

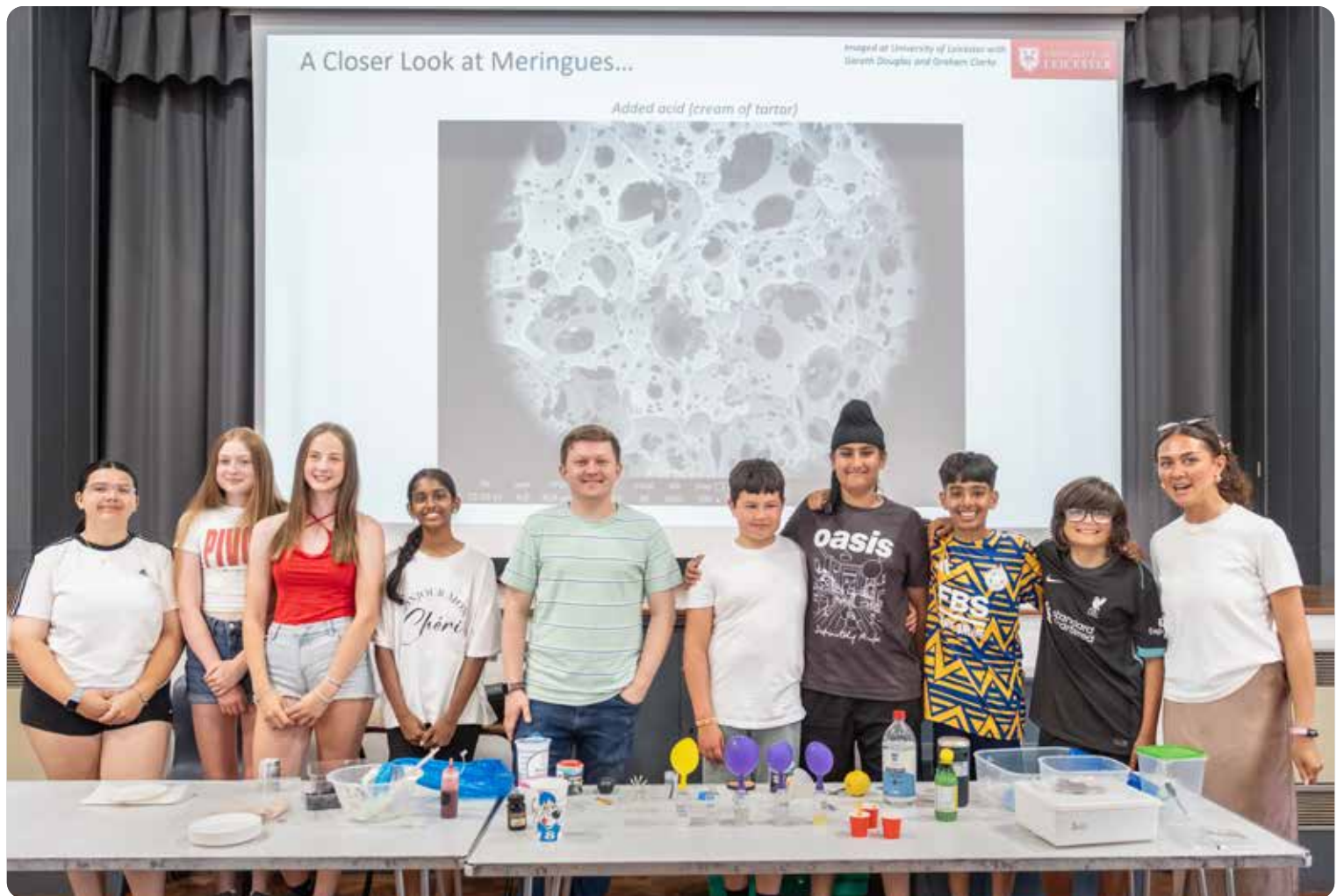
YOUNG VOICES MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

YOUNG PEOPLE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HEALTH RESEARCH – FINAL REPORT

Dr Sarah McNeill¹
Dr Kristen Clements²
Mrs Sacha Webb¹
Dr Laura Ewart¹

¹ Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Leicestershire

² School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University

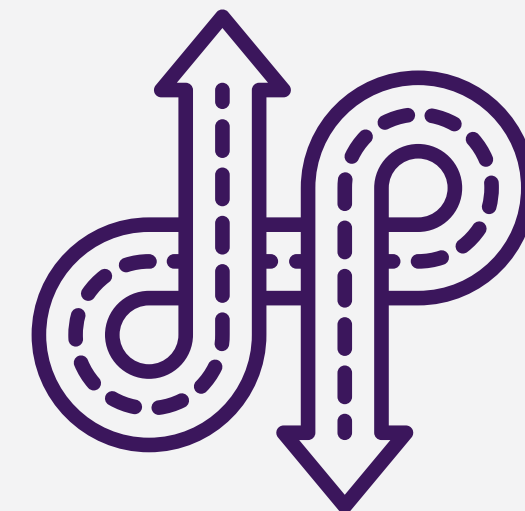




YOUNG VOICES SHAPING RESEARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Not everyone in Leicestershire has the same chance to live a healthy life - which is unfair. Health isn't just about access to good health care. It's influenced by housing, education, employment and more. The Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Leicestershire will help to address these health inequalities by building local evidence to inform council policies, decisions and services. The first step is to identify what research matters most to the residents of Leicestershire.

