scheme could be better connected in order to share best practice and common issues. They saw this as a way of maximising the value of the scheme across all sites.

8. Recommendations

Analysis of the processes, impacts and outcomes of the pilot scheme, and the counterfactual, show that in many ways the Open Doors pilot scheme has been successful in achieving its original aims. However, the research suggests several ways in which it could adapt in the future in order to scale effectively and efficiently, and to increase engagement with the local community and local businesses. Recommendations on this basis include:

1. **Clearer communication of application assessment and selection criteria for landlords.** More detail could be provided up front to landlords, so they can be clear whether their properties are considered appropriate for the programme. Additionally, for those who made an unsuccessful application, more detail about why it was unsuccessful could be provided. This may help them to prepare more suitable applications if they are interested in future meanwhile use schemes.
2. **More scrutiny of the accessibility of sites in the application process.** Toilets at a few sites were not considered particularly safe or accessible, meaning certain people were unable to attend groups' activities.¹²
3. **Review and revise engagement strategy to help raise awareness of Open Doors amongst local businesses.** Evidence from the interviews suggested that there was limited awareness of Open Doors amongst local businesses. Some businesses noted they would have liked to have known more about the scheme or even would have liked to become involved / utilise the space. This suggests that with more local knowledge about Open Doors it could engage more people in the local community and help contribute to both economically and socially stronger communities.
4. **Build a local network of meanwhile use sites that community groups can access after Open Doors leases expire.** This may reduce the risk of community groups being unable to operate once the Open Doors site closes, therefore reducing the risk of users being left without access to services.
5. **Operate Open Doors in conjunction with other meanwhile use initiatives in the same area.** Bringing multiple properties out of vacancy in a single area is likely to result in a more significant impact on the local economy.
6. **Establish Open Doors sites in central areas of towns.** Evidence from case study interviews indicates that the central location of most sites meant they were easy to reach for services users, thus increasing attendance at activities held at Open Doors. The central location was also attractive for services users as they could combine visits to the sites with other activities they would do in the centre of towns,

¹² The funding made available by MHCLG was intended to ensure Open Doors sites were accessible for all users this included having accessible toilets. MHCLG were not responsible for implementing the refit of the sites

such as shopping or socialising. A central location also increased the visibility of community groups and therefore helped raise their profile.

7. **Continue supplementing business rates of participating landlords.** This was a draw for landlords to the scheme and a positive of being involved, so should be retained as part of the programme going forward.
8. **Establish an Open Doors 'virtual community' across all sites,** which serves as a forum to share news, best practice and areas for improvement for the scheme.
9. **Flexibility around length of lease.** While the project was designed to offer leases of only 12 months, the evaluation shows there was appetite from both landlords and community groups to use Open Doors for a more prolonged period. Further, local businesses noted that the pilot was too short-term to have a notable impact on the local economy. Therefore, the option to extend leases in cases where there was interest may prove beneficial for landlords, community groups and the local economy.

Annex A: Background to properties

Open Doors sites

This section provides information on the background to the properties used for Open Doors. This includes, previous use, state of properties and extent of remedial works.

John Street, Bradford

The property at John Street in Bradford was a purpose-built retail unit spread over two floors. The ground floor of the property was a relatively large, open-plan area, while the first floor was slightly smaller and divided into several rooms. It was owned by the council and had been for a long time.

The site had previously been rented by Jamie's Ministry of Food; an initiative that aimed to get residents involved in cooking and healthy eating. However, they had to leave in March 2018 due to budget cuts that meant the rent was no longer affordable. The property had been vacant since then, until it was accepted for use as an Open Doors space. At the time of the landlord's application to the pilot programme, the property had a rateable value of £12,000 per annum.

The area immediately around the site in Bradford was struggling due to competition from a new shopping centre in the city centre and the closure of a large supermarket, among other shops, resulting in low footfall. The area had also been identified as a candidate by the council for redevelopment as an 'urban village'.

High Street, Kettering

The property in Kettering, owned by Nationwide Building Society since 1955 and who also occupied the unit next door, had been vacant since July 2014. During the five years from 2014 to 2019, the landlord had been trying to let the property for commercial use, with no success. From 2009 to 2014, it was let to commercial tenants who used it for retail purposes. The rateable value of the property was £14,250 per annum.

Kettering High Street has seen several high-profile stores – such as Marks & Spencer, New Look and Burton – close in the last few years, dramatically reducing footfall and the prosperity of the local area, according to the individuals spoken to during the case study. One local business noted that the high cost of parking, in comparison to nearby towns such as Northampton and Corby, has contributed to the lack of people visiting the town centre. As the town centre has become less attractive to shoppers, there is a perception that there has been an increase in homelessness and drug problems in the area.

City Road, Fenton, Stoke-On-Trent

One of six vacant shops adjacent to one another on the high street, the property in Fenton was a small ground floor retail site that had been occupied by a computer refurbishment business and a motorcycle customisation business in the past. However, it had been vacant for 18 months prior to Open Doors, and sporadically before that. It was owned by a private landlord and had been for many years. The landlord was a family business who had owned multiple sites in the area over the years, including a pottery factory behind the high street and the town hall. The rateable value of the property was £7,500 per annum.

Fenton had been facing difficulties due to the layout of the area, which is divided by a busy road and primarily used as a cut-through. Fenton was perceived to be a place people pass through to get to the centre of Stoke-on-Trent, rather than a destination in itself. It was also known as a dangerous road in terms of traffic and the area did not tend to attract people outside of the immediate community.

West Street, Rochford

The site in Rochford, a grade-II listed building that was formerly a pub, was owned by a private developer who acquired it in 2017 after the business failed. There were three units on the ground floor of 21m², 19m² and 15m². The property was prominently located on the main square in Rochford and it was well-served by transport links. The surrounding area was mostly commercial properties, although there were also a high number of residential buildings nearby. Since 2014 the number of vacant shop units had doubled from six to 12, and shop vacancy rates were at 14.5%.¹³ At the time of application to the scheme, the rateable value for the property was under reassessment.

The developer who acquired the property had a pre-existing relationship with the council and initially hoped to convert the property for residential use. However, an application for residential use was rejected by the council under stringent planning conditions to limit the number of commercial units repurposed as housing. As a result, it had been vacant since 2017 and the property had been the target of anti-social behaviour, including squatting and an arson attack.

Queensmere, Slough

The site in Slough was a high street shop of approximately 1,400ft² over two floors, part of a larger shopping centre. It was situated on the main high street, which is partly pedestrianised, and surrounded by other commercial properties. At the time of application to the scheme, the rateable value for the property was under reassessment.

The property was previously used as an e-cigarette shop, but the tenants struggled to sustain the business and eventually had to leave in 2017 after a period of between three to four years. Prior to that, the property was occupied by a single tenant for around ten years. Whilst an e-cigarette shop, a temporary partition was installed to reduce the size of the shop front, leaving the remainder of the building empty. Since the previous tenants left, the site had been fully vacant for around two years.

The high street in Slough was under plans for redevelopment to turn it into a more open and experiential shopping destination, although there had been confusion among local business around when this might happen, due to changes in ownership of the shopping centre.

¹³ *Rochford Town Centre Health Check*, Rochford District Council (March 2019)

Counterfactual properties

This section provides background information about each of the five sites included in the counterfactual research, including: previous use, current use and any recent remedial works.

Bradford

The unsuccessful property in Bradford was a grade-II listed building located in the northern quarter of the city centre. During the 1960s, it was a department store with five floors used as retail space and offices, although it was a single unit on the ground floor that was offered for use as an Open Doors space.

The current owner's father acquired the property in the 1980s and since then the building has housed shops, cafés and offices. This included one long-term tenant, Oxfam, who had been situated there for 15 – 20 years.

In recent years, the space had been partly occupied by start-ups and charities paying low rent; often taking rent breaks or paying reduced management fees, while the rest of the building remained empty. Oxfam had rented another unit in the building in the past few years, near to the unit offered for Open Doors use, and which the charity refurbished themselves.

Renovations to the property in the past six months had been minimal. Two years ago, they had received funding of £500,000 under a Government scheme to carry out refurbishments, although it was primarily the upper floors and exterior of the building which saw improvements, rather than the ground floor retail spaces that were most in need.

