SOCIAL
LIFE

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Wellbeing & Resilience on the
Moorlands Estate, Brixton

Wellbeing and resilience on the Moorlands estate

Social Life, a new social enterprise set up by the Young Foundation, has carried out an initial assessment of wellbeing and resilience on the Moorlands Estate in Brixton to help inform Brixton Green's understanding of their impact on the wider neighbourhood around the proposed Brixton Green site.

Brixton Green is an organisation that is owned and run by local people, constituted as a non-profit registered mutual society. It has been set up to regenerate an under-used strip of land close to the heart of Brixton. All local residents can become share holders for £1.

The Brixton Green development has potential to have a wider knock on to the area, going beyond the relatively narrow geographic boundaries of the Somerleyton Road site. A detailed understanding of the circumstances, needs and specific experiences of residents in the Moorlands estate, the adjacent community, can contribute to the development of the Brixton Green project in two ways:

- Building understanding of the value of Brixton Green's proposals and how they can contribute to residents prosperity and wellbeing in wider neighbourhoods
- Helping shape and frame the services and projects run from the Brixton Green development, including the new Health Centre.

This information will also be useful to local agencies and communities working in the Moorlands area, particularly the school and housing providers.

Although much is known already about the circumstances of the Moorlands estate, through deprivation statistics, and the knowledge held within the local community and local agencies, there has been no systematic attempt to measure the wellbeing and resilience of the estate.

Understanding wellbeing and resilience, the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity, can point to different strengths and vulnerabilities within a local area than conventional deprivation statistics. A wellbeing and resilience analysis helps pinpoint the assets in a local community, what and what helps people flourish, as well as revealing often concealed psychological needs, including anxiety and loneliness.

This rapid turnaround project used the Young Foundation's WARM measurement tool. WARM (the Wellbeing and Resilience measure) has been developed to understand community wellbeing and resilience at the very local level using publically available national data from surveys run by government and research councils. For this work, the WARM analysis was supplemented by a small number of interviews with key contacts within the local community.

WARM data tell us what communities with the same characteristics are likely to be experiencing, the interviews establish to what extent these findings are mediated by local circumstances.

The project revealed that:

- Wellbeing and resilience are low amongst the residents of Moorlands estate, relative to the national average
- The WARM analysis reveals potential weaknesses in key areas: feeling downhearted and depressed, satisfaction with work, fear about financial situations and lack of ability or capacity to save, and fragilities about facing life's problems and socialising with friends and family. It also illustrates some of the objective factors that can explain poor wellbeing and resilience, including a low proportion of people who are retired or married.
- The indicators that were higher than average, indicating assets within the community, include a high level of belonging, of being able to overcome difficulties, and stopping and talking to neighbours.
- The face-to-face interviews substantiated these findings, with residents and stakeholders reporting that many considered the area neighbourly and had a positive experience of living there, whilst others experienced it as a challenging place to live.
- High crime levels, and high fear of crime and gang related violence, impact negatively on people's wellbeing and quality of life. This will be no news to residents of the estate.
- The project suggests that interventions that boost positive social networks, tackle the stigma of the area, and tackle some of the psychological barriers to quality of life will help reinforce the assets of the area. If residents feel more empowered and less isolated, then their detachment from official agencies may lessen, and their sense of agency increase.

This research was carried out by Joelle Moore in July 2012, with WARM analysis by Nina Mguni from the Young Foundation.

1 What is WARM and who is it for?

The Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM) is a framework to measure wellbeing and resilience at a local level. WARM helps identify who is vulnerable, who is not, and why. It supports localism, by giving better information to both communities and residents, and agencies responding to their concerns and aspirations.

Wellbeing and resilience measures can enable local professionals and communities to see which services are having an impact on people's lives at a local level and which are failing to do so; identify a community's strengths as well as its weaknesses; and make more informed decisions about where to direct limited resources.

Understanding how people feel about the quality of their lives is important for local decision-makers and service providers at any time, but becomes vital when resources are as scarce as they are in these uncertain times.

The majority of available data at the very local level is gathered at either an individual level (unemployment, health or crime for example) or at the level of wider systems (such as school performance). This tends to miss out data on the quality and frequency of social and emotional supports that can be critical to the experience of areas and of daily life. Interviews were carried out with local residents and people who are, or were once active within the Moorlands community in order to explore the quality of social supports and networks.

