



We can't actually be a pub, we can only be 'more than' a pub

The Bevy in lockdown



Sophie Reid

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of our staff and volunteers at The Bevy who instigated the project, gave so much of themselves and their time to share their experiences, and engaged so enthusiastically.

We would also like to thank Self/Other for their work in crafting the project and supporting participants throughout, as well as their ongoing pro bono work to craft a practical output from the project. You can find out more about Self/Other here self-other.org

Finally, we'd like to thank Power to Change for funding this research.



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About this paper

This report tells the story of the experiences of members of the team at The Bevy, a community pub in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean in Brighton, as they dealt with the emotional and practical challenges during eight weeks of the Covid-19 lockdown between April and June 2020, and as their thoughts turned towards reopening.

The research was instigated by The Bevy team as a way to capture learning from the experience. The Bevy and ethnographic research collaborative Self/Other approached Power to Change to fund the research. All the views expressed in the report are those of the Bevy team and the authors.

About the authors

The report was written by Sophie Reid, a Power to Change Research Associate. As an independent researcher, Sophie works on evaluation, research and engagement projects across food insecurity, youth justice and community business and facilitates public conversations on the issues for which society has no clear answers as yet.

The ethnographic research was designed and delivered by Self/Other – a collaboration between anthropologist Simon Newitt, ethnographic photographer Curtis James and graphic designer Emily Macaulay, who use participatory, action-orientated, group enquiry to surface the assumptions and structures hidden in everyday life and to help communities and socially-purposed organisations learn and mobilise together.

01. Introduction

The Bevy is a community-owned pub in Moulsecoomb & Bevendean in Brighton, the only such pub on a housing estate in the UK. After being closed for several years, the pub was reopened in December 2014 by a committee of residents, as a much-needed place for people to meet, have a drink and some food, and spend time with others – as a way of tackling loneliness and social isolation in the local area. It has 700 local shareholders and provides space for groups to meet, regular lunch clubs for elderly residents and affordable meals.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, The Bevy, like all pubs, was forced to shut its doors for four months – closing in March and partially reopening again on 22 July. At the beginning of this period, members of the Bevy team discussed the importance of finding ways to capture learning from the experience, with long-time friend of The Bevy, Curtis James (an ethnographic photographer at Self/Other). The Bevy and Self/Other approached Power to Change to fund the research.¹

During this time, with staff furloughed, volunteers completed a refurbishment of the pub and delivered thousands of meals through the Bevy Meals on Wheels scheme. This was also part of a wider mobilisation of individuals, groups and organisations in the area, with which The Bevy partnered and collaborated.

This report tells the story of the experiences of members of the Bevy team as they dealt with the emotional and practical challenges of lockdown, and as their thoughts turned towards reopening. Despite these challenges, the Bevy team are, as a group, incredibly proud of how they worked together and what they achieved during the period – delivering more than 5,500 meals, being nominated for a Great British Pub Award and all the [positive feedback](#) they received along the way.

No photos of people have been included in this report, out of respect for participants' anonymity. To see some photos of our fantastic team, volunteers and the pub before, during and beyond lockdown, please head to [The Bevy Facebook page](#).

¹ The Bevy is one of the pubs that have been supported through the [More Than A Pub](#) programme, jointly funded by Power to Change and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and delivered by the Plunkett Foundation.

02. Methodology

The ethnographic research project was designed to support members of the Bevy team (volunteers, staff on furlough and later some local residents) to document their daily lives during the unfolding Covid-19 crisis. Ethnographic photographer Curtis James and anthropologist Simon Newitt from Self/Other set up and managed the project. They created channels for participants to record daily audio/written journals and take supporting photographs of their lives. Self/Other is a collaboration between Simon, Curtis and graphic designer Emily Macaulay, who use participatory, action-orientated, group enquiry to surface the assumptions and structures hidden in everyday life and to help communities and socially-purposed organisations learn and mobilise together.

The project involved a variety of different 'fields' in which data was collected – partly by participants themselves and partly by Self/Other:

- telephone calls between individual participants and Self/Other – at the start and end of the project
- individual audio/written diaries kept by participants
- weekly reflective calls as a group
- a WhatsApp group for participants.

As part of the project, the participants were also able to access a professional counsellor to support them to manage their thoughts and feelings throughout the period.

Power to Change research associate Sophie Reid carried out analysis and reporting, which involved a review of the varied data (including photos, videos, interview and weekly call audio, handwritten and typed diaries) to generate initial concepts and themes for analysis, which were developed into an analytical framework. Key audio was transcribed. The data was coded (using the qualitative analysis software NVivo) using the analytical framework as a guide to organise it under key themes. This was an iterative process that helped develop the framework further. Draft findings were shared with participant leads and a phone call was held with participants to provide feedback on and discuss the report, before the final version was produced. This report also contains reflections from Self/Other on their experiences of the project.

03. An overview of the eight weeks

Week	Date	Key events	Key themes
1	16–24 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Running the Meals on Wheels food delivery service – Cleaning and clearing out at the pub 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Guilt – Too much to do – Changing relationship to The Bevy – Coping strategies
2	25 April–1 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bevy deaf-friendly virtual pub quiz – Starting to think about who might be prioritised in reopening, e.g. most vulnerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coping strategies
3	2–8 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continued food deliveries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Planning for the future
4	9–15 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Starting the refurbishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Responsibilities of The Bevy – Changing identity of The Bevy – Learning about managing The Bevy
5	16–22 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Planning for providing socially-distanced outside space for most vulnerable and isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Anxiety – Planning for the future – Responsibilities of The Bevy – Changing identity of The Bevy – Too much to do
6	23–29 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Setting up partnership with Brighton Aldridge Community Academy (BACA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Responsibilities of The Bevy – Changing identity of The Bevy
7	30 May–5 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Preparing to move to BACA for food deliveries while refurbishing – Local baker selling bread and pastries from The Bevy's forecourt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learning about managing The Bevy – Planning for the future – Responsibilities of The Bevy
8	6–12 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Running first week of food deliveries from BACA – Planning for reopening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Responsibilities of The Bevy – Changing identity of The Bevy – Learning about managing The Bevy – Reflecting on support from funders



The refurbishment

Following a successful crowdfunding campaign in November 2019, with match funding from Power to Change, The Bevy reached a 'stretch' target allotted for upgrading the chairs and tables in the café part of the pub.