The changing face of retail has meant that the landlord had to find new ways to market the property, and they employ several managing agents to help do so. Despite this, they have been unable to maximise income from rentals because the area surrounding the property has struggled with a lack of investment and a struggling economy.

At the time of interview, the unit that was offered for use as an Open Doors space was occupied by a temporary tenant – a retailer of LED lighting. This was a rolling, week-by-week contract and it was rent-free. Prior to this, the unit was empty for around two years.

Gloucester

This three-storey commercial property, located in the centre of Gloucester, had been used in the past as a retail and office space, including as a solicitor's office. A social enterprise had recently been hired to manage the property on behalf of the landlord, and they were unable to provide specific details relating to the property's history. However, it was likely that it had been vacant for upwards of one year.

In the last six months, some internal refurbishments and decorating had taken place in order to improve the appearance of the property which increased the rental value by approximately 30%. It was worth £40,000 per annum at the time of interview.

Although there had been social projects in the area to stimulate the local economy, it still struggled with a lack of investment and low footfall in the centre of the city, which was having knock-on impacts on the property manager's ability to let the property.

The property was currently occupied, although the property manager could not provide details on the extent to which it was achieving its rental value. Tenants were found through third sector networks, such as social enterprises.

Leeds

The property in Leeds was a single-floor unit of 64m² situated at the entrance to a hospital in the city centre. Historically, the unit had been used for retail, most recently having been a hair salon for three and a half years, but due to its planning use class could not be used for hospitality, for example. The manager of the property was a specialist property company dealing mainly with primary care and community healthcare buildings; they had a large portfolio of buildings across the country.

The property had remained vacant since it had been offered for use as an Open Doors space, and for 18 months in total despite the manager advertising widely through their own website, a national property agency and online platforms (e.g. Rightmove). The service charge was around £10,000 per annum, while the rateable value was £7,235.50 per annum.

The main challenges for the company in letting the unit were associated with its location in a hospital retail parade, as the range of suitable tenants was somewhat limited by a need to their purpose to be suitable for the healthcare setting.

Weston-Super-Mare

This property was in a 25-unit shopping centre in the middle of Weston-Super-Mare, conveniently located close to the high street. It was a relatively small ground floor shop with street access, allowing the site to be opened and closed independently of the shopping centre. It required significant renovations, due to the condition it was left in by the previous tenant, a sports retailer.

The shopping centre was built in the 1980s and over the years it had housed a range of different high street chains, before being bought by the council in 2018 for investment purposes and with the intention of bringing improvements to the town centre. The local area was struggling economically due to competition from nearby cities, such as Bristol, and a growing community of independent shops outside the town centre where rent is less expensive.

To attract tenants, the council employed a managing agent and a retail agent, and they had previously been in communications with the Meanwhile Foundation regarding uses for several their properties. However, any potential opportunities did not come to fruition due to the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aside from being used as a grotto over the Christmas period for a period of around six weeks, the space had remained empty for two years (and since the Open Doors application). In total, there were six vacant units in the shopping centre, although the unit in question had proved more difficult to let due to its poor condition.

Willesden

The space in Willesden was located on the ground floor of a commercial unit, below a residential unit, and had formerly been used as a shop. The last tenant to occupy the space was a retailer of satellite dishes, although this was more than five years ago – there had been no tenants in the property since the current landlord had acquired it.

Due to issues obtaining planning permission, the landlord had been unable to convert the building for residential use as they had been encouraged to do by the council. There had also been unauthorised development at the property in the past and it was in urgent need of a substantial refurbishment.

Due to the barriers experienced in attempting to renovate the property, the landlord had not tried to attract tenants due to the poor condition which rendered it unsuitable for letting.

Annex B: Open Doors MI Collection Form

This annex includes the form used to collect MI information from community groups participating in Open Doors. Note, the italicised text indicates additions to the MI collection form between Wave 1 and Wave 2.

Introduction

ASK ALL

A1 **Welcome to the online data collection tool for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Open Doors Evaluation research.**

MHCLG have partnered with the Meanwhile Foundation to work with landlords of vacant properties to make these spaces available to community groups.

IFF Research have been commissioned by MHCLG to conduct an evaluation of the Open Doors programme.

We're interested in finding out more about your experiences of using the property in <LOCATION>. This will help us to understand the impacts of the Open Doors programme.

You may have already completed a similar form since you have been using the site. Even if you have, please do take the time to complete this form, so that we are able to measure how the use of the site has changed over the duration of the Open Doors project.

We will use this tool to collect the following information from you:

- The types of activities you use the property for
- The average number of participants who attend your activities at the site
- Any financial costs associated with using the property

If you believe that you have a colleague, or another member of your group, who would be better placed to fill this in, please forward this link onto them.

If you would like more information about this research, please click here.

Filling in this tool will take around 10 minutes to complete.

All data will be reported in aggregate form and your answers will not be reported to MHCLG in any way that would allow you to be identified. Under the data protection law, you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data, or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, please consult our website at iffresearch.com/GDPR

If you would like to confirm validity of the research or get more information about the aims and objectives, you can call:

- **MRS: Market Research Society on 0800 975 9596**
- **IFF: Jonnie Felton: 0207 250 3035**
- **MHCLG: Nicolette Lares: 0303 444 8911**

B Occupant Details

ASK ALL

We understand that due to the Covid-19 outbreak the Open Doors sites have not been in use for a number of weeks. For all of the following questions, please answer based on your typical use of the site before it was closed, towards the end of March.

ASK ALL

Firstly, we'd like to understand a little more about your community group or organisation, as well as how you use the space.

**B1 Which of the following best describes the main area of activity of your organisation?
SINGLECODE.**

Arts, culture and recreation	1	
Development (e.g.: credit and savings associations, organisations that aim to improve public wellbeing)	2	
Education (including playgroups and nurseries)	3	
Employment and training	4	
Environment	5	
Grant-making foundations	6	
Health	7	
Housing	8	
Scout groups and youth clubs	9	
Social services	10	
Other (specify)	11	

Don't know	12	
Prefer not to say	13	

ASK ALL

B2 And thinking back to around March time, or when you last regularly used the space, what activities did you typically use the Open Doors space at <LOCATION> for?
MULTICODE.

Meetings (drop-in sessions, support groups etc.)	1	
Arts and culture activities	2	
Health and wellbeing activities	3	
Sport or physical activities	4	
Educational opportunities (workshops, teaching)	5	
Awareness raising (presentations, discussions, information gathering, provision of information)	6	
Retail	7	
Outreach	8	
Testing new products/ideas	9	
Other (please specify)	10	

C Details of attendees/demographics

ASK ALL

C1a Which of the following best describes how often you used the space at <LOCATION>?

Again, please answer based on your typical use of the site in the weeks prior to the closure of the site due to Covid-19.

SINGLECODE.

More than five times a week	1	
Three to four times a week	2	
Twice a week	3	
Once a week	4	
Once a fortnight	5	
Once a month	6	
Less than once a month	7	
Don't know	8	

ASK ALL

C1b And when you used the space at <LOCATION>, how long did you typically use it for? Please consider how long you used the space each time you used it, irrespective of how many times a week or month you used it.

SINGLECODE.

Less than an hour	1	
Between one and two hours	2	
Between three and four hours	3	
Between five and six hours	4	
Seven or more hours	5	
It varies too much to say	6	
Don't know	7	

ASK ALL

C1 **How many people, on average, would you say attended the sessions your group held at the Open Doors property at <LOCATION> each time you used the space?**

WRITE IN (NUMERIC VALUE BETWEEN 0-100)		
Don't know	1	
Prefer not to say	2	

(C1=CODES 1/2) IF DON'T KNOW EXACT NUMBER – PROMPT WITH RANGES

C2 **Would you say it was approximately...?**

SINGLECODE

0- 9 attendees	1	
10 - 19 attendees	2	
20 – 29 attendees	3	
30 or more	4	
Don't know	5	
Prefer not to say	6	

ASK ALL

C3 **In a typical session, what was the split between regular attendees and new people?**

SINGLECODE

Mostly regular attendees	1	
Mostly new attendees	2	
A mix/about the same number of regular and new attendees	3	
Don't know	4	
Prefer not to say	5	

ASK ALL

C4 **In total, since you started using the Open Doors site at <LOCATION>, approximately how many people have attended at least one session your group has held at this location?**

WRITE IN (NUMERIC VALUE BETWEEN 0-10000)		
Don't know	1	
Prefer not to say	2	

(C4=CODES 1/2) IF DON'T KNOW EXACT NUMBER – PROMPT WITH RANGES

C5 Would you say it is approximately...?