2 About the estate and the surrounding area

The Moorlands estate is one of six large housing estates in Brixton. Around 550 two-storey homes replaced hundreds of derelict Victorian and Edwardian properties demolished during the 1970s. The estate lies between Coldharbour Lane, Somerleyton Road and Loughborough Park/ Shakespeare Road; colloquially known as "the Triangle".

Southwyke House, in the northern part of the estate facing Coldharbour Lane, consists of 176 flats. It has become known locally as "the Barrier Block" and was designed to deflect noise and pollution from a later abandoned inner-London motorway project.

Railway lines physically divide the estate from other residential neighbourhoods. The estate is effectively an enclave; geographically separate from the town centre, with the only connections to the rest of Brixton situated on (or very near) Coldharbour Lane.

Loughborough Park estate, a 390 home development, managed by Guinness Trust, is to the south of Moorlands estate. It was built in the 1930s and has been subject to numerous planning applications over recent years to demolish and rebuild at a higher density.

The Moorlands and Loughborough Park estates are within the Coldharbour Ward of Lambeth, one of the most deprived areas in the UK. Levels of severe crime in the area are higher than average, including numerous stabbing incidents. A fatality in March 2012 was widely publicised.

Amenities within "the Triangle" include the Moorlands Community Centre, Hill Mead Primary School, Evelyn Grace Academy, a small convenience store, an allotment and Loughborough Park.

Moorlands Community Centre hosts numerous events for the community, including "coffee and chat" every Wednesdays; the Golden Age group for over 50s; Judo for children of all ages and adults; sports and youth club sessions for children over 10 years old; vegetable growing; and Zumba. They also promote other events on their notice board, such as basketball at Evelyn Grace; gardening workshops; Metropolitan Housing's community forum; and "Art4Space" an employability and community art ten week accredited course. In addition, a Metropolitan Housing project called for aged 15-16 year olds, called "the Challenge 2012" was spread over the summer and provides an opportunity for local teenagers to gain "skills that employers and universities look for".

The recently built Evelyn Grace Academy on Loughborough Park is part of Lambeth Council's "Future Brixton" masterplan, which aims to improve the lives of local people through investment and regeneration in the area. Opposite Southwyke House is the Brixton Village arcade, which has had a facelift in recent times and houses lots of small shops and cafes, many of which are fairly expensive.

The gentrification of the area continues adjacent to the Brixton Village arcade with Brixton Square, a five-storey development of 117 private flats, which are being built by Barratt Homes to be sold when completed in Summer 2013 on the open market.

3 Applying WARM to the Moorlands Estate

The WARM framework allows us to identify where there are problems and provides information about which groups of people are most vulnerable and what potential assets exist within the community. However, as a statistical model it cannot explore some of the relationships between the indicators in a specific neighbourhood, or provide answers to why many of these problems exist in a particular area.

WARM can help prioritise areas for action, but local knowledge and a better qualitative understanding of those communities is required to design effective interventions to address the problems identified.

Using aspects of the WARM framework, we first looked at secondary data to identify potentially problematic issues on the Moorlands estate. We then carried out seven interviews with residents and those who are, or were once active in the local community, to identify what services residents are accessing and what other sources of support they depend on. The interviews also allowed us to explore the quality of social supports and networks, as well as the barriers people face in meeting needs.

In our own work we have found that qualitative research can provide powerful insights into why some places are more resilient than others, or why they avoid unrest or high crime.

Note: Loughborough Park Estate is included in the secondary data analysis as it is within "the Triangle", however, the main focus of the primary research and this report is Moorlands Estate.

Using secondary data

Trend data for key indicators such as health, education, income and benefits, as well as local and national surveys (primarily the Understanding Society Survey) are particularly useful for measuring wellbeing and resilience. We undertook some secondary data analysis, although, in this limited project, we were unable to complete a full WARM assessment. The main focus of the research was interviews with people who know or live in the community.

WARM is based on "OAC" (output area classification) categories. This understanding of the psycho-geography of small area was developed by the Office of National Statistics. It is based on an analysis of social attitudes by social group and the place they live. Each output area in the country – around 100 homes or 250 people – is assigned one of 21 categories. These categories are based of an analysis of what demographic and social characteristics are most likely to explain divergence in social attitudes.

OAC distils key results from the 2001 Census for the whole of the UK at a fine grain to classify communities with similar demographic profiles and indicate the character of local areas. OAC is widely used to profile populations, structure other data and target resources. The names of categories often cause confusion because they are based on very broad labels describing the OAC psycho-geographic categories.