With funding from the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) and Leicester University's Institute for Precision Health, and in partnership with Loughborough University, we ran three workshops in secondary schools in Leicestershire, allowing young people's voices to be heard in shaping HDRC research priorities.

We co-designed the workshops with the help of youth facilitators, HDRC and Loughborough University staff. The workshops offered the young people a chance to learn about research and wider determinants of health. Then followed an interactive exercise, where we encouraged them to 'Build a Healthy Neighbourhood' to show us what matters most to them to improve the health of their communities.

We analysed their creative work and, with input from our HDRC Public Advisory Group, six themes were identified. These themes will be used alongside desktop review and a wider public assembly to set our key research priorities for HDRC Leicestershire.

The six themes are named below and described in detail later in this report.

- Spacious, affordable and modern housing
- Community, safety, and protection
- Protecting and using green space, and living in the countryside
- Fun and friends
- Spaces and places that influence health behaviours
- Proximity to wants and needs.



2. INTRODUCTION

Young Voices – Make Your Voice Heard is an inspiring project to amplify youth perspectives in health research. Sixty young people from three Leicestershire secondary schools – Thomas Estley, Limehurst Academy, and Martin High School – took part in this initiative led by the HDRC Leicestershire.

2.1 What are the wider determinants of health?

Wider determinants of health are the powerful factors that shape our health long before we ever need to see a doctor. These include the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work, and age – such as education, employment, housing, income, environment, and social connections. They influence everything from our ability to access nutritious food and safe housing to the quality of our air and the strength of our communities. These factors can either build a strong foundation for lifelong wellbeing or create barriers that lead to poor health outcomes. Addressing the wider determinants is essential not just for treating illness, but for preventing it and creating healthier, fairer communities for all.

2.2 Who are we?

HDRC Leicestershire is a transformative initiative led by Leicestershire County Council, in partnership with surrounding academic institutions and backed by £5.25 million in funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). In collaboration with Loughborough University, the University of Leicester, De Montfort University and the University of Nottingham, HDRC Leicestershire is embedding research into the council's everyday operations, investing in a shift toward evidence-based policy and decision-making.

Loughborough University is a key partner in HDRC Leicestershire. The University is internationally recognised for its multidisciplinary approach to promoting health and wellbeing across the life course. It brings its strong research expertise and longstanding commitment to health, wellbeing, and community engagement to the collaboration. Through this partnership, Loughborough contributes to evidence-based approaches that explore the wider determinants of health – such as education, employment, housing, and environment – with the aim of improving outcomes for underserved communities in Leicestershire.



3. WHY DID WE DO THIS PROJECT?

3.1 Purpose

At its core, the HDRC is about reshaping how decisions are made, ensuring they are grounded in robust data and focused on tackling the root causes of health inequality. With the creation of a Public Advisory Group and a Public Assembly, the initiative places community voices at the heart of its mission, making sure that local people help shape the future of health and wellbeing across Leicestershire.

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) INCLUDE roadmap shows that the first stage to consider when making research more inclusive, is research priority setting. The HDRC proposed bringing research priority setting workshops to a group who are identified by the NIHR as underserved by demographic factors (those who are under 18). The workshops were especially designed to hear from pupils from a range of other NIHR identified underserved groups, such as different ethnic groups or looked after children.

To give a voice to underrepresented groups, particularly young people in school Years 7-10 (ages 11-15), the research team aimed to host three interactive, creative workshops. The goal was to identify the key health determinants affecting young people in Leicestershire and ensure that their perspectives are included in future research. The workshops were designed to offer a space for students to learn about research, explore the wider determinants of health, exploring how they are relevant to them and provide feedback on research priorities.

3.2 Aims

- Bringing the voices of an under-represented group to HDRC Leicestershire research priority setting in an interactive, creative and engaging fashion.
- Nurturing meaningful relationships between HDRC Leicestershire and local schools, increasing their involvement and engagement with future research.
- Gaining experience and understanding of how to engage this cohort and how they want to be engaged with. The outputs will be shared more broadly over the regional NIHR infrastructure and HDRC network including local authority, BRC, ARC- EM, the Centre for Minority Ethnic Health, the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM) and other university partners to create maximum impact.

4. HOW DID WE DO IT?

This report aims to detail the protocol used, data analysis and results. To shape a meaningful and inclusive youth engagement initiative focused on health, we followed a structured and collaborative approach:

4.1 Protocol

1. Exploring the evidence

We began with a comprehensive desk-based review in October 2024. This explored existing data and council documents to understand the key health issues affecting young people in Leicestershire. Drawing on expert insights and the data review, we mapped how these health challenges link to the wider determinants of health.

2. Agreeing a plan

We established the core goals, and aims pinpointed the most pressing health challenges, and outlined the outcomes we wanted to achieve. The proposed direction was reviewed and approved by the HDRC project board, ensuring alignment and accountability.

3. Preparation

We defined the aims and objectives of the Youth Engagement, ensuring they aligned with our broader mission to improve health outcomes. We initiated an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure the engagement process was inclusive and considered the needs of all young people.

