Understanding Southwark

An in-depth account of the impact of change and of COVID-19 in six areas

December 2021

Southwark Council
southwark.gov.uk

SOCIAL LIFE

This report brings together the findings of a year-long research project commissioned by Southwark Council that began in April 2020 and concluded in August 2021.

More about this research is on our website, http://www.social-life.co/project/understanding_southwark/

We would like to thank the local residents, stakeholders and traders who shared their knowledge, hopes and fears with us. We appreciate their expertise and the time they put into this work and hope the report will help bring about the changes they would like to see in their local areas.

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All photos by Social Life.

This is one of four reports bringing together the findings of the research. The other reports are:

- Summary report. Daily life and the impact of COVID-19 across the borough
- Understanding Southwark. Daily life and the impact of COVID-19 across the borough
- Understanding Southwark. Young people's perspectives.

All are available from social-life.co/publication/

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

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Contents

An in-depth account of the impact of change and of COVID-19 in six areas 3

Elephant & Castle 8

Walworth 27

Old Kent Road 49

Camberwell 67

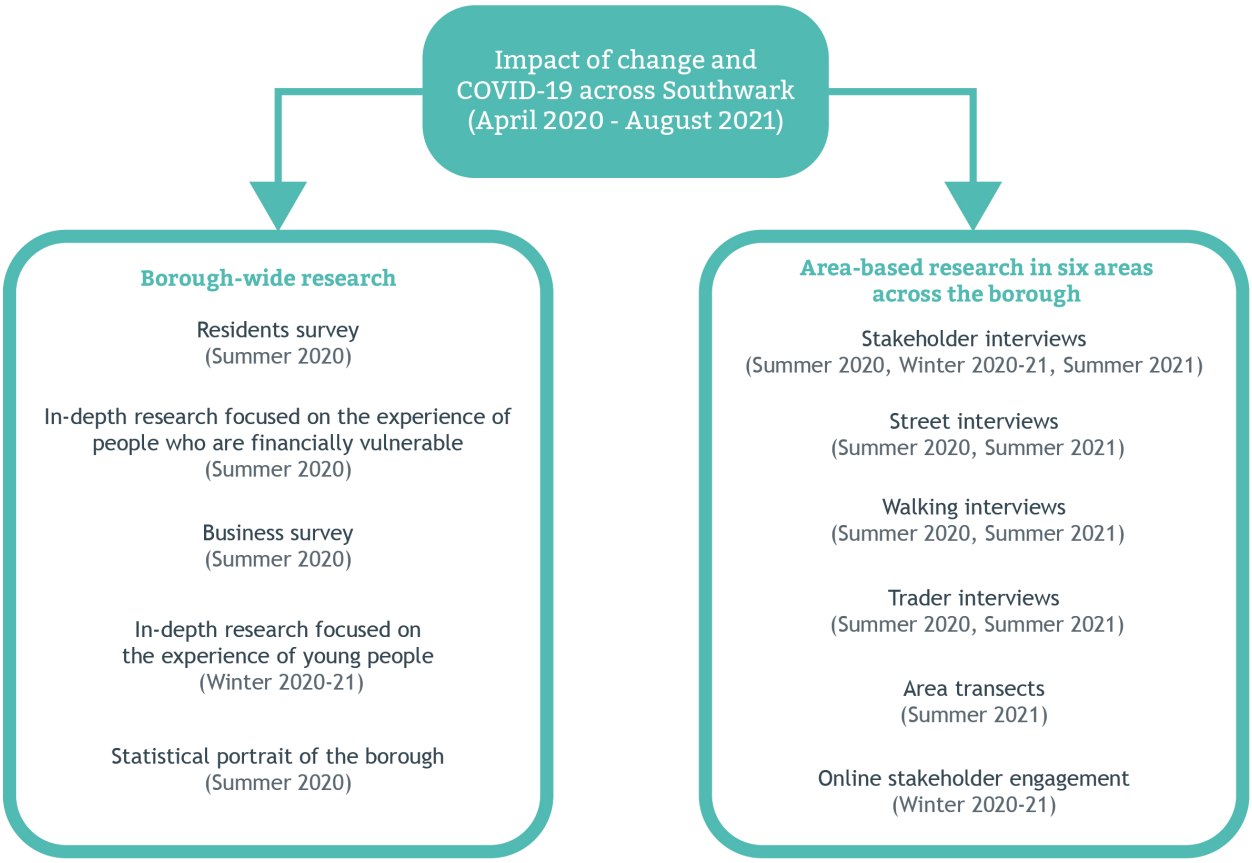
Peckham 85

Dulwich: focus on social housing estates 105

An in-depth account of the impact of change and of COVID-19 in six areas

This report takes an in-depth look at the findings of research in six areas across Southwark, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021. This research is part of a year-long research programme commissioned by Southwark Council, which took place between April 2020 and August 2021.

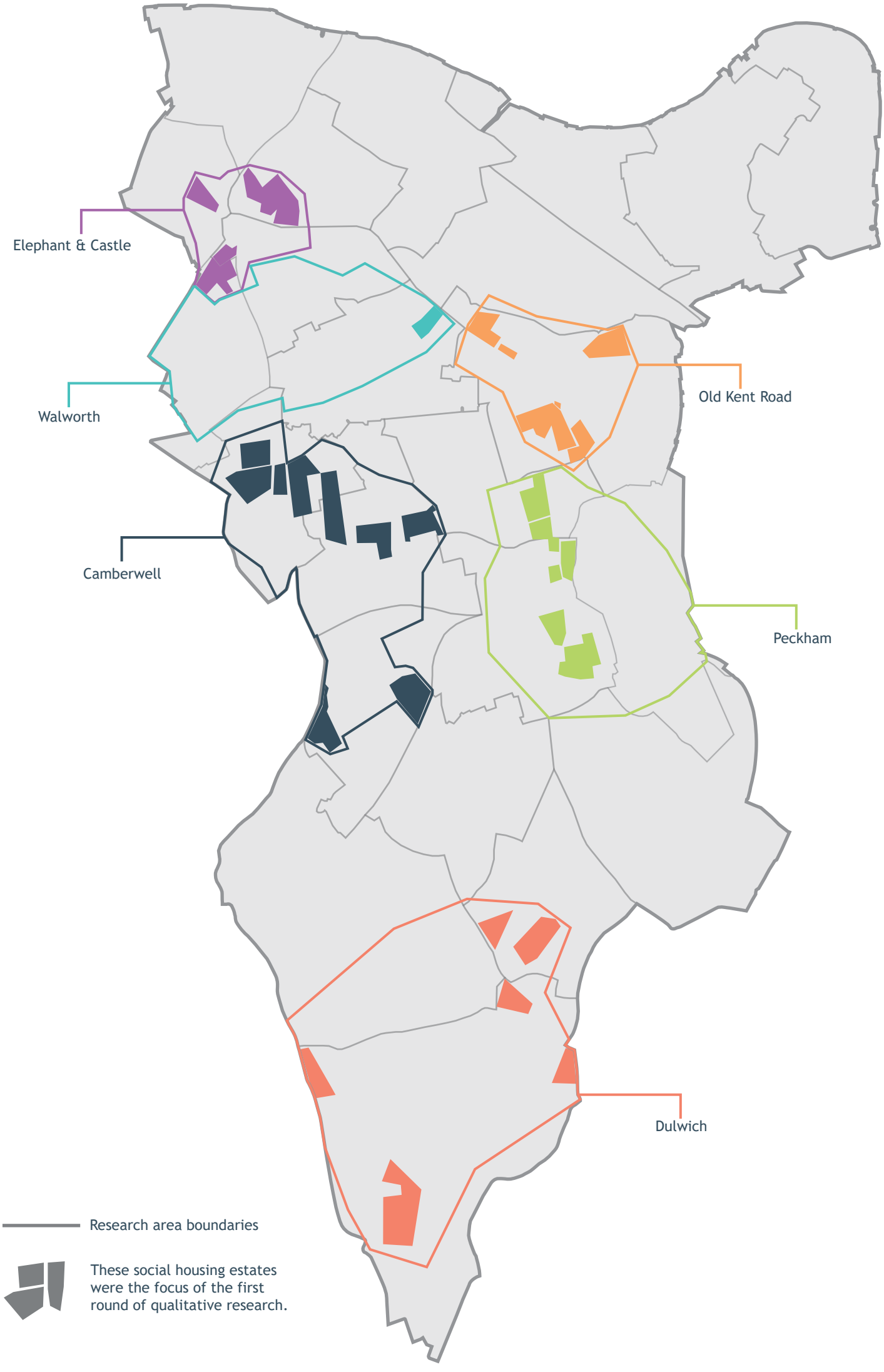
The research explored the impact of COVID-19 across the borough, and daily life in six areas going through change in Camberwell, Elephant & Castle, Old Kent Road, Peckham, Walworth and the social housing estates in Dulwich.



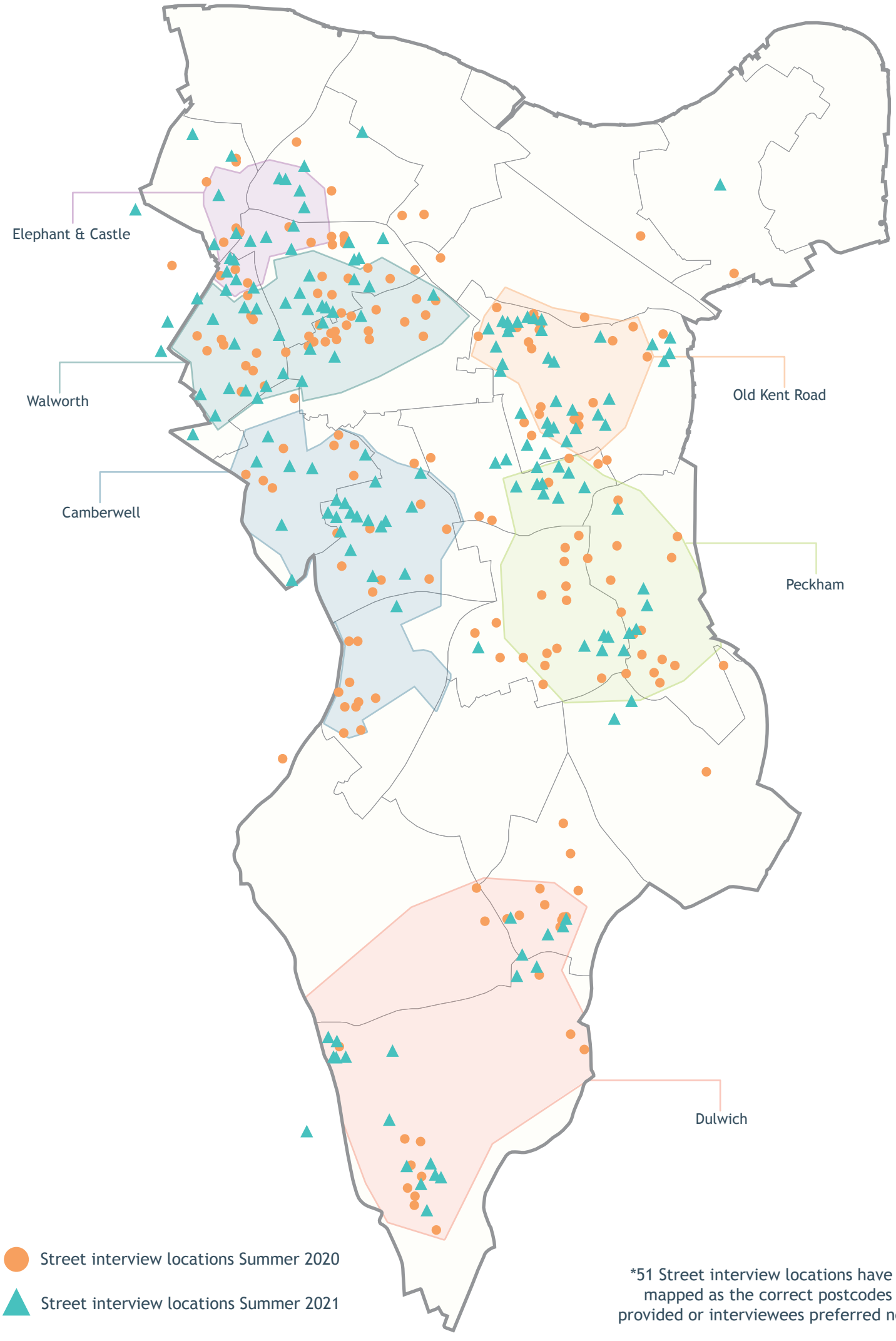
The six areas that became the focus of the research were prioritised after discussion with Southwark officers and other stakeholders. The intention was to focus on the neighbourhoods and residents that are most likely to be affected by change and regeneration, and within these to focus on the people likely to be most sharply affected by change. The six areas included places that are experiencing regeneration programmes delivered by the council and other public sector agencies, particularly Elephant & Castle, the Old Kent Road and Walworth; and two areas – Camberwell and Peckham - where agency intervention is on a smaller scale yet house price and demographic change are reshaping the neighbourhoods. The social housing estates in Dulwich were going through more gradual change but are also affected by wider changes in the south of the borough.

A separate report brings together key findings from the residents survey, the in-depth study about the experience of people who are financially vulnerable, the research with Southwark young advisors, the online survey of local businesses, and the online stakeholder engagement. A third report synthesises the key themes that cut across the borough-wide and area-based research. Finally, the research with the Southwark Young Advisors carried out in December 2020 and January 2021 is also featured in a separate report.

The quotes used in this report have been edited for clarity and were not always verbatim. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, researchers were not able to audiorecord interviews and relied on written notes taken during conversations.


Elephant & Castle
Walworth
Camberwell
Old Kent Road
Peckham
Dulwich
Research area boundaries
These social housing estates were the focus of the first round of qualitative research.

Street interview locations*



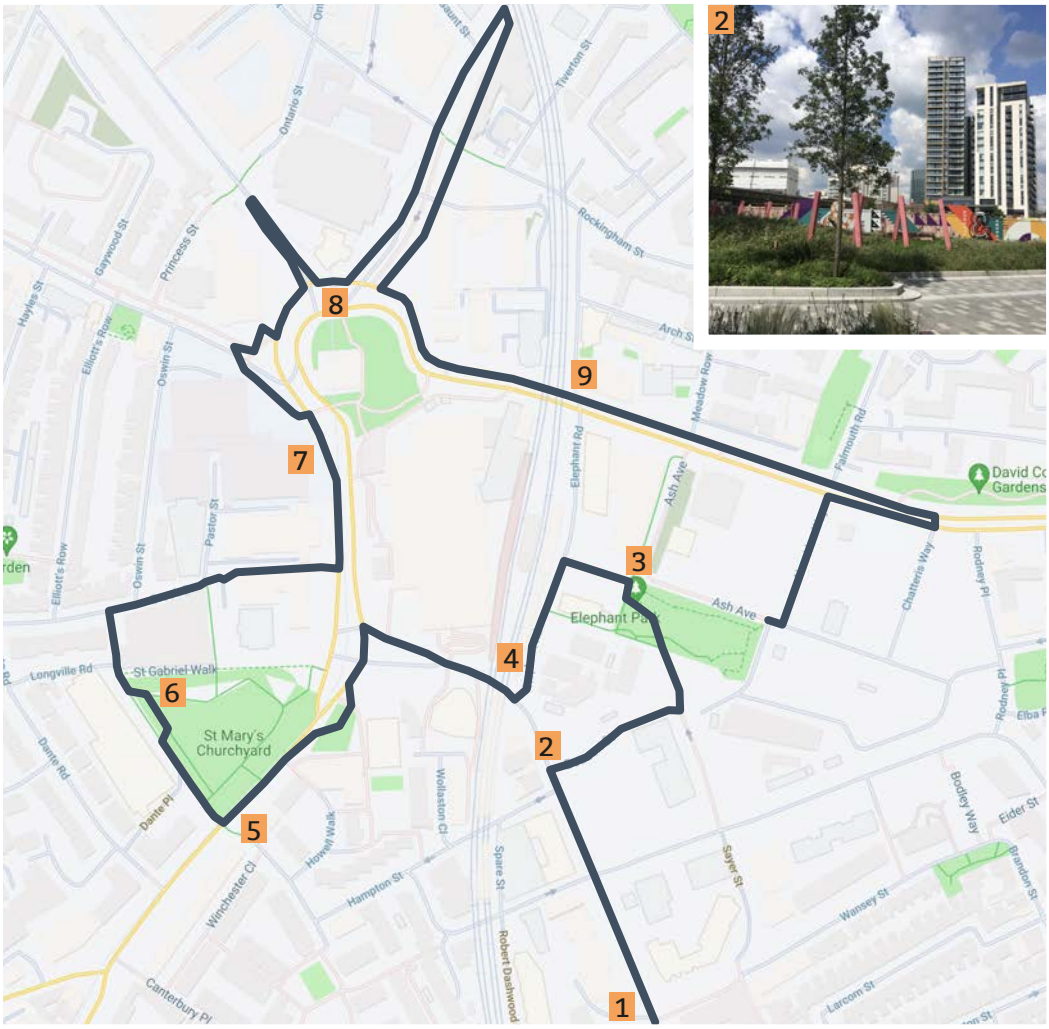
Street interview locations Summer 2020

Street interview locations Summer 2021

*51 Street interview locations have not been mapped as the correct postcodes were not provided or interviewees preferred not to say.

Elephant & Castle

Elephant and Castle



The neighbourhoods in the proximity of the roundabout have been at the centre of recent development, from the regeneration of the Heygate Estate to the demolition of the Elephant & Castle shopping Centre.

The tower buildings that have replaced older structures stand out, but the ongoing construction in the area makes the skyline and streetscape feel provisional. Some of the new buildings close to Elephant Park and St. Mary's Churchyard are mixed-use with retail, cultural and community-oriented spaces on the ground level. The redevelopment has brought new amenities and services, attracting a wider range of people to the area.

New street furniture was added to Elephant Park and near the former Walworth Library.

But the traffic remains a predominant feature of the environment here, with pedestrians, cars, buses, bikes and scooters vying for priority.

Elephant & Castle

This section sets out the findings of the research in Elephant & Castle, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Diversity, accessibility of amenities and familiarity with the area were key in making people feel they belong. People enjoy the area's diversity and its distinct identity, highlighting that there is respect for different communities and their cultures. But living side-by-side does not always mean interacting across ethnic and socio-economic boundaries. Many residents felt that different groups only come together when they have a common purpose such as a football game, a parents' group meeting or a mutual aid group.
- Local markets, pubs, the leisure centre (The Castle Centre), and the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre (which was still open during the first phase of research) were key social infrastructure, supporting local relationships and neighbourliness in the area. The Cinema Museum and Imperial War Museum were also mentioned by residents as important places for socialising in the area.
- Proximity to central London, connectivity and the cycling infrastructure are also seen as major assets. However, traffic and pollution were issues of concern. Some connected these to the Elephant & Castle regeneration, which is thought to have increased the severity of both problems. Some residents spoke enthusiastically about how the low traffic neighbourhood measures implemented in summer 2020 improved air quality and street safety.
- The difficulties experienced by 'invisible' groups with an irregular legal status became more noticeable to people in the area during the pandemic. Stakeholders working with migrants reported that these groups can be excluded from formal support or may exclude themselves because they fear the repercussions that might come from engaging with the authorities. They also noted that some Latin American migrants with irregular legal status experienced increased isolation during lockdowns as they had few contacts outside their work, and had to rely on overburdened social support networks.
- Perceptions of safety varied slightly for people from different age and ethnic groups, with Black, Asian and minority ethnic, and young and elderly groups experiencing some unease, especially in the evening and at night. A number of traders and residents noted that there is a need for better lighting and security on Elephant Road.
- People's perceptions of local change were tied to their feelings of belonging in the area. Longstanding residents and newcomers spoke about how the ongoing change in Elephant & Castle is affecting local communities, especially Black, Asian and minority ethnic and lower-income communities. They felt that there are competing priorities for the redevelopment of the local area. Many people raised questions about which groups get to direct local change and whose needs are prioritised. There are mixed views about the changing 'character' of the area around the Elephant & Castle roundabout and about who will benefit from this long-term change.
- The majority of residents and traders reported feeling a lack of individual control over decisions affecting the area. Some of the people involved in Tenants and Residents Associations, local groups or informal community groups had more positive views about their influence over developments, bringing up experiences of working with others to shape their neighbourhoods. But even those with more positive experiences of neighbourhood initiatives highlighted that there is no clear route to alter planning decisions about larger scale development.
- The changing business landscape is affecting local people and communities differently. Some

reported the loss of independent businesses on which they used to rely for shopping, support and socialisation. Others, including both people new to the area and some residents who have lived in the area for over ten years, were positive about the new shops, cafes and restaurants in Elephant Park. They noted that the new amenities have become part of their everyday routines, providing alternatives to the longer-standing ethnic shops, and that they are places to socialise with friends and family.

- Stakeholders and residents commented that the pandemic has affected the small shops in the Elephant & Castle area more than larger stores. Throughout the pandemic, the loss of jobs, and the decline in business footfall remained important concerns for small businesses, especially for traders that had just been relocated from the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre.

Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

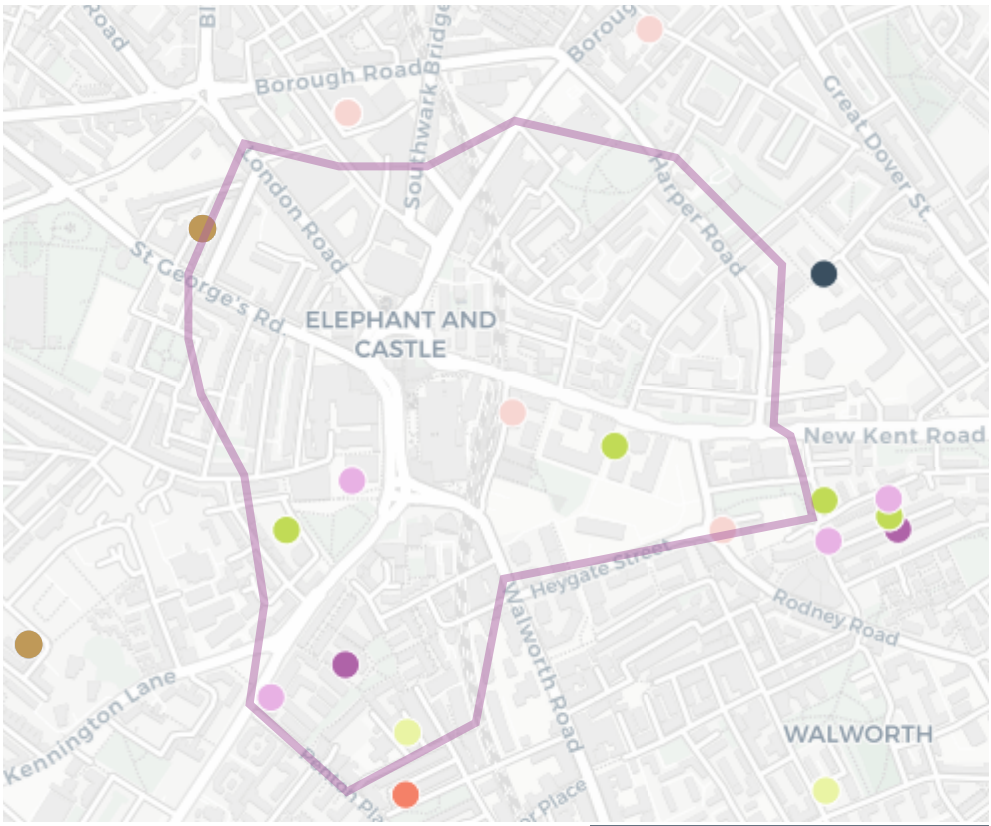
Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "interesting-things-to-do") is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year- and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Word cloud: how people described Elephant & Castle in street interviews in summer 2020 (left) & summer 2021 (right)

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020

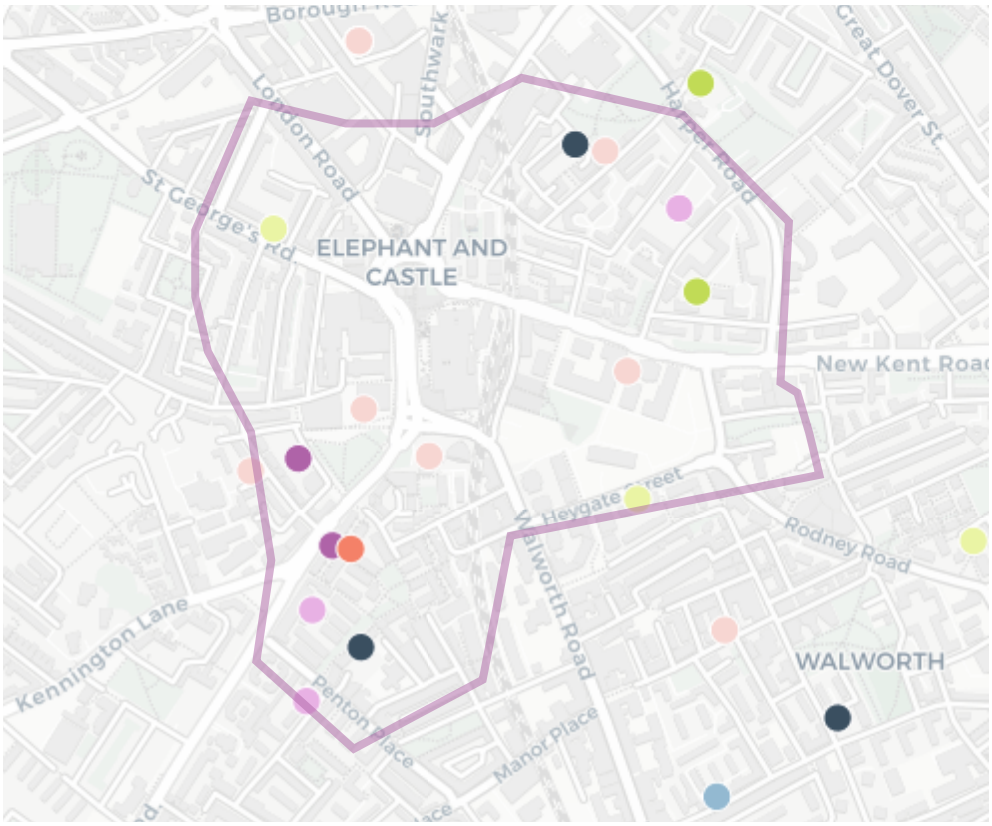


Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

1 1 6 1

Community
The redevelopment
Parks
The green
Shopping facilities
Proximity
Transport connections
Cleanliness
Other
Research area boundary