Refurbishment can be notoriously difficult to manage for a business – entailing the closure of the business and losing income during that time – meaning that refurbishment has to be rapid. The Covid-19 pub closures gave The Bevy the time and space to instigate a larger and more considered refurbishment – 'sprucing the place up' but also working on wider ambitions about reflecting the sort of environment they wanted to create in the pub.

As well as cleaning, painting, replacing chairs and tables and varnishing the bar, the outside space was a focus for the refurbishment. This meant improving the outside tables, preparing for social distancing and new cleaning requirements, and working on the fantastic garden to improve the space even further.

"Just to keep you up to date with the refurb' at The Bevy here's a couple of pics [of] the sanding that happened today"





Bevy Meals on Wheels

The Bevy had previously launched 'Bevy Bites', a hot meals takeaway service for the food offer in the pub. However, during the lockdown they were keen to offer hot meals delivered to those who needed them most in the community. Bevy Meals on Wheels was launched, offering free hot meals delivered three times a week, which reached a peak of around 90 recipients, some of whom took extra meals for days when the service wasn't running. This was supported by donations, surplus food provided by FareShare and produce grown in the Moulsecomb Forest Garden.

During the research project, The Bevy also formed a partnership with Brighton Aldridge Community Academy (BACA) to produce pre-prepared meals sent chilled or frozen to local residents – families with children who received free school meals. This project ran for 12 weeks and was funded by the Aldrich Foundation.

As well as providing a lifeline for residents who were unable to get out to buy food, Bevy Meals on Wheels was a way to check in on some of the pub regulars – an opportunity for social contact, running errands they needed and generally keeping an eye on their condition and following up if there were concerns.





Socially-distanced outside space

Early on in the project, participants' own reflections on the benefits of nature during lockdown – and the ongoing work in the Bevy garden and other garden projects around the area – led to the idea of opening the pub's outside space for local families or regulars to spend some time outdoors where they could be socially-distanced.

As The Bevy planned for reopening, this became a priority and the first 'Chatterboxes' clubs took place at the end of July.

04. Experiencing time

Throughout the project, participants experienced *time* in many different ways. As routines were disrupted, dealing with unstructured time could result in boredom in some cases and too much work in others, making participants feel overwhelmed.

Initially, the majority of participants felt that they had too much to do. Diary posts were full of photos of long 'to do' lists, reports of busy days trying to get things done and set things up (for The Bevy and beyond). For some without a workspace beyond the house, or even those spending time volunteering (on cleaning and food deliveries) in the pub, work seemed to be blending into their free time so that they didn't have time to themselves. This was driven by a real sense of urgency, that personally and as an organisation they needed to be acting quickly to help those who were vulnerable in the community and to be thinking about contingency plans. Many participants described competing priorities as many different areas of their lives demanded a response to the crisis at the same time. This included a multitude of projects that participants were involved in professionally, where they were having to adapt the plans, make decisions about their response and have difficult conversations. Then there were family responsibilities to manage in a different context; whether that was trying to ensure their children did some schoolwork at home while schools were closed, supporting elderly parents and grandparents and in some cases witnessing a decline in their health, and trying to support and maintain relationships with loved ones who didn't live with them.

- “ I'm locked in this little weird room and it feels quite, you know ... because so many things seem urgent and [need] to be done.
- “ There are lots of different priorities ... obviously got The Bevy, but I've also got, you know, my day job and Trustee of a couple other things as well. And literally everything is going through crisis mode at the moment. So there simply isn't enough time in the day. And also family stuff.

We can't actually be a pub, we can only be 'more than' a pub
The Bevy in lockdown



"This image of logs balanced in Stanmer woods from yesterday rather sums up the balancing act I often feel I'm doing to keep all the bits working together smoothly without falling down – it's a bit like a giant Jenga this pile"

For many, this sense of urgency and having too much to do bled into their free time, affecting their sleeping patterns. Without other things to do, participants found it harder to demarcate and create boundaries around work, finding themselves responding to emails in their free time, or experiencing boredom when they did have some time off. There was a lot of talk about creating opportunities to switch off and take time for themselves, with some participants having felt the benefits of doing this. For some, whether it was due to having too much to do or from the repetitive nature of the tasks that needed doing, days started to blur:

“ **All the days roll into one and because time is moving so fast, before you know it, it's Monday again. Before you know it it's going to be October because time is just flying by and you think 'God, where has that time gone?'**

This sense of time speeding up and the rapidity of change was reflected in some of the things that participants noticed in their weekly diaries, including observing with some humour how business cards seemed like something 'from a bygone era', and reflecting on an unused plane ticket where such a trip felt 'like another life'. Participants felt like some things would never return to how they were before and felt that the moment should be captured and preserved for the future. As well as the ethnography itself playing a role in doing this, participants were collecting photographs to display when the pub reopened, so that people could see what had happened while it was closed.

“ I also know that this moment of everyone pulling together to help one another will [always] remain a memory of not only mine but [everyone's].