4. Co-designing the workshops

We created a role description for the youth facilitators who would lead the workshops (Appendix 1). We shared this with youth groups within the council, at the public assembly and with internal and external colleagues to attract passionate and capable young leaders.

We invited our volunteer youth facilitators to review and reflect on the findings from our initial data collections – ensuring their perspectives shaped our planning for the workshops. We asked them how young people would want to be engaged with so that our approach was built around preferences, not assumptions.

5. Recruitment

We developed a clear and compelling school brief to disseminate to schools that outlines the purpose, structure and benefits of the workshop (Appendix 2). We distributed this brief through trusted networks of Leicestershire County Council. To ensure a diverse range of young voices, we engaged both internal and external youth-focused colleagues across the Council, including schools, youth justice, participation officers, and district councils. This outreach led to the selection of three schools: Thomas Estley High School (Broughton Astley), Limehurst Academy (Loughborough), and The Martin High School (Anstey).

We disseminated the school brief to all identified schools, with sufficient time for the schools to review and discuss the opportunity and decide whether they would like to participate. We then shared participation materials (including posters, assent forms for young people, information sheets and opt-out forms for parents) with schools to help spread the word and encourage involvement. The team who prepared and led the workshops comprised youth facilitators, HDRC and Loughborough University staff, and school wellbeing services to support students during workshops. Each school provided staff supervision, as facilitators were not DBS-checked. The workshops, risk assessments and all consent and assent forms were reviewed and approved by Loughborough University ethics committee, Ref LEON 21415, April 2025.



4.2 What did the workshops look like?

We hosted a workshop in each of three schools, with 60 young people contributing in total. To ensure the workshops were youth-led and engaging, we co-designed and co-delivered the day with our youth facilitators, scheduling planning meetings around their availability. Together, we developed a structured, interactive agenda with clear objectives for each session. Activities ranged from icebreakers and educational segments on health research to creative exercises exploring community health. The workshops were designed to be informative, inclusive, and supportive, with built-in breaks and wellbeing considerations. We relied on the pastoral leads of the schools to select the young people who were to be involved in the workshops.

The workshops began with a welcome and introductions which was followed by a short session introducing the HDRC, the concept of research, and the wider determinants of health.

The group transitioned into a hands-on “Health Detective” game facilitated by our youth facilitators. This activity involved exploring two fictional character profiles—one healthy and one experiencing poor health—designed to highlight how different life circumstances can impact wellbeing.