SINGLECODE

0 - 25 attendees	1	
26 - 50 attendees	2	
51 - 100 attendees	3	
101 – 200 attendees	4	
201 – 500 attendees	5	
501 – 1000 attendees	6	
More than 1,000	7	
Don't Know	8	
Prefer not to say	9	

ASK ALL

C5a Which, if any, of the following demographic information do you collect about the people who attend your activities?

MULTICODE.

Gender	1	
Age	2	
Ethnicity	3	
None of these	4	

ASK ALL

C6 **Were the people who attended your activities at <LOCATION> ...?**

SINGLECODE

Mainly male	1	
Mainly female	2	
Mainly other	3	
A mix of different genders	4	
Varied each session	5	
Don't know	6	
Prefer not to say	7	

ASK ALL

C7 **Did the people who attended your activities at <LOCATION> tend to be...?**

SINGLECODE

Under 18	1	
18 – 24	2	
25 - 34	3	
35 - 49	4	
50 – 64	5	
65 or over	6	
A mix of different ages	7	
Varied each session	8	
Don't know	9	
Prefer not to say	10	

ASK ALL

C8 Are the people who attended your activities at <LOCATION> ...?

SINGLECODE.

Mainly White	1	
Mainly Asian / Asian British	2	
Mainly Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3	
A mix of different ethnic groups	4	
Other (please specify)	5	
Varied each session	6	
Don't know	7	
Prefer not to say	9	

D Associated Costs

D1 While you were using the Open Doors site, were there any costs to your organisation of using the space on a regular basis?

Please think about whether there are costs specifically as a result of using the Open Doors property at <LOCATION>, rather than overall running costs of operating your group.

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	
Prefer not to say	4	

IF D1 = 1 (IF HAVE ADDITIONAL COSTS)

D2 What types of expenditure did these costs consist of?

WRITE IN		
Don't know	1	
Prefer not to say	2	

IF D1 = 1 (IF HAVE ADDITIONAL COSTS)

D3 In total, since your organisation started using the space at <LOCATION>, approximately how much additional cost has there been to your group?

If you are unsure, please provide a rough estimate.

WRITE IN (NUMERIC VALUES IN £ STERLING) DS – ALLOW 0-100000		
Don't know	1	
Prefer not to say	2	

IF DOESN'T KNOW HOW MANY COSTS OR PREFER NOT TO SAY EXACT FIGURE (D3=CODES 1/2)

D3a. Would you say it is approximately...?

SINGLECODE.

£0 – £20	1	
£21 – £50	2	
£51 – £100	3	
£101 – £200	4	
£201 – £500	5	
£500 - £1,000	6	
More than £1,000	7	
Don't Know	8	
Prefer not to say	9	

IF D1 = 1 (IF HAVE ADDITIONAL COSTS)

D4 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'not at all acceptable' and 5 is 'completely acceptable', how acceptable do you consider these costs to your organisation to be?

SINGLECODE

1 – Not at all acceptable	1	
2	2	
3	3	
4	4	
5 – Completely acceptable	5	
Don't know	6	
Prefer not to say	7	

ASK ALL

D5 **If the Open Doors pilot project was to be extended, how likely or unlikely would your group be to continue to use the space for your activities?**

SINGLECODE

Very likely	1	
Quite likely	2	
Neither likely nor unlikely	3	
Quite unlikely	4	
Very unlikely	5	
Don't know	6	

ASK ALL

D6 ***We are interested in knowing how the Covid-19 outbreak has affected your group and its activities. Please could you briefly tell us using the box below.***

Things you may want to consider:

- *How the volume of activities has changed.*
- *How the types of activities have changed (e.g. have you been able to conduct activities remotely?)*
- *What effect has it had on the number of people you are able to provide a service to.*
- *What effect do you think the outbreak will have on how you operate going forward?*
- *Have you incurred any costs as a result of disruption or changes related to the Covid-19 outbreak?*

<i>WRITE IN</i>		
<i>Don't know</i>	1	

E Thank and Close

ASK ALL

E1 **Thank you for taking the time to enter your data into our online collection tool.**

**Should you have any further questions about Open Doors, please get in touch with the
Meanwhile Foundation, on XXX**

MI Form Invitation Email

REF: [KEY NUMBER]

Open Doors Evaluation – Data Collection Tool

Dear CONTACT,

IFF Research, an independent market research agency, have been commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to evaluate the Open Doors pilot scheme. The evaluation aims to help MHCLG better understand the impact of the scheme on community groups and landlords alike.

We understand that following government social distancing measures, spaces have closed and your activities have had to change. The evaluation of Open Doors continues to be important and we would really appreciate your input.

We are inviting you to complete an online data collection form to help us understand how you have used the space provided by the Open Doors programme. The tool also asks about the people who attended the sessions your group held at the Open Doors property.

You may have already completed a similar form since you have been using the site. Even if you have, please do take the time to complete this form, so that we are able to measure how the use of the site has changed over the duration of the Open Doors project.

This form should take less than 10 minutes to complete. To complete the form, please follow this link:

<INSERT SURVEY LINK>

Please complete this form by **Friday 22nd May**.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the research at any point. We hope very much that you are able to take part.

If you have any queries concerning the research, please contact Jonnie Felton at IFF Research, tel: 020 7250 3035 or e-mail: Jonnie.Felton@IFFResearch.com. If you would like to speak to somebody at MHCLG for more information, you can contact Nicolette Lares on Nicolette.Lares@communities.gov.uk

Your responses to the form will be treated in the strictest of confidence under the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society. The data collected will be stored securely and analysed anonymously and responses will not be linked to individuals without their prior consent.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Jonnie Felton
Research Manager
IFF Research

Annex C: Open Doors Case Studies: Research Materials

This annex includes the topic guides used in interviews for the case studies at the five Open Doors sites:

- Landlord interviews
- Community group interviews
- Local business interviews

Landlords

Open Doors Evaluation: Landlords / Applicants

J10162 Date 19/11/20

Telephone/F2F

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** As you're aware, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has commissioned IFF Research to carry out research into the implementation and impacts of the Open Doors pilot project. We are speaking to property landlords and programme applicants, community groups making use of the space, and neighbouring business, to find out their views on the Open Doors project. The research findings will be used to help MHCLG to understand both the areas of success and any difficulties with the programme, as well as the potential for the programme to be rolled out more widely in the future.
- **Focus of interview:** Today we're interested in speaking to you further about your experiences of the Open Doors programme including the application process and subsequent steps.
- The interview will last 30-45 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.
- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don't have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Background to the property vacancy (10 mins)

B1 To begin, could you just summarise your involvement with/relationship to the property that we're discussing today?

- Landlord or other party working on landlord's behalf?
- Who owns the property (individual/company/local authority)?
- Does the landlord also own other rental/commercial properties aside from this one? How many (approximately)?
- IF YES: Are any of these properties in the same local area as the pilot property?

B2 Could you provide a brief description of the property currently in use by the Open Doors project?

- Location – including type of area/street (residential, commercial, etc?)
- Number of floors, space in square foot, arrangement of rooms in space
- What is the (actual or estimated) rental value of the property (per week/month/year)?

B3 Were any substantial changes made to the property in the run up to it being used for the Open Doors pilot? IF YES: What changes?

- Were these changes made for/as a result of Open Doors?
- Were they funded by the Open Doors programme? To what extent?
- What influence do (if at all) do you think that these changes will have on the future potential rental value of the property?

B4 And could you tell me a bit about the history of the property prior to involvement with the Open Doors project?

- When was the property acquired by you/the current landlord?
- Was the property in use/occupied by a tenant when acquired?
- (IF YES) How was the property being used?
- What was the duration of the most recent tenancy prior to Open Doors?

- To what extent has the property been occupied since acquisition? Why?

B5 How long was the property vacant before the Open Doors tenancy?

- What was the property last used for?
- Why was the property vacated?

B6 What would you say were the main challenges facing businesses or landlords in this area around the time of application to the Open Doors project?