As initial feelings of being overwhelmed passed, tinged sometimes with excitement about living through such an urgent and historic situation, some participants spoke about feeling an 'emotional hit' upon realising for how much longer social distancing could go on for. With rumours of pubs remaining closed for several months longer, some participants started to reflect on whether they could maintain motivation and cope in the current situation.

As people started to turn towards thinking about what would come next, some participants continued to feel pulled in different directions, as they dealt with present day challenges while keenly feeling that this was an opportunity to change things for the better in the future. For some, this gave a renewed impetus to the need to act quickly, as they started to become concerned that things could slip back into normality, including systems of inequality that they were trying so hard to counter.

“ I'm frustrated because there's a lot of stuff being talked about 'Let's do things differently from now on, let's not go back to the old normal' which I like, but then when you try to start those meetings and conversations it's really hard to get them going. 'Cos everyone is so busy with everyday stuff it's hard to have conversations about the future.

Others warned that The Bevy should pace itself in its response, so that it was able to support people over the longer term. In a reflective call, one participant described a chart showing how the impacts of the pandemic changed over time, from initial health impacts and deaths, through to later effects of mental ill-health, economic downturn and the effects of delayed health appointments. This had encouraged him to stop and reflect on the timescale of the Bevy's response to the crisis, from an initial rapid response to a more strategic longer-term approach.

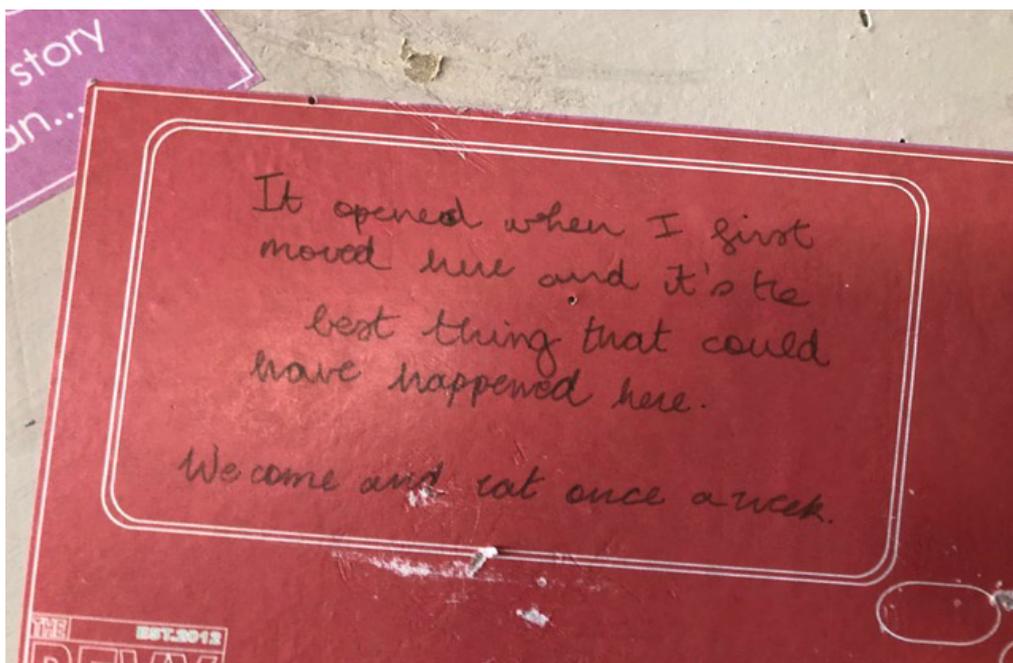
“ It made me kind of really digest how long and for how many this impact is going to last and what role we've got in it and how we need to pace ourselves ... it's sort of also made me kind of go don't think it's all about that first panic curve and therefore pace yourself and be aware that you've got a role in the longer term.

While the focus was mostly on the future, participants occasionally reminisced about the past and being together at the pub. In particular, the process of refurbishment was a symbolic but also very literal crossroads between what the pub had been and what it would be. Participants took photos ahead of the refurbishment so they could record how it looked before, and spoke about wanting to make new memories in the pub. The refurbishment also involved physically unearthing some old memories along the way which were shared with the group.

“ In 2017 we got money from the Heritage Lottery [Fund] and organised a history celebration day – 80 years [since] the pub opened in 1937.

The messages below were a response to the question 'what memories do you have of the pub/this area?'

I've been photographing the messages to keep a record ... since they will soon be covered up as the building is redecorated – the first time since we reopened as a community pub five years ago.”



05. Loss

Participants sometimes framed their experience during these weeks of the pandemic in terms of loss. In some cases that was the loss of human life, as some participants experienced bereavements. But in most cases the loss was more intangible – the loss of freedom, of enjoyment, and particularly of social contact.

Members of the team who were self-isolating and working from their homes missed the social contact of being able to go to The Bevy; the team exchanged photos from the pub and working from their desks at home. Those who were self-isolating sometimes felt quite removed from The Bevy. Those who weren't isolating and were able to be at the pub spoke about how grateful they were to have that opportunity to get out of the house and to be able to work with others, even if limited in number and in a socially-distanced way. All participants talked about missing the camaraderie, whether that was a drink after working in The Bevy's garden or the darts league, or just meeting different people each day who came into the bar. Participants were keenly aware that this loss of social contact was affecting their regulars as well, and felt that it was particularly unfair how those who were most vulnerable to Covid-19 were also likely to be most vulnerable to the isolation and lack of social contact that the lockdown was creating. This made the Bevy Meals on Wheels all the more important for the team to be able to offer regulars (whether of the bar or the lunch clubs) a continued connection to the pub, and a bit of social contact when volunteers dropped meals off. They were also able to follow up where individuals seemed to be struggling.

