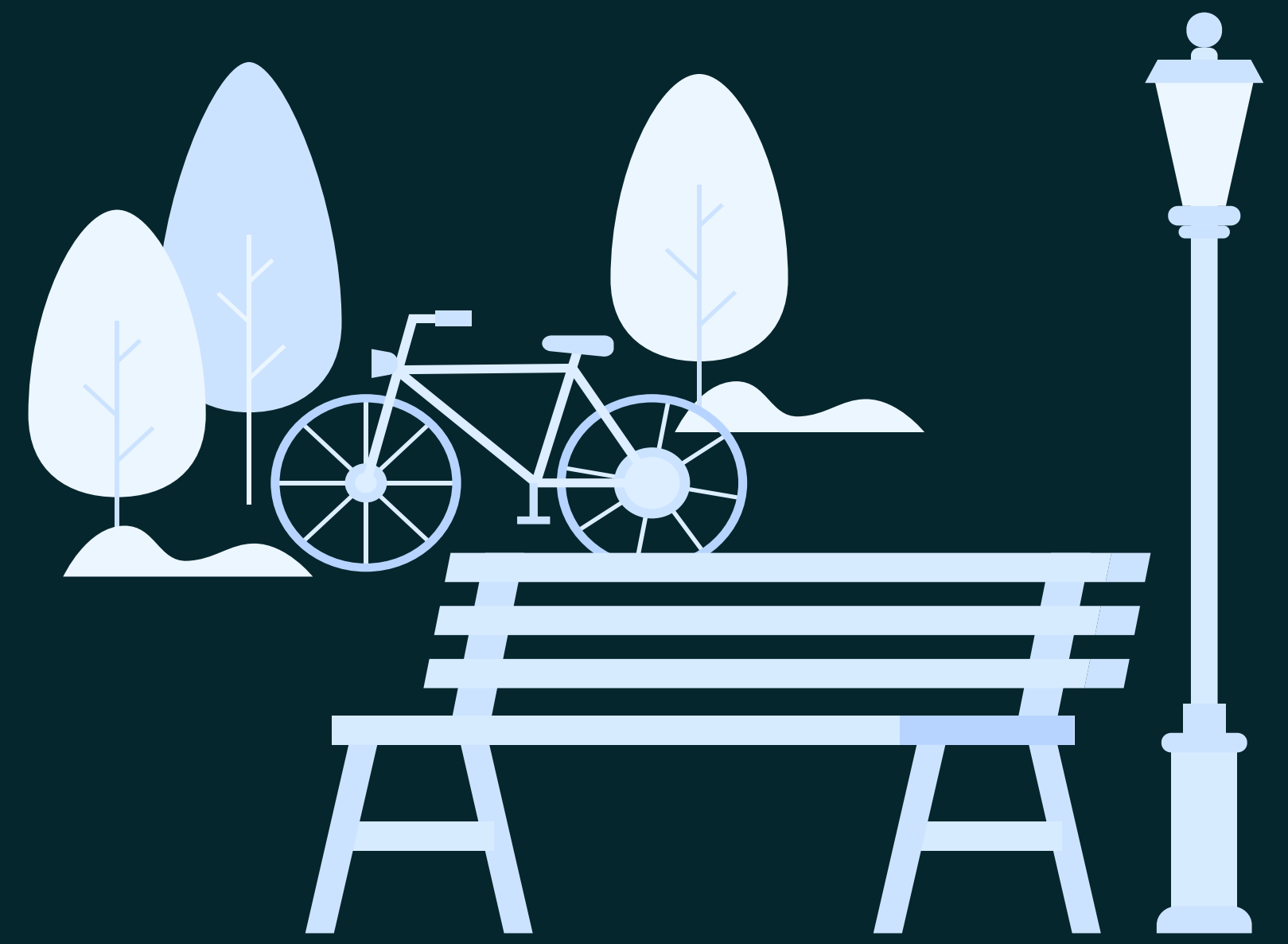


Stalybridge Community Hub Tameside



The Community Centre

Stalybridge is a town within the borough of Tameside, around four miles from central Manchester. Like many small towns in the UK, Stalybridge has suffered a gradual decline in businesses and shops trading on the high street over the recent decades, a problem which was exacerbated by the recent pandemic. The idea to create a dedicated space for physical activity and community engagement within the town centre came from TMBC's Active Neighbourhoods strategy, but strangely, the pandemic offered opportunities that were not previously available.

"We initially had the idea seven or eight years ago, but there were too many barriers to overcome and the system was not mature enough to make it happen. It is only possible now because of opportunities created by Covid."

Through the LP's links with Jigsaw Homes, a vacant building was identified which had previously been used as a customer contact centre for Jigsaw's housing developments which are now complete. This meant that Jigsaw had a vacant building in the town centre with its lease already paid for another year.



The building is located near some flats and shops which are well known anti-social behaviour hotspots, and happens to have a large paved precinct outside and good links to local walking and cycling routes. This provided an unmissable opportunity for the LP to pull one of their ideas back off the shelf and set up a Community Hub.