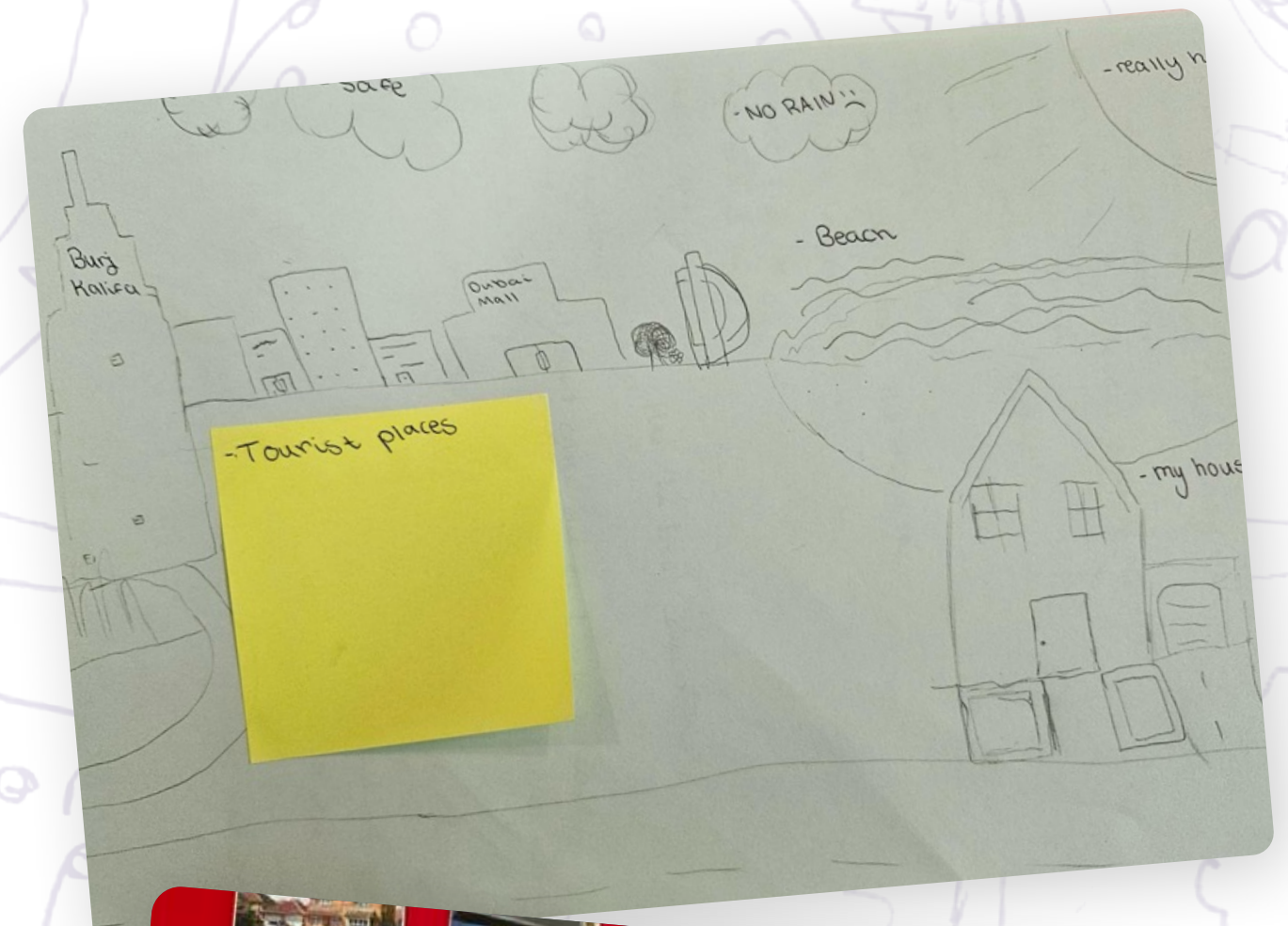
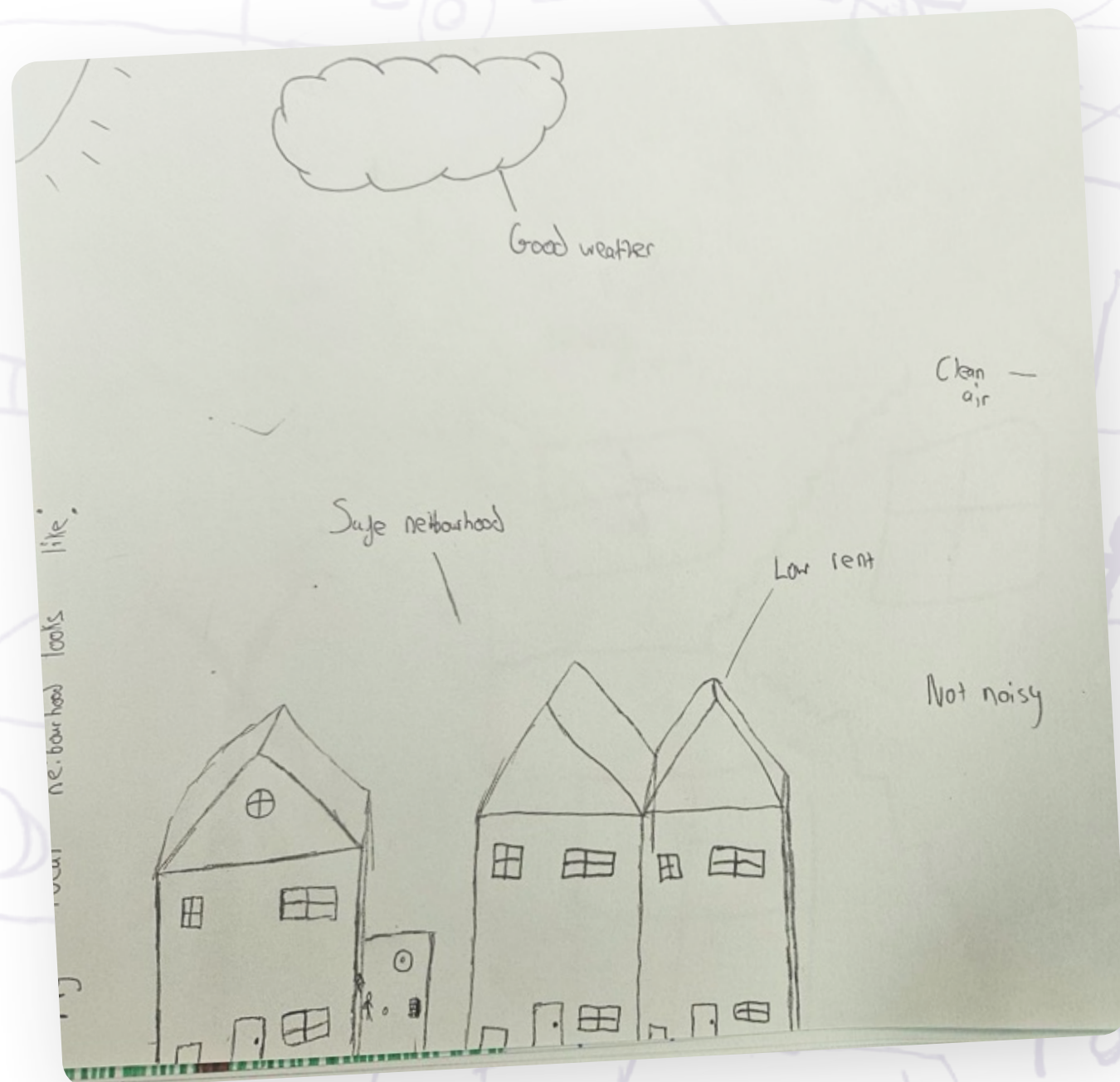
After a short break, the workshop resumed with a creative exercise. Young participants were asked to imagine, and design, what an ideal healthy community would look like. This was done through a collaborative “Build a Healthy Neighbourhood” activity, encouraging critical thinking and teamwork. Attendees could draw, write, build etc. to describe their neighbourhood. We used poster boards and images for the group to identify their top priorities for a healthy neighbourhood. The groups were also asked to identify the barriers preventing that vision.