“ **It's the camaraderie. Being able to walk into The Bevy and know just about anyone and everyone who's in there and say hello to them ... I'm missing the personal contact more than anything else.**

Of course, participants were also missing social contact that was unrelated to The Bevy, including being restricted from seeing partners or family members that lived elsewhere. Other social activities they took part in, like watching football, were similarly restricted. Participants missed physical contact as well as social contact in general, and one described it in terms of a loss of humanity itself. This was felt particularly strongly where participants wanted to be able to console or support others who were having a challenging time, but felt they couldn't adequately do this from afar via phone or Zoom conference. The most extreme example was the experience of attending funerals during this period and being unable to provide physical consolation to family members, which was particularly emotional for one participant.

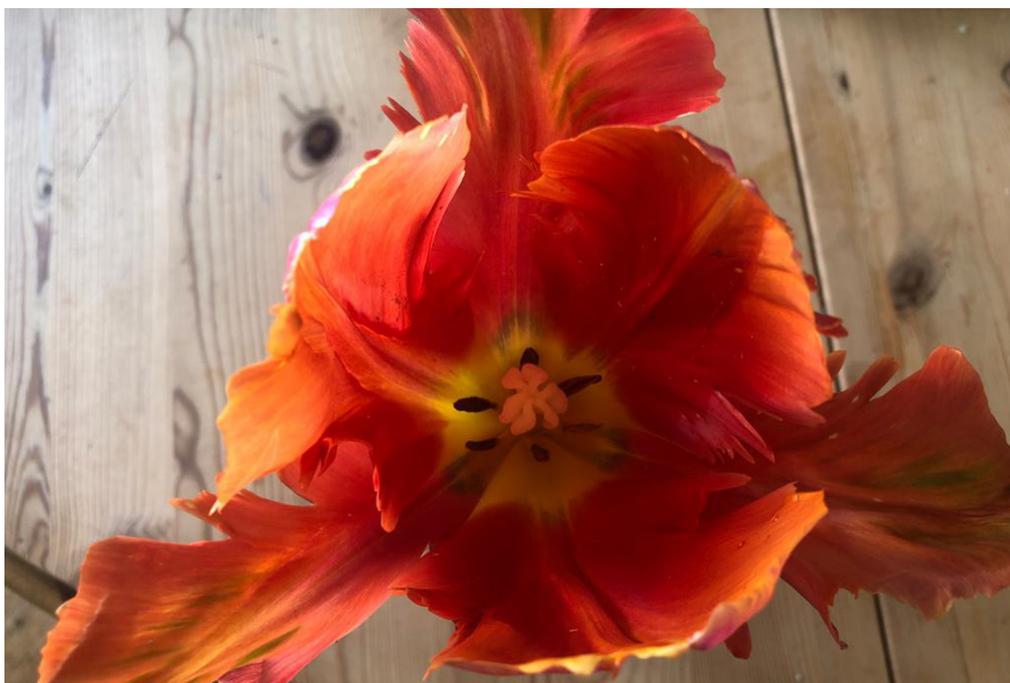
“ **We discussed many things, among them the thing that gets us most about the virus – the inability to embrace, to hug people, to have an essentially human connection.**

06. Coping mechanisms

Nature was a strong coping mechanism for many participants. The majority of photos shared as part of the diaries showed outdoor scenes, plants and animals as participants enjoyed spending time outdoors in their gardens or further afield; sought comfort in nature continuing (and flourishing) during the pandemic, and noticed a new soundscape in the city including birdsong that was louder without the crowds and cars. Given the time of year, growing vegetables was an important theme for many participants. For some, this was an existing interest, volunteer role or paid work, while others were learning growing skills for the first time and enjoying spending time on something practical and purposeful that allowed them to spend time outdoors and away from screens.

Photos captured small moments of natural beauty and wonder that participants had noticed: drops of rain on *Alchemilla mollis* leaves, a tortoise out for a walk, a peacock on the wall of a visited farm, a fallen bloom kept in water, a slow-worm on the path and the shadows of trees dancing across the ground. Participants' own experiences of the benefits of nature on their mood catalysed discussions about opening up The Bevy's garden to those who might struggle to access outside space otherwise, including families living in the flats nearby.

"Mesmerised by this little beauty that broke off the stem and is still strutting her stuff"



“ It was just so quiet. I've never known it be so quiet. It just stood out because that's all you could hear – the birds chirping in the trees – and it was absolutely amazing. Birds just carry on doing what they do.

When asked how they thought they might have coped if the lockdown had happened in winter rather than in spring, participants felt strongly that a winter lockdown would have been a great deal worse; the better weather and being able to spend time outdoors had made a big difference to their experience.

“ Unimaginable! For me, the outdoors and the garden have been the saving grace. They've been my solace, they've been my go-to place.

Another way in which participants coped with their sense of loss was through humour. Participants sent each other humorous photos and memes, and spent time doing things that brought a bit of lightness to the situation, such as rethinking the worker protective suits as 'ghostbusters' overalls, or seeking out oddly-shaped vegetables during the food delivery days.

"Even the veg was bored, getting up to mischief"



We can't actually be a pub, we can only be 'more than' a pub

The Bevy in lockdown

In some ways, The Bevy acted as a coping mechanism in itself. For many participants, it felt like volunteering their time for it gave them some structure to their days and a sense of purpose, knowing they were working towards something that they cared about (whether that was the success of The Bevy in the future, or the emergency response for the community in the present). Sometimes it also provided a way of having social contact when working socially-distanced with other volunteers.