The OAC characteristics indicate that the communities who live in the Moorlands and Loughborough Park estates experience higher than national average levels of unemployment and social renting; also that a higher than average number of residents were born outside the UK. The two main communities living in Moorlands and Loughborough Park estates, by OAC categories, are both called "Afro-Caribbean" communities; a high percentage of whom either live in flats or are lone parents living in social rented accommodation (see Table 1).

## Table 1: Geo-demographic characteristics of the two OAC groups in the Moorlands estate

Title of OAC group	Typical characteristics far *below* national average	Typical characteristics far *above* national average
Afro-Caribbean Communities (high % flats)	Detached housing 2 + car household	Unemployed Rent (private) Number of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi residents Public transport to work Renting from public agencies Born outside the UK Number living in flats Number of Black African, Black Caribbean or Other Black residents
Afro-Caribbean Communities (high % public rent and lone parents)	Detached housing 2 + car household Terraced housing Two adults no children Rooms per household	Population density Lone parent household Unemployed Public transport to work Number of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi residents Born outside the UK Renting from public agencies Number living in flats Number of Black African, Black Caribbean or Other Black residents

The WARM framework uses Understanding Society Survey data to estimate how communities with similar demographic profiles fare across different wellbeing and resilience variables.

The graph below shows that for both these groups, predicted wellbeing and resilience fall well below the national average. In the graph "0" equals the national average and below 0 is the extent to which average levels of wellbeing or resilience fall below the national average. The number on the left axis represents the "z-score", the amount the score deviates from the national average. A score of -1 indicates a significant level beneath the national average.

Both types of communities are lower in overall levels of wellbeing and resilience than the national average. However, wellbeing and resilience is even lower for the group defined as "Afro-Caribbean communities with a higher proportion who are lone parents living in social rented accommodation".

# Graph 1: Average levels of wellbeing and resilience
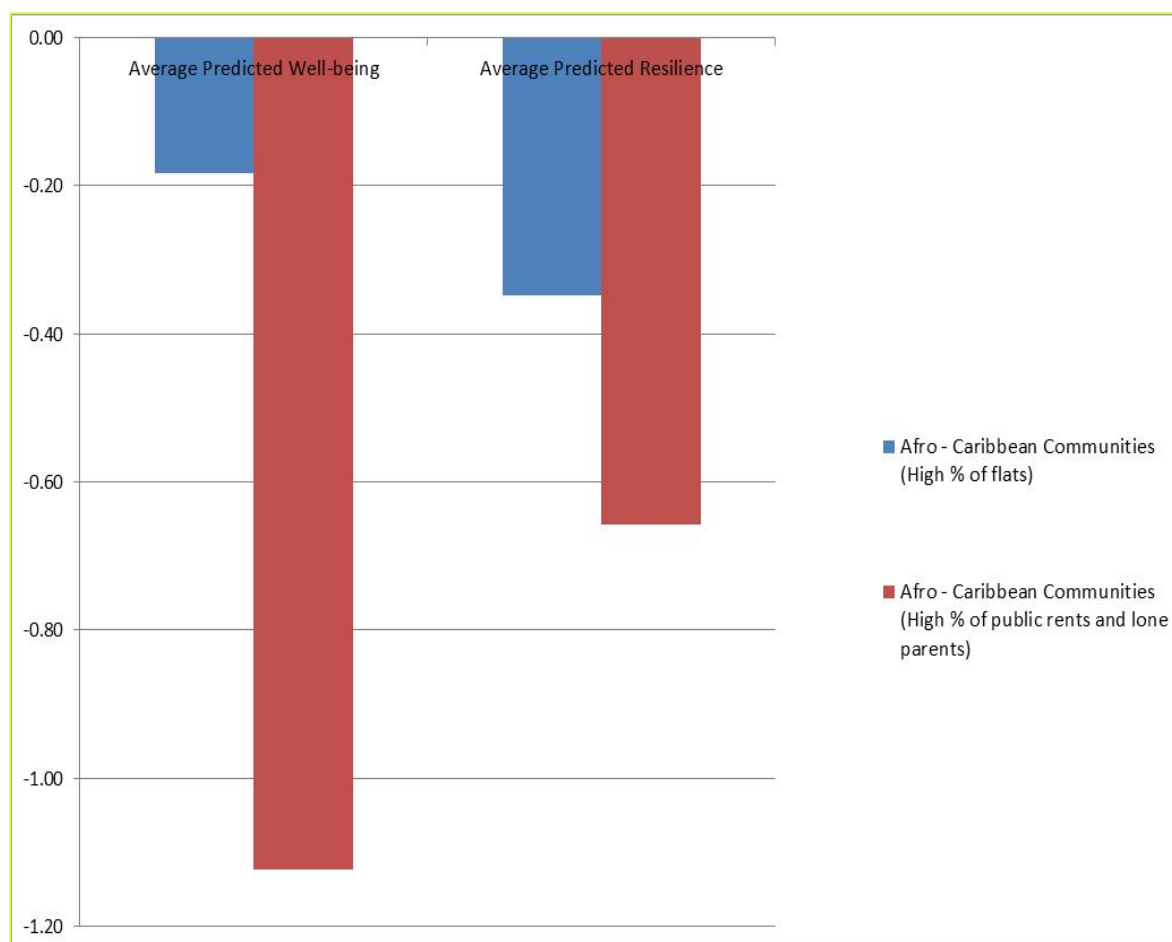
We used national and local authority wide data to draw out local trends in life satisfaction to benchmark the Moorlands and Loughborough Park estates against national trends. Figure 1 shows the variables for the area that are above and below the national average. The variables are those that best explain wellbeing and resilience, selected after an analysis of available data.