Summer 2021



Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

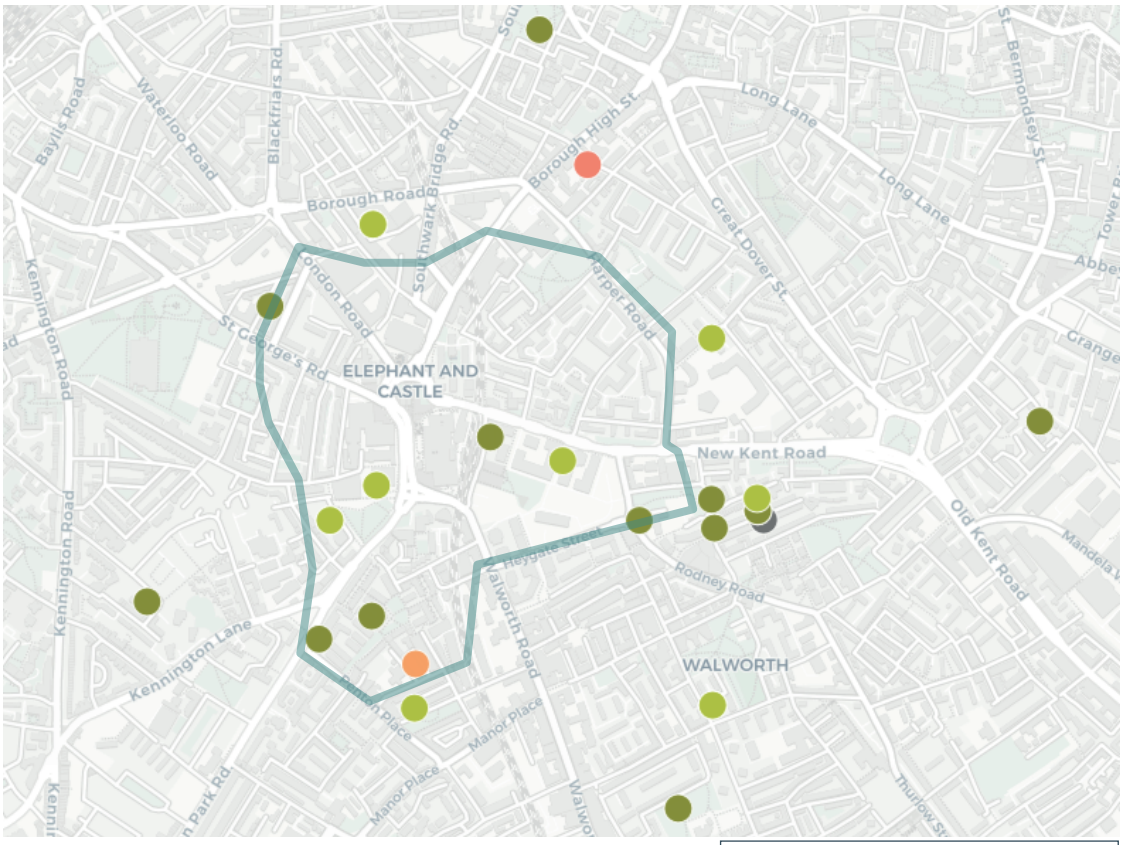
1 2 3 1 1 2 3

Community
The redevelopment
Parks
Diversity
Shopping facilities
Proximity
Transport connections
Location
Other
Research area boundary

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

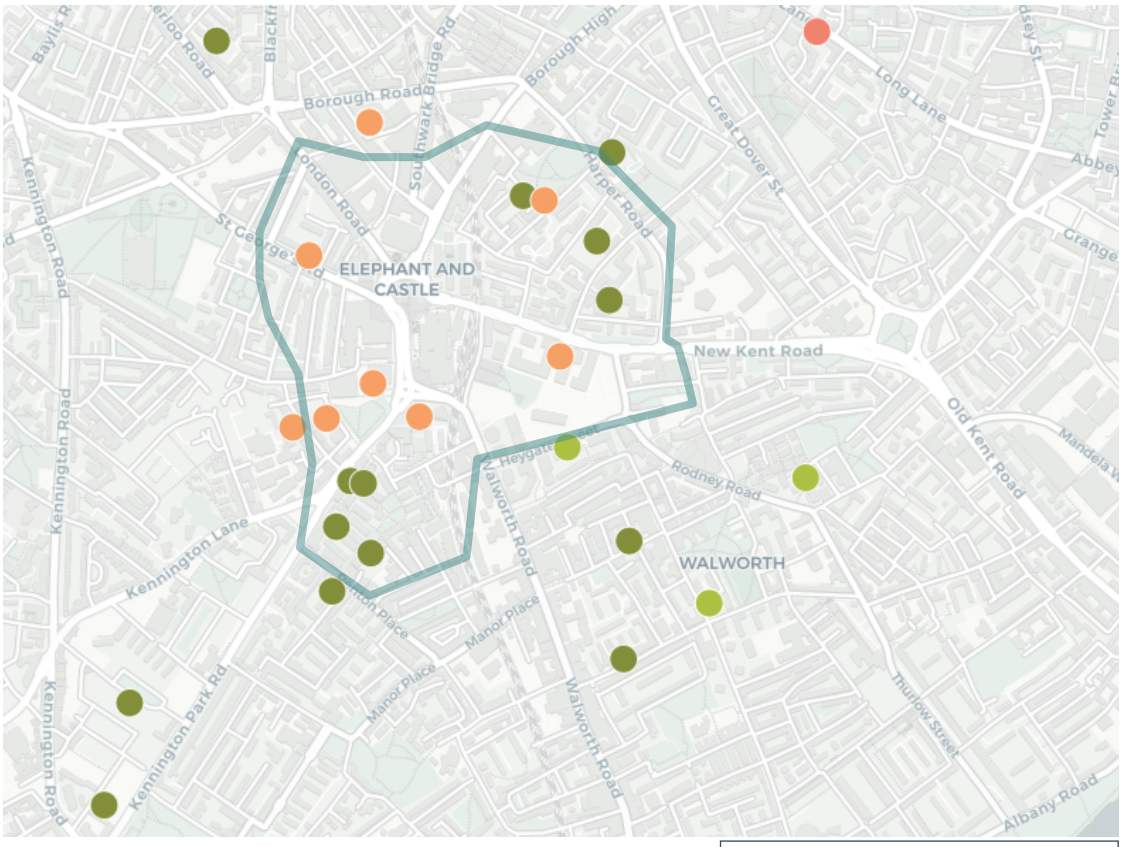
Summer 2020



Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 1 3 4

- Don't know
- Don't feel safe all the time
- Not safe at night
- Mostly safe but the park can be unsafe
- Mostly safe
- Yes
- Research area boundary

Summer 2021



Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
2 3 2 5

- No
- Don't feel safe all the time
- Not safe at night
- Mostly safe
- Yes
- Research area boundary

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 26 in-depth interviews: ten in phase 1, eight in pahse 2, eight in phase 3, including TRAs, a GP, a faith organisation, an academic institution, community centres, local agencies and activists and local councillors

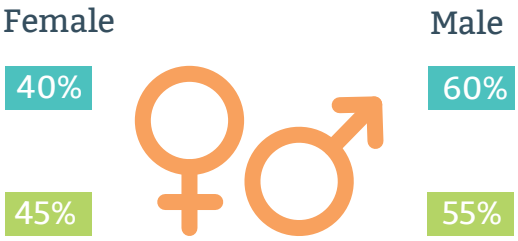
Traders: interviews with 14 traders, including a mini supermarket, coffee shop, food shop, butcher shop, restaurant.

Local residents: walking ethnographies with seven residents. Street interviews with 95 residents, demographics below.

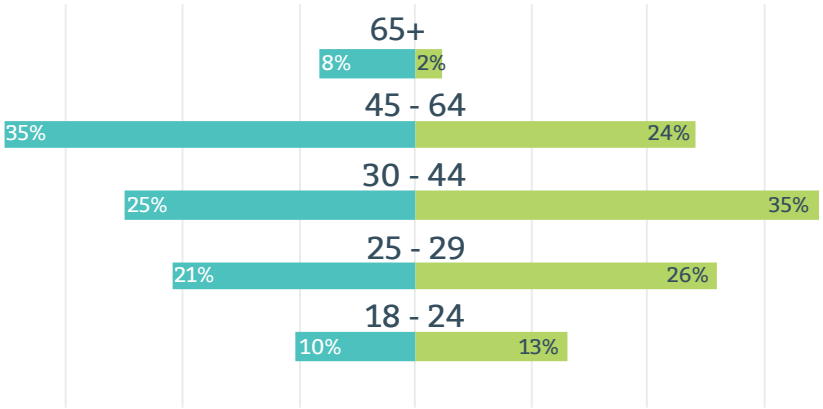
2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 48

2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 47

Gender



Age



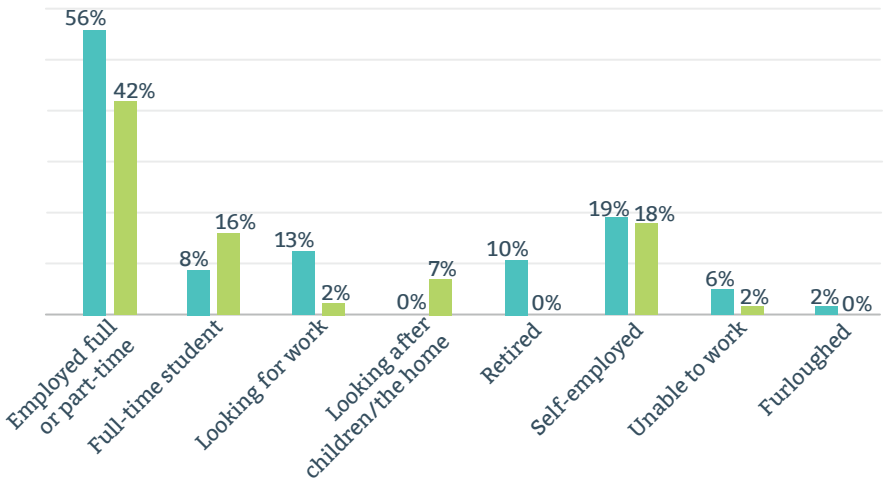
Lived in the area

10%	19%	< 1 year
21%	13%	1 - 3 years
15%	9%	4 - 5 years
10%	11%	6 - 10 years
13%	17%	11 - 20 years
31%	31%	20+ years

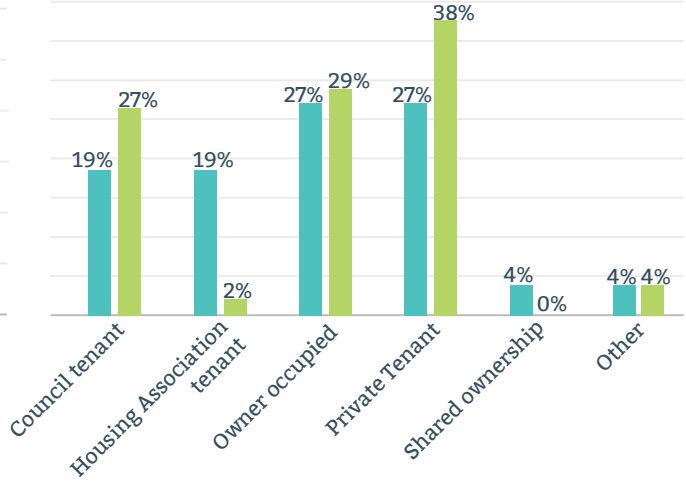
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	13%	7%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	13%	20%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	15%	0%
White	51%	61%
Other ethnic group	9%	13%

Employment



Tenure



Walk through Elephant & Castle:

"New residential tower blocks have been added to the streetscape. On the ground level, most of these have commercial and office spaces, with colourful storefronts and outdoor sitting areas. There is new street furniture all-around the Elephant Park and the former Walworth Library. The new spaces seem to clash with the existing styles, heights, colours and construction materials. The tower blocks dwarf the older housing stock, creating a new visual identity for the local area.

There are well-maintained and well-used parks and green spaces sprinkled throughout the area. The new amenities and green spaces have attracted families with kids and more affluent consumers.

In the afternoon, the parks and green spaces are crowded with families with kids, people walking dogs, and construction workers on lunch break. There are a lot of commuters moving in and out the area. The redeveloped open spaces and green spaces feel a bit like islands in a sea of cars and people transiting the area.

There are also plenty of outdoor community spaces, however, the spaces located in the immediate proximity of main roads seem to be less popular. The informal social infrastructure – shops, cafes, restaurants, pubs – are well used by a variety of people and in good physical condition."

(Transect walk fieldnotes, Elephant & Castle, 4th August 2021)

Detailed findings

PHASE 1: Summer 2020

A place to belong

The majority of local residents reported that they felt they belonged to the local area. Length of stay, comfort, accessibility of local amenities and diversity were listed as the main factors giving people a sense of belonging. When asked about how local residents get along, the majority of residents were positive. They noted that, while the local area is diverse, there is respect for other communities and their cultures. Other residents had more neutral views about relationships between local communities, highlighting that local residents are only brought together across ethnic and socio-economic boundaries by a common purpose.

"I think it's a diverse area, you tend to see a lot of segregation, commonalities like dogs or gym bring people together but apart from that no. Diverse but not integrated." (Resident)

The elements of social infrastructure that support local relationships and a sense of belonging include pubs, local markets, the local leisure centre (The Castle Centre), and the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre (which was still open during the first phase of the research). The Cinema Museum and Imperial War Museum were also mentioned by residents as places for socialising and are seen as assets of the community. Some people noted the importance of streets for socialising with neighbours. Stakeholders mentioned that local events and community activities play an important role in bringing people together in the local area and help create a sense of belonging.

"There are many activities and events the Latin American community organises for their community members, such as the "Carnaval del Pueblo" that used to take place in Burgess Park. The sense of community that appears in many of these events and places (such as restaurants and churches where people connect with others) is what makes people want to live [in Elephant & Castle]." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders and residents said that feelings of belonging and feelings toward change are interconnected, highlighting how ongoing change in Elephant & Castle is affecting local communities. Longstanding residents as well as newcomers mentioned that there are competing priorities for the redevelopment of the area, raising questions about which groups get to direct local change and whose needs matter most.

Rose.

We started the walk close to St Mary's Church playground, wandered toward the former local library, then headed to Elliott's Row Pocket Park and West Square Gardens.

Rose speaks highly of local parks, and thinks St Mary's Church playground is an important local amenity. She finds it easy to stop there with her children after school and wait for them to let off energy. She recalls that in her early years in the neighbourhood there were no parks and playgrounds.

When we reach the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre, Rose points out the convenience of having it close by. As a parent, the shopping centre is really helpful , offering a variety of things she needs for her family - food, clothes and shoes. Rose and her kids used to love the bowling alley, she decries the fact that it was shut down and that there is no local alternative . She talks about how the closing of the shopping centre will affect residents with reduced mobility, as they will have to drive or take the bus to shop on Walworth Road.

Rose thinks that there are other places in London that are better but finds it convenient to live here because it's central and well connected.

"Elephant & Castle has become a bit too built up, you can't see outside of your window. It feels a bit claustrophobic, didn't feel like this 10-15 years ago."

She does not feel like she belongs in the local area, because her friends do not live in Elephant and Castle and because she does not feel there is a strong sense of community in the area.

Some residents were positive about new businesses, saying that these have become part of their everyday routines as they are places to socialise with friends and family. The "diversified" new business environment is making them feel welcome and supports their consumption habits. A few residents remarked that the new businesses are providing alternatives to the longer-standing shops which serve particular minority ethnic communities. However, a large number of the residents interviewed were critical of these changes. They mentioned that the loss of independent businesses made them and others feel displaced and raised questions about whether they still belong to the area. They were not sure they could afford to remain part of the community in years to come. Regardless of their views on change, residents were concerned about the future of the longstanding Black, Asian and minority ethnic and lower-income communities in Elephant & Castle.

"I'm very happy with the change. Best thing that'll happen in the area. The local community will be affected. People moved out. Community has changed. People in new buildings don't mix in the community. We call them 'building people' and us 'community people.' [It would] be good to do more community activities in the park, such as a festival." (Resident)

Local change and control

The research reveals that change can mean different things to different groups, depending on its impact on local communities and the built environment. Some residents focused on the positive impact of local change, highlighting the improved green spaces, cycling infrastructure, and other new amenities such as coffee shops and restaurants. The majority of residents and stakeholders, however, focused their attention on the negative impact of change. They noted that recent changes have disproportionally impacted lower-income and Black, Asian and minority ethnic local residents and traders, and have had a detrimental impact on feelings of belonging and perceptions of community life. A large number of local residents reported that local regeneration has unfolded without taking local needs and communities into account.

"I don't object to regeneration but I object to the way they're doing it. I object to traders who have been here 15 years that have got nowhere to work. I used to have a stall. Lots of high streets are shutting, betting shops, charity shops, cafes, there's not enough variety in the new developments and not enough social housing." (Resident)

When asked whether they felt they had a sense of control over local change, the majority of residents and traders answered that they did not feel they had control. Some responses referred to everyday incidents that did not get resolved when reported to the council or the police, while others referred to larger issues such as the way the planning process is set up or who gets to participate in local consultations, including who has the time and resources to attend these meetings.

"No, no sense of control at all. There is very little from the police to solve problems. That's one of the reasons why I can't even put a table outside of the market: if I did that, it would be used by people who engage in anti-social behaviour. If I report them to the police, nothing happens … and it's something that has happened for many years now." (Trader)

Mike.

The walk started at Victory Community Garden and we strolled towards West Square. On our way back, we stopped by the East Street Market and Nursery Row Park.

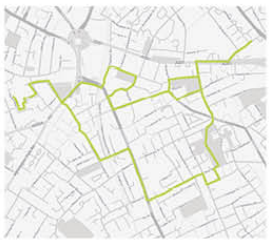
Mike thinks green spaces are important for the local area, and have been a lifeline for him and other residents during the first lockdown. He highlights Nursery Row Park, how it is welcoming to a variety of people and activities. Another green space he has enjoyed in recent years is the wild garden behind East Street Market, which is maintained by local residents.

"East Market has always been cheap and cheerful but it's not a destination for people."

Mike says that traffic has become more manageable and street connectivity and safety have improved with redevelopment. He believes local green links have improved the walkability of the area, and he praises the maintenance of local underpasses.As we pass through East Street Market, he notes how important it is, because of its stalls and its

connection to the African community. Mike says that he would like to be able to shop locally for everything he needs but cannot.

Crossing the street in front of the shopping centre, he reflects that new developments cluster around the Elephant Park but that nothing is happening on Walworth Road. In his opinion, East Market and Walworth Road should cater both to working and middle-class residents. He thinks there needs to be a clearer vision for the future of Walworth Road.



More positive views on control over local change were voiced by residents who were involved in TRAs or have had experience in other local groups. But even those who expressed positive views brought up the fact that there is no clear route to effect local change.

"Market forces are unleashed on the area. It's difficult to push against. There's no clear route to impact change and have your voice heard. It may come to no good even when you organise, the market forces might still win." (Resident)

A healthier life

Well-established community spaces and local networks were mentioned by both stakeholders and residents as resources that contribute to physical and mental health. The research indicates that this is particularly important for migrants, as many rely substantially on this social infrastructure to socialise, get advice, or look for jobs. A few mentioned that people from various local communities go to Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre and East Street Market not only for shopping or to send money to families in their countries of origin but also because, in these places, they meet up with people from their communities. Through their impact on mental and emotional health, these places are seen to benefit health in the area.

"I believe that the strength and weaknesses of Elephant & Castle is related to the degree to which people have or not networks of support." (Stakeholder)

Local stakeholders, traders and residents agreed to a large extent that the number of homeless people and

people with mental health problems in the area is a challenge. Some stakeholders reported that an increasing number of charities are trying to help homeless people. Stakeholder and residents believe that there is a need for a 24 hours support service to help people in need.

Another issue mentioned by a number of stakeholders was the connection between health and poverty. Stakeholders highlighted how low paid or precarious jobs become an important determinant of health. Stakeholders and residents also brought attention to pollution and traffic and the impact on health. Some connected these to the Elephant & Castle regeneration, which has increased traffic and pollution. Several residents, however, mentioned that recent "low traffic neighbourhood" measures have improved air quality and street safety, which has an impact on both their physical and mental health.

Safety

Most residents reported positive perceptions of safety during day time. Some said that in the evening and at night they are more cautious, avoiding certain areas. Safety is perceived differently by people from different age and ethnic groups, with Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and young and elderly groups experiencing most unease. Local residents who have lived in the local area for more than ten years reported feeling generally safe.

"Yes, I feel safe, I cycle everywhere. Different if you're a girl or teen. I'm not an at-risk demographic." (Resident)

"Yes, I feel safe. I've lived here a long time. Everyone knows me. I know the street." (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Our research shows that many residents and stakeholders believe that the main strength of Elephant & Castle lies in its diversity. Relatedly, stakeholders see the area as a hub for different activities: it is an important centre for commerce of all kinds of products (many people go to Elephant & Castle to shop for things that are not available in areas they live), and the universities bring to the area an enormous diversity of people (local and international).

Jeffrey.

We walked along Walworth Road and the smaller streets behind it. Jeffrey is critical of the tall buildings that are popping up all over Elephant & Castle and worries that the physical

transformation of the area is changing its character.

He values the diversity of local communities and is concerned that regeneration could erase the area's heritage.

Jeffrey doesn't spend much time walking around the area and he doesn't usually socialise with friends locally. He shops in the area for cooking ingredients. He talks about the different shops in the area, he knows exactly what he likes from each one and his routines are shaped by his appreciation of what is available locally.

Jeffrey enjoys local parks and gardens and remarks how these are spaces for socialising, giving the area a community feel. He is aware that it takes effort to maintain them and knows that many residents are involved in this.

Before the first lockdown, kids used to play around Canterbury Place, making the area feel welcoming. He describes how St Mary's Churchyard park attracts drinkers early in the day and thinks they could be a menace for families with children.

"There's too much traffic and pollution around the pedestrian/cycling crossing next to St Mary's Church playground."

Elephant & Castle is an important transport hub and an important meeting point. The area is home to people from very different backgrounds. Other assets mentioned by residents, stakeholders and traders were proximity to central London, local connectivity and the cycling infrastructure.

Stakeholders and residents mentioned the main challenges as high levels of unemployment, low-quality jobs and the lack of translation services, including at GPs, hospitals, schools and council offices. A few stakeholders raised the difficulties experienced by 'invisible' groups with an 'irregular legal status'. People can be excluded from formal support because of their legal status, or may exclude themselves because they fear the repercussions that might come from engaging with the authorities. Stakeholders noted that people in this situation often have low trust in state institutions and rely on the few local organisations (such as GPs and food banks) that do not ask about legal status, or on informal networks, usually from the same religious or ethnic background. Some stakeholders also mentioned that the lack of translation services increases stress and makes some local residents prone to isolation and depression because they cannot communicate with local institutions or access local support.

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

As well as the economic challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders also spoke about mental health problems triggered or aggravated by lockdown. Stakeholders reported that some residents were scared and have not left home for three or four months. Older people, children and teenagers, and people dealing with existing vulnerabilities (including poverty, unemployment and homelessness) were flagged as the groups most significantly affected.

The research findings bring attention to the rapid changes that took place during the summer of 2020 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and their impact on everyday life. Among these were reduced economic activity, people's changed perception of engaging with others outside their homes, the emergence of mutual aid groups, and access and awareness of council support. One stakeholder noted that at the beginning of the summer "you could see [the impact on COVID-19] on the streets. Elephant & Castle became a desert." By August, however, things had changed again. Some traders spoke not only about the transformation of their business because of COVID-19 health protocols but also about structural changes in

their business product. Likewise, for many residents finding employment post-lockdown has become more challenging not only because of a lack of jobs but also because community spaces where opportunities used to be advertised locally remained closed.

“A decision was made to change: the business changed because of the pandemic. Before, it used to be a restaurant where people could dance. Now, it is a minimarket where Latin products are sold. The change has been very positive so far." (Trader)

“COVID-19 has certainly brought issues related to mental health and stress. [A] small survey of [registered residents] showed that there is a lot of anxiety, preoccupation, isolation, and that most do not have access to basic information because it is all in English. As such, many [of the registered residents] who try to watch the news in English do not really know what is happening around them. Likewise, the majority of them have lost their jobs.” (Stakeholder)

Both stakeholders and traders noted that the small shops in the Elephant & Castle area have been affected more than larger stores. Smaller shops have also faced difficulties changing to cashless payments and moving some of their business online. Overall, the uncertainty and lack of stability affected the local area at multiple scales: at the individual one through shops and residents, and at a community level by halting or limiting the activity of local groups.