“**Knowing I can't go into work and do something [is] sort of annoying because I'd much rather be there [than] be at home. I think it's because there is always something to do at the pub.**

“**Personally for me meeting new people throughout this period of time makes me feel less isolated and hidden.**

The research project itself was also a way in which participants coped with these feelings of loss – whether through the individual diaries or supporting each other and discussing their feelings through the weekly reflective calls.

“**Then at three o'clock we had to be on a call meeting to talk about how we are and how we are finding the research and I really enjoyed it. There were a lot of times I wasn't talking and that was because I was trying not to cry. I found it really nice to listen to other people's opinions and how they are feeling.**

“**We've had our meetings and sometimes we haven't wanted to come because we've been upset, all sorts of stuff, but actually I feel like it's actually been a real support for me.**

07. The Bevy's responsibilities

In the first weeks of the project, despite all their work, most participants experienced strong feelings of guilt which they reflected on in their first weekly phone call.

“ Everything is laced with 'I should be doing something else', whether that be 'I should be at the pub', whether that be 'I should be playing with my family', whether that be 'that thing I didn't do could be an urgent thing to help somebody do something else'. I just ... spend my life in guilt basically at the moment.

For some, this was directly linked to The Bevy, especially for those who weren't able to physically be there because they were self-isolating. Seeing other members of the team working hard to clean and prepare for the refurbishment, as well as delivering meals, they felt that they were unable to contribute – and what they could do always seemed to involve making more requests of the people physically at the pub. The first reflective weekly call was a good way for the team to explore this; for everyone to express their gratitude to those physically at The Bevy, and for those who had been working there to reassure the others that they understood that everyone was doing their part to help it get through the crisis.

For others, the guilt was connected to the variety of different projects and commitments they had. In a time of crisis, suddenly they felt pulled in many different ways at the same time – and were unable to give as much of themselves as they would have liked to each – whether that was work, volunteering or time with family.

“ you simply don't have enough time to spend across those, that huge variety of different things. And I think it's just really, really tough. And I think that, for me, that's definitely where the guilt comes from. I feel emotionally attached to all of those different things. And actually I can't do as much as I'd like to for any of them, really.

The pandemic created a backdrop of heightened sensitivity to what was appropriate or acceptable behaviour and how individuals, organisations and government should be responding. Many participants felt this on an individual basis and also collectively as The Bevy in its role as a community business.

“ So I think the guilt is attached to something about the ... The sense of crisis that we're wanting to do as much and be as effective as we can.

However, participants were also frustrated by these feelings, as they were highly aware that feeling guilty itself wasn't productive – for their own mental wellbeing or their ability to take action. One participant was keen that guilt didn't become a sense of needing to take responsibility for everyone else (an impossible task), but instead to create genuinely mutual networks of people supporting people. This was triggered by the examples of mutual aid groups and concern about how these could easily fall into activities that felt more like service delivery rather than mutuality.

“ I've got concern that what the guilt leads to us doing is feeling like we need to serve everybody and save everybody. And actually what's gonna get us through is not that mentality at all. It's [that] we're all here to help each other out. Be here for each other.

Participants reflected on The Bevy's role and responsibilities in the pandemic throughout the eight weeks – and these changed over time. Initially, priorities included keeping spirits up through social media stories, running the Bevy Meals on Wheels food deliveries (and developing a partnership with Brighton Aldridge Community Academy to extend this) and taking activities online, including a successful deaf-friendly pub quiz.

As it became apparent that the pub closure and lockdown was going to last a lot longer than expected, and social distancing even longer than that, participants reflected on their responsibilities to vulnerable people in their communities, including their regulars and those who attended lunch clubs. One week's activity to nominate 'the strongest person you know in the community' received a nomination for a much-loved regular, one of two who were repeatedly mentioned throughout the project. For participants, these two appeared to be symbolic of the sorts of people that The Bevy was set up to support; in normal times providing a welcoming space for them, an opportunity to talk and often giving them a meal at the pub or one to take home. It was clear that not being able to offer this care for their regulars in the way they were used to was difficult for the team. Having the garden at The Bevy started to feel like a responsibility to provide that outside space to local families and regulars, who might not have that kind of space themselves, or might be feeling very isolated or missing social contact. Here, participants started to discuss how they might prioritise those who could come to The Bevy when it started to reopen – some wanting to offer the opportunity for the most vulnerable in the community, even if that meant not bringing in any income.

“ The Bevy garden is stunning. It is possible for us to do something there. I think we should work on it even as a mini plan for some of the people that you know have just been stuck indoors the whole time how we get them to come to The Bevy, sit in the garden. It's busy – people are going past, buses are going past. Just to go 'I'm out of my walls for a few hours' that won't cost us anything – I think it's something we should offer.

“ But if we decide financially we don't want to do the booking scheme we can still offer the garden for an hour or two for some of the people who've been isolated so they can sit in the garden and have a cup of tea and a change of scenery.

As thoughts turned towards reopening, responsibilities for the safety of the staff became a priority. With rumours circulating of government guidelines on pubs, with possible restrictions (like a three-pint limit) and extra requirements (two metre social distancing, enhanced cleaning), the team were sometimes torn between the desire to open up and to protect their staff. The added ingredient of alcohol made this more challenging, as the team wondered how such restrictions could be enforced when people had had a drink, and how they could ensure that staff (and customers) weren't put at greater risk of contracting Covid-19.

“ There were leaks about pubs having limits where people would come in for three pints and then be chucked out. How on earth would you police anything like that? Or enforce anything?