This reveals weaknesses in key areas: feeling downhearted and depressed, satisfaction with work, fear about financial situations and lack of ability or capacity to save .and fragilities about facing life's problems and socialising with friends and family. It also illustrates some of the objective factors that can explain poor wellbeing and resilience, including a low proportion of people who are retired or married.

The indicators which were higher than average, indicating assets within the community, include a high level of belonging, of being able to overcome difficulties, and stopping and talking to neighbours

Figure 1: Key wellbeing indicators for Moorlands and Loughborough Park, against national trends
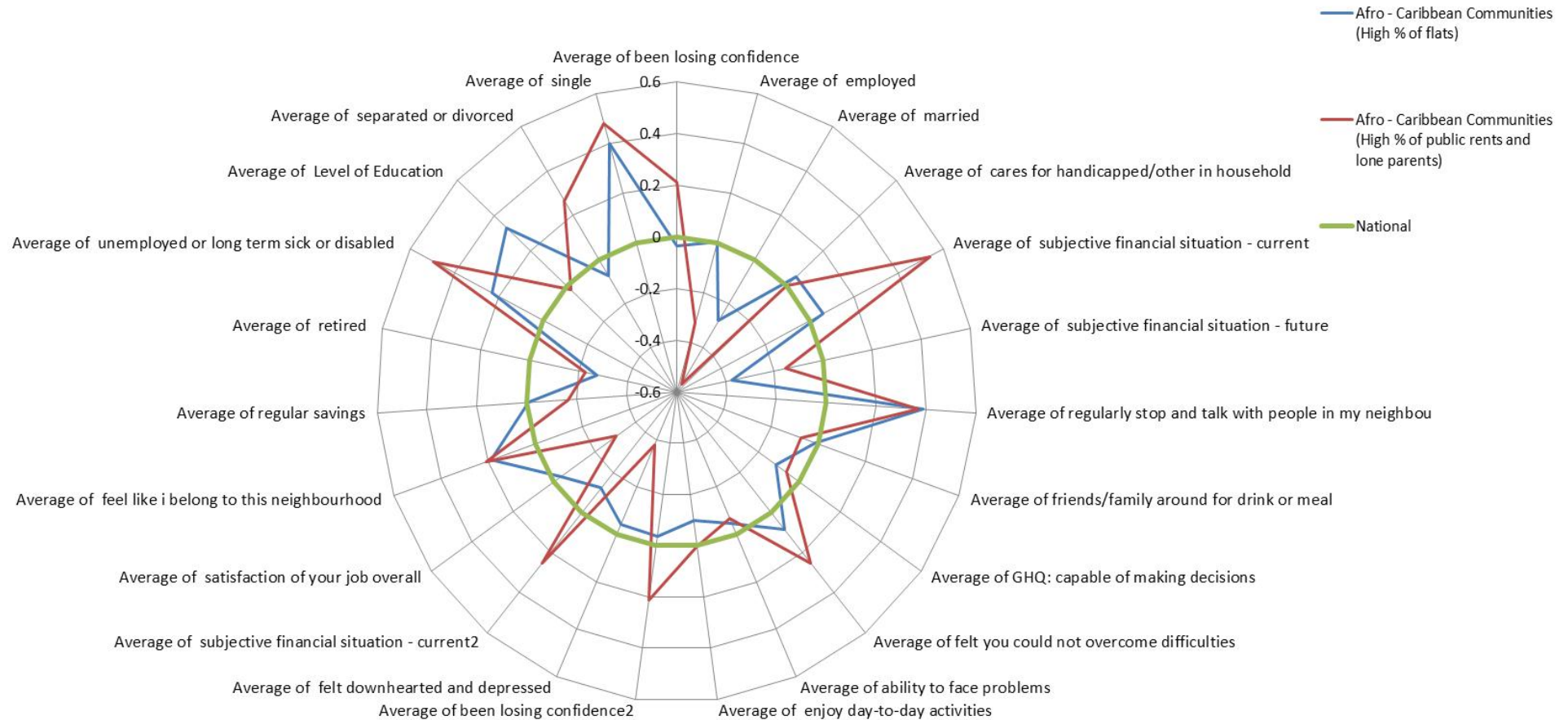
4 Interviews