“The fact that the shops in the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre closed meant that people were not where they used to, many times, spend their entire days. Likewise, people could not socialise anymore.” (Stakeholder)

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

The closure of the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre featured prominently in our interviews with stakeholders in the second phase of research. The shopping centre highlighted differences in views about the ongoing change in the local area. Many people were left feeling that there is little sense of community. Stakeholders noted that Black Lives Matter and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have brought renewed attention to the different experiences that groups have in their everyday lives. The lack of interaction between communities with different lived experiences appears as a common thread in the conversations in this phase of the research.

"People seem to be living separate lives. It's easy to live in the new blocks without meeting people from other walks of life." (Stakeholder)

At the same time, stakeholders mentioned that the lack of affordable housing and the need for mutual aid during the pandemic have brought people together across ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Stakeholders said that the pandemic has made new partnerships between local residents, different communities and activists possible. Many stakeholders were left wondering if local mutual aid groups and grassroots efforts will survive after the end of the pandemic, and how these could be best supported in the future if they are to continue their work.

"Memory fades … mutual aid groups that haven't been able to enshrine themselves in people's minds will die out. Some of them will stay to help with the 'new normal', others will disappear because their purpose will disappear." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

Stakeholders noted how closing the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre has had a major impact on the liveliness of the area. They mentioned that the businesses that used to be in the shopping centre were an important part of the Elephant & Castle community. It was frequently noted that local people regard its demolition with mixed feelings. Some have welcomed the change, while others fear that its closure is having a wider impact, disrupting the everyday routines of many residents who used to rely on the shopping centre for shopping, socialising and support.

Stakeholders also reported that residents living close to the shopping centre are worried about the noise and pollution that the redevelopment will bring. There are fears that longstanding residents might not be able to afford to continue living in the local area because of high housing costs. There is concern that some of the new developments will remain unoccupied while waiting lists for social housing do not get any shorter. Some stakeholders were also concerned with the overall transformation of the physical environment of the Elephant & Castle area, reflecting on its impact on local services, accessibility and mobility.

"Don't fill everything with buildings, there need to be spaces for people to socialise!" (Stakeholder)

Another issue that came up more often in this second phase of interviews is the relationship between different local groups and the council. Stakeholders noted that community groups have worked more closely with the council during the pandemic and with better results. Some felt that there is room for improvement, especially in communications. Ideas about how the council could improve this included using posters at gathering places like bus stops and commercial centres, a website that would motivate local people to share their ideas on local change, creating innovation tournaments and podcasts. Some stakeholders also emphasised that good communication campaigns rely on "word of mouth."

A healthier life

Loneliness, isolation and mental health issues dominated our discussions about the health of local residents. Stakeholders flagged that loneliness and mental health issues have disproportionately increased among young, older people, and Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Stakeholders working with the Latin American groups noted that young people from these communities, especially those living in overcrowded households, were especially affected.

Stakeholders noted that services provided by charities focusing on mental health and wellbeing are most in demand, as well as those providing food. The grey days, the rain and cold weather had made most people stay inside during the second lockdown. Low mood was compounded by the fact that the pandemic has been dragging on for so long. Stakeholders said that many older people have not seen their children and families in person for many months.

"With COVID, loneliness has become more of an issue. Loneliness has changed as well: it's not just about being alone like before COVID-19, it's more about the inability to hug, see people, of physical touch. It has led to a different type of loneliness." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders noted that TRAs have had an important role in tackling loneliness and isolation, especially for older people. Some reported that isolation is probably worse for some of the recent Latin American migrants with irregular citizenship status, who have few contacts outside of the people they meet in their low paying jobs. Likewise, digital and data exclusion have remained significant issues for many Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, which puts them at a higher risk of social isolation. Stakeholders noted that these issues will have an important impact on individuals' need for social, emotional and material support.

Safety

Local perceptions of safety have not changed since the first phase of stakeholder interviews, with the Elephant & Castle area being generally seen as a safe area. It was noted that, like in other parts of the borough, gang activity and drug dealing dropped during the first lockdown but bounced back afterwards.

Local assets and challenges

The transformation of the local area is seen as both a productive and disruptive force in Elephant & Castle. On the positive side, the local area is seen as dynamic, filled with energy and vibrant communities. On the negative side, the high turnover of people in the area, especially students and young professionals, raises concerns about the area's sense of community and the medium- to long-term affordability for longstanding local residents.

Stakeholders noted that community centres, local hubs and youth centres are missing in the local area. As a stakeholder put it, there is a need "to create a space not a service", "a proper hub", a space where you can make a cup of tea, that is welcoming to the local communities, that is multigenerational and multi-ethnic, and where service users can develop more personal connections to those working there: "don't call it a hub if it's just a job."

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

The lack of jobs and the loss of liveliness were major concerns in the area. Stakeholders mentioned that some students came back in October but their presence has not made things much better. Many noted that there are few students around and those who are in the area do not go out very often or at all.

Many stakeholders highlighted that moving services online, including health and council services, has posed continuous challenges to older people. Lack of access to devices, insufficient internet access and limited technical skills have remained an issue for older people even though council-sponsored programmes have been put in place and various community groups are working to tackle digital exclusion.

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A place to belong

As in the previous two phases of research, most of the local residents we spoke to reported that they felt they belong to the local area. Both longstanding residents and newcomers listed diversity of the area as a key reason for feeling that they belong. Longstanding residents also talked about the importance of being familiar with local shops and being able to rely on the area's social infrastructure, while newcomers noted that making new routines in the area helped them feel they have become part of the neighbourhood.

"If you walk into any shop or the barbers, they are owned by local people, they have been here for so long, I feel part of it. I've been here 25 years … you feel like it's your own area and the community." (Resident)

"Absolutely [I belong]. Again, [because] it's multicultural and diverse, it makes it easy for anyone, accepting of any cultures, anyone will feel like they belong. My girlfriend works in the local school, so we're quite invested in the area. There are a mix of races and cultures." (Resident)

Local parks, playgrounds and pubs were mentioned as key social spaces for building local support networks. A few residents and stakeholders reported, however, that it is not always easy for local people to come together and interact with others in the area, and that during the pandemic months people had even fewer chances to connect with others.

"Networks are affected - [people] don't see each other." (Stakeholder)

Mateo.

The walk began at Chatica café, across the street from Castle Square, and we strolled towards West Square along the backstreets behind the Elephant and Castle roundabout, following the recently built cycling lanes.

Southwark Playhouse is one of his favourite local venues; it "feeds his imagination" and it is "part of the story" of the local area. Walking past Mercato Metropolitano, Mateo mentions that he enjoys the venue. Though it started out commercially, he thinks it has grown organically into a community space for different groups. However, he regrets the lack of free things to do in the area. "If you don't pay, there's nothing to do" he notes.

Mateo has mixed feelings about regeneration. On the one hand, there is a need for housing. On the other, he feels the rate at which new buildings are popping up is "unsustainable, and it's not solving the problem." He has noticed that many of the new apartments seem to be standing empty. He worries that the built environment is losing its local character, "it'll all look like NYC".

Mateo would like to see more LGBTQIA+ venues in the area, as many of them have been closing down over the past years. He sees Elephant & Castle as being a very diverse area with an important Latin American population and an Afro-Carribean community. He thinks everyone mixes well at key sites like pubs and outdoor spaces.

"Having no control creates a sense of despair."

While the pandemic made everyone feel more isolated, the majority of stakeholders said that for migrants the situation was more difficult, partly because there was little communication between different ethnic groups. Some added that, before the pandemic, some community spaces such as local churches functioned as social spaces, bringing together residents from a wide range of backgrounds, helping migrants feel they belong in the area. As many of those places closed during the pandemic, stakeholders were worried that people's mental health has been severely impacted and that rebuilding social ties will take time.

"How do we rebuild the connection [between different groups]?" (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

Like in the second phase of research, the demolition of the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre was at the centre of discussions about change in the area. Views have remained divided among those we spoke to, which included traders, stakeholders, longstanding local residents and newcomers. There is agreement that, at the beginning, the sense of loss over the closure of the shopping centre was prevalent.

As the demolition continued as planned, some think that "things are getting better" and are waiting to see what benefits the new planning might bring. Others, however, said that the redevelopment is not something helping the local community. They explained that the disappearance of the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre has meant the loss of an important community space, and that there is little investment locally in the Latin American community.

"[Some] are missing it [the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre] like mad! You had everything there, it was everything you needed". (Stakeholder)

The need for clearer information and more signposting about the traders' new addresses was raised by residents and traders alike. An important community hub is trying to fill this need by providing easy access to information about where traders were relocated.

"We need help with promoting. If the landlord had a banner on the former shopping center they could display our faces because people still come looking for us and don't know where we are, it would help. People ring me and I direct them, they're like 'where are you?' Our postcode has changed, there was a misunderstanding. Deliveroo can't find us, that's an issue for restaurants." (Trader)

Some stakeholders believe that the community has been increasingly involved in the redevelopment process, as one stakeholder put it, "as long as the community is taken into consideration and feels included in the project, everything seems to have worked out well, with no complaints." Yet other stakeholders were more sceptical, flagging that in Elephant & Castle there are at least two different groups of Latin Americans. There are those who have lived in the area for a few generations, and then there are the new immigrants who are in a much more precarious situation. There is some concern that the council's attention goes towards the former, not the latter, group.

As in the previous two phases of research, the majority of residents and traders do not feel that they have control over what happens in their local area. A few also noted that an interface between local community organisations and large developers is missing. They thought the presence of such a mediator would balance the relations of power and "translate" between the interests of different groups. There is concern that some developers prioritise profits over the wellbeing of local people, as one stakeholder put it, "there needs to be a second bottom line, a wellbeing one."

"On the macro level, there's [no control]: with big developments, the word goes around to write the council and say your bit opposing it. I type a few lines and say something but I know that it'll go ahead, there's an inevitability about it. For example, they're planning a tower on the corner and people don't like it but it'll probably go ahead … But on the small scale, there are many ways to get involved, gardening in the squares, there's a good Residents' Association around Trinity Village, they're good at making their voice heard (for example they got traffic calming)." (Resident)

Casey & Mark.

The walk started close to Casey and Mark's home on Harper Road. They enjoy being able to walk everywhere in the borough and they frequently take long walks to local parks and the Southbank area.

As we walked, they shared stories about the area, from

the history of Newington Gardens to the more recent stories about the local pubs lost to redevelopment and tree activism on the former Heygate Estate.

Casey and Mark are part of the Tenants and Residents Association and participate actively in consultations about the local area. As we made our way through the neighbourhood, they pointed to rooftop extension projects and potential relocation spots for the Elephant & Castle shopping centre traders.

They don't think they have control over the changes transforming their streets.

They dedicate time to their allotment and work to ensure that other residents have access to allotments. To Casey and Mark, the allotment is many things: a green relaxing environment, a way to keep active and get out of their flat, and an important social space where they were able to come together with others safely even during the pandemic.

"It's nice to have neighbours come by and check on you...this is what being part of the community is!"

The issue of in-fill developments came up more prominently in this phase of the research. Stakeholders noted that planned in-fills have mobilised some groups in the local area, especially those who are critical of "making green spaces into housing". While the need for affordable housing has remained key to local people, not all think that in-fill developments are the solution, especially if these would entail replacing green spaces or playgrounds.

Another issue that was more frequently mentioned in this phase of research was the fact that the Elephant & Castle area has a "provisional" feel to it. Some local residents called it "a building site", and traders worried that the ongoing development will have a negative impact on the business footfall.

"It's very productive, multicultural, a meeting point for Latin Americans, very well-known. It's less active now, it's sad, the transition has been difficult with the development and what's happening now." (Trader)

Lastly, the concern over changes in the built environment is another difference between this round of research and the previous ones. This time around, more local residents and stakeholders brought up the changes in the physical landscape (some referred to them as being "striking"). It was noted that the physical changes are connected to changes in demographics, and residents and stakeholders appeared to be concerned that the change in the built environment might lead to the area "losing the local flavour". All things considered, a number of local residents are still weighing the pros and cons of local change, "I think it is for the better, but I don't know. It also affects people negatively because some are forced to move out and lost their jobs. But change is good, overall, it's better".

A healthier life

As in the previous two phases of research, stakeholders and residents alike said that loneliness was a big issue across age groups. Some also raised the issue of increased alcohol consumption and dealing with the lack of routines: "people have relied on work to keep sane", "if you're not self-disciplined, what would you do?".

Stakeholders working with migrant groups said that, throughout the pandemic, feeling isolated has been the key challenge. Feelings of isolation or feeling that they were disconnected from other people has led to an increasingly difficult situation, some stakeholders noted. Added to the already precarious job market situation, the current situation has made a lot of migrants develop high levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

Local residents and stakeholders agreed that young people and children are struggling given the lack of certainty about the future and the overall difficult employment situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A

few stakeholders brought up the negative impact of overreliance on technological devices over the pandemic months. While the reasons given were different, stakeholders also said that older people are struggling, especially from loneliness and isolation.

Stakeholders also mentioned that the pandemic months have been very difficult for young children who were confined inside their homes for hours and hours with their mothers. There was concern that they missed the camaraderie of their peers, which might have an impact on their wellbeing. A similar concern was raised about older people, some who had not been visited by anyone, as one stakeholder put it, "They were left with the radio and TV, some are mixing reality with TV because they don't have anything else to do".

Stakeholders also reported that the experience of the pandemic has been extremely difficult for deaf people and people with dementia, as they have been neglected and "suffered an enormous amount" from the isolation and overall disconnect. It was noted that older people with dementia also suffered because their support networks were affected by the pandemic, which led to further complications for them and their carers. Overall, stakeholders and many residents thought that the challenges to a healthy life were very much exacerbated by the pandemic.

Safety

As in the second phase of research, safety emerged as an issue of concern, as the views of residents and traders have shifted once more. They brought up concerns about safety after dark, some mentioned that there has been an increase in knife crime, robberies, alcohol-related violence, and drug dealing since summer 2020. A number of traders said that there needs to be better lighting and security on Elephant Road.

Some stakeholders also said that crime eased between the second and third lockdown but with the easing of the restrictions at the end of spring 2021 it increased. It was noted that, between Christmas 2020 and spring 2021, there was less drug dealing but that in May 2021 it returned to pre-pandemic levels. Some residents said that in the areas under construction around the Elephant & Castle roundabout it was common to see people using drugs. Overall, though, most local residents said that they feel safe, especially those familiar with the area. There is however awareness that some demographics are more impacted by local crime than others (for instance, a number of those interviewed said that young people and women are more at risk than white males).

"Yes, but I know their area. I know it's not necessarily the safest at the same time. My version of safety might be different, I might be talking about familiarity." (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Views on local assets have remained mostly similar during the course of the research. Proximity, location, good transport connections and the community are key assets mentioned by local residents. Parks and the redevelopment are two assets that changed slightly between the research phases but this should be interpreted cautiously given this was not a longitudinal survey.

"It used to be quiet, now it's getting busy, it's becoming commercial." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders mentioned that the congestion fee is a problem in the local area. Some faith organisations said that it made it more difficult for some of the members of the congregation to join the service, "People miss the daily prayers because of this".

As in the previous phase of research, residents and stakeholders agree that a community hub is something that's needed in the local area. A place that is inclusive, multigenerational, with IT facilities. The library was closed down and the new library will open in the autumn. At the moment, churches have played a social role for some local communities. Bowling and bingo spaces are missing too as they used to be housed in the shopping centre.

A key issue that was brought up by stakeholders working with local TRAs was the challenge of "non-urgent repairs", which were delayed due to the pandemic. It was noted that some council residents couldn't bring up these issues with the council and went without the needed repairs for months. Stakeholders said that the COVID-19 pandemic hid these issues and made the housing situation even more precarious for many vulnerable people.

"How do vulnerable residents complain about things that they need? The council is relying on those who can raise complaints." (Stakeholder)

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Stakeholders agreed that at least some of the local support groups (mutual aid groups, befriending, online neighbourhood groups, etc.) that emerged during the pandemic are continuing their activities and might try to offer needed support in the future. While some stakeholders reported that mutual aid groups fizzled out, especially the ones that relied on WhatsApp, there is still a network of people that could act in a situation of crisis. Some thought that individual networks had become stronger, for instance groups that are based on a building, or an estate, or around a church group.

Nonetheless, a number of stakeholders working with migrant groups said that there is still a lot of demand for these services at the moment, and additional funding for these local groups is needed. Without enough funding, they thought, their efforts are going to come to an end quite soon. Currently, lack of funding is limiting the support these local groups can offer communities, especially to invisible groups. A few stakeholders mentioned that, while local groups raised and administered well an infrastructure of local support, provisions from the local administration would ensure wider assistance.

"We are doing something that the council or government should be doing. Sure, new organisations wanting to help continue being created, but this is happening in a precarious context. There's many people who want to help, but it is all unfeasible without help from the government." (Stakeholder interview).

Walworth

Walworth

The architecture is varied, the majority dating from the 19th century. The diversity of architectural styles supports a hyper-diverse population to integrate and find ways of living in the area, cushioning the impact of change.

Larger new housing developments have precedents in the compact social housing estates that are a feature of Walworth. The diversity of types of social housing at different times is distinctive, most is in good repair.

Public spaces are generally well used by people from different backgrounds. There is a sense of greenness in both east and west Walworth.

The north of the area is dominated by new blocks at Elephant Park and the growing number of tall buildings, while the south is defined by the older blocks of the Aylesbury Estate.

Walworth

This section sets out the findings of the research in Walworth, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Most people experience Walworth as a place where people from different backgrounds are accepted and get on, although not necessarily mixing. Diversity is often mentioned as an asset. The accessibility of Latin culture – the music, dancing, football and restaurants - were described as facilitating relationships with people from other backgrounds. Some tensions between groups were highlighted, particularly around social class and the people moving into the area into new developments.
- There is a strong sense of belonging in Walworth, though this can be hyperlocal, to particular estates or small areas. East and west Walworth have a different feel: the west is dominated by century-old squares and mid-rise modern estates that have changed little in recent decades. The east has experienced a long period of substantial upheaval and population churn, and the redevelopment of two major social housing estates – the Heygate and the Aylesbury. These two developments, both going through a process of demolition and rebuilding, dominate the north and south of the area, and colour local perceptions.
- Living in Walworth has different meanings to different groups, the well-established white working class community strongly associate with East Street Market and mourn the loss of a particular sense of community; for others it is a convenient place that provides relatively cheap food, good transport, and an accepting environment. For others it is just a place to pass through, with few local attractions and amenities.
- Residents generally feel they have little control, often distrust the council and there is discomfort about some new development, and questions about who will benefit. There are different perceptions of regeneration, some welcome new public spaces and facilities, others see it as symbolic of loss of a way of life.
- Walworth is characterised by its greenness, with many local parks and Burgess Park to the south. There are pockets of community gardening and activism around greening. Walworth Road is another asset, many shops support local identity and promote a shared experience. The strength of local community organisations, and the activities of many residents working to improve the area make it work better for all the different communities in the area.
- The COVID-19 pandemic generated extreme anxiety in the early lockdown, because of fears of illness, tense and difficult living situations through lockdown, financial insecurity and about the future loss of employment as furloughing ends. Lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions drew attention to the number of people living precarious lives, on very low incomes. Agencies worked together well and quickly galvanised new ways of working, particularly around food solidarity, local networks and mutual aid groups formed quickly and supported vulnerable people throughout subsequent lockdowns.
- Concerns about mental health and wellbeing were frequently voiced, residents were aware of the impact of the pandemic on themselves, and on others, particularly on young people. By the winter, more people were worried about the number of people on the streets visibly experiencing mental health problems, often linked to destitution.

- The reopening of different venues and community centres in summer of 2021 was welcomed. However, by this time opinions were polarising around road closures that were part of the council's Low Traffic Neighbourhood.
- Change is affecting the area differently, Walworth Road is more financially fragile to the south towards Camberwell, exacerbated by the closure of some big shops. This is a concern to local traders, many businesses being owned by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who are vulnerable to the economic shock of the pandemic.
- The range of types and style of buildings and of use support a hyper diverse population in terms of ethnicity, age and social class and this cushions the impact of change. The stable social housing estates provide continuity and a different experience from the rapid change to the north and south. Although they are close to Walworth Road, the residential areas to the east and west have a much slower pace that encourages play and socialising.

Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

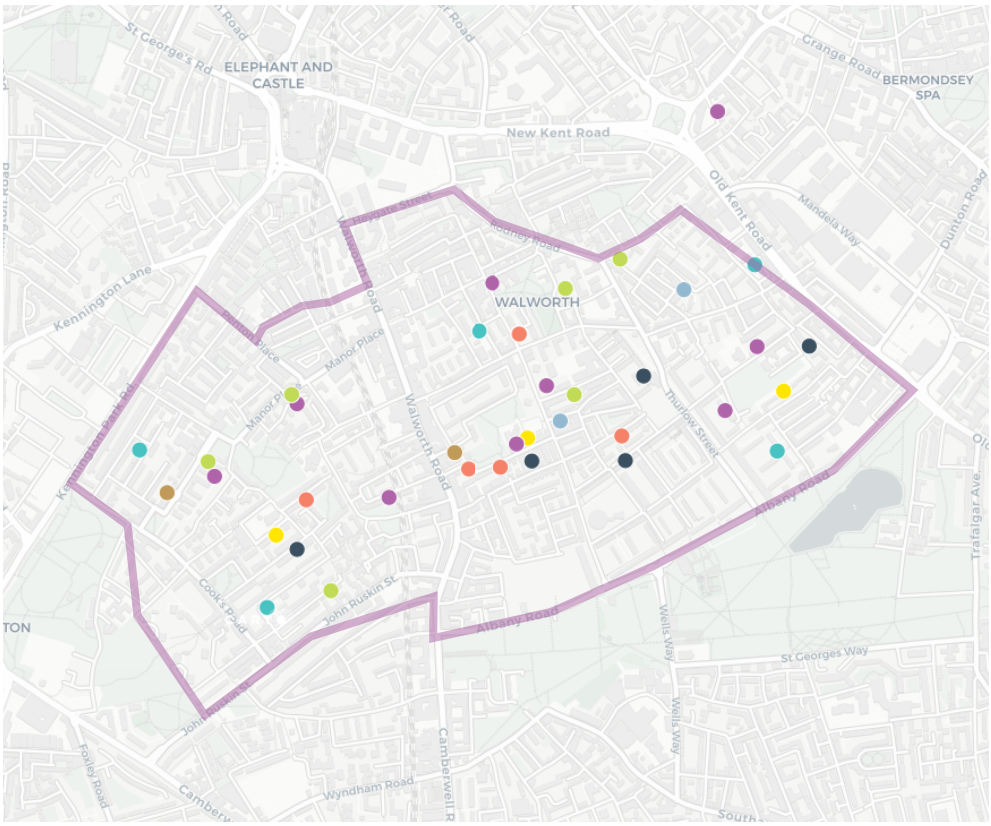
Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "loud-in-the-summer" or "sense-of-history") is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Word cloud: how people described Walworth in street interviews in summer 2020 (left) & summer 2021 (right)

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020

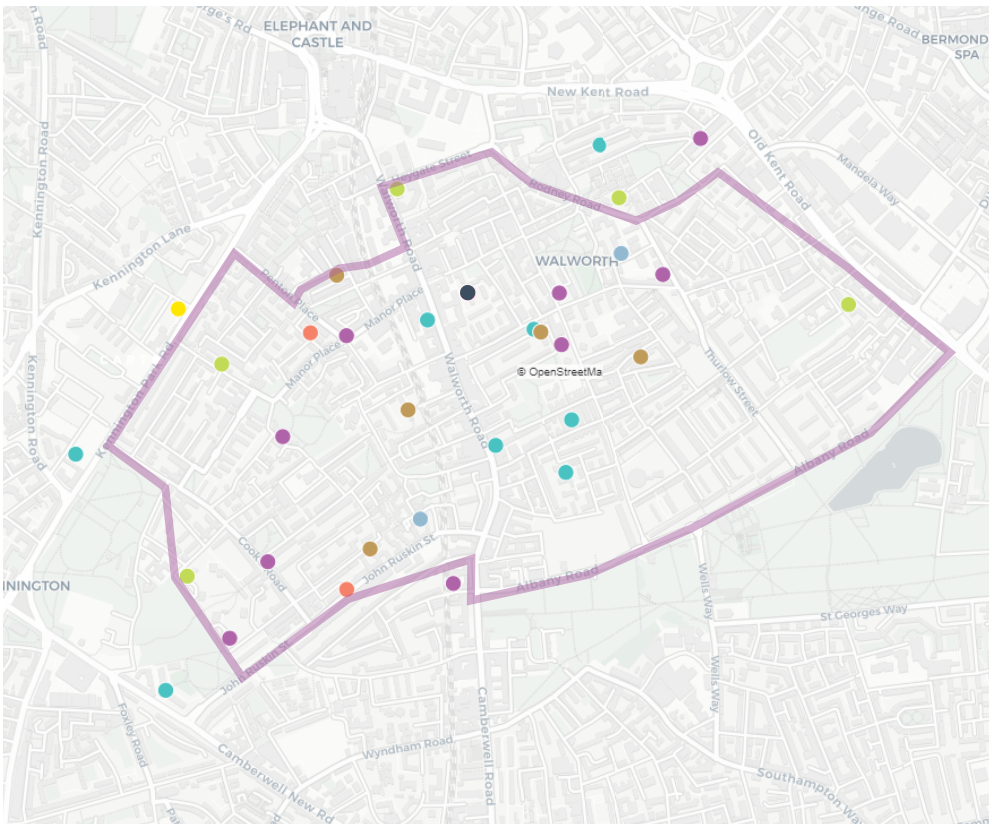


Community
Parks
The green
Diversity
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Outdoor space
Other
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