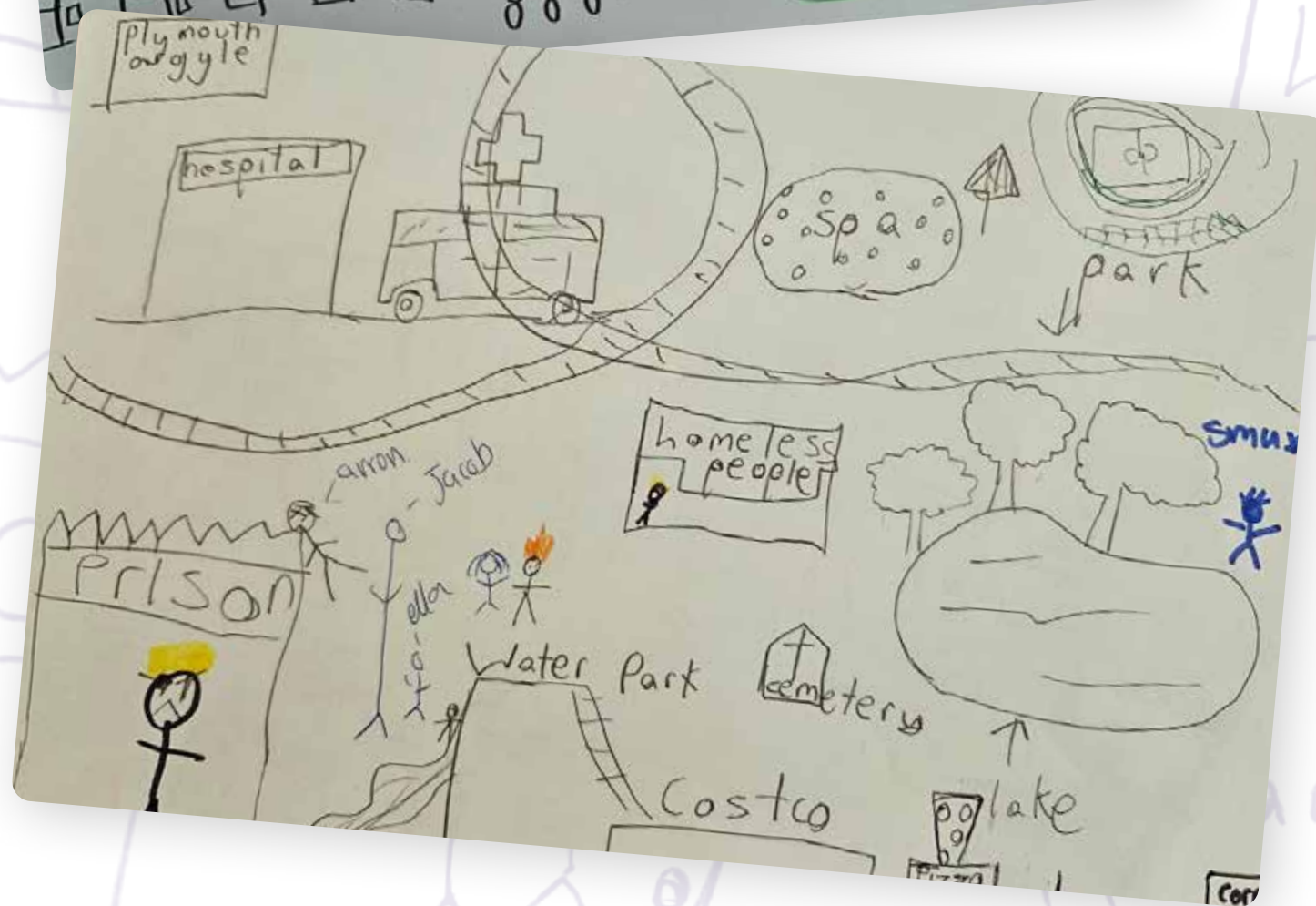
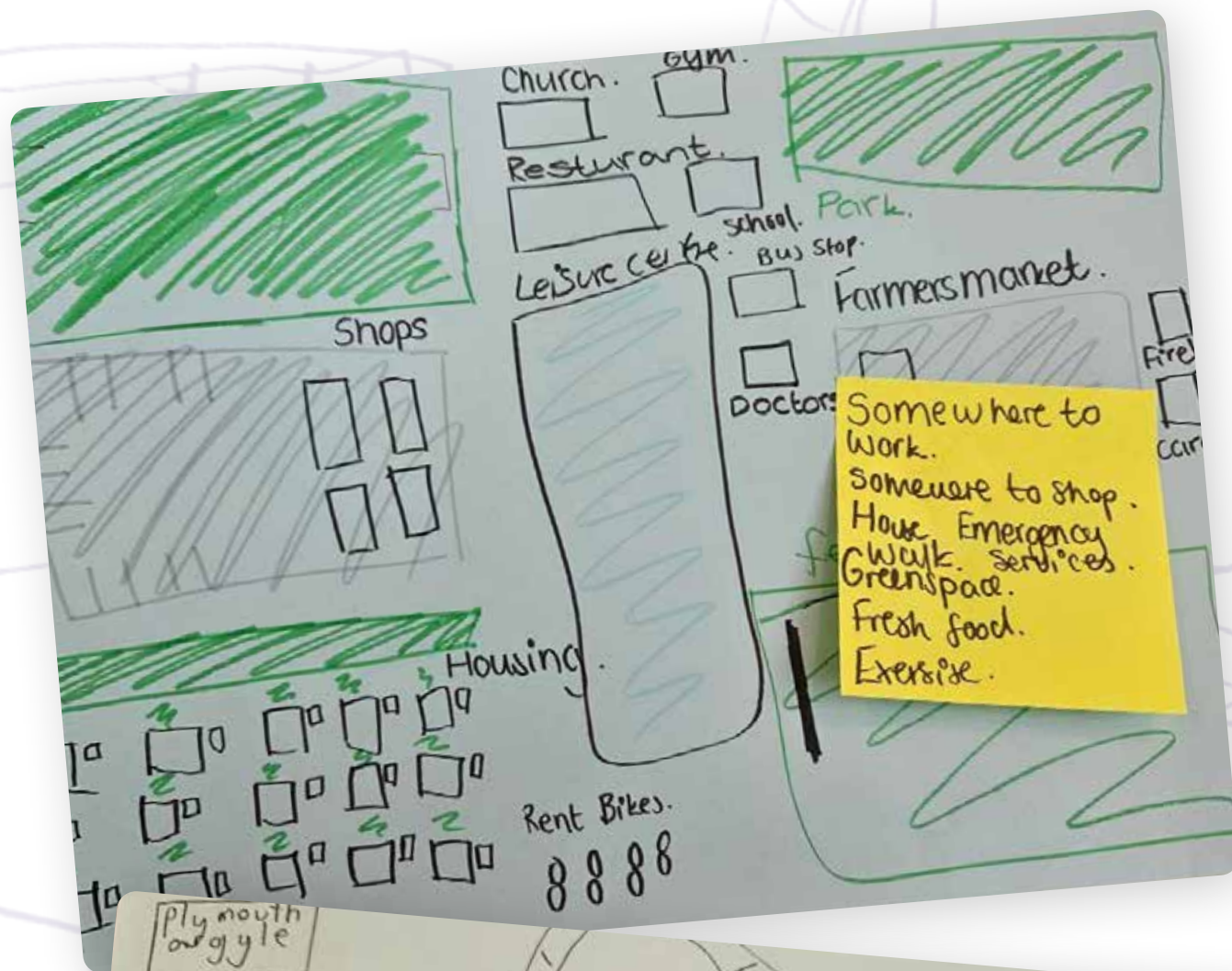
The session concluded with a summary, expressions of thanks, and an evaluation segment. Participants shared their feedback verbally with the facilitators to reflect on their experience and suggest improvements.