To help understand the WARM data we gathered local knowledge and conducted seven interviews with a range of people who are active, or were once active in the Moorlands community, including youth workers, board members of Brixton Green, and the organisers of groups and activities for older people. The aim was to explore why resilience and wellbeing were so low.

Most of the interviewees currently live or have lived on the Moorlands estate at one time. One of the residents interviewed was awarded an MBE this year in recognition of her community work on the estate and efforts to improve the local environment over the last 25 years.

The interviews provide a qualitative understanding of the local community.

The following are an example of the questions we asked during the interviews:

- Do you live in the area and if so how long?
- What is your role in the community?
- How happy are you with this area as a place to live?
- How would you describe the Moorlands community? Is there a strong local identity?
- What makes the area a good place to live?
- What would make the area a better place to live?
- How often do you talk to your neighbours?
- Do people support each other? In what way?
- Do people from different backgrounds get on well?
- Are particular groups of people isolated?
- Are you aware of any local community or decision making groups?
- How often do you help to improve your area – e.g. take part in litter picks, planting trees, street parties etc?
- Is there enough space for children to play? Are there things for older people to do?
- What do you think the area will be like in ten years?

The interviews help us understand the findings of the WARM data analysis. Accurately identifying the assets, for example social capital, and the vulnerabilities, for example social isolation, helps estimate the capacity of a community to withstand shock and pinpoint where support should be targeted.

5 Our findings

Sense of community

Despite Moorlands estate's association with drugs and crime there appears to be a fairly strong sense of community on the estate, with some people describing Moorlands as a "little village", where everyone knows everyone and neighbours watch out for each other. One of the interviewees commented that social networks can "bring you out of isolation, but whether they help you make positive choices is up to the individual".

Some interviewees, however, felt that Moorlands was quite a transient place, saying that people "come and go" and there's no reason for people living on the estate to talk to each

other; language barriers were suggested as playing a part in this. One previous resident whose family still live in Southwyke House reported that people keep themselves to themselves and they don't like to get involved in each other's business.

Every resident, or past-resident interviewed said that they enjoyed living on the estate.

Fear of crime

The mixed messages around community cohesion could be related to the fear of crime that most people spoke about. Moorlands was described as quite a dangerous place to live; we were told that people do not feel safe and that residents are wary of each other and officialdom. Gangs are said to provide status, and the younger children are reportedly targeted and often forced to join the gangs. It was also said, repeatedly, that people from other areas in Brixton and further afield come onto the estate to cause trouble. Some of the interviewees felt that the gang culture had calmed down, mainly because a number of the perpetrators are now in prison. Despite the fear of crime people were happy overall about living on the estate; the youth worker succinctly stated, "there's crime but still joy".

Identity and reputation

Most of those interviewed thought the estate had a strong identity, although there was recognition that the estate does not have a very good reputation and that everyone knows the estate for bad things such as violence and crime. One of the interviewees who did not think that Moorlands Estate had a strong identity, added that, even so, it was a "nicely designed estate and not oppressive" and a "good place to get somewhere else".