3 1 2 2 1

Summer 2021



Community
Parks
The green
Diversity
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Outdoor space
Other
Research area boundary

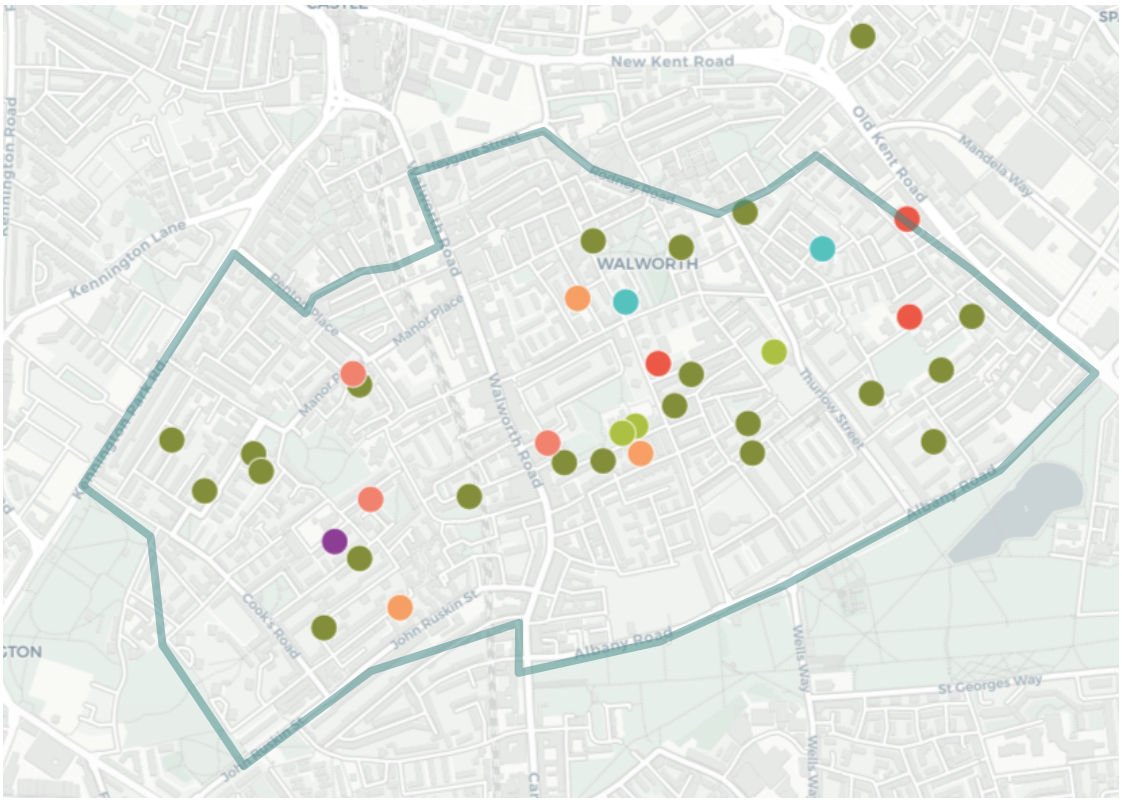
Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

1 7 1 1 1 2 1

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

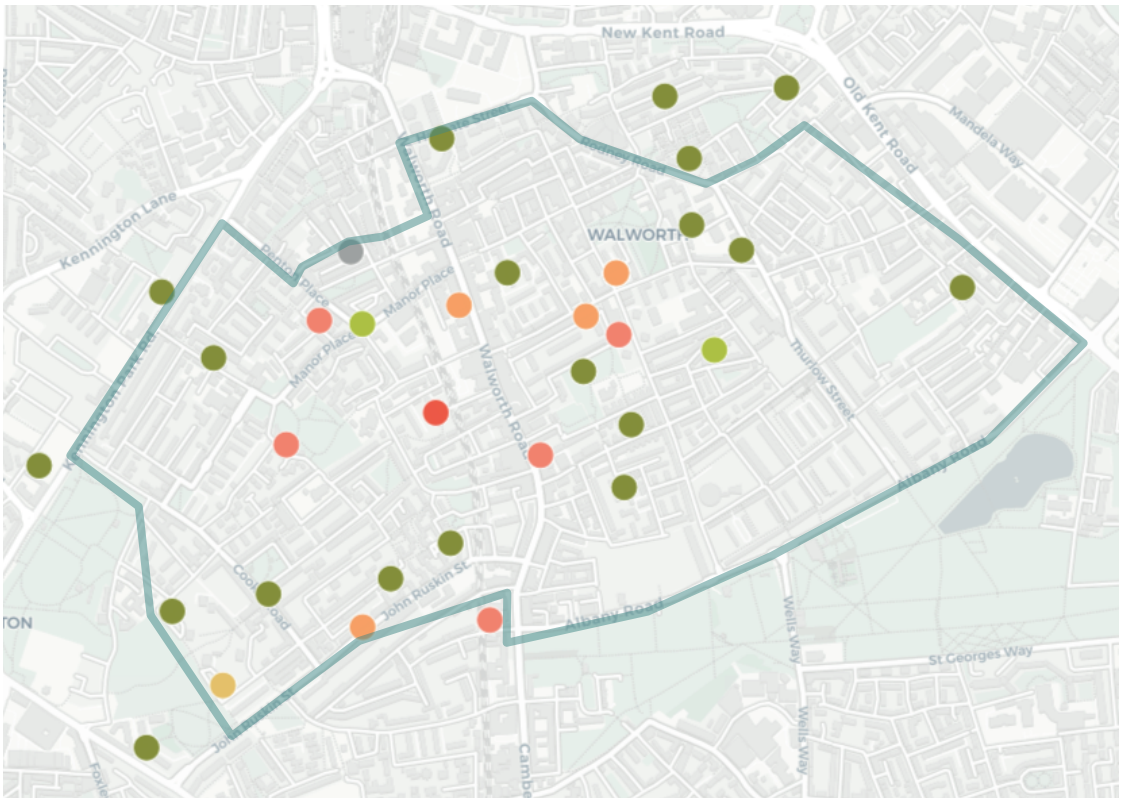
Summer 2020



No
Don't feel safe all the time
Not safe at night
Mostly safe but I don't feel safe in the communal areas
Yes but for teenage boys it doesnt feel safe
Mostly safe but the park can be unsafe
Mostly safe
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 1 1 5

Summer 2021



No
Don't feel safe all the time
Not safe at night
Mostly safe but I don't feel safe in the communal areas
Mostly safe but the park can be unsafe
Mostly safe
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
3 1 1 1 8

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 23 in-depth interviews, nine in phase 1, five in phase 2 and 9 in phase 3, including TRAs, young people and children's agencies, four local agencies and activists, the police, a school, an arts organisation, a local councillor and faith organisations.

Traders: interviews with 16 traders, including an electrical goods shop, a shoe shop, an ethnic supermarket, beauty, a jeweller, shoe repairs, a butcher, restaurants and cafes.

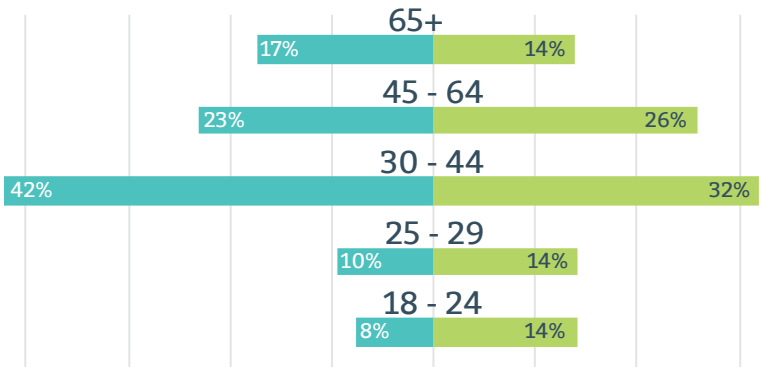
Local residents: walking ethnographies with six residents. Street interviews with 105 residents, demographics below.

2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 52

2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 53

Gender

Age



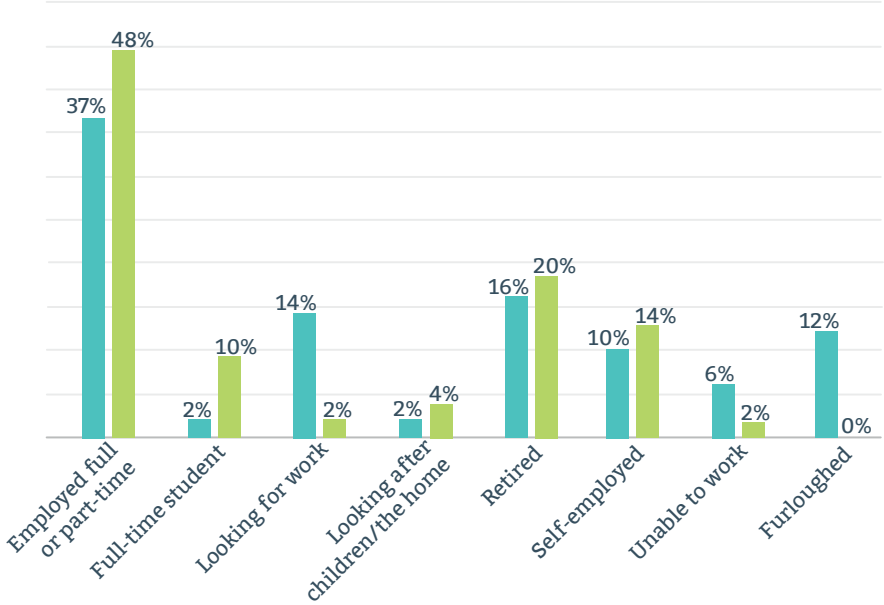
Lived in the area

12%	11%	< 1 year
8%	13%	1 - 3 years
8%	8%	4 - 5 years
14%	15%	6 - 10 years
19%	25%	11 - 20 years
40%	28%	20+ years

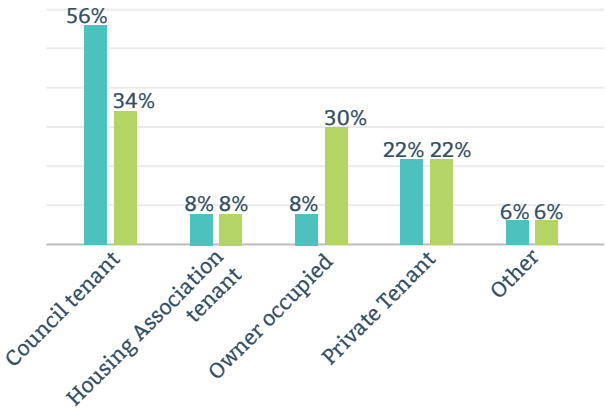
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	4%	0%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	37%	31%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	6%	12%
White	48%	57%
Other ethnic group	6%	0%

Employment



Tenure



Walk through Walworth

"The walk passes through a very varied urban environment, starting on a shopping street with buildings mainly dating from the 19th century but also more recent.

Some of the older buildings are handsome and substantial, others are in poor condition, including some 20th century buildings. Going along Amelia Street there are substantial new housing developments, over 10 years old, that address the railway creatively. However, there is a clear difference in style and design quality between the affordable and private homes in one development. New homes built at the end of the street have already developed maintenance problems.

Moving along towards Walworth Road there is a return to the mixed architecture – from the mock Tudor pub to the 1970s brick of a building that appears to being emptied before demolition. There are old thriving businesses, including Baldwins and Threadneedleman tailors. Some shops are subdivided into different units allowing a number of people to trade from one unit. Some of the Victorian buildings are well maintained, others less so. The newer 20th century buildings seem to be in the worse condition. There are new shops, possibly reflecting demographic changes, including Louie Louie and the Plant Societree. The street is crowded and there is some rubbish, but overall the public realm looks well used and useable."

(Transect walk fieldnotes, Walworth, 19th July 2021)

Detailed findings

PHASE 1: Summer 2020

A place to belong

Most residents feel attached to Walworth, often this is because they have grown up in the area or are long-term residents, however many new to the area report that it has become home.

"Yes, my accent sometime shows I'm not local but this is home to me." (Resident)

Walworth's identity can be overwhelmed by Elephant & Castle, or by individual estate identities, like the Brandon Estate or the Kinglake Estate. East Walworth was described as being made up of "little islands", being more fragmented and "cellular" in its geography and layout than west Walworth. East Walworth is characterised by large scale regeneration at Elephant Park and the Aylesbury Estate, however west Walworth has seen little neighbourhood change.

Many residents value the diversity of the area, and experience it as a place where people from different backgrounds are accepted and get on. The accessibility of Latin culture – the music, dancing, football and restaurants - were described as facilitating relationships with people from other backgrounds. Some tensions between groups were highlighted, particularly around social class and the people moving into the area into new developments. A stakeholder described how new arrivals tend to be white, while the dominant group in the area is black African. There were suggestions of differences between older and younger people, and, on the Aylesbury Estate between people in temporary accommodation and people with secure tenancies and leaseholders. A wish was articulated for more groups and venues that bring together people from different backgrounds.

"It's multicultural but people don't mix. When we were younger communities came together. The area is changing and they are moving in more and more … Homeless people, drug users, and people from different religions and people who can't afford to live here anymore have a more difficult time." (Resident)

"For me the main difference is around money. Those who have [money] tend to be the ones moving into the area and can afford the nice restaurants and cafes but I think that they are too expensive for local people." (Resident)

May.

The walk started outside Walworth Town Hall, went up Sayer Street through Elephant Park, over Walworth Road, round the back of the Newington Estate, finishing in Manor Place.

May describes how she enjoys the area, and taking part in local activities. May is involved in local life, goes to meetings, is an active gardener, and is knowledgeable about local changes.

May believes that by being involved in the local community she can be influential, and that the small scale activities and events she is involved with enable people to have a voice.

May likes the new buildings in Elephant Park and speaks approvingly about environmental sustainability within the buildings and planting.

May likes the new restaurants and cafes, eating out is important to her social life. She realises that these are expensive and that many local people can't afford them. She describes some tensions between "old" and "new" residents, and between east and west Walworth, particularly where regeneration money is being spent.

"It don't matter how long you live here, if you are not born here and if like me you have an accent, the locals always think of you a 'new'"

May thinks that generally people from different backgrounds get on, that the main tensions are economic, about access to new facilities. She worries that many people cannot afford to benefit from

Many residents have family locally, or have created local friendship groups, though some were more isolated. Faith organisations, gardening groups and networks, and relationships based around children were cited as ways that people get to know each other.

"I'm lucky, I have family, friends & good neighbours. Mostly, it's from living here over the years. … I'm involved with my church and through that I have a strong support network." (Resident)

Local change and control

Residents interviewed generally felt they had little influence over their local area. When asked "Do you feel you have control?", one person responded "not really - maybe getting more involved in the community would help but there is not much opportunity for people to get involved." Another: "No - I'm Black. I can voice my opinions but who listens and where do they go?".

There has been a history of significant activism and protest about change across the area. One stakeholder described one of Walworth's features as "how awkward everyone is", how people react strongly to changes they do not like. Formal spaces like tenants halls, and informal spaces, are important. Burgess Park was described as including places where Nigerians, Chinese and Ecuadorians gather and talk to each other about mutual solidarity efforts, finding jobs or simply to socialise.

Attitudes towards regeneration often focus on the redevelopment of the Heygate Estate and Elephant & Castle. This coexists with a perception that the area has changed little, particularly around Walworth Road, and in west Walworth where the high proportion of council homes limits potential for redevelopment. However, across Walworth, stakeholders and residents described more affluent people moving into the area. Opinions about the new housing polarise feelings.

"I didn't like it at first, I lived in the houses that were demolished and I didn't understand why and what was happening, but now I understand it and now I'm ok with it. I've seen people demonstrate about regeneration but no one listens." (Resident)

"If the area becomes homogenous it would be a real shame as it would become the same as everywhere else in London and currently it's so unique." (Resident)

Residents living in regeneration areas described different experiences. Some are very much looking forward to being rehoused, others are anxious about where they are going to go, once their block has been knocked down. Others are, according to a stakeholder, "disillusioned - asking is it really going to happen?". An important aspect of change has been increases in housing costs – to rent or to buy. One stakeholder described how people living in the area feel stuck and cannot afford to move. One impact could be increased polarisation between council estates and private homes.

"People and facilities are changing around them that are economically and culturally not the same." (Stakeholder)

There were some criticisms of the council, about slow feedback from consultation, and the approach to maintenance and regeneration. Feelings ran high about the recent road closures. Most residents interviewed did not object to these, however traders on Walworth Road and some activists felt this to be an impediment to their daily life and businesses, introduced with little consultation. The police were mentioned alongside the council as institutions which residents felt they had no control over.

"Don't alter my space without asking me … They used lockdown as an excuse." (Stakeholder)

A healthier life

Walworth is characterised by a series of small green parks and public spaces, and these contribute to quality of life and make the area walkable. Stakeholders reported that there is evidence that far more people walk to shops on Walworth Rd than in other Southwark town centres.

Senait.

The walk started near Pembroke House, an important social centre for the family, and went south to Surrey Square then Burgess Park. The park is important to Senait for socialising and activities but she described some difficult incidents that have made her worry for her son's safety.

Senait likes going to Southbank and to Mercato Metropolitano, noting how few black and Latino people go to these places.

"I see a lot of young couples, working people and change through new cafes and shops … I like the change. It's good for generating jobs . I can also see the negative … if you have a bad income and job, it's the government's choice where they go."

She used to go to the TRA, but thinks it isn't influential and stopped going. Senait believes there is a need for change and regeneration but worries about the impact on people on low incomes.

Senait appreciates events that bring different groups together, including the annual seaside trip organised by the TRA. Sometimes she feels isolated. This has intensified since March when she stopped being able to see her family in other parts of London.

She speaks warmly of the area's diversity, the range of shops, often low cost. She is aware some families are struggling, financially and with their mental health. She thinks COVID has made this worse.

Stakeholders stated that Walworth was an early COVID-19 hotspot in early and mid-March 2020. Lack of testing meant there was no good data about the extent of infection, GPs struggled and many residents became nervous about leaving their homes. By summer 2020 some households – including families and people living alone - were reported to still be staying inside, with an impact on physical and mental health. There are concerns that "behind closed doors there are concerning issues bubbling up … Domestic violence

is off the scale".

Levels of anxiety have increased because of fears of illness, tense and difficult living situations through lockdown, about financial insecurity and about the future loss of employment as furloughing ends. Anxiety and stress are linked to the experience of living in an area where regeneration timetables and processes are unclear. On the Aylesbury Estate, the impact of decanting, and housing people in temporary tenancies, has put some vulnerable households in poor quality housing in blocks with few neighbours, vulnerable to exploitation. The impact of change and the eradication of longstanding street patterns can be disorientating, particularly for both older people and younger people.

Safety

The majority of residents interviewed, and stakeholders, felt that overall the area is safe. However, many described pockets of crime and anti-social behaviour. Safety was mentioned more often as a problem in the east of the area than in the west, although problems were mentioned on the Pullens Estate because of the open stairwells, and the legacy of a stabbing on the Newington Estate that hung over local young people for several years. Various locations were described for different reasons: the Brandon Estate (associated with particular gangs); Walworth Road around Bagel King; Burgess Park. Gang activity was described as coming "in waves".

"It's a safe place, if anyone comes onto the estate there are eyes on them." (Stakeholder)

On the Aylesbury Estate, there were increased concerns about drug taking and safety for the small number of existing residents on the upper floors of Wendover and Taplow. One stakeholder described how people are "afraid to walk about because they come across people who are defecating and injecting."

For young people, and especially Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents, stop and search was an important issue. One stakeholder noted, "When a policeman comes up to you and talks to you like you are an adult and you are only 14 years old it is scary."

Local assets and challenges

The assets of the area that were most often mentioned were the transport connections, the walkability, the green spaces, the shops and local traders, and the strong local community organisations.

"You can buy any kind of food and it is very cheap. Everything is local, you don't need to travel. There's Caribbean and African shops that are local and have spices ... If you don't have a lot of money, it's cheap." (Resident)

Walworth's council estates and associated green spaces are generally seen as strong assets of the area, providing housing and stability. The Aylesbury Estate, and to a lesser estate the Kinglake Estate, were seen differently because of disrepair. The area was described as having been more affordable in the past (relative to other parts of London), and as a place where the cost of living is still relatively cheap. One interviewee described the decision to move to the area: "we looked at what was most affordable and closest to the centre, which is Walworth." However, there are now concerns about affordability and redevelopment. Regeneration and demographic change are leading to increased churn, this is most pronounced in east Walworth. Growing numbers of street homeless people, often visible around Walworth Road, are of concern to many.

Alessa.

The walk started on the Pullens Estate, and went through different community gardens, the Newington Estate, and down to Pullens Gardens. During the walk Alessa stopped often to speak to other residents. Alessa is very involved in local community gardening and greening. This shapes her experience of the area and has enabled her to get to know other local people. In general she thinks local people get on and support each other.

During lockdown she spent a lot of time in local green spaces. She didn't feel isolated because she knows so many local people.

Alessa feels she belongs in the area. She meets other

parents after school in the local park, she commented on the wide diversity of backgrounds among local families.

Alessa feels angry about how the area is being redeveloped and refuses to go to Elephant Park. She is concerned about the impact on longer term residents, and young people. She is critical of policing, and the council's attitude to the green spaces and trees that she loves. She thinks the council values local people less than the interests of developers.

"These developments are luxury homes, while there are hundreds of homeless people underneath."

Walworth Road with its local shops was often mentioned as an asset, traders described how they stepped up during the lockdown to offer meals and deliveries. Rents on Walworth Road are cheaper than other areas which gives people opportunities to open businesses, this has bought Korean and Lebanese restaurants to the area. However, there are fears that demographic change is removing customers for many longstanding jobs. Walworth's working-class history, and its multicultural traditions were often referenced together, including shops like Baldwins on Walworth Road, and the area's many pubs. East Street Market has changed but continues to support both diverse and longstanding white populations.

"Walworth is a hidden gem. People go to Brixton or Elephant & Castle, but people don't know about Walworth. It's quiet too." (Resident)

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Stakeholders described how the initial shock meant that everyone "was in the same boat". They described how lockdown levelled access to the area's assets, particularly the parks. Financial difficulties and disruption were harsh for many, some people found themselves newly vulnerable – Uber drivers lost all their income, childminders, people working in retail, food, or restaurants lost work. There were delays before benefit support kicked in.

"Most issues were solvable. But not mental health, this had a different timeline." (Stakeholder)

For people living in the extreme poverty, "lockdown shone a light on what was already there", affording to one stakeholder, describing how the people given hot food during lockdown were the same families that the agency supported before March.

"Everyone was skint and hungry before, now people have noticed." (Stakeholder)

Residents described how, after lockdown, people seemed friendlier, and kind, and how they came together to offer support. Another interviewee reported that appreciation of nature and the area's green assets had increased. The youth agency described how young people seemed to be gentler with each other, as a result of spending more time around family, and how removing the stress of school had been a great relief for some.

There were concerns about the number of people still not leaving their homes. This includes people who are more inward looking, some who don't speak English well. Some families, because of their history of arrival in the UK were concerned about breaking rules, the prospect of being stopped by police in parks brought back memories of difficult times in the past. After the end of lockdown, children who had stayed indoors during COVID-19 went out to the parks, young adults started drinking and socialising. Use of public space changed as restrictions eased. The Brandon estate, with its large grass area next to Kennington Park, became the scene of BBQs and parties, often for people from other areas: "It has become a place for raves and parties." Police described an increase in complaints about noise.

"[Burgess] Park made pressure of COVID bearable for residents." (Resident)

Traders described making efforts to support communities and stay open, several mentioned how busy they were immediately after lockdown eased. Others described extreme financial pressures.

"A lot of people have a gambling addiction in the area, but over lockdown betting shops were shut. This benefitted us and local people as people have more money." (Trader)

Agencies worked together well and quickly galvanised new ways of working, particularly around food solidarity; this response showed the strength of local agencies relationships, including with funders.

"If we hadn't had these links at the beginning of lockdown, we would have been scrabbing around … by end of the week preceding lockdown we had supports in place to support our vulnerable families." (Stakeholder)

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

In winter 2020-21 we were told how different groups attach particular meanings to living in Walworth, for some the area is fundamental to their families' history, and is under threat; for others it is a place you pass through with little sense of "destination"; for others it is a functional, useful, diverse and modern part of London.

Stakeholders continued to describe the strong perception of loss of community solidarity and identity among certain groups. This is associated with the demolition of the Heygate and Aylesbury Estates, and their rapid decline over the relatively short period of 30 years. This sense of dispossession often colours how the present is seen.

"People talked so much about how it used to be. There is a strong identity for the area, East Street Market was a central community space. An ethos of fairness, about helping each other out." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders continued to note that people from different backgrounds tend to live parallel lives, while also describing how diversity is key to the area's identity. However local shops were described as supporting a sense of identity and shared experience. Some groups, including faith groups and TRAs, were seen to be succeeding in bringing people together.

"There are a range of views and a range of peoples who all share the Walworth Road … Shops are smart enough to make sure they reflect the community they serve." (Stakeholder)

"It's not a melting pot. Mary's Café and Arments Pie & Mash are more white, with some BME customers. If you go to the African restaurants you will be only white person. Local businesses cater for different cultural and class backgrounds." (Stakeholder)

One stakeholder reported how residents in Elephant Park and other new developments are integrating into the area. Many have low disposable incomes, after paying the rent, and appreciate the cheaper shops on Walworth Road and the lower travel costs from living in central locations.