5. WHAT DID THE YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?

Young people were asked to design their dream, healthy community. The first exercise was to attach pre-printed images to a board highlighting what was most important for community health, they were encouraged to add anything they felt was missing.





6. WHAT DID WE LEARN?



6.1 Data Analyses

The data collected from the Youth Engagement sessions included six facilitator notes, 40 images of creative outputs, and ten written notes from facilitators present on the day. Reflexive Inductive Thematic analysis was identified as the appropriate methodology to analyse this rich and varied data. Thematic analysis is a way to find, study, and explain patterns in qualitative data by looking closely at the data to understand its meanings and patterns. An inductive approach involves creating themes directly from the data without prior theories or assumptions, allowing the data to speak for itself. Reflexivity involves researchers being aware of their role and influence during the research process, recognising perspectives, biases, and assumptions and thinking about how these might affect how they interpret themes from the data.

The first data analysis step involved familiarisation, which was achieved by transcribing the handwritten facilitator notes. The research team also met with facilitators present at the sessions to ensure the meaning behind creative outputs, such as drawings, was accurately captured.

Next, brief codes were assigned to highlight key features within the data. This coding process allowed for adjustments and revisiting of codes as new insights emerged. All codes and relevant quotes were organised using comments in Microsoft Word to facilitate easy tracking. Initial codes focused on emerging themes such as safety, proximity, and housing. An attempt was made to include a youth facilitator in the analysis; however, due to scheduling, this was unsuccessful.

As codes were examined, patterns were identified, with related information grouped under potential themes. The developing themes underwent a thorough review, with checks against the coded data to ensure accuracy and relevance. Refinements were made, which included splitting, combining, or removing themes as necessary to strengthen the overall analysis.

At this stage, themes and initial descriptors were shared with the Public Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG met to discuss the themes and add comments to a collaborative Word document. The HDRC core team addressed and responded to these comments, ensuring that the PAG knew how their feedback had been incorporated into the theme titles and descriptions. Following the PAG feedback, the HDRC board provided further commentary on the themes and descriptions, which were also considered when finalising the themes.

As a result of a collaborative process of public involvement, the focus of each theme was clearly defined, culminating in the selection of finalised names that capture the core of the youth engagement sessions.

6.2 Themes

The following themes were co-created with the Leicestershire HDRC Public Advisory Group based on the drawings and other contributions from all three workshops. We have included a description and examples from the workshops for each theme.