Participants felt a strong sense of responsibility over the survival of the business, at a time when they had no prospect of income coming in, in order to maintain The Bevy for future need. While initially the priority was to act quickly – successfully being able to respond to the immediate crisis – towards the end of the project the team started to think further into the future again. They were keen to think how they could use the pandemic as an opportunity to 'reboot' the pub – both in terms of taking the opportunity to refurbish and to consider its purpose anew, rather than allowing a 'business as usual' mentality to win out (see Section 8: Rebuilding for the future). The timeline was therefore relaxed a little to ensure they could reopen in a way that was safe (and enjoyable) for staff and customers, but which also didn't jeopardise their financial sustainability in the future, when they anticipated the need was likely to be even greater.

“ I wouldn't want to rush ahead and open the pub and it be a financial nightmare and us close and lose all that good work.

“ The government or the social enterprise sector has got to realise that you can't let places [like] The Bevy disappear because of this crisis, because if they can survive, the need is more than ever.

Participants also reflected on how The Bevy was part of a wider mobilisation of individuals, groups and organisations in the area. Being embedded in the community in this way allowed them to respond quickly and to coordinate activity with others, to share resources and avoid duplication of effort. Local organisations and businesses in Brighton and Hove gave food donations to the Meals on Wheels scheme, while The Bevy also extended its reach through partnering with the Brighton Aldridge Community Academy to deliver pre-cooked and frozen meals, which included cooking in their kitchens while more disruptive parts of the refurbishment took place at The Bevy.

“ But I think the story isn't just The Bevy. I think the story is the whole of Moulsecomb and Bevendean and all those organisations have been absolutely amazing.

08. What is The Bevy?

A couple of weeks into the project, participants started to reflect on the identity and meaning of The Bevy, at a time when it was forced to close its doors as a pub. Despite being closed, many of the activities that made them 'more than a pub' could still continue.

“ **Because at the moment we aren't a pub. We can only be more than a pub. We can't actually be a pub.**

Participants started to reflect on what the core elements of The Bevy were – without the physical space where people could gather and drink, but continuing to offer services to improve the wellbeing of the community, they were certainly still a community business but were they still a community pub? Particularly relevant to community businesses formed around an 'asset', like a building, this led to an existential question: Does the meaning and identity of the community business reside in the building, or in more intangible aspects like the people, activities or networks created? This question was specifically sparked by the success of the 'Deaf-friendly Pub Quiz', attended by many people but not particularly pub regulars.

“ **[One thing I've been thinking about a lot recently is] what The Bevy is and how much of it is related to the actual building and how much of it is almost the concept in the group of people and ... the networks created and all that sort of stuff ... Actually, it's not really related to The Bevy as a physical building. It's actually about what The Bevy, in a weird way, represents.**

This also exposed the existing dual identity within The Bevy (and probably for all community businesses) in a particularly pertinent way – the balance between bringing in trading income and fulfilling a social purpose. As a business, participants readily admitted that their financial sustainability was vulnerable – and some felt that, while The Bevy was 'so strong on the social side', they sometimes struggled on the commercial side of running a viable pub. When considering whether the enforced shutdown was changing what The Bevy was, participants sometimes characterised it as a 'pause' where they were able to reflect on what made it the unique place it is.

“ **I don't know if it's changing what it is. I think maybe it's just putting more of a light ... you know, I mean, it's because we've been forced into this situation where the physical building is shut. We're running a different sort of enterprise from it. Also, we're trying to from those embers, blow life into other things. In some ways, it's changing it. But on the other hand, I sort of feel like it's just allowing some of the things that we've always been doing to come to the fore a bit.**

This manifested itself in thinking about who The Bevy had the greatest responsibility to, a theme covered more fully in Section 6. Participants discussed their feelings of responsibility to the most vulnerable in the community – elderly people who attended lunch clubs, or those that might not make it into the pub but that The Bevy could support through the Meals on Wheels service (and its extension through partnering with BACA). On the other hand, they also felt a responsibility to the regulars and the drinkers, providing somewhere to have a drink and let off steam, and to socialise with friends and others in the community. Linked to this are the challenges of being a 'wet-led' pub reliant on the sale of alcohol, that needs to balance selling enough to be financially sustainable with discouraging the kind of anti-social behaviour that might arise as a result. Participants also recognised the challenges of providing a viable food offer which can meet the demands of a range of different customers.

Although some participants felt most comfortable on the social rather than the commercial side of the operation, there was universal acknowledgement that the real impact of The Bevy came from the combination of the two.

09. Rebuilding for the future

The sense of Covid-19 providing the opportunity to pause and reconsider how The Bevy operates was carried through in conversations about planning for the future and what had been learnt during this time.

For many participants, the crisis had underlined the value of good people. That included immense gratitude for the staff and volunteers who had pulled together to improve The Bevy during lockdown – from managing the upkeep of the pub and garden, planning the refurbishment and managing the Meals on Wheels service, to applying for grants and keeping the community informed. Participants spoke about wanting to give staff more freedom over making decisions about running the pub in future.

“ **Actually make it a clear working method that we deliberately give people the ability to make those decisions and use the same kind of trust and also the forgiveness thing where we're not looking that every decision those people make has to be right and work out right, 'cos life's not like that.**

Participants also reflected on the importance of having the right people in other aspects of the pub – for example in its governance. The enforced isolation from the pub and participants spending more time at home (which for some was in other parts of the city) provoked some to reflect on what it meant for a community business to be 'locally-rooted'. Considering membership of the committee in particular, participants were keen to ensure a good balance of people with specific skills and people with local experience.