A previous resident has seen the area improve since he left the estate; people have bought their homes and he has noticed there are more expensive cars parked on the estate now compared with a ten years ago. Most of those interviewed did not think that things on the estate would improve in the next ten years. The need for an economic function in the immediate area to help the community thrive was raised.

Interestingly, it was mentioned that on one hand people are proud of being from Brixton and Moorlands, however, when you actually speak to some of the children they say they would like to leave Brixton if they get the chance.

Inter-generational relationships

A few of those interviewed touched on the relationship between some of the children and adults on the estate. One said that adults need to be seen and visible so that children know they will not put up with any trouble. Another interviewee said she had to act as mother and father figure for the children; she acknowledged that poverty has a part to play and has previously bought birthday cards and gifts for parents to give to their own children.

The youth worker perceived that elders have let young people down; they rely too much on schools to teach them rules and morals. This gives the older children the opportunity to target the younger and more vulnerable children, who do not have much support from their families, and force them to join their gangs. The youth worker also described how the gangs effectively fill a void and tend to think of themselves as a family; they "fight, laugh and cry together".

Gang culture and race

Gang violence was perceived by most to be about territory; manifesting for example in tensions between the gangs in Tulse Hill and Brixton. One of the interviewees said these are over drugs or gangs and not necessarily race related; another interviewee agreed with this and said that most disputes were for personal reasons. No issues of racism were raised by the interviewees, who varied in backgrounds. They all felt that people from different backgrounds got on well and that like the rest of London everyone is used to different cultures and that Moorlands is "free from issues of race".

Mistrust of officialdom

Interviewees talked of a lack of voice in the community. Residents feel powerless and it can be difficult for agencies and community activists to gain their trust. Mistrust extends to local people, organisations and groups, as well as the more formal institutions and organisations, such as the police and the Council.

Residents seem to have a poor relationship with the local Housing Association and there are rumours of older people in supported housing having their belongings stolen. The youth worker was keen to stress that the authorities need to listen to the community so they have a benefit and a say in what happens; "hear people out and they will hear you out".

Community activism

Involvement in the community varied, with some residents investing lots of time in the neighbourhood (including young people) whilst others were very withdrawn. There are some key figures who are active in the community, these older spokespeople have lived a long time on the estate and have gained a lot of respect. There have apparently been numerous failed attempts to set up a residents association, but "egos over chairmanship" got in the way.

Overall, positive activity in the community was frequent and there are some valuable local amenities but there is also room for improvement. One activist spoke of her success lying in setting out aims and objectives; and lack of patience with community groups "who get money, mess about and don't produce results".

Local amenities

The park was not always regarded as an asset, with people saying it could be dangerous. The nursery is derelict after being closed down because of poor management. Convenience stores can often act as community hub, but the Moorlands shop is not viewed in this way.

The Community Centre is an asset, however, it has created divisions. One interviewee described the centre as more of a commercial centre or business than a centre for the community. We were told that only the Golden Age group use the centre; it is seen to be too expensive and is therefore under utilised.

Most interviewees believed that there not being enough for young people to do. Children were described as the most disadvantaged in the community. Kids were said to need more play areas and teenagers were said to have nowhere to go. There is not thought to be enough support or activities for teenagers or for young parents wanting to get back into work.

6 Future opportunities

The estate is home to many vulnerable people living on the estate. The physical separation of Moorlands, with the tube line dividing the estate from the centre of Brixton accentuates it vulnerabilities , and the relative seclusion means that violence can take place unnoticed. Moorlands was described as "very close to Brixton but somewhat enclosed". The estate needs to be made more permeable as it feels cut off and unwelcoming for non-residents.

People felt it would be good for the Moorlands community if the Brixton Green initiative was developed, as it could bring employment opportunities with it and encourage social cohesion. If left undeveloped the site would have a negative effect on the area, with the Moorlands estate becoming more and more isolated and stigmatised.

7 Next steps

A more detailed assessment of communities, such as that provided by this brief wellbeing and resilience analysis, can help shape pre-emptive interventions which promote greater levels of resilience and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Implementing plans will require commissioning new interventions, reshaping existing programmes and possibly, given current economic drivers, decommissioning services or initiatives that are no longer seen to be priorities.

A number of vehicles for action exist, including local partnership arrangements, established social networks and local business consortiums.

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Social Life is an independent social enterprise set up by the Young Foundation in 2012 to take forward the Young Foundation's work on placemaking and innovation. Go to www.social-life.co for more information.