Spacious, affordable and modern housing

The need for big, modern, safe homes, with gardens and space around the houses.

Examples:

As seen in the images, many young people drew big houses with gardens in their healthy communities, with one noting 'low rent'. When asked about barriers, one young person said there 'wasn't enough land' for all the housing needs.



Community, safety, and protection

The importance of feeling safe, in calm environments with limited noise and disruption, includes infrastructure such as streetlights, and safety precautions around schools. This also includes the presence of supportive communities and reliable and trustworthy police officers who can ensure community safety.

Examples:

Young people added ideas including 'CCTV' and 'cameras' to their built neighbourhoods and described barriers such as 'high crime rate', 'doesn't feel safe to go out' and 'drug usage'. Drawings also included street lights and labels including 'not noisy', showing the importance of a safe, calm environment to promote health.

Protecting, using, and living in the countryside and other green space

Protecting green and blue spaces so that they can contribute to clean air, places to walk, and provide habitats for animals and other wildlife. This includes the relationship with farms, allowing healthy, fresh, local food to be available.

Examples:

Almost all of the drawings included garden space, and community green spaces. Many of the young people also noted 'clean air', presenting ideas like clean bubbles around homes or growing trees on airplanes to reduce impact of pollution, and having factories and busy streets far from their houses. Many of the drawings included cycle or walking facilities and farms or farm shops as part of their communities.

Fun and friends

It is important to have 'fun' places to connect and engage in recreational activities that have a positive impact on mental health, stress and provide opportunities to socialise. This could include spaces to play and watch sports, cinemas, parks, community events, or restaurants.

Examples:

Drawings included recreational facilities and being near places you could meet friends.

One young person said 'everything around here is closing' to explain that he felt there was a lack of opportunities for recreation for young people in the area, and that this has a negative impact on health.

Spaces and places that influence health behaviours

This theme has four parts (**FRESH**)

- The availability of healthy food options and limiting unhealthy food options e.g. fried chicken shops. (**F**ood)
- Access to appropriate religious buildings for spiritual health. (**R**eligion)
- The provision of affordable or free spaces to exercise for all ages, e.g. gyms or leisure centres. (**E**xercise)
- The availability, sale and use of controlled substances, cigarettes and alcohol to prevent/reduce use. (**S**ubstances)

Examples:

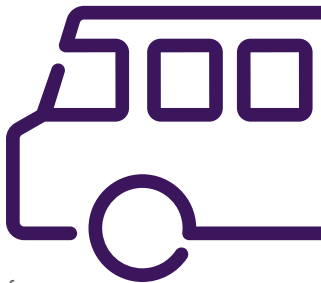
Young people felt that 'fried chicken' was too prominent in their areas and that other healthier options such as 'Nandos' or 'farm shops' would benefit health. Some young people drew religious buildings and many drew gyms and other spaces for exercise opportunities. Somewhat linked to the community, safety and protection theme, young people described the barrier to health of 'drug users', 'rough people' and felt that the availability of substances could be controlled for better health.

Proximity to wants and needs

To live within walking or cycling distance of friends, green spaces, public transport links, and health spaces e.g. pharmacies

Examples:

Drawings showed that young people imagined their dream neighbourhood to be accessible and have walking, cycling or public transport links between key places. One young person described 'not much transport links' as a key barrier for health in their community.



7. WHAT COMES NEXT?

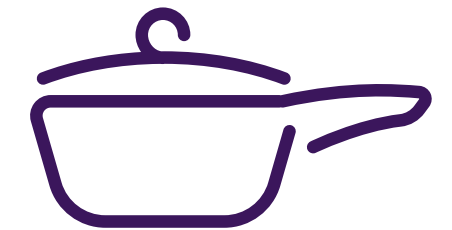


It was important for us to thank the young people who got involved in these workshops. Dr Josh Smalley's visit provided an educational opportunity that showed the young people that we valued their contributions. They were able to learn about the chemistry of baking and try Josh's chocolate, sourdough and meringues.



Dr Josh Smalley, Bake Off Finalist, said

It was a real pleasure to deliver a Science of Baking outreach session at Martin High School, as part of the collaboration with NIHR Leicestershire HDRC and the Universities of Leicester and Loughborough. A huge thank you to the pupils and staff who took part so enthusiastically – your curiosity, questions, and interactions made the workshop such a joy to deliver. From exploring the role of science in our kitchens to the taste-testing of sourdough, it was fantastic to see students so engaged in understanding the chemistry behind flavour, nutrition, and baking from scratch. I hope the session left you feeling inspired and appreciated for your valuable contributions during the previous Young Voices workshops.



Jasmine Lewis, Student Manager at The Martin High School, said

On behalf of the learners at Martin's, we truly appreciated and enjoyed Josh's visit. Our young bakers greatly valued the expertise and knowledge he shared throughout the workshop. Josh's baking story was both engaging and inspiring, making it a memorable and special end to the school year for everyone involved.





The youth engagement workshops were part of a wider process that Leicestershire HDRC was conducting to identify research priorities. The findings from this project along with those from a public assembly were combined to produce nine overall research themes for Leicestershire HDRC. These can be found on the Leicestershire HDRC website.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1


Young Person Engagement Lead Advert



Young Person Engagement Lead

Are you passionate about making a difference and inspiring others? Would you like to help ensure that young voices are heard? Are you aged between 18 - 21 years old? Are you confident in public speaking and leading? Do you live in Leicestershire?