"Ordinary people on ordinary salaries who have no choice other than to pay these extortionate rents." (Stakeholder)

In spite of the lack of connections between groups the area was described as being a place with fewer tensions around race and ethnicity than other parts of the north of the borough. For many, Black Lives Matter has been important, enabling new conversations to happen and affirming longstanding concerns about discrimination and inequality.

The importance of networks in supporting residents was mentioned, including informal networks that have come together spontaneously since March, and more formalised networks around churches and mosques.

"It is important to recognise that the black community have been running mutual aid support for years, there is loads to learn from this experience. COVID has made it visible." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

The impact of change is a pervasive aspect of the area for all stakeholders interviewed.

"Increasingly, like most of north Southwark, the area is [transitioning from a time when] it had large identifiable working-class and middle-class areas to small patches … Increasingly, you can't say whether an area is working-class or middle-class by how it looks. It's now a patchwork." (Stakeholder)

The differential impact of change within Walworth was noted. Walworth Road is seen to becoming more financially fragile to the south towards Camberwell, exacerbated by the closure of Argos and Peacocks in

the summer. This is a concern to local traders, many of which are owned by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and who are vulnerable to the economic shock of the pandemic.

A healthier life

Concerns about mental health and wellbeing were frequently voiced, residents are reported to be both concerned about the impact of the pandemic on themselves, and on others, particularly on young people. Stakeholders voiced more concerns than in the summer about the number of people on the streets visibly experiencing mental health problems, often linked to destitution.

"Walking up form Camberwell there are many people who I am concerned about, people shouting, street drinkers … they're people who aren't getting the support they need." (Stakeholder)

The green spaces in the local area were identified as important in supporting wellbeing. Work, lack of work, or fears about future work were identified as sources of stress, as was the lack of contact with others across different aspects of everyday experience. Older people are out in the community more than in the summer, following changes to shielding guidelines. Some commented that their lives had not changed much as they usually spend a lot of time at home; others felt lonely and scared of the experience of the pandemic.

Safety

Safety was mentioned at times, connected to knife crime and the drugs trade, and was a particular worry for some older people and people who feel vulnerable. It was mentioned that there has been more dealing over the last year, those in charge of this activity are believed to be from outside the area, although local young people are most likely to be arrested and charged.

Local assets and challenges

Housing continues to be a concern for many residents, there are specific concerns among people living on council estates fearing demolition; people paying high rents; and people who do not have a home, including those who are living on the streets.

There continue to be concerns about young people: the lack of provision, the lack of housing, and the impact of the pandemic on their lives. One stakeholder mentioned how new homes built close to green spaces stop children and young people paying football. The parks and green spaces in the area are vital for families, as well as supporting wellbeing over the last year.

The strength of the local community sector was mentioned. The strong ties between organisations before the pandemic were identified as critical to the strong response from agencies since March.

"We were surprised and interested in how many small existing community orientated groups were up and running." (Stakeholder)

The closing of venues and meeting places had stopped residents meeting, and stopped agencies having day to day interactions with residents, reducing their connections and local understanding.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Food solidarity and information sharing were identified as early priorities for agencies. They worked with local food businesses, including market traders, and skilled individuals, to set up support. One agency reported that requests for food rose seven percent in the November lockdown, and a further seven percent in January 2021.

Stakeholders described how COVID-19 has bought people together. There are three mutual aid groups in North Walworth ward - engaging people who have not previously been active in the community.

“People talked about how they are looking out more for each other, looking out for lights in windows, putting notes through doors.” (Stakeholder)

“I see genuine neighbourliness raising its head.” (Stakeholder)

In the Autumn there were emerging concerns that people were not sticking to the rules, that they are getting jaded, or careless.

“Older people are getting angry with people not sticking to rules. No respect for anyone any more.” (Stakeholder)

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A place to belong

There is a strong sense of community in Walworth – it came up in almost every interview - and several people interviewed in summer 2021 said they feel 'lucky' to live here.

Many people have lived in the area for decades and have family or support networks close by. They talked of mutual trust between neighbours and estates in west Walworth and the social activities they organised together.

Alongside the longstanding white working-class community there are strong and very visible Latin American, West African, North African and Somali communities, within which there are smaller socioeconomic groups.

"It's a pretty harmonious area by and large. It genuinely is a very mixed area. You might get someone who's an artist, someone who lives on an estate and someone who works in the City all in the same local group." (Stakeholder)

"I'm living there from '94, we get on so well, different nations, I get on well with everyone on my estate, I watched the babies grow up and they excelled, they went to university. Muslim, Christian, Black, White, Chinese, African, Caribbean - on my estate landing, the youngsters, they mature, we look after each other." (Resident)

As they reopened, important places of belonging and coming together in the area were recognised, including TRA halls, school gates, churches, East Street Market, Burgess Park, high streets, pubs, cafes, barbers, community gardens, football teams, shared interest groups, open-air sports courts. Before it closed in 2019, older people would go to the bingo at Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre and say they still miss it.

Lisa.

The walk began on Kennington Park Road and we strolled toward Pasley Park, Walworth Garden, St Mary's Churchyard, with a final stop at Draper Estate. Lisa highlighted the importance of having accessible green spaces and other outdoor spaces for children, not just playgrounds but safe and entertaining places for older children such as adventure parks.

"Walworth Garden is somewhere I take my daughter. It's not just a place to relax but a place of education...I can't say enough good things about this place. I'd be devastated if it ever closed."

Lisa enjoys the local area and especially appreciates the sense of community that exists among the people living in her block of flats. She also spoke highly of the community networks that allow local TRAs to host joint events (pre-COVID). Her

daughter attended and loved those as well, she attended theatre and crafts there.

In Lisa's view, TRAs are spaces where the local community comes together, which is why she thinks that keeping community halls on the big estates closed at the moment is a big problem. She thinks this affects children particularly hard, leaving them with no

activities to attend or places to make friends.

One important concern for Lisa is local traffic (from cars and bikes alike). She noted that there is a "sea of bikes" at rush hour – this makes her feel very unsafe especially when trying to cross the street with her daughter.

The areas to the west and east of Walworth Road have distinctive and very different characters. The west is dominated by century-old squares and large mid-rise modern estates that have changed very little in recent decades. The east has been experiencing a long period of substantial upheaval that has seen residents relocated from the area. One school reported a number of families from the Aylesbury Estate being moved out of the area but still choosing to take two buses to school and maintain their community support networks.

Often people referred to their area as 'Kennington', 'Camberwell', 'the Aylesbury', and many look towards the Elephant & Castle for entertainment; several people questioned whether Walworth is a place in its own right.

Housing is a major issue, particularly for younger residents who have grown up in the area.

"A lot of the younger people have benefitted from the regeneration of the area but the ones who are older - there's no way they could leave home and still live round here … Rent is a joke. How do they get out of their parents' house by the time they're 30? One young man was even talking about moving to Bristol. We need more social housing." (Stakeholder)

There is a mixed reception for the new residents: resentment ('why do they get the new flats?'); concern for the impact on the high streets ('they don't shop locally'); perception that this new community will be transient and will move out of the area when they have families because they won't be able to find or afford a larger flat.

"People are very much locked into the local area - though I would say that's changing rapidly with the gentrification and the regeneration of the area. You've got a lot more young professionals. The area is becoming somewhere people sleep not somewhere they live." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

In general, there remains a lack of trust of the council and an overarching narrative that "they [the Council] are going to do what they want anyway".

"Local people feel like they don't have a voice … I feel powerless. How can you implement anything if you're not listening to people? … They plan on getting rid of everybody anyway." (Resident)

In addition, the new housing isn't seen as being for the people who currently live in Walworth, but many are hopeful that the Old Kent Road might offer more social housing for the wider area.

"There is a lot of resentment as it doesn't seem to be any of our community [parents at a school] who are getting the new flats. They see the new flats and say, "'Why don't I deserve one of those? I've been living here for three years." (Stakeholder)

There is concern that infill proposals may result in the loss of community facilities and green spaces.

"There's an increasing sensitivity to proposals for infill sites. Local people seeing it as their small parks and pockets of green space being lost. In the past these spaces might have been underused but during lockdown they've been appreciated and needed a lot more." (Stakeholder)

The most contentious recent change in the area has been the implementation of street closures and low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), which strongly divide opinion. Many people say they were not consulted enough. This issue emerged much more strongly than in earlier phases of the research.

“It’s been really divisive. It's made people really angry. I've been shouted at in the street because I'm identified with the campaign that supports them.” (Stakeholder)

Poor maintenance of street frontages and council estates was a complaint from a lot of local people, not just tenants and traders. There were also concerns that even some of the new housing was already showing wear and tear.

The large amount of social housing in Walworth has helped retain the area's character in the face of gentrification. Attempts at ‘hipsterification’ of East Street market, including restyling of some shop units, were met with suspicion.

“It hasn't taken … it felt sterile and nobody felt welcome.” (Resident)

Traders feel at the mercy of rising rents and business rates and worry that the change in demographics could have an impact on their businesses.

“Our regular customers who used to live in the council flats have been moved elsewhere. A lot of the new people are working so their shopping habits change.” (Trader)

“The market needs to be here, but it feels like the council don’t want us … It serves the community. It’s cheap! It's a social place - they come down here to talk to us.” (Trader)

Some businesses have capitalised on the new demographic for example by selling organic produce. The demolition of Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre and redevelopment of the Heygate as Elephant Park has been a dramatic change, with the speed of change being experienced as “'overwhelming” by some. Most people in Walworth think the area looks more attractive, and enjoy the public spaces, though some say the new towers lack character.

A healthier life

The pandemic exposed underlying poverty and precarity in Walworth, intensified by the immediate experience of food poverty as schools and other community support facilities closed. At the start of the pandemic, community groups, official and unofficial, mobilised quickly to get food to people; this also became a useful route to check on vulnerable households. However, they plan to phase these out and reassign their resources to address underlying longer-term issues.

“Food poverty is absolutely rife - well it's just poverty in general. It's not just food poverty, it's just poverty, but it affects your ability to provide food for your children.” (Stakeholder)

At the height of lockdown, in spring 2020, 135 families - more than half of one primary school - were referred to Pembroke House for food packages. In September, these numbers fell as pupils returned to school, where they had access to breakfast and lunch. In May 2021, 55 families were receiving food deliveries from Pembroke House one to three times a week.

In street interviews, local residents brought up concerns about drug use. The walkways of emptying blocks of the Aylesbury were identified as spots for drug dealing and antisocial behaviour.

Many people also expressed concern for the numbers of rough sleepers in the area, particularly around the Walworth Road and East Street, and the lack of safe spaces where someone could go when feeling vulnerable. One stakeholder mentioned a young woman who slept in McDonalds as it was the only place open 24hrs and she felt safe because there were other people there.

More positively, “green” was a word commonly used to describe Walworth, with people of all ages and groups continuing to make good use of the space and facilities in Burgess Park, describing it as a place where local communities mix. Smaller green spaces and outdoor gyms have also become more important for local exercise dog walking and recreation such as Nursery Row Park, Pasley Park, and Surrey Square Park.

Quieter streets during lockdown and recent street closures and pavement widening have made many feel safer walking, jogging and cycling in the streets.

“When I take the kids to the park - down Bagshott Street, which has been closed - they are much safer and don’t have to worry about the traffic.” (Resident)

However, the rise in electric scooters being ridden on pavements was described as ‘a menace’, especially by older people.

Fly-tipping and rubbish on the streets was highlighted as an issue around Walworth Road and Old Kent Road, especially shop waste with nowhere to put it.

“The piles of trash make me incandescent. That's what they think about us. It can be there for days. It's really difficult to navigate with a pushchair. It's unsightly, unhygienic, disgusting.” (Resident)

Safety

In spite of an outside perception of the area as being dangerous, well-reported gang-related activity and three high-profile fatal stabbings near the Brandon Estate that upset the whole community, most people said they personally felt safe in the area, and that Walworth is definitely safer than it was 10-15 years ago.

“[Knife crime] has really impacted that community but as awful as it is, it's a very small group of people who get involved with that.” (Stakeholder)

The area is more likely to be described as 'sketchy' and 'unsettling' than dangerous, and their neighbours as fundamentally honest.

“The area is rough but extremely friendly. I could drop money and the chances are much higher that someone would pick it up rather than steal it.” (Resident)

Street drinking and petty but intimidating drug dealing are reported as being prevalent, with particular issues on the walkways of the Aylesbury Estate as blocks are decanted. Many people were also concerned about rough sleeping and begging, particularly on and around the Walworth Road and East Street. Loud parties and shouting around the Brandon Estate has also been causing tensions.

There is some unease around people with mental health issues who are perceived as having “not taken their medication”.

Younger women said they didn't feel safe on their own after dark, and were intimidated by the male-dominated spaces (including some pavement cafes at the top of Old Kent Road) or where there are not eyes on the street (for example by closed shops and dark kitchens, or paths through smaller parks with poor sightlines).

Traders complain that the police do not respond quickly enough when they raise an issue about shoplifting or aggressive customers. However, some members of the community feel intimidated and unfairly targeted by stop and search.

Although many people are concerned about air pollution and agree that traffic needs to be reduced, street closures have divided opinion. For traders on Walworth Road and East Street, loss of parking and loading bays have made deliveries more difficult.

“Tell me, is it saving the planet if instead of me just driving down this road I have to drive for miles a long way round? It makes no sense!” (Trader)

Local assets and challenges

Walworth is considered to benefit from good transport connections, close proximity to central London and relative abundance of green space. However, across the three phases of the research, many participants complained of a lack of activities for older children and young adults, the gradual loss of services (particularly youth provision) and activities and entertainment for all ages, the unavailability of genuinely affordable housing, the lack of variety on the high streets and the need for community spaces.

Anna.

We met at Surrey Square Primary school and walked along Congreve Street, Elsted Street and East Street, passing through Burgess Park and the Aylesbury estate, ending the walk on Walworth Road (close to Elephant Park).

Anna enjoys the area's sense of community and thinks the street itself is a social space. She says 'hello' to lots of people as she's walking around in the neighbourhood.

On several occasions, Anna points out poorly maintained council property, fly tipping, graffiti, and things that just look unsightly due to lack of care from the council. She is concerned about all of the rubbish piling up outside shops

on the Old Kent Road as they have nowhere else to put it.

"People think the area is terrible. It's not. It's just colourful."

Air pollution is another concern for Anna. She mentions it many times during the walk, bringing up either the need for more green spaces or less traffic in the local area.

Overall, traffic worries Anna and she hesitates crossing Albany Road even at crossing, and at one point during our walk she visibly jumps back when a car speeds down East Street.

Anna thinks the area can be a bit 'shady' but it is not unsafe. She is fond of its diversity and worries that gentrification will change the local character of the neighbourhood in the future.

"[The local area] was always a bit rough and ready but that's because of lack of investment."

The diversity of buildings and of use support a hyper diverse population in terms of ethnicity, age and social class. Although they are close to Walworth Road, the residential areas to the east and west have a much slower pace encouraging play and socialising.

The greenness of the area, including Walworth Road with its trees, gives it a welcoming feel. There is sense of greenness in both east and west Walworth. The green infrastructure is strong, there are many parks and small patches of cultivation, some (especially in west Walworth) have been initiated and are managed by residents. Parks and playgroups appear to be well used by adults and children.

Stakeholders working closely with younger groups, parents of older children, and some younger residents themselves say that there is nothing for them to do once they have grown out of playgrounds, and that many services have been lost over the past few years. Local assets participants reported they would find useful include: youth clubs, adventure playgrounds, drama groups, creative activities, a cinema, boxing, a community kitchen to learn skills.

"When I was young, we were lucky, you could go to a youth club; it made a big difference. It's not an affluent area, kids might have nothing to be at home for so they're out on the street, doing petty crimes and silly things just out of boredom, parents may struggle." (Stakeholder)

Closing the spaces that had been used for group activities (such as TRA halls and sports cages) during lockdown has highlighted the everyday importance of these spaces. Many people were frustrated that they were taking a long time to reopen.

"People want to know when the bingo's back on. That sounds a bit flippant, but having those social spaces back is really important." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders also flagged that access to meaningful employment and training opportunities is also increasingly challenging for young people.

"They [young people] just want to leave and start earning a wage, not £3.50 an hour. Often they are just used as cheap labour. They need a proper mentor who can train them and show them the longer-term benefits of being an apprentice." (Stakeholder)

Walworth's high streets are seen as lacking in variety or useful shops. East Street is "all butchers and fruit shops"; Old Kent Road "It's cafe, cafe, butcher, bakery, bakery, church, café … And how many kebab shops do we need?"; Walworth Road has "too many fast food places" and "nowhere to get the items I need, like the bulbs for my kitchen lights". Closures of banks on the high street is an issue, forcing people to walk further and queue longer (an issue raised by older residents) and the loss of cheap, practical shops and services that were in the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre.

The transect walk from outside Tesco Express on Walworth Road to the junction of Walworth Road and East Street revealed that shops and cafés are changing, reflecting the demographics of the area. The Eritrean café on East Street and the refurbished Turkish restaurant show that ethnic businesses are thriving and finding new markets. McDonald's is an important social hub for younger people. On Walworth Road there are several very long-established businesses – like Baldwins and Schwar jewellers, as well as others reflecting newer more affluent residents like Louie Louise café and PlantSocietree.

There are more empty units on East Street than on Walworth Road, on Walworth Road there is most footfall and bustle to the north, going towards Elephant & Castle. There are many churches visible in the area, some with discrete buildings like the Walworth Baptist Church, others like the Four Square church are occupying spaces above shops on Walworth Road.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Loneliness and isolation were reported by all sectors of the community as 'epidemic' with depression described as 'rife'. Sufferers include older and vulnerable people who have been stuck at home, middle classes who feel destabilised, workers such as Uber drivers who lost work, and furloughed workers with no motivation to get up in the morning. At the same time, people feel it is more acceptable to say that they are experiencing these issues. Domestic violence and young men's susceptibility to suicide were also mentioned.

"Depression seems to be a plague at the moment. We've used our networks to reach the sorts of people who are the sorts of people who tend to stay at home." (Stakeholder)

"Mental health has taken a big battering. People with depression found lockdown hard but at least they felt safe. Now trying to emerge is really hard for them." (Stakeholder)

Many wellbeing issues persist, the easing of lockdown has not ended worries.

"There will be a lot of mental health issues that catch up with people and grief. It will be a bit like PTSD." (Resident)

COVID-19 exposed digital poverty, although some work was done to alleviate this (e.g. schools sourcing recycled devices for pupils). Several stakeholders mentioned that where services have gone exclusively online, some communities, for instance the Latin American one, are also excluded on the grounds of language and literacy.

The easing of lockdown has not imparted an automatic sense of freedom; older people and young girls still worry about COVID-19 risks.

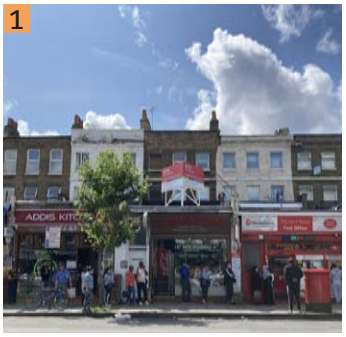
At the start of the pandemic, in response to the first lockdown, most community groups, schools, churches, support services and local residents transferred their activities online. This kept groups together for social support and mental stimulation, and allowed some groups such as churches to expand their reach. However, over the second lockdown Zoom fatigue set in; by Spring/ Summer 2021 online participation had declined.

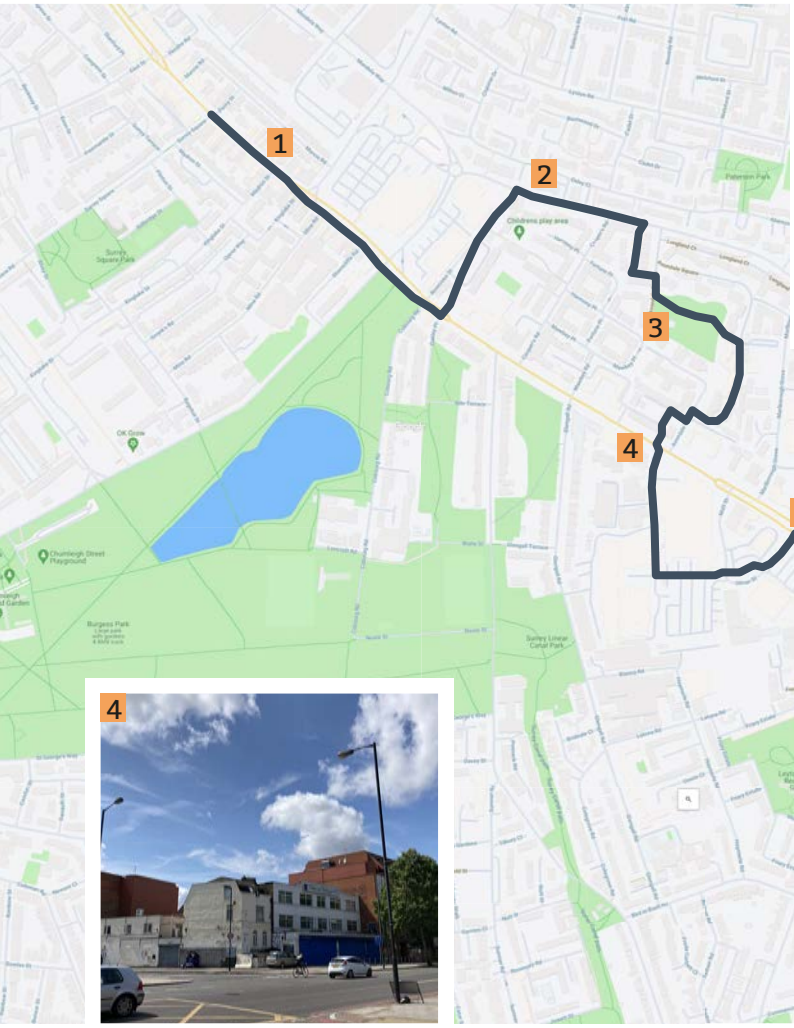
"There's no benefit to being online. People want to be around each other again." (Stakeholder)

One lasting digital legacy, however, is the formation of WhatsApp groups, still widely used by all sectors of the community, young and old, to share information and coordinate social activities and support.

Old Kent Road

Old Kent Road





The architecture of the area is a mix of industrial land-use and residential low-rise estates.

The public spaces consist of a few parks and green patches without too much landscaping. The spaces outside the large stores on the Old Kent Road are the most active.

The changes in the built environment are prominent on the main road, where the regeneration is currently focused.

The transformation is characterised by voids where buildings have been demolished, surrounded by signposts announcing the new scheme and the number of properties.

Burgess Park stands out as a place of peace on the main road. Leyton Square Recreation Ground is the other well-used park in the area, both parks appealing to wide demographics. Besides that, you must walk down a side street to find residential calm.

Old Kent Road

This section sets out the findings of the research in the Old Kent Road, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Community life and the sense of belonging were frequently described as the Old Kent Road's key strength. For some a sense of belonging was linked to socio-economic solidarity, pride in the industrial and working-class history of the area, and its role as a gateway to London for newly arrived migrants. Weaker sense of belonging was linked to perceptions of racism, crime, weak neighbourliness, lack of opportunities to connect, and negative feelings about the regeneration.
- The area was described as having multiple identities, northern parts associate more with Bermondsey, The Blue, or Rotherhithe, and areas to the south associate with north Peckham. The Old Kent Road's council estates are distinctive, with Avondale Square and the Ledbury Estate towering high over the area. A coherent Old Kent Road identity is created by TRAs and community groups as well as the large number of faith spaces, which are particularly used by Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.
- High levels of ethnic diversity were often mentioned by residents as a strength, and occasionally as a source of tension. This was sometimes explained as being a result of a lack of opportunity for different ethnicities to meet, others reported experiences of direct racism.
- Green spaces were valued places to exercise, relax and socialise, particularly in the first lockdown. However, many felt they were poorly maintained, and were frustrated by litter and fly tipping in parks and across the area. Other strengths were the bus links and the supermarkets, although traders were more likely to see these as competition. Many people would like to see more amenities like banks, shops and pharmacies; many pubs have closed and were missed. The amount of social housing was praised, although there were complaints about maintenance. Traffic and pollution along the Old Kent Road were seen as significant problems.
- The most frequent concern, voiced by a wide range of respondents, was about the lack of support, spaces and opportunities for young people in the local area. Fights over territory were believed to be common, between young people within the neighbourhood as well as outside.
- Perceptions of safety varied, some believed the area had moved on from a more violent past, while others – including many traders – believed crime and anti-social behaviour had worsened. Those who believed crime was not significant associated this with their longstanding relationship with the community and the area.
- In general, residents, stakeholders and traders did not believe that they could influence the regeneration. However, many had been involved in engagement and consultation; barriers to engagement were identified including language, and unfamiliar structure and processes. By summer 2021 some new initiatives were mentioned positively, including the work of the Southwark Young Advisors, workshops for younger people, and better relationships with community groups.
- Views were polarised about plans for regeneration. People living further from sites to be developed were more likely to welcome the changes, believing that the area needs investment and improvement. Others living in homes more directly affected by demolition and construction voiced more concerns. Many feared that the needs of the local community or the shortage of affordable

housing, would not be addressed, voicing fears about building at height and increasing density. Smaller local traders worried about rents rises and declining footfall - particularly businesses in light-industrial estates and those with Black and minority ethnic-owners.