The initial plan was to run the hub as a partnership, involving individuals from Public Health, Community Safety, and Town Planning from Tameside Council, as well as other organisations like Active Tameside, Jigsaw Homes and others from the voluntary and community sector. However, as the idea took so long to come to fruition, interest and investment changed significantly and it was Active Tameside who took charge of the Hub operations. There are a number of reasons why Active Tameside had an advantage in being able to get this project off the ground.

"Active are not bound by the same restrictions we are, so they can move, make decisions, act, and change the system faster, so they can get into a space and run with the ball and if you want to get the job done then they can do that. If it was purely a council project then it probably wouldn't be happening as they would be so slow dealing with governance, lack of resource, having to navigate with elected members, political differences, and other things that would hold the whole process up."

Context

Lack of local provisions and high levels of anti-social behaviour nearby

Intervention

Open a Community Hub in the town centre to increase opportunities

Then

ASB will be reduced and people will be more active

Because

Opportunities and positive engagement will become more prevalent

Challenges

One of the primary motivators was to tackle youth anti-social behaviour in the area, positively engaging young people and providing alternative activities to hanging around the local shops.

"I hoped that anyone between the age of 12 and 17 could go somewhere and learn some life skills, speak to people their own age, get warm, and not be roaming around the streets getting influenced and pressured into all kinds of things. It was just a case of trying to trying to just give them a provision that would help them, rather than just be seen as a way of keeping them out of trouble."

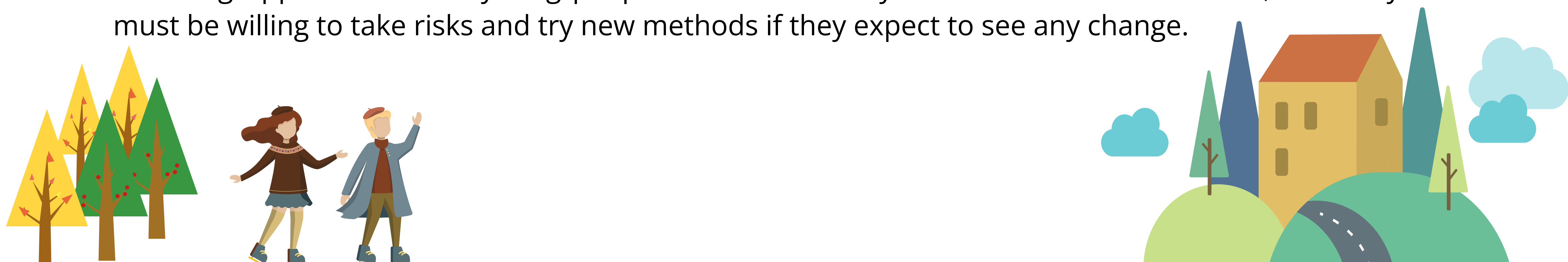
However, there were conflicting opinions between departments of TMBC, with detractors thinking that this space would simply congregate anti-social youths in one space and be gate-kept, creating a negative influence. Furthermore, the pandemic resulted in council staff members being deployed to 'front-line' roles like testing centres, meaning that their community engagement and delivery was low to non-existent. On the other hand, Active Tameside had continued delivery in the later stages of the pandemic through Holiday Activity and Everybody Can funds, meaning that they were in a much stronger delivery position when this idea was coming to fruition.

The LP have played an essential role in the creation of the hub, primarily in bringing like-minded people and organisations together. Despite working in community engagement roles in the area for over 10 years, one TMBC staff member stated that without the LP they would not have found a starting point to get things off the ground.

When the cuts to the public sector happened in 2014 and 15, the Community Safety team went from 76 staff members to 2, Community Regeneration was completely wiped out. and New Charter disappeared along with their knowledgeable community-based staff and all of the small neighborhood hubs around the estates. also disappeared. This meant when I came into this role and was looking for people and communities to contact they had all disappeared so I didn't even know who to get in touch with.

Key Learning

- The ability of the LP to bring together organisations from statutory, voluntary, and community sectors is vital to tackling complex community challenges.
- Slow decision making processes might mean that organisations other than local councils may be better placed to run with delivery opportunities.
- Declining opportunities for young people will undoubtedly affect anti-social behaviour; statutory bodies must be willing to take risks and try new methods if they expect to see any change.



Next Steps

The Stalybridge Community Hub officially launched in March of 2022, so only time will tell whether this has been a success. Whilst the initial idea was to provide a space for young people, the scope has now widened so that family groups and classes, cycling and walking groups, cooking classes, charities, and other activities will now take place out of the hub, using the LP's connections to a wide range of community and charity organisations. Jigsaw have a lease on the building until November of 2022; after this point Active Tameside will need to pay the £14,000 annual lease if the Hub is to remain open. Next steps include.

- Promoting the space to the public
- Bringing in more partners/activities
- Striking a balance with services who disengaged
- Anchoring outdoor/town centre activities from the Hub
- Generating (modest) revenue to cover costs
- Linking with Street Feast and other events