If you have answered yes to all the above, we need you!



Background

Whilst overall the health and wealth of Leicestershire is relatively good, statistics mask serious health differences within the county. Over 11,000 residents experience the highest levels of disadvantage in the country, over 12,000 children live in poverty and over 32,000 people live in fuel poverty. There are high levels of asthma, cancer, obesity, and diseases of the heart. People living in our poorest areas live about five to six fewer years than those in the richest areas. This inequality is unjust, and we must address it. Research can help us do this.

Who is doing this work?

Leicestershire County Council (LCC) has been awarded funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to establish a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). A HDRC brings together local authorities, local universities and local communities to share each other's knowledge and expertise. The aim of HDRC is to create a culture in local government where research is built on robust evidence which then influences the way services are delivered. This investment will take our ability to do research to the next level, working with communities to generate more of our own information and using this and existing evidence to improve the services that we provide and inform the council's strategic priorities.

Where do the public fit in?

LCC cannot undertake the HDRC without public engagement and involvement and the support of our wider partners. We aim to ensure that our research evidence is robust and is collaboratively created with our under-served communities (experts by experience). This will ensure that public involvement is at the core of our research and most importantly, relationships between LCC, partners, and under-served communities are strengthened and prioritised, fostering a positive culture change within the organisation.

Where do young people fit in?

We are hosting a young person engagement activity, delivered in schools to 25 pupils to seek help to support us to set our research priorities for the HDRC. The event will be an opportunity for young people to share their lived experiences, be involved in research prioritisation, highlight gaps in research areas, and understand how wider societal issues such as education, poverty, housing, planning, transport, and employment influence the health of the communities in Leicestershire. We recognise that communities, public contributors, the general public and young people are experts by experience, and we want to draw on this expertise to strengthen our approach in research.

Why do we need you?

We are seeking a young person who lives in Leicestershire County to work with us on this engagement activity. You would help us engage young people in this topic area, help to design the activity, work with us collaboratively to create our plans, and help us to communicate what we have found.

In this exciting role, you'll:

- **Connect:** Be the voice of your peers, reaching out to schools, clubs, and communities to get young people involved.
- **Inspire:** Use your creativity to design fun and engaging ways to share ideas that will be meaningful and relatable to young people.
- **Collaborate:** Work with LCC HDRC Staff to drive positive change. This will involve attending meetings to co-produce the design and delivery of the day.
- **Lead:** Help shape the discussions by representing the views of young people, ensuring everyone feels heard and included. You will facilitate the day with the help of the Public and community involvement, engagement and participation (PCIEP) lead.

How to get involved

If you're a team player who loves meeting new people, sharing ideas, and making an impact, this is the perfect role for you!

If you are interested in this role or you would like more information on the role, please contact sacha.webb@leics.gov.uk for an informal chat.

APPENDICES

Appendix 2

School Brief

SHAPE THE FUTURE OF HEALTH RESEARCH: GET INVOLVED!

Is your school passionate about making a difference in the health of your community?

The **Leicestershire Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)**, in partnership with Loughborough University, is inviting your school to participate in an exciting project to help shape future health research. This is a fantastic opportunity for your pupils to learn about **the wider determinants of health** and how research can impact their lives.

We are looking for **young people in years 7-10** to share their views on health research priorities.

Why get involved?

- **Give young voices a platform:** Your pupils will have the chance to **influence research** and ensure that their priorities are taken into account.
- **Make a real difference:** This project aims to ensure that research reflects the needs of young people in Leicestershire, especially those from under-represented groups.
- **Build relationships:** Your school will have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with the Leicestershire HDRC and be involved in future research opportunities.
- **Contribute to impactful learning:** The learnings from this project will be shared regionally and nationally through the HDRC network, including local authorities, universities and other research centres.

What will happen in the workshops?

We will run **an engaging and interactive workshop in your school in April-June 2025**. We will discuss final details with the participating school. This workshop will last 2-3 hours and will:

- Introduce young people to research and the wider determinants of health.
- Provide a chance for young people to **comment and add to research priorities**.
- Ask young people how to **improve accessibility of research** for young people.
- Use creative methods such as writing, drawing and discussion to **encourage participation and feedback**.
- Provide lunch or snacks for all participants, depending on time of day.

What's in it for your school?

- A visit from **British Bake-Off Finalist, Josh Smalley**, as a thank you, to deliver a session on baking and chemistry, details to be sorted in conversation with you.
- The chance to **support the development of engaged and informed young citizens**.

How to get involved

If your school is interested in participating or wants to learn more, please contact Sacha Webb at sacha.webb@leics.gov.uk

Don't miss this chance to be a part of important health research and empower your pupils to make a difference!



Appendix 3

Use of Funding

Resources	416.09
Catering	562.50
Youth Volunteers	400.00
Travel costs	49.86
Comms and Design	90.80
Other incidental costs	205.75
Total	1725.00





For more information please contact:

Dr Kristen Clements
K.M.Clements@lboro.ac.uk

lboro.ac.uk/ssehs