- Reasons for not being able to find a replacement tenant?

C Programme application (10 mins)

C1 How did you become aware of the Open Doors programme?

- Initial source of awareness
- First thoughts or impressions about suitability or relevance of the programme to your property?

C2 What were your main motivations for applying to take part in the Open Doors programme?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most important/significant motivator and why?

C3 To what extent did the following factors influence your decision to apply and why?

PROBE AND EXPLORE:

- **Anticipated financial benefits?**
 1. Which specific financial benefits/advantages did you anticipate?
- **Potential benefits to the community groups that would make use of the space?**
- **Benefits to the wider neighbourhood/community?**
- **Reputational benefits as a landlord?**

C4 Did you have any concerns or doubts about potential drawbacks or negative aspects of the Open Doors programme when applying?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?

C5 Could you talk me through your recollection of the process of applying to take part? What steps were involved?

INTERVIEWER: PLEASE PROBE ABOUT ANY LEGAL PROCESSES THAT FOLLOWED APPLICATION ALSO

- FOR EACH STEP:

1. How long did this aspect take?
2. How easy or difficult was this step to complete? Why?
3. How could this aspect of the application process be improved?

C6 Overall how satisfied were you with the overall application process?

- How easy or difficult was it to provide the information required?
- How long end-to-end was the process? How reasonable do you think this duration was?
- Any other suggested improvements to process?

C7 Overall how satisfied were you with the legal processes that followed your successful application?

- How easy or difficult was it to secure the tenancy agreement for Open Doors?
- How long end-to-end was the process? How reasonable do you think this duration was?
- Any other suggested improvements to process?

D Programme Outcomes (15 mins)

D1 Now returning to discuss further the property and the local area around the site. At the time of application to the Open Doors project (Winter 2018 – Spring 2019), how would you have described the immediate area (e.g. the street it's situated on) around the property?

- What were the neighbouring units/properties?
- Who mainly used/frequented the area (e.g. families, shoppers, workers, young people, older people etc.)?

- What was the atmosphere of the area like?
- What was the level of footfall on the street like? Were there any busy times/quiet times?
- How safe did the area feel? Why?
- How healthy was the local economy? Why?
- How much of a sense of community or connectedness was there in the area?

D2 Has the immediate area around the property changed at all over the duration of the Open Doors pilot project? If so, how and why?

PROBE FOR ANY DIFFERENCES IN THE CHARACTERISTICS DESCRIBED AT D1

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED

D3 Specifically, are you aware of any changes over the course of the pilot period in the following aspects of the local area?

IF YES: To what extent do you think these changes relate to the use of the property as a Meanwhile Space?

PROBE FOR SPECIFIC CHANGES:

- Changes to the local economy?
- Footfall?
- Safety or levels of anti-social behaviour?
- Sense of community or connectedness of those who live or work nearby, or otherwise frequent the area?

D4 What have been the main positive outcomes for you/the landlord of taking part in the programme?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- **Financial benefits?**
 1. Details of specific financial benefits including value of these benefits
- **Reputational benefits as a landlord?**
- **Planning/development benefits?**

D5 And more widely do you think the programme has been of benefit to others? If so, how?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- **Potential benefits to the community groups that make use of the space?**
- **Benefits to the wider neighbourhood/community?**

D6 Have there been any disadvantages or downsides of taking part? Why?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- **Financial?**
- **Any opportunities declined/missed due to having a tenancy agreement with Meanwhile Foundation?**
- **Anything else?**

D7 Overall, what have been the financial impacts of taking part?

PROBE FOR:

- Value of remedial works done (funded by the Open Doors project)
- Impact on potential rental value of property
- Costs of application process and/or participation in programme
- Any ongoing costs either paid by landlord, or savings made by costs being covered by MF/occupants
- **How do any costs incurred balance with savings/gains made?**
- Overall, how acceptable or unacceptable are these financial impacts? Why?

D8 How have these outcomes or impacts compared to those you anticipated when applying for the programme?

REFER BACK TO C2/C3 RESPONSES

- Were there any surprise/unexpected impacts? Where there positive/negative/neutral and why?

D9 On balance, has your experience of participating in Open Doors been positive, negative or neutral? Why?

IF POSITIVE: What were the key aspects that led to the programme being a positive experience? Why?

E Final thoughts (5 – 10 mins)

E1 When the lease agreement for Open Doors ends, what are your plans for the space?

PROBE:

- Drivers to decisions about how to use the space next
- Any plans to assist the occupants after the lease expires? How and why?
- Any concerns about the property being vacant, either imminently or in the future?

E2 To what extent would you consider offering this space, or another property, for meanwhile occupancy again in the future?

PROBE:

- Factors that influence decision to offer or not offer a property for meanwhile use?
- Are there any actions that could be taken or offered to encourage you to offer a space for meanwhile use in the future?

E3 Do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements that could be made to the Open Doors scheme?

PROBE:

- Methods of publicising the scheme
- Incentives to encourage landlords to apply
- Improvements to the application process
- Improvements to the legal processes following application
- Changes to the advantages/incentives for landlords
- Methods to support landlords to manage a meanwhile space?

E4 Do you have any advice on rolling out the Open Doors pilot more widely?

PROBE:

- Any key factors or considerations required for the project to be successful if scaled up?

- Considerations that apply to this location/local area, or other considerations if rolling out to the rest of the UK?

F Close (5 mins)

F1 **Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today – particularly on your experience of the Open Doors project or the impacts of this?**

F2 **And would you be willing to help us in any other further research we're conducting in relation to the Open Doors project?**

Yes	1
No	2

F3 **Thank you very much for your time today. Can I confirm:**

Name	
Telephone	
E-mail	@

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
	Finish time:	Interview Length mins

Community Groups

Open Doors Evaluation

J10162

Date 19/11/20

Face to face

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** As you're aware, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has commissioned IFF Research to carry out research into the implementation and impacts of the Open Doors pilot project. We are speaking to property landlords and programme applicants, community groups making use of the space, and neighbouring business, to find out their views on the Open Doors project. The research findings will be used to help MHCLG to understand both the areas of success and any difficulties with the programme, as well as the potential for the programme to be rolled out more widely in the future.
- **Focus of interview:** Today we're interested in speaking to you further about your experiences of the Open Doors programme including how you use the space, and any associated benefits and challenges.
- The interview will last 30-45 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.
- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr). You can also consult MHCLG's Personal Information Charter (*IF NECESSARY:* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government/about/personal-information-charter>)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don't have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Intro and background

B1 To start, could you tell me a bit about your organisation and your aims and objectives?

- What does the group do?
- What are the motivations or objectives of the group?
- Is the group a social enterprise e.g. a Community Interest Company (CIC)?
- How long has the group been in existence?
- What area (geographically) does the group operate in?
- Do they have links to other groups/are they a branch of a larger organisation?

B2 And could you tell me a bit about your role within the group?

- How long have you been working with the group?
- How is the group managed – who is in charge?
- To what extent were you involved in the process of applying on behalf of the group to use the Open Doors space?

B3 Where (if anywhere) did you conduct your organisation's activities prior to Open Doors?

- Were there any other programmes, like Open Doors?
- How were these spaces different to the current Open Doors location?

B4 Before becoming aware of the Open doors pilot, what challenges were you facing?

PROMPT:

- Around finding appropriate/suitable space (size, location, accessibility etc)
- Financial challenges

C Programme Application (15 mins)

C1 How did you become aware of the Open Doors pilot?

- What was the initial source of awareness?

C2 What were your first thoughts or impressions about the pilot?

- What were your initial thoughts about the suitability or relevance of the pilot to your community group?
- What was attractive about the Open Doors pilot?
- Were you aware of/had you applied for any similar programmes/initiatives in your local area?

C3 What were your main motivations for applying to be a part of the Open Doors pilot?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most important/significant motivator and why?

C4 Did you have any concerns or doubts about potential drawbacks or negative aspects when applying for the Open Doors pilot?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?

C5 Could you talk me through your experience of the process of applying to take part?

PROBE

- What steps were involved in the process
- How easy or difficult was it?
- How long was the process end to end?

C6 How would you describe your relationship with the landlord of the space?

PROBE

- Why do you say that?
- Have there been any tensions or difficulties with the landlord?
- Has the landlord prevented you doing anything you would have like to have done?
- Did you have any influence on how the space was developed for use?