The opportunity to reflect on what was working in the pub and what it needed to do next, raised thoughts about the continued difficulty of bringing in trading income to ensure The Bevy was underpinned by a sustainable business model that supported the social side of the business (in contrast to the current situation, which was sometimes the reverse). Understanding that the two sides of the business were intrinsically connected, one participant reflected on the desire for more business knowledge and experience on the committee, and the importance of someone who could bring that along with understanding the context and social remit of the business. Participants were also thinking about alternative income streams, reducing the cost of running the pub and how they could ensure more money from their food offer and across the bar.

We can't actually be a pub, we can only be 'more than' a pub
The Bevy in lockdown

- “ Coronavirus gave us a blank slate and opportunity to look back at what's not working – which we needed to do anyway.
- “ It's an organisation that is a trading organisation so it needs to run as a trading pub and at the same time it's got this very specific social remit to improve the lives of people in Bevendean and Moulsecomb. Naturally with anything like that, there is going to be a tension, how on earth do we make money and do good? The social impact is always going to need money to sustain it.



10. Supporting community pubs

The difficulties of balancing the 'social' and the 'trading' parts of a community business have particular resonance in a more deprived urban area, where relying on trading income from a community with little money to spend is challenging. However, it is exactly in these areas that the need for community businesses may be greatest. There was a sense that Covid-19 has shown how valuable, resilient and resourceful community pubs and other businesses can be – often able to act much more quickly than charities and public authorities in ensuring that local residents had access to the support they needed to overcome some of the distinctive challenges they faced during the pandemic. Participants discussed the frustration, building through the project, that there wasn't more support for opening community pubs in areas like Moulsecoomb and Bevendean – the perception was that most community pubs (including those supported by the More than a Pub programme) were in more affluent areas.

Participants also raised questions about trust and the nature of relationships between community businesses and funders. The Bevy conceptualised its existing relationship with funders as a partnership, but had been disappointed in the emergency response from some of them (including Power to Change) – a lack of clarity around access to support during the early stages of the pandemic and then grants with conditions and oversight attached which were considered disproportionate for the amounts made available.

Although acknowledging that funding organisations had also been affected by the unprecedented circumstances, The Bevy's experience led it to conclude that funders in the sector might helpfully aspire to a more ongoing and relational, as opposed to project-based, approach to funding in future. The Bevy has been trading for more than five years and anticipated the next five would see them further exploring their ideas, making mistakes and winning victories. They hoped to be able to rely on support from funders with whom they could develop an ongoing relationship – one based on a clearer understanding of the often intangible work they do and what they really needed for that to become more sustainable.

11. Experiencing ethnography

By Curtis James and Simon Newitt (Self/Other)

The project was instigated by one of the participants who got in touch with Curtis in the early days of the pandemic. They were concerned that essential stories would be lost, forgotten in the heat of the moment, and keen to find a way to stop this from happening. The project took around three weeks to get started. There was an urgency on our part not to miss anything, while at the same time designing a light but robust methodology that would not get in the way of the work. The research started without a full complement of community researchers; it felt important to start, and we felt more participants would get involved as they heard about their friends' and neighbours' experiences.

One of the most challenging aspects was that the lockdown meant we could not support the data collection and collaborative analysis in person. Curtis had spent many years visiting The Bevy, building trust, becoming a known face in the pub, and in some ways it felt like this 'trust' process had to begin again. Indeed, we were also separated from one another – as researchers – through the entire process. The data collection and weekly sense-making we embarked on over the eight weeks was necessarily an entirely digital effort, using WhatsApp (to stay in regular contact and as another medium to post data), Zoom (for our weekly group calls), Miro (for knowledge capture) and WordPress, which we used to create a simple (private) blog on which we hosted and organised the data as it came in.

Our initial concern was that the digital element of this work could exclude some participants, either because their access to hardware and data was limited, or because different levels of fluency in digital platforms would make it harder for some to engage practically and emotionally in the process. To counter this we tried to spend time at the outset ensuring each participant had the technical means and knowledge to participate, and we tried not to make the technology an end in itself; asking instead how technology might help us achieve our goal of a participatory group enquiry. Consequently, we kept data collection as simple as possible, suggesting participants use their mobile phones to take photographs, record short video and voice messages (audio journaling), and even to take pictures of any handwritten journaling they might do. We did not limit the way people could gather data – it could be emailed to us directly each week, posted to the WhatsApp group, or even hand-posted in one example.

Our weekly sense-making calls with the group were generally well attended and were always viable group conversations – these calls were also recorded as data. A more challenging element of the project related to how we were able to provide emotional support and containment to the group at a social distance. We retained the services of a professional counsellor on standby as part of our offer to participants, and his (virtual) services were taken-up by one participant. However, it was the group itself that provided the emotional energy and container for the work. Throughout the eight weeks, we heard of exhaustion and fatigue, frustration and tears, and our response at such times was to slow the process down, remind the group to prioritise their health before any obligations they felt for collecting data, and practise good self-care. In the case of the latter, we asked our professional counsellor to draft some simple resources we could share with participants.

The pandemic was a deeply emotional experience because it was an existential one, both for the participants as human beings with their view on the world, their work with some of the most vulnerable in the local community and for The Bevy as 'more than a pub'. At a transpersonal level, this was often demonstrated in the reflections on the passing of time, on yearnings for 'normal', and the disruptive impact of Covid-19 to established patterns of life and our relationship to one another and the natural world. At a more operational level, there was an emotional split in the group that mirrored the division of labour in The Bevy's response – with the committee distanced from the venue itself and able to support its operations 'only' virtually and intellectually. While on the ground, in the kitchen and on the food drops, the emotional toll of the work was felt perhaps more acutely. Furthermore, behind this, the weekly conversation kept looping back to what this all meant for the identity of The Bevy, its business model and future beyond 'reopening'. A particular feature of these conversations – which wasn't explicit but was generally always present – was the way its members understood The Bevy as one part of a broader local systemic mobilisation in the area, one that included mutual aid groups, schools and food co-operatives. The sophistication of this thinking and response emerged as a real theme and strength in our analysis.

