

Judith Green

We would like to share the experience of a jointly planned, designed and produced exhibition called “West End Stories”, created by a local partnership of community-based organisations in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne in partnership with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. Among other things, this case study illustrates some of the difficulties of co-design and co-production stemming from the differing cultures and practices of the organisations involved. “West End Stories” is part of the Imagine project which is funded through Connected Communities. I am involved as secretary of the Heritage and Environment Group and as coordinator of the community projects for Imagine North East.

Judith Green, St James’ Heritage and Environment Group

“West End Stories”: The museum and the community - a case study of co-design and co-production

The newly created “West End Stories” digital exhibition is the latest version of a series of “West End Stories” exhibitions created by community-based organisations in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne in partnership with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM). This area has a rich and fascinating history, and it would have been easy to organise an exhibition around a linear narrative starting with the Roman occupation and ending with the area’s decline from a globally significant industrial area during the Industrial Revolution to its current status as one of the most deprived places in the country. Instead “West End Stories” uses objects to tell, without “expert” interpretation, a range of different stories that indicate some of the complexity of the area’s history and the diverse lived experiences of its inhabitants. The objects come from two sources, reflecting two key aims of the project. Some come from the collections held in TWAM’s museums and galleries, including many items that had never been on public display. We wanted to make them available to the community to whose history they belonged. The other source was objects loaned or given by current and former residents through the efforts of community organisations, linking the project with the personal stories of local people. Starting as a museum exhibition, “West End Stories” has subsequently been turned into a series of smaller and regularly changing exhibitions in different community venues, bringing the stories back into the heart of the community to which they belong.