D Programme Outcomes (15 mins)

D1 What do you use the space for?

- What activities do you carry out in the space?

D2 What types of attendees use the space?

- **PROBE:** Demographics: Ages, genders, ethnicities of attendees
- Have the types of attendees changed?
- Has the number of attendees changed?

D3 What do you think have been the key benefits of using the space for your community group?

PROBE

- Number of attendees
- Types of attendees
- Financial benefits
- Social benefits
- Raising group's profile on the high street

D4 What do you think have been the key benefits of using the space for your attendees?

- Are you able to do more activities or host events?
- Are you able to offer different types of activities or events?
- Do you think it has helped to alleviate loneliness?

D5 Are there any negatives, or any drawbacks to using the space?

- IF YES: What are they?
- How could the space be improved?

D6 Are there any benefits or disadvantages that come with other community groups using the space?

- If so, what are they?
- How much do they affect your use of the space?

D7 Have you faced any difficulties/barriers whilst being involved in the Open Doors pilot?

- IF YES: What were they?
- IF YES: Have these issues been resolved? How and why, or why not?
- IF NO: If you were facing any issues, would you be confident to raise them? And would you know who to raise them to?

D8 Have there been any unexpected, or unanticipated, outcomes of being involved in the pilot?

PROBE

- Positive outcomes
- Negative outcomes
- Short term / medium term / long term outcomes

D9 I'd like you to now think generally about your local area and your perception of it. So, how would you describe the local area?

- What was it like before the Open Doors pilot?
- How would you describe the local economy before the Open Doors pilot?
- Do you think it has changed as a direct result of Open Doors and, if so, how?

D10 Have you noticed any changes in the local area since Open Doors has been introduced in the area?

IF YES: To what extent do you think these changes relate to the use of the property as a Meanwhile Space?

PROBE:

- Has the local economy changed?
- Has there been any change in footfall?
- Has there been a rise or fall in ASB cases?
- Has it had any impact on the local community spirit / social connectedness?
- Has it helped to alleviate loneliness?

E Final Thoughts (5-10 mins)

E1 When the lease agreement for Open Doors ends, what are your plans for the group?

- How will the Open Doors Programme influence your decisions when choosing a new space?

E2 Do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements that could be made to the Open Doors scheme?

PROBE:

- Improvements to the application process (i.e.: length of application, topics covered, time to receive decision etc)
- Improvements to the booking process (booking the space)
- Impacts of other groups using the space?

E3 Overall, do you think your experience of participating in Open Doors has been positive, negative or neutral?

- PROBE: Why?

E4 To what extent do you think that Open Doors should be continued and expanded to reach more communities?

- PROBE: Why?

E5 What advice would you give to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to help ensure that expanding Open Doors to other communities would be a success?

- PROBE: Why?

F Close (5 mins)

F1 Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today – particularly on your experience of the Open Doors project or the impacts of this?

F2 And would you be happy for us to call you back if we needed to clarify anything that has been discussed today?

Yes	1
No	2

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Local Businesses

Open Doors Evaluation: Businesses

J10162

Date 19/11/20

Face to face

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** We would like to speak to you today as a neighbouring business to the “Open Doors” site at [ADDRESS OF PILOT SITE]. You may recall that this property was vacant earlier this year. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have partnered with the Meanwhile Foundation to work with landlords of vacant properties, like this site, to make these spaces available to community groups. For information, MHCLG are the government department responsible for communities, housing and local government.
- MHCLG have commissioned IFF Research to carry out research into the implementation and impacts of the Open Doors pilot project. We are speaking to property landlords and programme applicants, community groups making use of the space, and neighbouring business, to find out their views on the Open Doors project. The research findings will be used to help MHCLG to understand both the areas of success and any difficulties with the programme, as well as the potential for the programme to be rolled out more widely in the future.
- **Focus of interview:** Today we’re interested in speaking to you further about your views of the Open Doors programme and any impacts that this may have had on your business or the local area.
- The interview will last 15-20 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society’s Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.
- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you’d like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr) You can also consult MHCLG’s Personal Information Charter (*IF NECESSARY:* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government/about/personal-information-charter>)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don’t have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Background and Awareness of the Programme (5 mins)

B1 To begin, could you tell me a little about your business?

- What does the business do?
- How long has the business been operating here?
- How long have you personally worked in this area/location?

B2 And thinking about the property at [PILOT ADDRESS], could you tell me whether you were aware of any changes to that property over the last year or so? IF YES: What types of changes?

PROBE FOR AWARENESS OF:

- Change from being vacant to occupied?
- Renovation or changes to appearance of property?
- Changes in usage of site?
- Anything else?

B3 As mentioned, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have partnered with the Meanwhile Foundation to make the property at [PILOT ADDRESS] available for use by community groups under the Open Doors programme.

This means that the Meanwhile Foundation have acquired the right to lease the property for up to one year (until early/mid 2020), have carried out certain renovation and design works to make the property more suitable for use by community groups and have employed a PA to assist community groups with accessing the site.

Were you aware of the Open Doors Programme prior to the location space being converted for this use?

- IF YES: How did you become aware of the programme?
- Awareness of the site being used as part of the "Open Doors" programme prior to being approached for today's interview?
- Are you aware of the benefits the pilot provides to the community groups such as free use of the space, new décor and furnishings, a reduction in business rates for the landlord?
- Do you understand how a meanwhile lease can be used with a vacant commercial property?
 - o If the answer is yes, please explain how you came to know?

- If the answer is no what would be the best methods of helping business owners to learn more about this type of lease and its benefits?

B4 And to what extent were you aware of the details of the scheme that I've just described?

- Awareness of who (MHCLG/Meanwhile Foundation) was operating the scheme?
- Awareness that the property is being used by community groups?

B5 Are you aware of any other similar programmes operating in this area?

C Local Area (5 mins)

C1 Now thinking more generally about your local area and your perception of it. How would you describe the local area?

- How would you describe the street and neighbourhood?
- How would you describe the local economy?

C2 What would you say are the main challenges and issues in the local area, both for businesses and residents?

- Have these challenges or issues changed at all since the Open Doors site opened? (How/why?)
- Do you think the changes will remain once the Open Doors pilot closes, or do you think things will revert to the way they were?

C3 Did you have any concerns or doubts about the Open Doors Programme using a space in your local area and the possible effects it would have on it?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?
- Have these concerns materialised?

C4 Since the Open Doors site opened have there been any positive or negative changes in the local area?

PROMPT

- What do these changes look like within the local community? PROBE FULLY FOR DETAILS OF CHANGES (e.g. how many times something has happened)

- Any changes in:
 - Footfall in the area
 - Anti-social behaviour
 - Community spirit / social connectedness
 - Local economy?

C5 And since the Open Doors site opened has there been any positive or negative changes for you and your business?

- Changes to profile of customers
- Changes in turnover?

IF ANY CHANGES AT C4 OR C5

C6 To what extent, if at all, are these changes as a result of, or related to, the establishment of the Open Doors site in the local area?

- *PROBE FOR VIEWS ON HOW/IF AREA MIGHT HAVE CHANGED WITHOUT OPEN DOORS SITE*

C7 How much interaction have you had with the occupants of the Open Doors site, if any?

- Have you visited the Open Doors site? If yes: What was the purpose of the visit? Which community group did you visits?
- Have the users of the Open Doors site visited your business? If yes: who was this (e.g. community group, landlord)? What was the purpose of the visit?
- Have the users of the Open Doors site communicated or engaged with you in any other way?

D Final thoughts (5 mins)

D1 When the lease agreement for Open Doors ends (in Spring/Summer 2020), what impact do you think this will have on the local area?

PROBE:

- Will the impact of the Open Doors Programme remain? (on footfall or ASB etc)
- Any concerns about the property being vacant, either imminently or in the future?

D2 If the opportunity arose for businesses to participate in the Open Doors scheme, what level of interest would you have in participating? Why/why not?

PROBE:

- How do you envisage your business participating in the scheme? E.g. by occupying a vacant property, by offering Open Doors use of a vacant property that you own?
- Would you like your business to be offered the opportunity to become involved in Open Doors in the future?

E Close (5 mins)

E1 Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today – particularly on your experience of the Open Doors project or the impacts of this?