In the end, the participants themselves are best placed to report on their experience of the project. We concluded the data collection by recording one-to-one interviews with each participant, asking them a series of reflective questions to help ground their own (and our) learning. Our sense was that although it was often obvious that 'collecting data' wasn't a priority in any given week, and sometimes even an unhelpful obligation, the weekly group calls were regarded as a valuable space and opportunity to process an unprecedented experience. Not all participants were able to participate equally, but this was less to do with technology as we had feared, and much more to do with the personal circumstances each faced through lockdown with their own physical and mental health, family circumstances, financial wellbeing and changes to working life.

Throughout the project, participants were encouraged to reflect on the process and their involvement, partly to facilitate any improvements to the way the project operated and partly to understand the role of the project during these eight weeks of participants' lives.

There was early excitement in being involved in the project and enthusiastic engagement with posting photos, keeping daily diaries and attending the weekly catch-ups (which continued throughout the project). But also early on, some participants experienced it as another thing that they had to do amongst what seemed like an ever-growing to-do list, adding to the sense of guilt which many felt in the initial weeks due to competing responsibilities, all of which they felt an emotional connection to (see Section 6 for more on this theme). Self/Other discussed this with participants in the first couple of weekly calls, to make any changes or provide additional channels to help participants contribute more easily – and to reassure participants about sharing as much or as little as they could.

“ Part of it is another little addition to my slightly feeling guilty that I haven't done the thing that I'm supposed to have done ... I really believe in this project. I think it's great to share. I really think we do need to capture this learning. So I guess the guilt is ... just is there because I believe in it.

During the project, both the participants and the researchers suggested that a WhatsApp group be set up for participants to more easily share photos and reflections – and importantly, to do so together – in a way which allowed them to share and chat. While this was welcomed and the group maintained it throughout the project, participants reflected on the different environments of the research (the individual diaries, the weekly reflective calls and the WhatsApp group) and how that affected how comfortable they felt to share their thoughts and feelings.

Some participants commented that there was a 'performative' aspect to the WhatsApp and therefore felt that there were different expectations of what they posted there – a need to be 'chipper' and not wanting to be seen as 'going on' about things. This meant the WhatsApp tended to be used as a way for the group to be in touch and post light-hearted content to keep each other's spirits up, while the personal diaries explored a wider range of individual emotions and the weekly reflective calls generally unpacked some of these issues usefully in a group setting. Perhaps the main reason for this (and the reason why participants felt better able to explore a range of emotions in the reflective calls, despite also being in a group setting) was the asynchronous nature of the WhatsApp group. With this style of communication, participants could post at any time, and so were perhaps not only more sensitive as to whether they got a response or not but also more aware of imposing their feelings on the others in the group throughout the day. On the other hand, during synchronous communication during the weekly reflective calls, it was clear for participants to see how others were responding to what they said, and the hour was a set time agreed by all participants to discuss how they were feeling. It was also facilitated to bring out some of the sorts of things discussed in the individual diaries.

“ But [what] I have realised is that for me, it makes me more self-conscious putting things in the WhatsApp and ... So I probably will do some of that. You know, here is a picture or something. I feel like it's not that I don't want to ... but if I feel like I'm reflecting on my ... I don't want to be this person ... I don't want to be blurring on [sic] in a WhatsApp thing. I feel like it seems you've got to be chipper and I don't always feel chipper.

By hearing each other's experiences and emotions in the weekly reflective calls or posting humorous photos and comments in the WhatsApp, participants were also able to support each other over the weeks, to share the ups and downs of the period and their own responses to it. Participants also commented on how being involved in the project helped them to get their own thoughts in order, particularly in quiet individual reflection through the diaries, through which they made time to process how they were feeling about the situation.

“ But it gives me time to myself to be able to sit down and actually talk about how I view stuff instead of other people telling me what their views are, which gives me my own time to sort out what my opinion is because I don't really feel like I get a lot of time to do that.

12. Final thoughts

The Bevy started to reopen gradually from Wednesday 22 July with limited hours of 4–8 pm – focused on the garden and using a booking system, serving food and offering takeaways. Since then, the days have been extended and The Bevy is open from Wednesday to Saturday.

A particular focus has been trying to bring elderly residents together for some food and a chat, filling the gap while the variety of lunch clubs at The Bevy (Friday Friends etc.) have not been possible. Since the end of July, The Bevy – in partnership with local charity Glad Rags – has been offering 'Chatterboxes' weekly lunch clubs in the garden, for older residents and people who've been shielding.

The government's Eat Out to Help Out scheme had a very positive response and The Bevy is hoping to maintain the enthusiasm for its food offer during the week. It has started to unfurlough some staff and is also collaborating with other organisations across the south-east of England to bring young people into work, using the government's Kickstarter scheme.

Overall, the group is rightly proud of its achievements. Positive feedback from volunteers and recipients has kept spirits up along the way, as they delivered more than 5,500 meals through Meals on Wheels and worked together as a team in incredibly challenging circumstances. The Bevy was also nominated for a Great British Pub Award in the 'feeding the community' category, in recognition of its work to make sure nobody went hungry over this period.

“ Thank you so much to everyone who have been so kind to me and my children. It has been a huge weight lifted when I have found shopping limited at these times. Your kindness has been so appreciated. Best wishes to you all.

A thank you note from a Meals on Wheels recipient

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