- Many residents reported a stronger sense of community during the COVID-19 lockdowns and afterwards, and describing how a neighbourhood-wide mutual aid group connecting TRAs and faith groups managed to get support to those who needed it. Closing community halls and faith spaces in the second and third lockdowns had a big impact on social relations, many struggled to stay in touch and connect digitally in the winter.
- In the second and third lockdowns problems of mental health were raised more often, linked to isolation, the closure of social spaces, overcrowding and loss of work and income. As restrictions continued, more concerns were raised about poverty and its impact on everyday life.
- As the pandemic progressed, stakeholders described a sense of fatigue and how some residents felt overwhelmed by constant information on the dangers and risk of the virus. Traders voiced many concerns about the economic impact of the pandemic and the future viability of their businesses.
- As restrictions eased in 2021 there was a renewed emphasis on green spaces, and the importance of the reopened social spaces, from faith spaces, barber shops, hairdressers and schools. New community spaces like the Livesey Exchange were welcomed. However new issues like the impact of housing infill surfaced. While some individuals remained isolated and anxious, many described how improved neighbourliness continued after the initial lockdown, valuing the stronger connections they feel with the local community.
- By summer 2021 there were some signs of increased tensions within the community. The perception of race inequality was more prominent than in 2020. There were more concerns about young people using parks and public spaces to socialise at night and a rising perception of knife crime and violence among young people, as well as the impact of stop and search. There were more mentions of gender-based safety, and how domestic violence was exacerbated by lockdown.

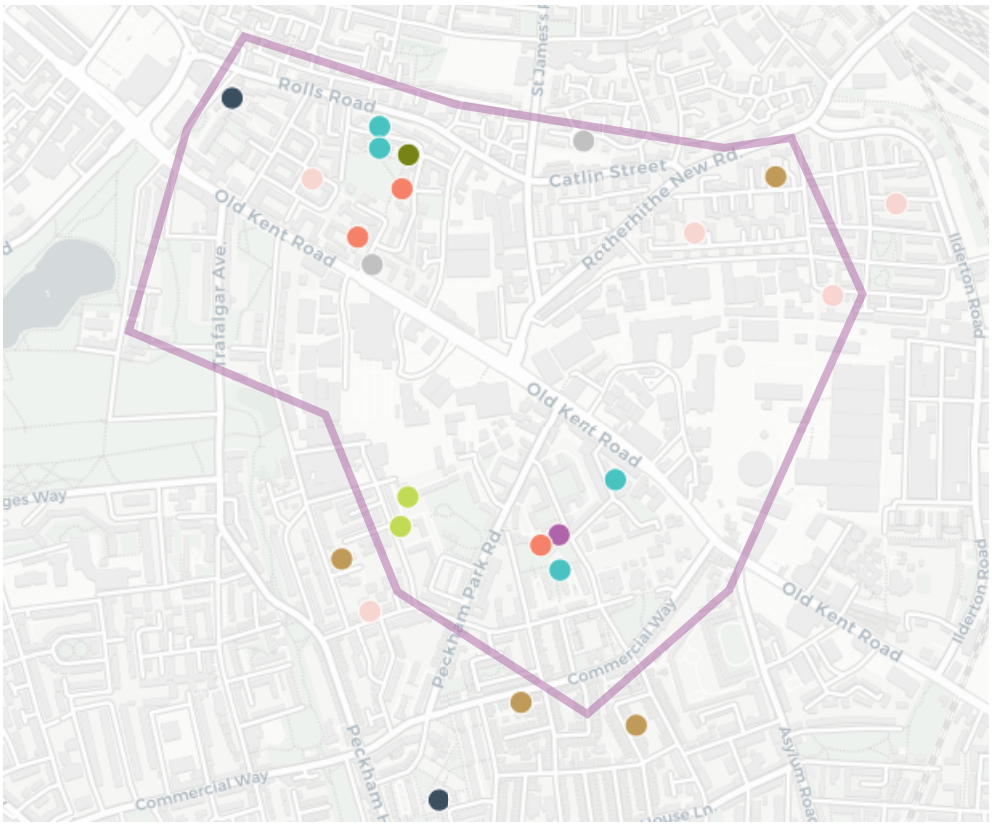
Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "people-don't-take-care-of-the-environment" or "good-parts-and-bad-parts") is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020

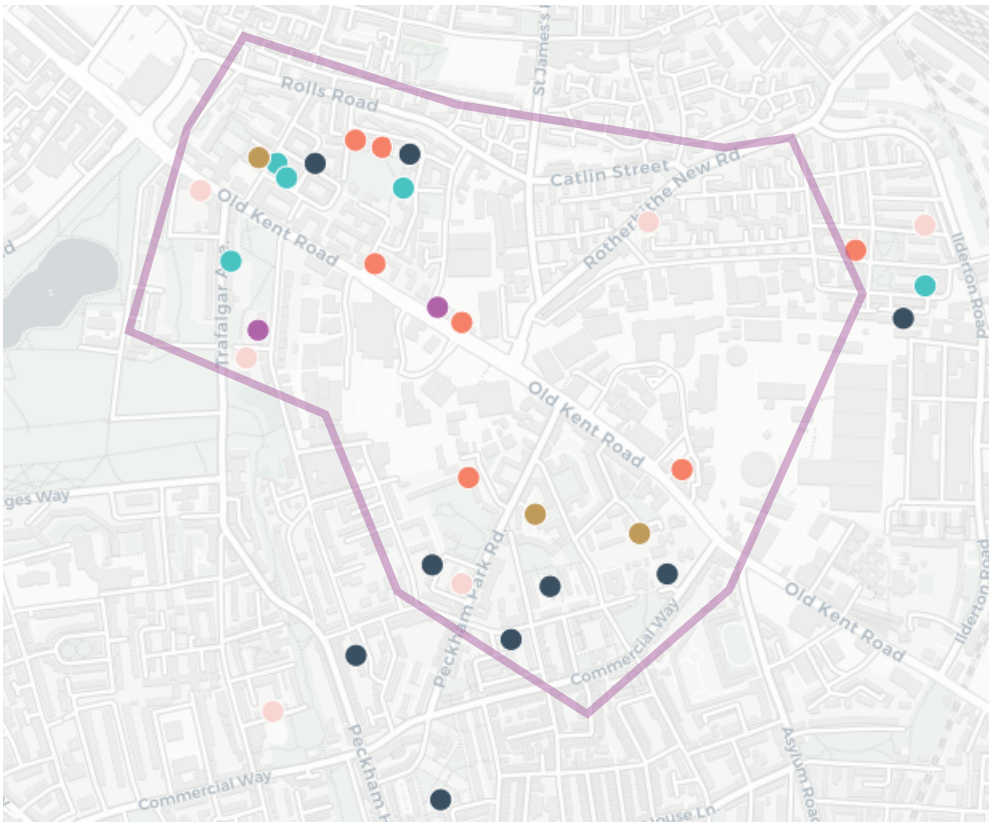


Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

1 1 3 1 1 6

Community
Parks
The green
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Proximity
Safety
Other
None
Research area boundary

Summer 2021



Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

5 1 1 1

Community
Parks
The green
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Proximity
Other
Research area boundary

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 2 10

No

Don't feel safe all the time

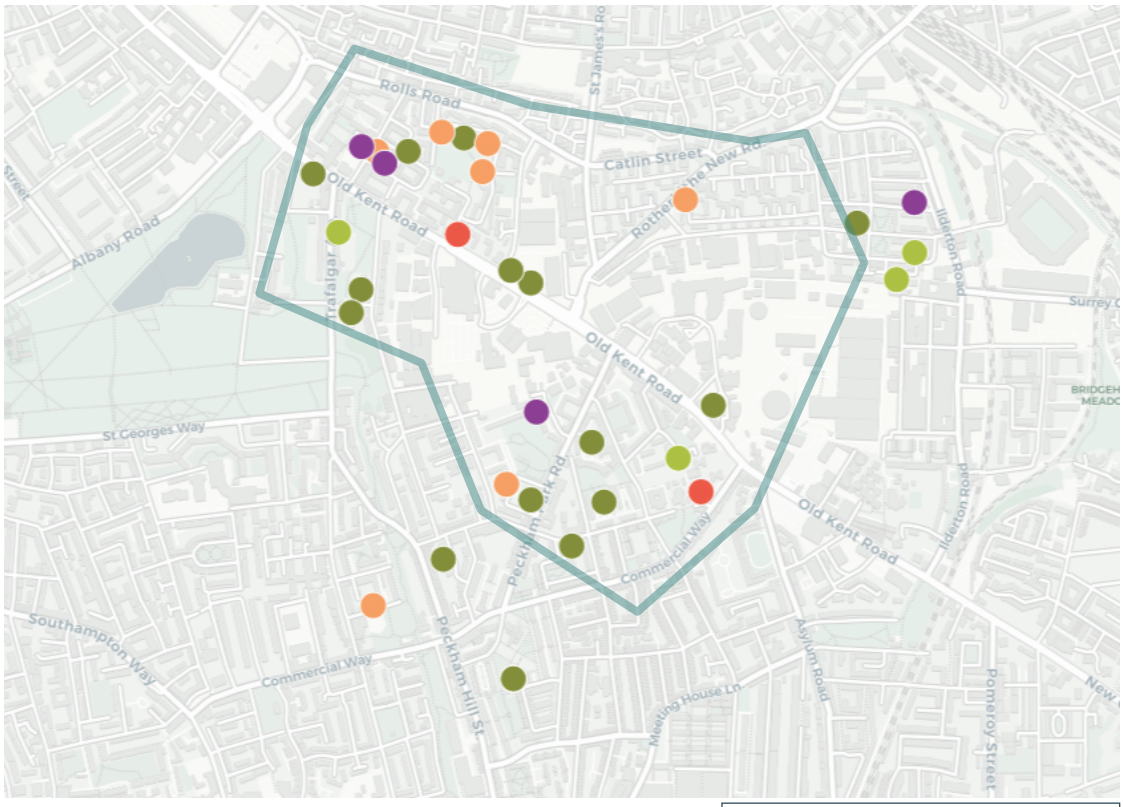
Not safe at night

Mostly safe

Yes

Research area boundary

Summer 2021



Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 1 1 5

No

Not safe at night

Yes but I avoid parks at night

Yes but for teenage boys it doesn't feel safe

Mostly safe but don't feel safe in the communal areas

Mostly safe

Yes

Research area boundary

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 26 in-depth interviews, including interviews with five different TRAs, a local councillor, a school, a local business, one community organiser, a researcher, a park group, and a teacher.

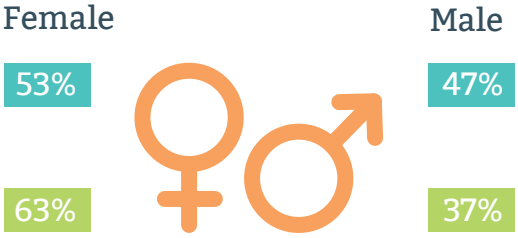
Traders: interviews with 22 traders, including a cafe, corner shop, computer repair shop, garage, party shop, brewery and event space, butchers, African grocery store, hair and nail salon, betting shop, and a clothes and accessories shop.

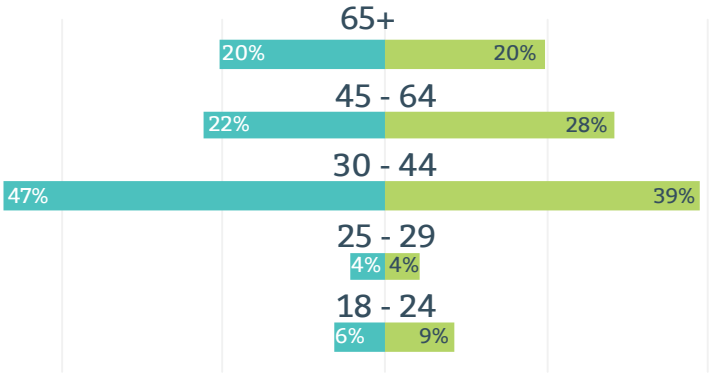
Local residents: walking ethnographies with five residents. Street interviews with 96 residents, demographics below.

2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 50

2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 46

Gender





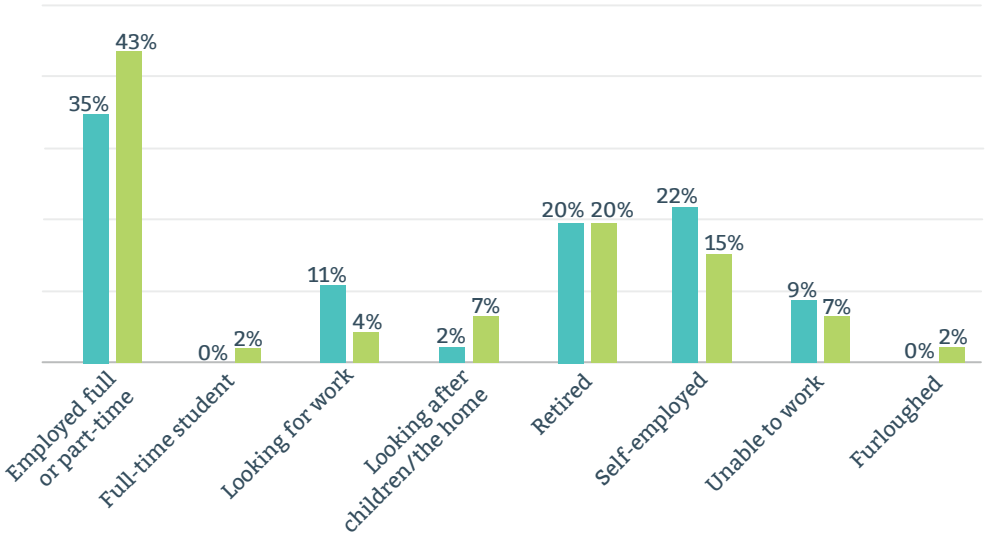
Lived in the area

14%	0%	< 1 year
4%	9%	1 - 3 years
4%	11%	4 - 5 years
25%	22%	6 - 10 years
12%	30%	11 - 20 years
41%	28%	20+ years

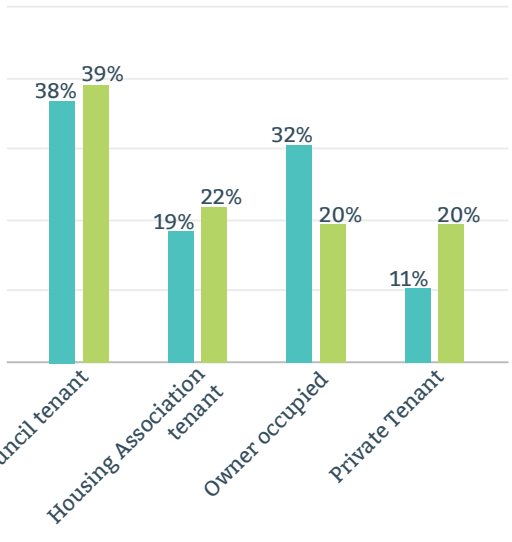
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	4%	9%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	29%	34%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	0%	5%
White	59%	43%
Other ethnic group	8%	9%

Employment



Tenure



Walk through Old Kent Road

"The Old Kent Road neighbourhood is arranged around a very busy main road of the same name, which slices through its centre running from Elephant & Castle to Lewisham, South East London. Historically this road connected London to the coast, and was used by traders and travellers stretching back to Roman times. This history can be seen depicted on the exterior of the Everlasting Arms Ministry Church, in a mural made by Adam Kossowski in the 1970s.

In the 19th Century it became an industrial district with a canal connecting it to the Thames. Two gasworks can still be seen (one has been listed, the other is set for demolition as part of the regeneration), as well as the old canal-side districts and Tudor housing. In recent decades, following deindustrialisation, the area became a light industrial zone with small merchants, car mechanics, and large box-chain stores. These industrial zones are rapidly shrinking and set to be removed, however clusters can still be found across the whole neighbourhood.

Today, it is being regenerated in one of the largest schemes in London, with two new town centres planned, 15,000 new homes, and until recently a Bakerloo extension (which was scrapped during the pandemic). Hoardings can be seen across the neighbourhood, with demolitions well under way.

Old Kent Road is historically a working class area, and today still has one of the lowest land values in Southwark. Its estates are very distinctive, with Avondale Square and the Ledbury Estate towering high. The rest of the estates are low-rise redbricks with community gardens scattered in between, and well-tended balconies and front yards."

(Transect walk fieldnotes, Old Kent Road, 9th August 2021)

Detailed findings

PHASE 1: Summer 2020

A place to belong

Community life and the sense of belonging were frequently described as the Old Kent Road's key strength by street interview respondents and stakeholders. For some of the residents, a sense of belonging was often linked to socio-economic solidarity, and a pride in the history of the area as an industrial and working-class neighbourhood, and more recently as a gateway to London for newly arrived migrants. Those who reported not feeling they belonged pointed to perceptions of racism, crime, a recent decline in neighbourliness, lack of opportunities and spaces to connect, and a sense of hostility from the local regeneration.

"We're all pretty much the same, we're all poor." (Resident)

Some reported that the spatial identity of the Old Kent Road has been improved in recent years by changing the name of Livesey Ward to Old Kent Road, and because the regeneration has encouraged some communities to define themselves as belonging to the area in order to participate.

The six largest estates and their TRAs were commonly viewed as the cornerstones of community networks, alongside the large number of faith spaces, particularly for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

"There was a church next door that was renting the top floor of a self-store. They were on a different planet as far as we were concerned, but loved having them there." (Stakeholder)

Alice.

The walk begins near her home. Alice is very happy with where she lives, and had planned to stay throughout her retirement. She is now worried about the size of the development which will surround her.

Even though the area is 'rough around the edges', Alice loves the rich local history, the good transport links to central London, and the range of local shops. Having raised her kids here she feels a strong sense of belonging.

Alice notes how the clearing of industrial sites has decreased footfall and made things quieter, but she worries about the noise and pollution from the construction work that is to come. She has raised concerns with the council and developers, but has found doing so very difficult and taxing.

Alice gets on well with her neighbours, many have lived in the area for a long time and they come together to solve problems.

"When you've got a little neighbourhood without much turnover, and most residents have lived there for 10+ years, you feel very at home."

Alice notices how the demographics of the area are changing with younger and wealthier people moving in, she worries lower-income people risk being pushed out.

High levels of ethnic diversity were often mentioned by residents as a strength, and occasionally as a source of tension. This tension was sometimes connected with the lack of opportunity for different ethnicities to interact and integrate, while others reported strong perceptions of racism, which they saw as being part of a longer, more complicated history. Millwall football club is sometimes connected to this racial conflict, particularly on match days, but some local residents see this as an outdated stereotype. Intergenerational conflict was also frequently mentioned, as well as the lack of support for 'invisible groups' such as the Latin, Eastern European and traveller communities.

Local change and control

In general, residents, stakeholders and traders did not believe that they could have any impact on the regeneration. However, these same respondents would also frequently report being aware of opportunities to participate through consultations, and believed that the council was actively trying to engage with local residents. But although some reported positive experiences and outcomes through participation, usually those involved in TRAs, many others were cynical towards what they would achieve in the long term.

"[Have control?] No not really, I don't think you would anywhere. There's a very good TRA on this estate but beyond that, no. It'd be the same in all boroughs I imagine." (Resident)

Views were strongly polarised about specific plans for regeneration. Some residents living further from regeneration sites welcomed the changes, believing that the area needs investment and improvement, while others who were more impacted by demolition and construction works could feel extremely threatened, perceiving the council was not providing enough support to them.

Many smaller local traders viewed the regeneration negatively because of anticipated rents rises and declining footfall. This was particularly the case for renters, light-industrial land-uses and Black, Asian and minority ethnic-owned businesses, but less so for larger chain enterprises and free/leaseholders.

"When the regeneration starts to increase it's going to get worse. Cannot afford rents already, and there are hardly any customers."; "We're beginning to feel like residual idiots." (Trader)

Local residents also mentioned that the council has regularly been slow to respond to complaints and to deal with building repairs or anti-social behaviour. There was, however, a broad perception that council capacity was overstretched and underfunded.

David.

The walk begins on Ossory Road, and loops through the Glengall Road Industrial Estate. David outlines the long history of his company, and speaks of his pride in it, and how he employs 12

local people. They also rent out space to other smaller businesses.

David is involved in local business networks, and encourages other businesses to get involved with cultural events and activities. David believes it is important to make visible the valuable contributions businesses make to the community, and to be involved in decisions affecting the local area.

David is pessimistic about the redevelopment of the area, and feels there will not be a place for them here in the future. Rising rents are a problem, David feels other land-uses are taking priority.

"We feel that we are part of the industrial economy in this area and that we are being pushed out by what is happening - the process of redevelopment of the Old Kent Road and the plans for big scale housing projects."

David likes the diversity of the Old Kent Road, but feels there isn't often much interaction between groups, however this is slowly changing. David believes there needs to be more opportunities to bring people together, and to value this diversity and the benefits it brings.

A healthier life

Stakeholders and local residents frequently expressed the value of local green spaces as places to exercise, relax and socialise. However, many felt they were poorly maintained, and were frustrated by litter and fly-tipping in communal spaces and on the Old Kent Road itself. Some residents noted that they would like to see more frequent bin collections and maintenance of public spaces and streets, while others highlighted littering and fly-tipping as instances of anti-social behaviour in the local community.

Traffic and pollution along the Old Kent Road were significant concerns for local residents. Some residents living closer to development sites voiced concerns about further pollution caused by growing population density in the future, as well as by construction. Local stakeholders reported high rates of respiratory health issues and asthma caused by air pollution, and feared this might worsen the effects of COVID-19. There was a general view that there have been issues with access to healthcare facilities in the neighbourhood, and that although the new Silverlock practice was an improvement, much more was needed.

Safety

Perceptions of safety ranged quite widely, with some believing the area had successfully moved on from a more violent past, while others – often local traders on the high-street – believed crime had worsened. Those who believed crime was not a significant issue for them usually said this was because they have a longstanding relationship with the community, and have a sense of where not to go and when. These same people would therefore believe newcomers could be at much more risk.

"Generally, it's a safe place, maybe unsafe for some, but it's fine for us as we know a lot of people." (Resident)

The most frequent and strong concern, voiced by a wide range of respondents, was about the lack of

support and opportunities for young people in the local area coupled with a growing exposure and involvement with crime and anti-social behaviour. Fights over territory were seen as a common occurrence, between young people within the neighbourhood as well as outside.

"I feel safe - I grew up around chaos so I feel fine. If my eldest was out more I would be worried, but he's more focused on his books. The area is not safe generally and kids can be misguided so it's a concern." (Resident)

Key spaces where people felt unsafe, usually at night, were generally outside shops, on the high street, on green spaces, courtyards and within some estates. This was usually related to drug dealing and loitering. A reduction in community policing was also frequently cited; some wanted to see a greater police presence. A different safety concern was building maintenance, particularly of higher buildings and towers, learning from the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Ledbury Estate was frequently mentioned in these discussions.

Local assets & challenges

Commonly cited strengths were the strong bus links along the Old Kent Road, particularly by older people who may have reduced mobility. Access to large supermarkets was also widely seen as positive by residents, however traders were more likely to see these as a challenge and difficult to compete against. Some however felt services such as banks, post offices or pharmacies were missing from the Old Kent Road, and hoped the regeneration would address this. The amount of social housing was widely praised, however there were concerns that these were not being well maintained, and that the regeneration would create one- and two- bedroom homes rather than family units which were in much greater demand.

The green spaces, particularly Burgess Park, but also residential squares such as Leyton and Avondale Square were widely valued as key spaces to connect. However, many believed that traditional meeting spaces such as the pub and other night-time social spaces were declining. Some TRAs in the area seemed enthusiastic to take control of unused infrastructure like the Leyton Square Hub, and were willing to work more closely with the council in programming and operating these spaces.

The largest concern overall amongst residents, stakeholders and traders was the lack of activities, spaces and education and employment opportunities for young people. Some TRAs wanted more funding for older residents.

"If you live on an estate in a place like Southwark you don't get many chances in life, and if you miss the ones that you get, you're in trouble. Creating those opportunities is what needs to be the focus … and education." (Stakeholder)

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Local stakeholders reported Old Kent Road as having one of the highest and earliest infection rates in the borough, linked to low standards of living and precarious employment. Many residents reported a stronger sense of community during the lockdown and afterwards, and a neighbourhood-wide mutual aid group that linked up all the TRAs and faith groups was seen as being effective in getting support to those who needed it. A number of TRA organisers felt empowered by the way the council had referred to them. However, they felt more support was still needed from the local council as well as the central government.

"The [area-wide] mutual aid group was a successful initiative. That was setup very quickly. From what I can see it's been able to respond really quite well to the immediate needs of people." (Stakeholder)

Dimitris.

The walk began outside the Links Community Centre, going north toward South Bermondsey station. The centre has been closed most the year because of COVID. This has had a huge impact

and makes it difficult for community groups to come together, however Dimitris thinks that Zoom meetings can sometimes be more accessible.

Dimitris has witnessed a huge amount of change on the Old Kent Road, particularly the transition away from industry, as well as increased ethnic diversity. Although many groups from different backgrounds interact, there is difficulty getting everyone

involvemed in the residents' groups.

"I do all this voluntary work as I don't want the estate to go downhill, I want to keep it going, that's why I volunteer."

Dimitris has many long-standing relationships in the area and often stops to chat with other local people. There is a lot of poverty in the area, and he doesn't believe the new affordable housing will be affordable for many.

Dimitris dedicates a lot of time to volunteering. He is involved in his TRA and the community centre, the South Bermondsey Partnership and the Rotherhithe Forum. He says this is necessary to communicate the priorities for the neighbourhood to the council and to have more of a voice.

Some local residents said they valued their local spaces more during lockdown, particularly the green spaces, and are now keen for more investment to expand play areas and install more facilities, as these can become overcrowded.