E2 And would you be happy for us to call you back if we needed to clarify anything that has been discussed today?

Yes	1
No	2

E3 Thank you very much for your time today. Can I confirm:

Name	
Telephone	
E-mail	@

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Annex D: Counterfactual: Research Materials

This annex includes research materials used in interviews for the counterfactual exercise:

- Unsuccessful landlord interviews
- Unsuccessful community group interviews
- Interviews with businesses local to the properties of the unsuccessful landlords. Note that due to the quality of data collected from the first of these interviews, no further interviews were carried out with local businesses in the counterfactual. The decision was taken to conduct remaining interviews intended for these businesses with community groups who had applied for Open Doors but did not ultimately use the spaces

Landlords

Open Doors Evaluation: Non-participating Landlords / Applicants (Counterfactual)

J10162 Date 19/11/20

Telephone/F2F

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has commissioned IFF Research to carry out research into the implementation and impacts of the Open Doors pilot project. As someone who applied to the pilot scheme, but was not ultimately selected for a pilot site, we would like to speak to you to find out about how your property is currently being used.
- The research findings will be used to help MHCLG to understand both the areas of success and any difficulties with the programme, as well as the potential for the programme to be rolled out more widely in the future.
- **Focus of interview:** Today we're interested in speaking to you further about the property that you applied to be used in the Open Doors scheme.
- The interview will last 30-45 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.

- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don't have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Background and current use (10 mins)

B1 To begin, could you just summarise your involvement with/relationship to the property that we're discussing today?

- Landlord or other party working on landlord's behalf?
- Who owns the property (individual/company/local authority)?
- Does the landlord also own other rental/commercial properties aside from this one? How many (approximately)?
- IF YES: Are any of these properties in the same local area as this property?

B2 Could you provide a brief description of the property?

- Location – including type of area/street (residential, commercial, etc?)
- Number of floors, space in square foot, arrangement of rooms in space
- What is the (actual or estimated) rental value of the property (per week/month/year)?

B3 Have there been any substantial changes made to the property recently, say in the past 6 months? IF YES: What changes?

- Why were these changes made?
- What influence (if at all) do you think that these changes will have on the future potential rental value of the property?

B4 How is the property currently being used?

- Why is it being used this way?
- Are there currently any occupants?
- IF CURRENTLY HAVE OCCUPANTS: Who are the occupants? How are they using the property?

- IF CURRENTLY HAVE OCCUPANTS: How long have they been occupants?
- IF CURRENTLY HAVE OCCUPANTS: What is the expected length of the tenancy?
- IF NO OCCUPANTS: Have you tried to attract occupants?

B5 What have been the main difficulties in trying to attract tenants to the property in the last 12 months or so?

- Cost of renting the property?
- The physical state of the property?
- Economy of the local area?
- Anti-social behaviour in local area?

IF CURRENTLY HAVE OCCUPANTS

B6 What have been the main difficulties in trying to retain tenants in the last 12 months or so?

- Pressure from tenants to maintain the property?
- Economy of the local area?
- Anti-social behaviour in the local area?
- Pressure to decrease/freeze rents (from tenants)?
- Pressure to increase rents (due e.g. to own financial situation / other circumstances)?

B7 How have you gone about trying to find occupants for the property, if at all?

- Have you used estate agents?
- Have you approached any other organisations?
- Have you tried to occupy the property through Meanwhile Use by means other than the Open Doors scheme?

B8 And could you tell me a bit about the history of the property?

- How was the property being used?

- When was the property acquired by you/the current landlord?
- Was the property in use/occupied by a tenant when acquired?
- IF CURRENTLY HAVE TENANTS: What was the duration of the most recent tenancy prior to the current one?
- IF CURRENTLY VACANT: What was the duration of the most recent tenancy?
- To what extent has the property been occupied since acquisition? Why?

IF PROPERTY CURRENTLY OCCUPIED

B9 How long was the property vacant before the most recent occupants?

- What was the property last used for?
- Why was the property vacated?

IF PROPERTY CURRENTLY VACANT

B10 How long has the property been vacant for?

- What was the property last used for?
- Why was the property vacated?

B11 What would you say have been the main challenges facing businesses or landlords in this area in the last 12 months?

- Reasons for not being able to find a replacement tenant?

C Programme application (10 mins)

I'd now like to talk about the Open Doors pilot application process

C1 How did you become aware of the Open Doors programme?

- Initial source of awareness
- First thoughts or impressions about suitability or relevance of the programme to your property?

C2 What were your main motivations for applying to take part in the Open Doors programme?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most important/significant motivator and why?

C3 To what extent did the following factors influence your decision to apply and why?

PROBE AND EXPLORE:

- **Anticipated financial benefits?**
 1. Which specific financial benefits/advantages did you anticipate?
- **Potential benefits to the community groups that would make use of the space?**
- **Benefits to the wider neighbourhood/community?**
- **Reputational benefits as a landlord?**

C4 Did you have any concerns or doubts about potential drawbacks or negative aspects of the Open Doors programme when applying?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?

C5 Overall how satisfied were you with the overall application process?

- How easy or difficult was it to provide the information required?
- How long end-to-end was the process? How reasonable do you think this duration was?
- Any other suggested improvements to process?

C6 What were the reasons for your application being unsuccessful?

- Was this made clear to you?

- How was this communicated to you? Was it done so in a timely manner?
- Was the feedback received helpful?
- To what extent would you consider applying to the scheme again?

D Programme Outcomes (15 mins)

D1 Now returning to discuss further the property and the local area around the site. At the end of 2018, around the time of your application to the Open Doors project, how would you have described the immediate area (e.g. the street it's situated on) around the property?

- What were the neighbouring units/properties?
- Who mainly used/frequented the area (e.g. families, shoppers, workers, young people, older people etc.)?
- What was the atmosphere of the area like?
- What was the level of footfall on the street like? Were there any busy times/quiet times?
- How safe did the area feel? Why?
- How healthy was the local economy? Why?
- How much of a sense of community or connectedness was there in the area?

D2 Has the immediate area around the property changed at all over the past six months or so? If so, how and why?

PROBE FOR ANY DIFFERENCES IN THE CHARACTERISTICS DESCRIBED AT D1

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED

D3 Specifically, are you aware of any changes over the course of the past six months in the following aspects of the local area?

IF YES: To what extent do you think these changes relate to how your property is currently being used?

PROBE FOR SPECIFIC CHANGES:

- Changes to the local economy?
- Footfall?
- Safety or levels of anti-social behaviour?
- Parking?

- Sense of community or connectedness of those who live or work nearby, or otherwise frequent the area?

IF CURRENTLY OCCUPIED

D4 What have been the main positive outcomes for you/the landlord, if any, of how the property is currently being used?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- **Financial benefits?**
 1. Details of specific financial benefits including value of these benefits
- **Reputational benefits as a landlord?**
- **Planning/development benefits?**

IF CURRENTLY OCCUPIED

D5 And more widely, how has the way the property is currently used benefitted others, if at all?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- Potential benefits to the tenants of the space?
- Potential benefits to service users?
- Benefits to the wider neighbourhood/community?

IF CURRENTLY OCCUPIED

D6 Have there been any disadvantages or negative outcomes of how the space is currently being used? Why?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS THEN PROBE FOR:

- Financial?
- Any opportunities for using the space another way declined/missed?
- Anything else?

IF CURRENTLY VACANT

D7 What have been the disadvantages and challenges of the property remaining vacant?

- Financial?
- Anti-social behaviour (e.g. damage to the property, graffiti)?

- Anything else?

D8 Overall, what have been the financial impacts of owning the property in the last 6 months?

PROBE FOR:

- Value of remedial works done
- IF VACANT: Impact on potential rental value of property
- IF OCCUPIED: Any ongoing costs either paid by landlord, or savings made by costs being covered by occupants
- How do any costs incurred balance with income gained / savings made through the property?
- Overall, how acceptable or unacceptable are these financial impacts? Why?

D9 On balance, has your experience with this property over the last 6 months been positive, negative or neutral? Why?

E Future of the property and final thoughts (5 mins)

E1 What are your plans for the space over the next few years?

PROBE:

- Drivers to decisions about how to use the space in the future
- IF NOT CURRENTLY VACANT: Any concerns about the property being vacant, either imminently or in the future?

E2 To what extent would you consider offering this space, or another property, for meanwhile occupancy in the future?

PROBE:

- Factors that influence decision to offer or not offer a property for meanwhile use?
- Are there any actions that could be taken or offered to encourage you to offer a space for meanwhile use in the future?

E3 Do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements that could be made to the Open Doors scheme?

PROBE:

- Methods of publicising the scheme
- Incentives to encourage landlords to apply
- Improvements to the application process

F Close (5 mins)

F1 Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today?

F2 And would you be happy for us to call you back if we needed to clarify anything that has been discussed today?

Yes	1
No	2

IF PROPERTY HAS OCCUPANTS

F3 As part of the evaluation, we're looking to talk to occupants of properties in the local area to find out their views on how it has changed in the last while. Please could we take the contact details of the current occupant(s) of your property?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: We can only collect business details at this question, not personal details e.g. names or personal phone numbers/email addresses.

Business Name	
Job Title	
Telephone	
Organisation (if applicable)	
Business E-mail	@

F4 Thank you very much for your time today.

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Unsuccessful Community Groups

Open Doors Evaluation: Counterfactual – Unsuccessful Community Group Applicants

J10162

Date 19/11/20

Telephone

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has commissioned IFF Research to carry out research into the implementation and impacts of the Open Doors pilot project. As someone who applied to the pilot but did not end up occupying a space through Open Doors, we would like to speak to you to find out about the process of applying, reasons for not ultimately being involved and how the group is currently operating. The research findings will be used to help MHCLG to understand both the areas of success and any difficulties with the programme, as well as the potential for the programme to be rolled out more widely in the future.
- **Focus of interview:** Today we're interested in speaking to you further about your experiences of the Open Doors application and what the group is doing as an alternative to using an Open Doors space.
- The interview will last 40 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.
- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr). You can also consult MHCLG's Personal Information Charter (*IF NECESSARY:* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government/about/personal-information-charter>)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don't have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Intro and background (5 minutes)

B1 To start, could you tell me a bit about your organisation and your aims and objectives?

- What does the group do?
- What are the motivations or objectives of the group?
- How long has the group been in existence?
- What area (geographically) does the group operate in?
- Do they have links to other groups/are they a branch of a larger organisation?

B2 And could you tell me a bit about your role within the group?

- How long have you been working with the group?
- How is the group managed – who is in charge?
- To what extent were you involved in the process of applying on behalf of the group to use the Open Doors space?

B3 Before becoming aware of the Open doors pilot, what challenges were you facing?

PROMPT:

- Around finding appropriate/suitable space (size, location, accessibility etc)
- Financial challenges

C Programme Application (10 mins)

C1 How did you become aware of the Open Doors pilot?

- What was the initial source of awareness?

C2 What were your first thoughts or impressions about the pilot?

- What were your initial thoughts about the suitability or relevance of the pilot to your community group?
- What was attractive about the Open Doors pilot?
- Were you aware of/had you applied for any similar programmes/initiatives in your local area?

C3 What were your main motivations for applying to be a part of the Open Doors pilot?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most important/significant motivator and why?

C4 Did you have any concerns or doubts about potential drawbacks or negative aspects when applying for the Open Doors pilot?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?

C5 Overall how satisfied were you with the application process?

- How easy or difficult was it to provide the information required?
- How long end-to-end was the process? How reasonable do you think this duration was?
- Any other suggested improvements to process?

C6 What was the outcome of your Open Doors application?

- Did you withdraw the application?
- Was the application not accepted by Meanwhile Foundation?

IF APPLICATION REJECTED BY MEANWHILE FOUNDATION

C7 Do you know the reasons for your application not being accepted?

- What were the reasons?

- Was this made clear to you?
- How was this communicated to you? Was it done so in a timely manner?
- Was the feedback received helpful?
- To what extent would you consider applying to the scheme again?

IF APPLICATION WITHDRAWN BY COMMUNITY GROUP

C8 What were the reasons for withdrawing your application to Open Doors?

- To what extent was the withdrawal of the application due to circumstances surrounding your organisation, or the Open Doors scheme? Or both?
- To what extent could this issue / these issues have been avoided? If so, how?

ASK ALL

C9 What, if anything, do you think could have enabled you to make a successful application to the Open Doors scheme?

PROBE:

- Changes to eligibility criteria?
- Change to legal / contractual requirements or participating?
- Changes to timeframes?
- Changes to the space itself?
- Changes to application guidance?

D Current activities and impacts (15 mins)

D1 **Can I just check, is the organisation still operating?**

D2 **Where is the current space your organisation uses for its activities?**

- Probe in terms of: town/city, area of town (e.g. town centre), proximity to Open Doors site.

D3 **Could you tell me a bit about the space that your organisation currently uses for its activities?**

- Probe in terms of: location, type of building, number of rooms, arrangement of rooms
- Do you share the space with anyone else? If so, who?
- How long have you been using this space?
- How easy or difficult was it to find this space?
- IF HAVE MOVED INTO SPACE IN LAST YEAR AND A HALF: why did you vacate the previous space you used?

D4 **What do you use the space for?**

- What activities do you carry out in the space?
- To what extent is the space 'fit for purpose' for the activities your organisation carries out there?

D5 **What types of attendees use the space?**

- **PROBE:** Demographics: Ages, genders, ethnicities of attendees
- Has the number of attendees changed since last summer?
- Have the types of attendees changed since last summer?

D6 **What do you think have been the key benefits of using the space for your group in the last 6 months or so?**

PROBE

- Number of attendees

- Types of attendees
- Financial benefits
- Social benefits
- Raising group's profile

D7 What do you think have been the key benefits of using the space for your attendees?

- Are you able to do more activities or host events?
- Are you able to offer different types of activities or events?
- Do you think it has helped to alleviate loneliness?

D8 Are there any negatives, or any drawbacks to using the space?

PROBE:

- Location
- Relationship with landlord
- Terms of use
- Accessibility
- Financial implications of using the space

IF SHARE THE SPACE WITH OTHERS

D9 Are there any benefits or disadvantages that come with sharing the space with others?

- If so, what are they?
- How much do they affect your use of the space?

D10 To what extent do you think your organisation's experiences would have differed over the last 6 months if you had had access to the Open Doors site?

PROBE:

- Scale of activities

- Type of activities
- Type and volume of attendees
- Visibility / marketing
- Do you think use of the Open Doors site would have led the organisation to be in a better/worse position than it currently is? Why do you say that?
- Is there anything that the use of the Open Doors site would have enabled you to do / achieve that you are not able to using the current space?
- Is there anything that you are currently able to do that would not have been possible if you were using the Open Doors site?

D11 I'd like you to now think generally about your local area and your perception of it. So, how would you describe the local area?

- How would you describe the local economy?

D12 Have you noticed any changes in the local area since last summer?

IF YES: To what extent do you think these changes relate to your organisation's presence at the current space?

PROBE:

- Has the local economy changed?
- Has there been any change in footfall?
- Has there been a rise or fall in ASB cases?
- Has it had any impact on the local community spirit / social connectedness?
- Has it helped to alleviate loneliness?

E Final Thoughts (5 minutes)

E1 **What are your plans for the organisation over the next year or so?**

- Do you expect to change the type or scale of your activities?
- Do you anticipate remaining in the current location?
- IF EXPECT TO MOVE: Why?

E2 **Do you think you would consider applying for Open Doors again in the future if the scheme was repeated?**

PROBE:

- Factors that influence decision to apply / not to apply?
- Is there anything that would encourage you to apply for the scheme in the future?

E3 **Based on your knowledge and experience of Open Doors, do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements that could be made to the scheme?**

PROBE:

- Methods of publicising the scheme
- Changes to terms of scheme
- Improvements to the application process

F Close (5 mins)

F1 Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today?

F2 And would you be happy for us to call you back if we needed to clarify anything that has been discussed today?

Yes	1
No	2

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Local Businesses

Open Doors Evaluation: Businesses

J10162

Date 19/11/20

Face to face

A Introduction (<5 mins)

- **Interviewer introduction**
- **Thank respondent for agreeing to participate**
- **Background to the research:** We would like to speak to you today about the property at [ADDRESS OF COUNTERFACTUAL PROPERTY] and the local area. We are conducting research on behalf of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) about how properties that have recently been vacant are currently being used, and the effect this has on the surrounding area. For information, MHCLG are the government department responsible for communities, housing and local government.
- The interview will last 15-20 minutes.
- **MRS Code of Conduct and Confidentiality:** IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you or your organisation unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. We will not pass any of your details on to any other companies.
- **GDPR:** Before we begin, I just need to read out a quick statement based on GDPR legislation. I want to reassure you that you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you'd like to do this, you can consult the IFF Research website (*IF NECESSARY:* iffresearch.com/gdpr) You can also consult MHCLG's Personal Information Charter (*IF NECESSARY:* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government/about/personal-information-charter>)

Permission to record: We like to audio record all interviews of this nature so we don't have to take a lot of notes – the recording will be used for analysis purposes. Is this ok?

B Background to local area and property (5 mins)

B1 To begin, could you tell me a little about your business?

- What does the business do?
- How long has the business been operating here?
- How long have you personally worked in this area/location?

B2 And thinking generally about your local area and your perception of it. How would you describe the local area?

- How would you describe the street and neighbourhood?
- How would you describe the local economy?

B3 What would you say are the main challenges and issues in the local area, both for businesses and residents?

- Have these challenges or issues changed at all in the last 6 months or so? (How/why?)

B4 And now thinking about the property at [COUNTERFACTUAL ADDRESS], could you tell me whether you were aware of any changes to that property over the last year or so? IF YES: What types of changes?

PROBE FOR AWARENESS OF:

- Change from being vacant to occupied?
- Renovation or changes to appearance of property?
- Changes in usage of site?
- Anything else?

B5 Do you have any concerns or doubts about the way the property is currently being used and the possible effects it could have on the local area?

- IF MULTIPLE: Which was the most significant concern and why?
- Have these concerns materialised?

C Changes in the local Area (10 mins)

C1 In the last 6 months or so, have there been any positive or negative changes in the local area?

PROMPT

- What do these changes look like within the local community? PROBE FULLY FOR DETAILS OF CHANGES (e.g. how many times something has happened)
- Any changes in:
 - Footfall in the area
 - Anti-social behaviour
 - Community spirit / social connectedness
 - Local economy?

C2 And in the last 6 months has there been any positive or negative changes for you and your business?

- Changes to profile of customers
- Changes in turnover?

IF ANY CHANGES AT C1 OR C2

C3 To what extent, if at all, are these changes as a result of, or related to, the way the property is currently being used, or not used?

- *PROBE FOR VIEWS ON HOW/IF AREA MIGHT HAVE CHANGED WITHOUT OPEN DOORS SITE*

IF PROPERTY OCCUPIED

C4 How much interaction have you had with the current occupants of the property, if any?

- Have you visited the property? IF YES: What was the purpose of the visit? Who did you visit?
- Have the occupants visited your business? IF YES: Who was this? What was the purpose of the visit?
- Have the users of the site communicated or engaged with you in any other way?

D Final thoughts (5 mins)

IF PROPERTY OCCUPIED

- D1 **When the current occupants of the property leave, what impact do you think this will have on the local area?**

PROBE:

- Will the impact of the occupants remain? (e.g. on footfall or ASB etc)
- Any concerns about the property being vacant, either imminently or in the future?

- D2 **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have partnered with the Meanwhile Foundation who are an organisation who grow the use of vacant properties for projects that deliver economic development and social or environmentally led regeneration. They are currently piloting a scheme called Open Doors, which makes vacant properties available for use by community groups and charitable organisations.**

This means that the Meanwhile Foundation have acquired the right to lease a vacant property for up to one year (until early/mid 2020), have carried out certain renovation and design works to make the property more suitable for use by community groups and have employed a PA to assist community groups with accessing the site.

If the opportunity arose for businesses to participate in the Open Doors scheme, what level of interest would you have in participating? Why/why not?

PROBE:

- How do you envisage your business participating in the scheme? E.g. by occupying a vacant property, by offering Open Doors use of a vacant property that you own?
- Would you like your business to be offered the opportunity to become involved in Open Doors in the future?

E Close (5 mins)

E1 Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we've been discussing today?

E2 And would you be happy for us to call you back if we needed to clarify anything that has been discussed today?

Yes	1
No	2

E3 Thank you very much for your time today.

THANK AND CLOSE

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Annex E: Application form

Landlord application form

How to apply

Interested landlords should complete the brief application form below. The closing date for applications is 23:59 on 31 December 2018.

All details on the application form will be kept confidential during the assessment process and will not be shared outside of MHCLG and Meanwhile Foundation.

Electronic applications are preferred and should be sent to Laura.hurley@communities.gov.uk. Paper applications will also be accepted and should be sent to the following address:

FAO Communities team
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2nd Floor Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Any queries should be directed to Laura.hurley@communities.gov.uk.

OPEN DOORS POLICY – APPLICATION FORM FOR LANDLORDS

SECTION 1: Contact details		
1.1 Lead contact for the application		
1.2 Role and organisation of the lead contact		
1.3 Contact address		
1.4 Telephone number(s) (a) Office (b) Mobile	(a)	(b)
1.5 Email address of lead contact		

SECTION 2: Location details of proposed space	
2.1 Address	
2.2 Local authority	
2.3 Supporting details about the area (if applicable and known) such as anecdotal summary of the high street/town centre; deprivation levels; vacancy rates	

SECTION 3: Further details of proposed space	
3.1 Size of space (sq ft)	
3.2 Date of last occupancy	
3.3 Reason for vacancy (if known)	
3.4 Please outline any ongoing running costs e.g.	
3.5 What is the planning use class of the property?	
3.6 What is the rateable value of the property?	
3.7 Do you have a floorplan of the property? If yes, please attach.	
3.8 Do you have recent photographs of the interior and exterior of the property? If yes, please attach.	
3.9 Please give a brief description of property including any urgent fit-out/repair works needing to be undertaken	

3.10 Likely duration for which space could be used	
3.11 Is a water survey or information on supply available?	
3.12 Is an electrical survey or information on supply available?	
3.13 Are there legislative constraints to making changes such as listed buildings consent?	
3.14 Is there appropriate heating and ventilation available?	
3.15 Does the property have asbestos?	
3.16 Are Fire/Smoke/Carbon Monoxide alarms and emergency lighting installed and serviced/tested?	

Transparency and privacy

Meanwhile Foundation will be expected to spend funds in an open and transparent way. We would expect plans relating to the projects to be publicly available. In addition, we will expect details of the projects and progress to be made available to Meanwhile Foundation and MHCLG over the duration of the project including taking part in monitoring and evaluation.

Any personal data provided through the application will be processed in line with data protection legislation. The following is to explain your rights and give you the information you are entitled to under the Data Protection Act 2018.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is the data controller. The Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@communities.gov.uk

Data protection legislation sets out when we are lawfully allowed to process your data. The lawful basis that applies to this processing is 6(1)(e) of the GDPR: the processing of personal data is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority.

Your personal data is being collected to choose places to take part in a pilot matching landlords of vacant premises with community groups looking for space on a temporary basis. We are processing your data as part of the application phase deciding which places will be included in the pilot.

We may also use it to contact you about further opportunities to apply for this project if we expand the pilot in future.

We will share the information with Meanwhile Foundation and Meanwhile Space as we assess the applications.

Your personal data will be held for the duration of the pilot, including monitoring and evaluation.

The data we are collecting is your personal data, and you have rights that affect what happens to it. You have the right to:

- a. know that we are using your personal data
- b. see what data we have about you
- c. ask to have your data corrected, and to ask how we check the information we hold is accurate
- d. ask to have your data deleted
- e. complain to the ICO (see below)

In some circumstances you may also have the right to have all data about you deleted, or to object to particularly types of use of your data. We will tell you when these rights apply.

Your personal data will not be sent overseas.

We will not use your data for any automated decision making.

Your personal data will be stored in a secure government IT system.

When we ask you for information, we will keep to the law, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation.

If you are unhappy with the way the department has acted, you can [make a complaint](#).

If you are not happy with how we are using your personal data, you should first contact dataprotection@communities.gov.uk.

If you are still not happy, or for independent advice about data protection, privacy and data sharing, you can contact:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow, Cheshire,
SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545 745
<https://ico.org.uk/>