Local traders expressed significant concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on everyday life. Some of the local shops reported increased business in the early stages of lockdown when more residents shopped locally. However, the majority of small businesses in the Old Kent Road area have been experiencing reduced customer numbers and more cautious spending habits in recent months. Many staff have been laid off, and there has been a reduction in informal employment of family and friends, and reduced opening hours, particularly in the hospitality sector. Many local traders were highly anxious about a second wave, and were unsure whether they would be able to survive the quieter winter months after having lost the busier summer trading period.

"The summer season is usually the busiest, but that has been lost due to coronavirus. Winter is usually much less business - so worried about this winter." (Trader)

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

As in the first phase of stakeholder interviews, the Old Kent Road was reported as having multiple identities, with northern parts sometimes associating more with Bermondsey, The Blue, or Rotherhithe, and areas to the south associating more with North Peckham. Community life was still seen to be strong, with a coherent Old Kent Road identity created mostly by the local TRAs and community groups as well as the large number of faith spaces. The closure of community halls and faith spaces in the second and third lockdowns was widely seen to have a big impact on social relations, with many struggling to stay in touch and connect digitally over the winter months.

"Everybody would like to be in a place where they feel at home and relaxed. Before COVID, when we go to church, we can see the people, and then when the service finishes they don't want to go, they want to associate and bond. When you don't have that space it's a challenge." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

Views around the regeneration were slightly more positive in the second round of interviews in terms of the potential benefits investment could bring. However, many were still concerned that the new developments would not address the needs of the local community or the shortage in affordable housing, as well as continuing fears over high-rise and densification.

"We're not talking about 'oh yeah it's a couple of buildings going up' - it's substantial change in terms of population density. I think change is a scary thing for most people. And if change is coming on a big scale it can causes a lot of anxiety." (Resident)

Another important concern was the lack of a voice for many groups, particularly the most disadvantaged Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups who also may face difficulties accessing services.

"Many have significant needs, and they are not voicing their need, it is tough. To hear their views is the most important job right now." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders felt that some groups were misunderstood, and barriers to engagement were put in place. For example, many families are too overstretched with work and childcare to invest time in consultation processes. The formal requirements of setting up a TRA were also seen to be a barrier, stopping some communities from accessing funding and having a voice.

These barriers were also seen to exist in other formal spaces, for example some local schools did not have a parents' group, because parents were seen to be too busy and these traditional structures were unfamiliar to some people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

"When you do have kids, you will go to a school which has a PTA, which provides a very strong voice for the local community. We don't have one here - what's replacing it? Being here after a few years I was shocked that there was so little voice in the community." (Resident)

A healthier life

Many concerns about mental health were voiced, linked to social isolation and the closure of social spaces – including faith spaces and community halls. This was described as affecting certain groups differently, such as for younger people who were struggling with the impact of home-schooling in the summer, and older people who had less access to the online spaces where interaction and support could be found.

"Mental health is difficult to measure, unless you take a wider survey. But from what we know, I think having the children at home most of the time affects their social interaction skills, and also not being able to carry out the regular routine, go out play football with mates or whatever, and has affected their fitness." (Resident)

Additionally, there was concern around the delays to hospital treatments for residents with non-COVID-19 health issues, as well as continued concern about air pollution along the Old Kent Road.

Safety

Safety was raised less in the second phase of interviews than the first, however when mentioned there was a general view that things had improved compared to the past. Compared to the situation in the past, tensions around race were seen to have diminished.

Others described specific problems such as graffiti on faith spaces and public areas, but the main concerns focused on perceptions of crime and a perceived lack of security.

Local assets and challenges

Compared to the first phase of interviews, stakeholders put less emphasis on open and green spaces, and much more on the lack of affordable housing and indoor community and youth spaces.

"Some of our community members complain about the housing problem. Getting moved from one place to another. Queuing for a very long time. We make this known to the council when we speak to them. This is a BIG problem that some are facing." (Stakeholder)

The absence of social spaces in the area was exacerbated by the closure of those that exist in the second and third lockdowns. Uncertainty about reopening was challenging for people operating spaces.

There was a view that there are severe shortages in skills and work opportunities, particularly for young people. High numbers of residents in temporary accommodation and those with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' were also cited as major challenges for agencies providing services.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

All stakeholders shared a general view that the impact of COVID-19 had been the loss of work and income, overcrowded home situations and worsening mental health. Access to funding has also been a challenge for faith spaces who rely on in-person donations during services. Many have shifted to online funding platforms, but older groups have difficulty accessing these pages. Some faith groups also struggled to access council funding programmes.

"The council at the beginning around March/April time provided help for the charities and the mosques and the temples. We were rejected at this time for this funding - but we were not given a specific explanation why." (Stakeholder)

Most stakeholders, however, cited a general sense of fatigue about the pandemic, how the length of the crisis has led to many becoming burnt out and disengaged. Agencies have had to acknowledge how some residents felt overwhelmed by constant information on the dangers and risk of the virus.

"I remember putting something on the noticeboard about washing your hands and keeping your distance etc. And a neighbour stopped and was not interested at all - so much stress already, she didn't want another reminder. I decided to put something more positive, like 'keep calm and carry on' with pictures of rainbows and whatever! You have to find ways to give people more kindness and more hope." (Resident)

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A healthier life

The third phase findings had a number of similarities with the first and second phases, such as complaints of litter and poor maintenance of public and communal spaces. There was also a renewed emphasis on safety concerns over air pollution and traffic along the Old Kent Road. Some asked for better cycling infrastructure, as well as cycling shops and facilities, since a growing number were using cycling as their main means of transport. Although there was some appreciation that Future High Streets Funding could introduce an improved crossing on the Old Kent Road, a faster, larger scale response was felt to be needed.

The return of NHS treatments and surgeries was also valued after long backlogs during COVID-19, however there was concern that the early discharge of elderly patients needed more attention and support, particularly those without support networks of family and friends.

"Older people getting their surgeries and being discharged early have to rely on their families, but I'm not sure what happens with those who don't have community support." (Stakeholder)

Poor mental health due to the impact of the pandemic as well as wider issues of poverty were raised frequently in the second phase findings, and continued to be a pressing issue in the third. The reopening of spaces has been seen to be helping this, particularly for faith spaces holding regular face-to-face activities again. Green spaces and community gardens were also particularly praised for relieving mental health strains and allowing social connection. However, there was concern that many spaces on estates may be lost due to infill from regeneration plans, as well as there being an increasing burden placed on spaces such as Burgess Park from the planned increase in homes. The Cleaner Greener Safer Fund was seen as useful, but there was frustration that it could only be used for physical assets, when funding for workers to run activities and programmes was most needed.

A place to belong

Like the first and second phase, residents reported having a strong sense of belonging and identity in the area. These communal links were facilitated by the TRA's, faith spaces, community activities and residential green spaces. The mixed ethnicity and heritage, and the area's history as a neighbourhood for working people added to this sense of belonging for many.

"For a mum with children it's very inviting, has a strong community, the greenery, the parks for children, it's friendly, and the history. I like that there are so many people like me, my heritage." (Resident)

The perception of race and tensions between groups was slightly more prominent than in the first and second phases, with there being a greater awareness of inequities between white and Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents.

Like the first phase findings, the often overlooked history and heritage of the Old Kent Road was raised by a number of stakeholders. Some felt this history needed more attention and a space or museum to showcase the area's rich past. For example, some were concerned that Adam Kossowki's mural of the area's history being incorporated into a new private development would lead to its inaccessibility, since it is one of the few public art pieces in the area. Many also noted the need for more social and civic spaces, as well as more shops and cafes to act as social spaces to better facilitate community ties. There was great uncertainty over the impact of the regeneration on the pre-existing community relations, spaces and sense of belonging.

"I think the reason this street is interesting and alive is because it's home to so many people, and if they can't live there it'll feel even more of just a road." (Stakeholder)

"I don't like the word regeneration as it implies taking down cultural traditional ethnic shops and businesses to replace with new infrastructure like apartments." (Resident)

Local change and control

Like in the first phase findings, some residents welcomed the investment and change planned by the regeneration, and sometimes pointed to Elephant & Castle as a successful example they would like to see replicated. However, these sentiments were often mixed with a view that the changes would not benefit them, but higher-income and newer residents. Like the first and second phase findings, there was a common view that while there were consultations, residents' views were not heard or responded to.

There was also a growing perception that development schemes were planned and decided before consultation even began, adding to an increasing cynicism towards the council's efforts to engage. As in the first and second phase, some were still very frustrated with there being a lack of a clear definition of affordable housing. This was particularly the case in relation to the number of planning applications being made, and the limited time and capacity available for residents to engage on each.

"The same things keep coming up: what's affordable, what's for the community? Until there's a definition that can't be interpreted in different ways, and is clearly written down, we will keep asking." (Stakeholder)

Aaron.

Aaron led us down the Old Kent Road from Burgess Park. He is extremely knowledgeable about the area, having collaborated with community groups, architects, business owners, and artists to document local heritage. On our walk, we passed through several large-scale housing developments surrounding the park.

Aaron is wary of the development process. He speaks about the absence of public consultation, a negative impact on wildlife and greenery, and longstanding estates being allowed to fall into disrepair.

"Consultation needs to be done differently, and should be a physical presence in the neighbourhood...it's a box ticking exercise."

As we moved from one side of the neighbourhood to the other, Aaron noted that there is very little public art in the area. He believes works such as Adam Kossowski's mural on the former North Peckham Centre are part of the area's heritage. Aaron wonders if the mural will still be visible to the public given all the changes that are taking place in the neighbourhood.

We pass the big box stores, which once replaced smaller shops, but are now an important part of community life. Most are being demolished to make way for residential towers. Other businesses are struggling with rising rental costs.

Aaron is part of a network of residents concerned with the changes that are taking place in the local area. They have tried to make the consultation process more democratic, and contest demolition-led housing development. However, a lack of funding available to community groups has made it difficult for them to keep going.

"This neighbouring road was recently pedestrianised, which at first worried and angered local businesses who thought they would lose business and struggle to do deliveries. During the pandemic it became a strength though, as they were able to spill their outdoor seating out into the road."

Some residents however felt the council were making extra efforts to engage residents in planning decisions, and particularly so for young people. Southwark's Young Advisors being present on planning calls, workshops for younger people, and efforts by local community groups to include them, was reported to have had an impact.

"There were a lot of interesting voices coming from young people which I thought was really interesting. At times it is usually middle-aged people, almost predictable. They were very vocal. One was talking about creative spaces, and accessibility, and affordability. Which really got the discussion going." (Stakeholder)

As in the first and second phase findings, local businesses have continued to report feeling excluded from regeneration plans. Light-industrial businesses continued to feel entirely marginalised and excluded, and high-street traders along the Old Kent Road have been hugely impacted by the regeneration plans coupled with the pandemic, with many closing down between the first and third rounds of research. Many reported receiving no council support, and many that remain believe they have little future in the area.

"They are championing things as they destroy them … It's a tickbox exercise." (Stakeholder)

Safety

As in the first phase findings, it was often traders who were most consistently vocal about anti-social behaviour on the street, as this they said impacted their business. As in all the phases of the findings, there was a concern that young people had fewer opportunities and activities available to them. More so than the previous two phases however, young people using parks and public spaces to socialise caused greater anxiety for some residents, especially at night. There was also a rising perception of knife crime and violence among young people, the trauma and social problems surrounding it, and also a perception that it was a lot less reported than in the past. Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were described to be impacted worst, and a number reported feeling less safe in the presence of police due to discriminatory stop-and-search practices.

"Teenagers used to have somewhere to go after school instead of the streets but that's been taken away from them." (Resident)

As in the previous two phases, longstanding residents reported feeling safer due to having more connections with the local community and a greater sense of belonging.

"Sometimes there are people smoking and drinking at night. I am a waitress so come home late and they hang out over there by the park corner. But my neighbours are always out too, and they leave their doors open and hang out so it feels safe." (Resident)

Unlike the previous two phases, however, there was more mention of gender-based safety, particularly issues of domestic violence in the community which had been worsened by the impacts of the lockdown. Some female residents also reported feeling increased anxiety and less safe since the murder of Sarah Everard in Clapham.

Local assets and challenges

As we saw in the first and second phases of research, the accessibility and convenience of public transport links were widely praised, but there was still a wide view that there were too few amenities such as banks, shops or pharmacies. Some were disappointed in the planned closure of the large box stores due to the regeneration, and others were concerned over the rising cost of living. Like the previous two phases the existing social housing was seen as a strong asset, but there was a view that the regeneration would impact the affordability and supply of these homes.

"More civic cultural spaces that represent the community that are here. I think in the future it'll be amazing to have a cinema or more social spaces created along the road. Without that, it really does become just a big road." (Stakeholder)

Like the first two phases, the most mentioned challenge was access to opportunities and spaces for young people.

"GCSEs being predicted, and then the final term of year 11 just being a bit nothingy. Was a real sense that the 15-18 year group had so little in the way of very local opportunities." (Stakeholder)

However there are a couple of community-led spaces soon to be opened which has generated a lot of enthusiasm and engagement in the community. The operators of these spaces however felt like they could have had more support from the council.

"That experience being in a space that was very visible (on the high-street) proved to us that if you can make creative activity more accessible in terms of visibility, then lots more people get engaged." (Stakeholder)

As in the first and second phases, local businesses have continued to be impacted hugely by the pandemic and the regeneration. A number of businesses interviewed in summer 2020 had closed. Key issues were road closures and parking, business rates, loss of footfall due to the pandemic and the regeneration, and rising supply costs. Some called for better promotion of businesses such as through a community directory, business rent relief, and greater COVID-19 support from the council.

"The Council has helped some people but not me, I'm really struggling, they say I'm selling food so I got no help."; "landlord is not helping with rent, so I'm paying from my savings"; "if we don't survive this year we might have to close." (Trader)

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

The reopening of many spaces and the relaxing of social distancing has brought a lot of benefits to some residents. The reopening of faith spaces, barber shops, hairdressers and schools for example has provided a lot of relief for some parts of the community, helping reduce the impact on mental health and social connections.

"A lot more people back to work, and most children back to school - can hear the kids at school which is really nice."; "Reopening has been quite a good thing, being in doors was hard for the kids also affecting their mental health, but now they can play and you can see their excitement." (Resident)

Some vulnerable groups however are still facing isolation, particularly older residents and those without adequate internet access. For some organisations there is difficulty phasing out and balancing online engagement with face-to-face, with some residents still remaining at risk of the virus. On a local level, however, many describe a continued neighbourliness brought about by the initial lockdown, particularly through children playing together, and value the stronger connections they feel with the local community.

"Everyone was locked away but now we talk to our neighbours and can get out which is great. I go to my neighbours to chat if I ever need anything and now we see each other more." (Resident)

Compared to the first and second phases, some organisations and businesses have found it increasingly difficult to find support from the council. Others have not been eligible at any point of the pandemic for council support, and still feel they have not been given a clear explanation as to why, causing frustration.

"Funding has been really hard to come by in the past six months, as a lot of emergency funding started at the beginning of lockdown, but now sort of feels like that funding has dried up for the future." (Stakeholder)

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Camberwell

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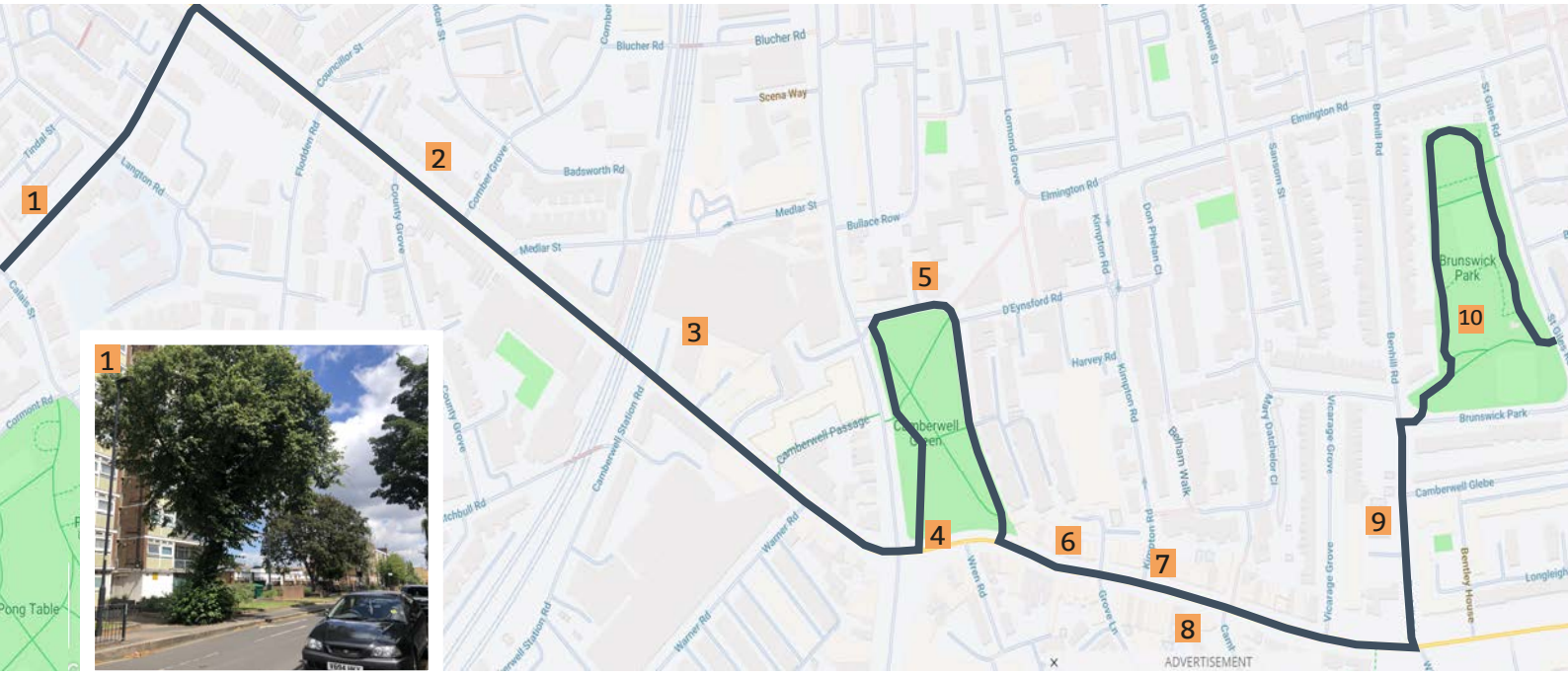
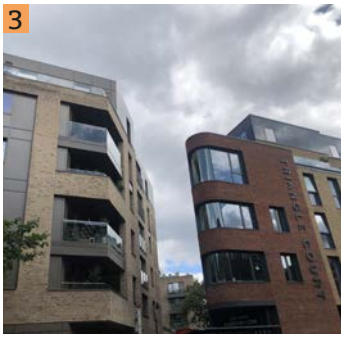




There is a mixture of scales and architectural styles in the area. Housing blocks loom over terraced housing. New multi-use buildings lead up to Camberwell Green. They blend in with the neighbouring buildings, only standing out slightly for their newness

.

With its light colours and clean design lines, the library is among the most noticeable new buildings in the Camberwell area. Behind the library is the now closed Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court, a deserted space that contrasts with the welcoming library and the lively park nearby. The seating area nearby is well-maintained and used by different groups of people.

New shop fronts are popping up amongst the old shops, especially on Church Street. These are differentiated by their colours and designs. The newer shops have simpler designs whilst many of the more established businesses have ad hoc storefronts.

Camberwell

This section sets out the findings of the Camberwell research, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Diversity is seen as a key strength of the local area. While residents perceived Camberwell to be home to a mix of people, residents were uncertain whether those from different backgrounds interact regularly. Residents and stakeholders noted that more community events and activities would encourage wider participation and would help develop networks of support across groups.
- Burgess Park and other green spaces are highly valued by residents. These have been important places where people connected to each other throughout the pandemic, many people reported meeting friends and socialising with neighbours in the park.
- The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups and lower-income communities was a concern raised during the three phases of research. Stakeholders spoke about how vulnerable people, including those with dementia or living in overcrowded households, have struggled. Residents and stakeholders reported that the pandemic put a further strain on people working informally, in precarious work or on zero-hours contracts.
- There are mixed views about the changes that are taking place locally. Camberwell residents were generally sceptical about their ability to influence what goes on in their area. A common feeling is that the regeneration will not bring opportunities for longstanding residents, and there are fears that this group might be pushed out of the area. A smaller group of residents was more positive about the current pace of development and appreciated that the area is attracting new visitors.
- Several residents raised concerns about the amount of community engagement that has moved online in the pandemic. They hoped that opportunities for face-to-face participation will return once lockdown measures are lifted.
- Pollution, noise and air quality were among the major concerns for those who took part in the research. Some residents noted that areas around Camberwell Green, where the traffic moves slowly and buses and lorries are idling, are most affected by noise and pollution.
- The majority of Camberwell residents felt safe in their neighbourhoods. Some characterised their local area as 'quiet,' though a few residents and traders thought that a post-COVID-19 uptick in the night-time economy might increase anti-social behaviour on the streets.
- Residents were also worried that lockdowns had affected people's physical and mental health. Some commented how reduced physical activity and eating processed foods is having an impact on their bodies. A majority of residents and stakeholders reported that issues such as anxiety, loneliness, and loss of confidence were affecting people from all age groups, with younger and older people identified as being most at risk.
- Volunteering with local groups increased during the first lockdown in March-June 2020. Residents spoke about working with local groups to deliver groceries or prescriptions to people who were shielding. This made them feel more involved in their local communities at a time when other community activities had stopped. In the third phase of research, fewer residents spoke about their volunteering activities and participation in mutual aid groups, suggesting that there had been a drop in involvement as the pandemic entered its second year.
- In June and July 2021, with the easing of the third national lockdown, Camberwell residents and

stakeholders reported that their local area was slowly coming back to life. However, many traders said that they were still struggling with the effects of lockdowns and noted a sense of reluctance among their customers to come into their stores.

Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

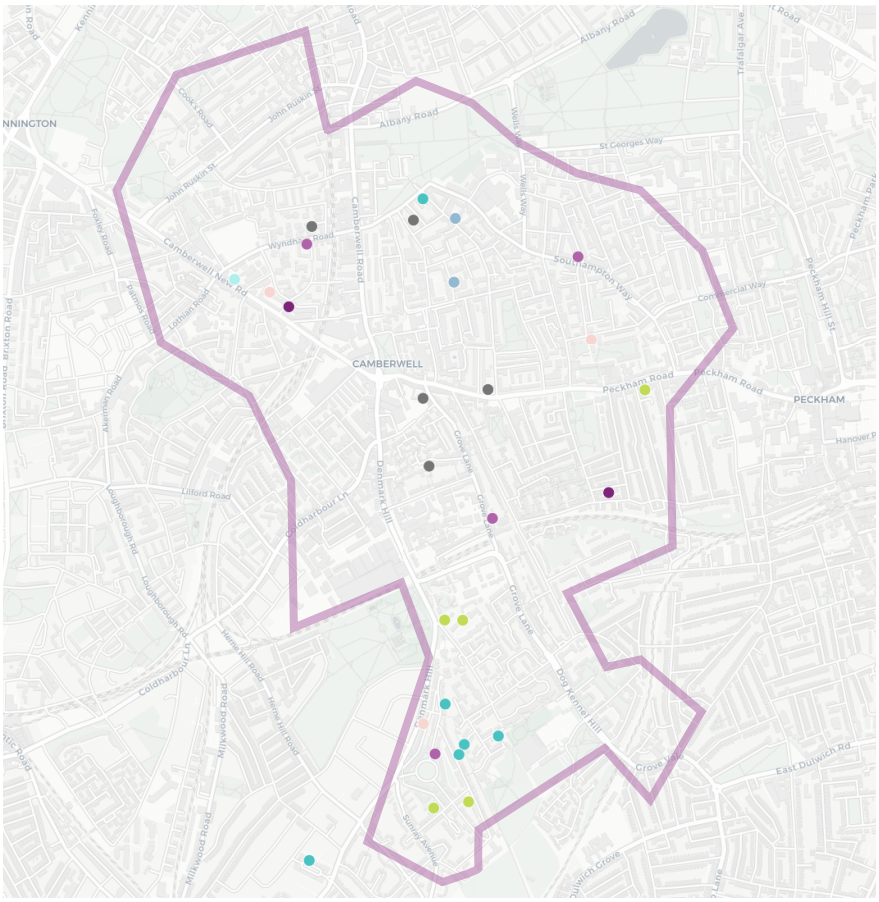
Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "not-noisy" or "don't-come-here) is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year- and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Word clouds: how people described Camberwell in street interviews in summer 2020 (left) & summer 2021 (right)

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

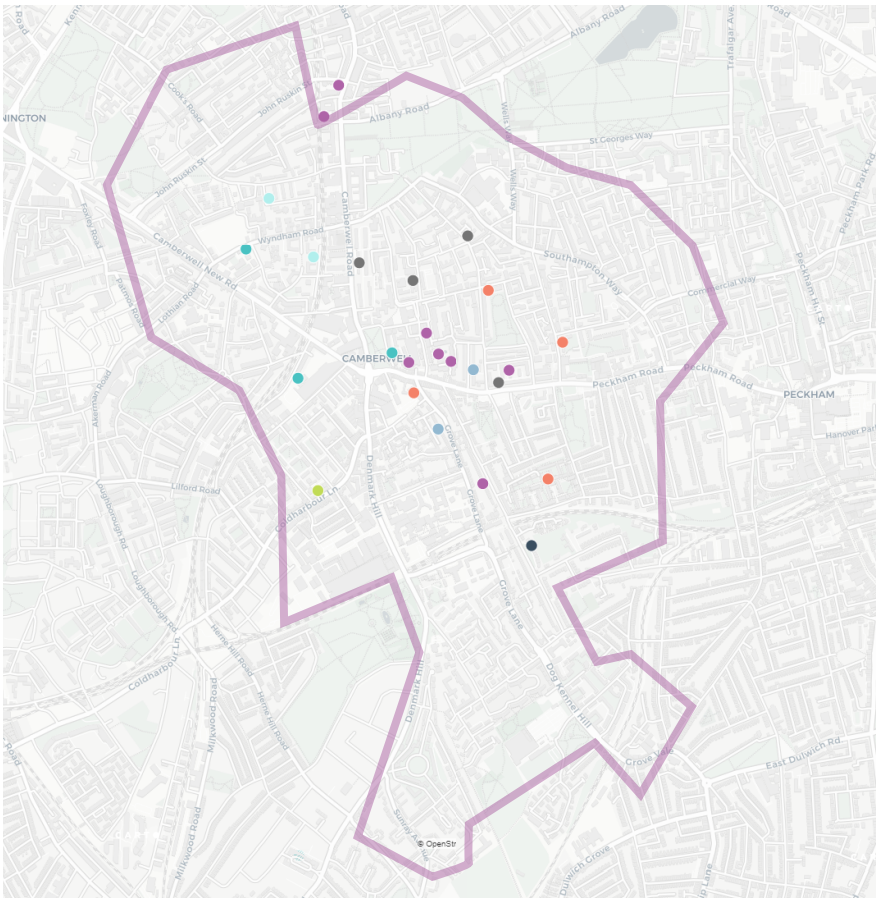
Summer 2020



- Parks
- The green
- Quiet areas
- Diversity
- Transport connections
- Recreation facilities
- Proximity
- Other
- Research area boundary

Incomplete postcods, not mapped
1

Summer 2021



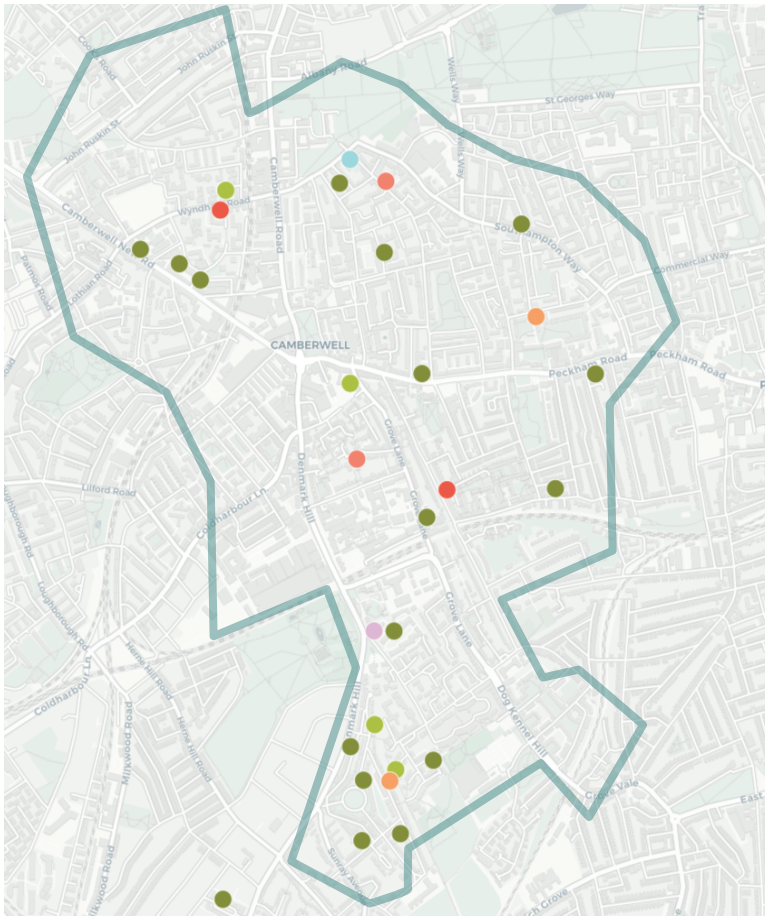
- Community
- Parks
- The green
- Quiet areas
- Diversity
- Shopping facilities
- Transport connections
- Other
- Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
7 3 1 1 1 3 2

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

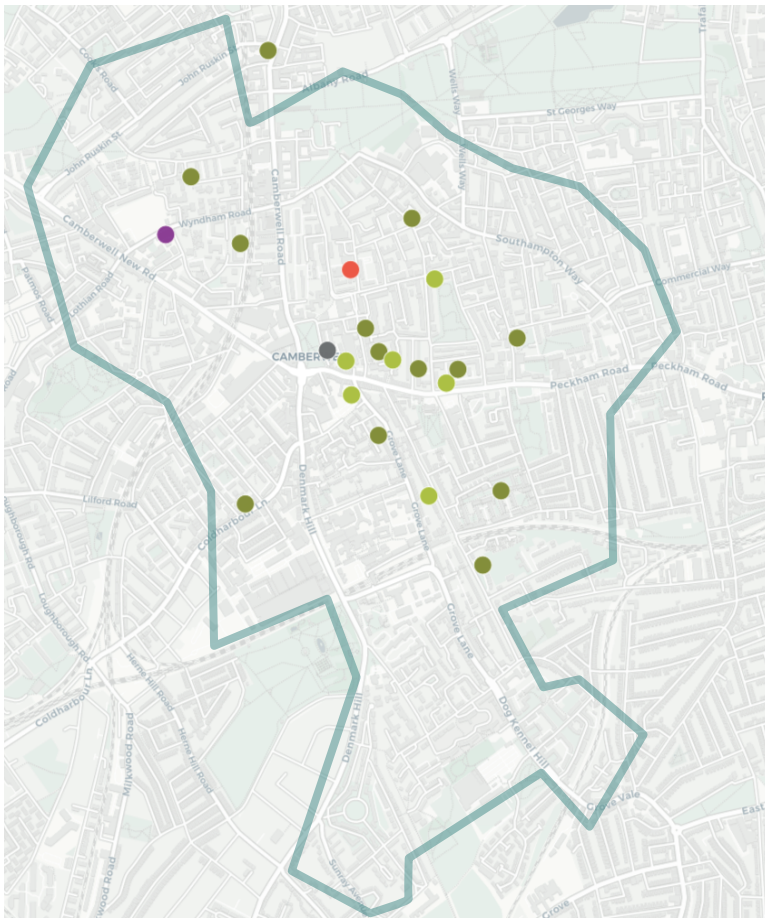
Summer 2020



No
Don't feel safe all the time
Not safe at night
Mostly safe
Yes but Church Street can be unsafe
Yes but around Camberwell Green can be unsafe
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcode, not mapped
1

Summer 2021



Don't know
No
Not safe at night
Yes but I don't walk through Burgess Park at night
Yes but for teenage boys it doesn't feel safe
Yes but the lighting is poor in the area
Mostly safe
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 1 1 1 2 10

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 23 in depth interviews: nine in phase 1, seven in phase 2, seven in phase 3 including a faith organisation, community organisations, a business network, two local agencies, a GP, tenants' and residents' organisations, and a community health worker.

Traders: interviews with 18 traders including a bakery, café, laundrette, dry cleaner, bike shop, grocery, barbers, tailor, hairdressers, nail salon, and pub.

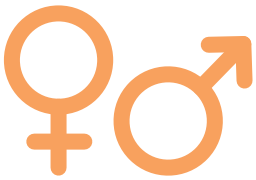
Local residents: walking ethnographies with five residents; street interviews with 86 residents, demographics below.

2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 35

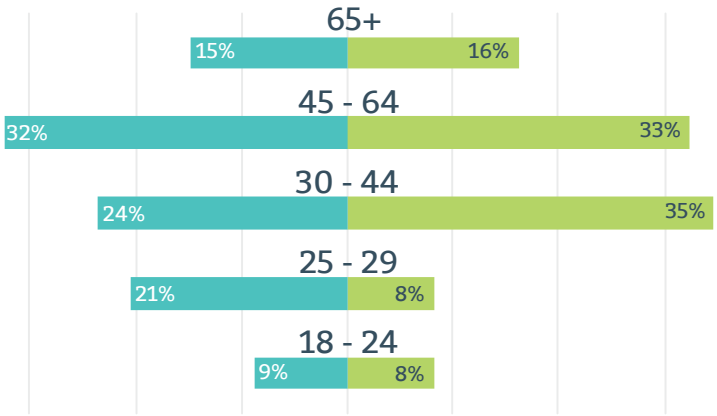
2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 51

Gender

Female	Male
62%	38%
41%	59%



Age



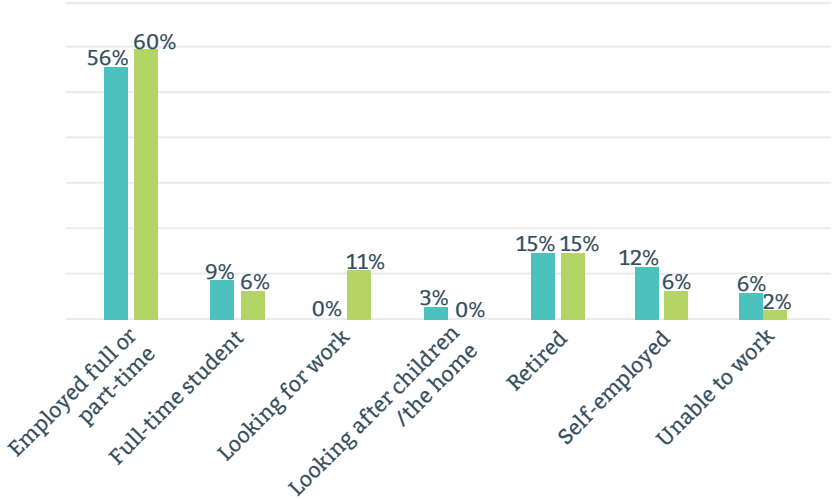
Lived in the area

6%	6%	< 1 year
18%	6%	1 - 3 years
18%	9%	4 - 5 years
9%	19%	6 - 10 years
15%	28%	11 - 20 years
33%	32%	20+ years

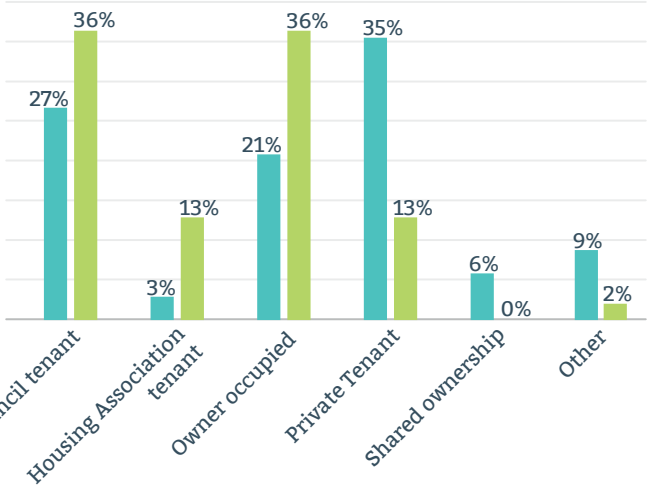
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	0%	4%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	31%	40%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	9%	7%
White	56%	49%
Other Ethnic group	3%	0%

Employment



Tenure



Walk through Camberwell

"As you make your way on Camberwell New Road from the intersection with Lothian Road, the area appears moderately green and well-kept. Buildings in the area have a mix of architectural styles and heights: low and wide buildings, rising newer tower blocks, relatively new two-storey brick terraced houses, and semi-detached Victorian housing.

The road looking to Camberwell Green is still relatively green; mature trees line the pavements on either side. However, as the high street approaches, the area changes its character. The Walworth bus depot marks the change in the built environment. Greener, quiet residential roads to the left and the louder, busier high street to the right.

Camberwell Church Street is home to a variety of businesses, including a wide range of food establishments. One notices easily the mix of longstanding and newer establishments. The older businesses with their colourful storefronts contrast with the muted colours used by the newer shopfronts.

Benhill Road is a quiet residential area in the proximity of the High Street, with a mixture of terraced housing and low-rise blocks. Moving even further away from the bustling High Street, Brunswick Park appears rather small from the entrance. However, as you walk around its winding paths, you realise it's wider, accommodating a variety of users and activities: people walk their dogs, use the two tennis courts and basketball/football court, or just enjoy sitting on a bench."

(Transect walk fieldnotes, Camberwell, 29th July 2021)

Detailed findings

PHASE 1: Summer 2020

A place to belong

In general, residents reported that people living in Camberwell get on well with people from other backgrounds. Churches, a community centre, cafes, pubs, local clubs, and parks are mentioned by residents as places to socialise and spaces where they have built their networks of support. However, there are mixed views about the way that people from different backgrounds interact, and a significant number of residents reported that they do not often engage with their neighbours and do not rely on community supports.

Residents noted that there could be more contact between people from different backgrounds. A number commented that more community events and activities would encourage wider participation and would help develop networks of support.

"I like how multicultural it is, so I wish we could make things accessible and bring people together. COVID highlighted that people need support (it instigated it), isolation is hard, there's fear, mental health issues - we should know more about each other. We need more people to connect and talk to each other and ask for help." (Resident)

Residents reported a strong sense of belonging to the local area, giving a wide range of reasons, including having been born there, access to amenities, diversity, familiarity with the area and knowing the neighbours.

"Yes, [I belong]! I have been here a long time, from when it was nothing, and do feel like I belong - it's like any relationship, they have their ups & downs but you have to stick with it, not just chop and change; how will you ever build anything that lasts?" (Resident)

Residents spoke about the way that differences in income and health vulnerabilities have made certain groups struggle more than others.

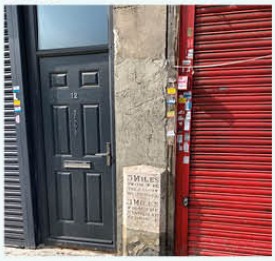
George.

The walk starts at St. Giles Church, and the estates north of Peckham Road, then Camberwell Grove, Denmark Hill, back to Peckham Road again and to Sophocles Bakery.

George describes Camberwell as historically diverse with ever changing demographics. He likes that different people bring their own cultures to the area. In the last 10 years he says that more people from Latin America have moved to the area. He has never witnessed animosity between different groups and he feels safe in his area.

George feels that he belongs in his neighbourhood and that it has a strong sense of community and the common good. He is very engaged with his local community and local projects and he feels that residents do have some control over what happens in the area. He believes there is a very strong social aspect to life in Camberwell and the many green spaces encourage people to come together outside of their home. He likes to socialise with friends in local pubs, where he knows many of the regulars. George does not like the amount of traffic, which contributes to high levels of noise and pollution, jeopardising health.

"The great diversity of people has always been a very strong point of the area."



Local change and control

The majority of residents and traders reported that they did not feel they have control over what happens in their local area and did not feel their voices are being heard.

"No, I guess, the few times I've engaged with the council it's been difficult. I don't know where to get more info about the outcome. I don't know where to report safety issues in Camberwell. I tried reporting anti-social behaviour, but was told it was not an emergency, so I left a voicemail and then didn't hear back. There's a lack of response. Voices aren't heard." (Resident)

There are mixed views about the changes that are taking place locally. A significant number of residents emphasised concerns that lower-income residents were being displaced by change. Stakeholders and residents commented that affordable housing is needed, however there were concerns that this would replace green spaces, disproportionately affecting families and older people.

"Not sure how I feel about the changes taking place through regeneration in the local area. Redevelopment behind Sainsbury's (football club grounds) will increase housing. But there are also negatives - flats, more pressure on transport. It will negatively affect families, but some see the positives. I'm neutral." (Resident)

Residents were unsure about who will benefit from the changes that are taking place in their local area. Some did not feel that the longstanding residents are benefitting from new housing or new businesses.

"I think the changes should be for the whole community and not just for the few. For example, there was this nursery, and they closed it, and opened a pawn shop, and then they closed that and built penthouse flats. So, it's the better off who benefit, but really it should be the whole community." (Resident)

A healthier life

Local stakeholders mentioned that there is a good health provision and much health expertise in the area, as it is very close to two major hospitals – Kings and the Maudsley. Parks and green spaces are seen as supporting healthier lives, both residents and stakeholders mentioned the positive impact these assets have on physical and mental health of people living in the area.

"I like the greenery … it's a wellness feature which allows people to walk and cycle … Ruskin Park, Brockwell Park, Dulwich Park - there's a lot of trees." (Resident)

Some of the stakeholders flagged that recent migrants and people with no recourse to public funds have limited access to healthcare. Many people were believed to be experiencing poor mental health. Stakeholders described how vulnerable local people, such as people with dementia, have faced additional struggles during lockdown. They noted that these groups have less resilience, making them more vulnerable to crisis.

"Carers haven't been coming around to look after people with dementia. They have been abandoned. Volunteers have taken responsibility for looking after these people. They are not supposed to be doing this. Also, neighbours have had to step in." (Stakeholder)

Many residents also brought up concerns about noise, pollution and air quality caused by traffic.

"There is a big problem with pollution and noise because Peckham Road serves as a major transportation artery to the lorries that carry goods from warehouses west of London into central and south London. In Camberwell, this is particularly bad because the road is close to the estates and high streets, meaning that the levels of CO2 that people inhale in the area are very high." (Resident)

Safety

Most residents reported feeling safe in Camberwell. A few, however, commented that they avoid some places, because of anti-social behaviour. Some felt there were problems linked to alcohol and people hanging around on Camberwell Church Street and Camberwell Green.

Local assets and challenges

Green spaces, local diversity, easy access to central London, and having shops and supermarkets nearby were the main assets mentioned by residents. Perceptions of transport were more mixed; some residents mentioned that there are good connections to other parts of Camberwell, Brixton, Peckham and East Dulwich, while others believed that transport links across south London could be improved. Tight local communities were perceived as an important asset, especially because of the support they offer to vulnerable groups.

"There are parks in the local area where I can socialise, especially Camberwell Green and Ruskin Park. It's also easy to get transport (there are buses and trains everywhere)." (Resident)

The lack of opportunities for young people was a common concern for stakeholders and residents. While schools in the area are seen to be good, there are few outside school activities and spaces for young people. Some stakeholders spoke about the need for enrichment activities outside school to support aspirations at an early age. Stakeholders and residents also discussed the lack of good quality work for young people, as well as for older adults.

Traffic and air quality were also seen as major problems by residents and stakeholders. Lack of parking was flagged by some residents and traders, especially during the lockdown as people started to rely more on their cars for everyday shopping.

"Parking needs to be improved. I used to have a lot of clients but lost them because of parking. Hair can take five hours, so it adds up. Now people are avoiding public transport more, so they need parking, or people will choose alternative places to do their hair." (Trader)

Frances.

The walk began in Rust Square, passing through Addington Square, to Burgess Park and on to New Church Road. The walk then continued to the Magistrates Court Camberwell Library and Camberwell Green.

Frances enjoys living in Camberwell and especially appreciates her proximity to Burgess Park, which she describes as her sanctuary. She walks through Burgess Park every day and describes how spending time in the park was fundamental to her recovery after a period of ill health.

Overall Frances loves the improvements that have been made to the area, however, she thinks that graffiti on the Magistrates Court should be removed. She thinks that the area would benefit from much better signage.

Frances is unhappy at the number of homeless people that gather on Camberwell Green.

Frances doesn't feel safe shopping after dark in Camberwell and says that there are not enough community police officers about. She also describes concerns people drinking alcohol in the summer on Camberwell Green, without enforcement.

Frances reports not feeling heard by the council. She objects to the council being 'digital by default', which she feels makes it very difficult for those not connected digitally, to get in touch.

"It's hard to get in touch [with the council] unless you are online."

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

The main concerns cited by stakeholders and residents that they associated with COVID-19 were the loss of jobs in the local area, increasing strain on mental health, the few places to socialise, the move to online education, and digital exclusion of those without devices or limited internet access and digital skills.

"The pandemic has affected everyone. It's not like before. We implemented social distancing and safety rules and hand gel at each station in the shop. We stopped watching football in the shop because of social distancing; football would bring a lot of people into the shop who came to watch it together." Trader)

A number of stakeholders flagged that residents with multiple vulnerabilities were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and restrictions, many remained isolated for long periods of time. Some residents mentioned how they started volunteering to help people who were shielding, or to help neighbours with groceries or prescriptions. This made them feel more involved in their local communities at a time when other community activities had stopped.

"During COVID-19 there was a WhatsApp group created called 'The Denmark Hill Estate' and there were other similar groups created to help out in other estates. Leaflets were posted so people knew they could get help. It's a keen community and people help those in need who use to live isolated. The community helped with groceries, collections for groups, donations and prescription pick up for vulnerable people." (Resident)

Cora.

The walk with Cora took in the breadth of Burgess Park, ending at the Tesco store near the Old Kent Road gate.

Burgess Park is a very important part of Cora's everyday life and she spends a lot of her time there with her children. She likes the new additions to the park, including the new playgrounds, and the BMX space. Chumleigh Gardens is her favourite spot and she often takes her children there. Cora feels she belongs in the area and that it has a rich diversity comprised of many cultures. Cora describes herself as a 'foodie' and enjoys eating with her friends at the many local ethnic restaurants.

Cora describes how, in the summer and at weekends, different communities come together for celebrations, including Latin American, Jamaican and African communities. Cora especially enjoys the Colombian parties and football activities. She says she feels safe walking through the park both during the day and at night.

Cora commented on the exclusive, gated housing in the neighbourhood, and how this contrasts greatly with how the majority of people in the neighbourhood live. Overall Cora thinks that change in the area is not a bad thing, except when it disrupts the community and people get driven out.

"All my life has been around Burgess Park."

"So many different cultures and things to do."

The impact of COVID-19 on small local traders has been substantial, and the majority of those we spoke with reported significant difficulties. Some who had just reopened after a period of three to four months said that footfall in Camberwell was still low. Bringing back customers was difficult, even as lockdown restrictions were being lifted. A small number of traders noted that they extended lines of credit to their customers more often than before, "but only for loyal customers, as it doesn't help the business".

"So quiet because of COVID. We shut for four months. We're trying to rebuild up the shop from scratch and encourage old regulars." (Trader)

"A lot has changed. Tried to do it slowly, in phases. First two weeks of lockdown, we participated in the scheme for NHS staff, where local people bought food and we cooked and delivered food to them. This helped us to keep going and showed our support to the NHS. Doing home deliveries and collections for online orders increased. We furloughed and cut staff, and changed from being a sit-in cafe to doing only takeaway, expanding the grocery part of the store. Probably won't be a cafe again." (Trader)

Traders were concerned about the future, anticipating difficulties paying rent and bills. Some mentioned that they were thinking about shifting their business to make it more convenient for customers, some were experimenting with home deliveries.

"People are not coming in. Employees can't work. People are scared to come out. I need a word for more than "worse" to describe how bad the business is doing." (Trader)

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

Residents and stakeholders interviewed in winter 2020-21 overwhelmingly described Camberwell as an area rich in diversity with a high level of tolerance amongst different groups. Tenants and Residents Associations were highlighted as working hard to organise community events, including working closely with local community arts centres. Stakeholders described a strong sense of belonging and neighbourliness amongst different local groups.

"The Muslim communities get on with each other very well. Both the local Muslim community and their faith membership is very diverse, it includes Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Nigerians, Indians, Sierra Leoneans, and other West Africans as well as people from other parts of the world." (Stakeholder)

As we found in the first round of research, stakeholders noted that the types of people living in the area are changing rapidly, and that in the last five to six years many more younger people, including students, have moved in. Some student accommodation is close to social housing estates, however the two groups do not mix.

"The area seems to have two streams of demographics: the newcomers and gentrifiers and the existing council tenants." (Stakeholder)

"[Camberwell] is very diverse and interesting and dynamic with lots going on but people on the estate are just busy getting on with their lives and don't take part." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

The stakeholders we spoke to described regeneration in Camberwell mainly in negative terms. Repairs to housing estates are perceived as taking an unnecessarily long time, which effects residents' quality of life. Some stakeholders reported that some long-standing residents view new developments with resentment and anger. A common feeling is that the regeneration will not bring any opportunities for people who live in the area for longer, and there are fears that this group are being pushed out of Camberwell.

"There is a lot of development and that brings stress and strain ... All this is stressful and impacts on mental health of residents." (Stakeholder)

"Camberwell is a changing area. You blink and new flats are going up everywhere. There is a lot of anger in the original community. They feel they are being pushed out." (Stakeholder)

Access to information about local issues was described as being poor. Stakeholders pointed out that information from the council is available online but not all residents have online access. Stakeholders also described how online consultation, common since March 2020, can create barriers for some.

"Consultation is all online and so it is excluding people who are the most vulnerable and who haven't got access to digital. It is a completely flawed system. There is no arbitration system to escalate things. All people are disempowered. Decisions are being made only from the council's perspective. We used to all sit around a table and include everybody's perspective." (Stakeholder)

If there is access to the internet anyone can find out information from the local council, however, for those who don't it is very difficult. There are notice boards around the areas and estates are never maintained, the information is all out of date." (Stakeholder)

A healthier life

Stakeholders spoke of high levels of mental health problems amongst local residents, rooted in problems accessing benefits, unemployment, difficulties seeing family, and a lack of access to leisure facilities. Some

stakeholders mentioned that some residents from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities were experiencing higher levels of suffering and loneliness. It was noted that some members of these communities do not trust health services and can be wary of engaging with services.

"The GPs do not understand their culture and they do not feel listened to and they feel dismissed. There is a lack of a nuanced approach culturally to minority ethnic groups." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders also described an increase in mental health problems among parents and how this puts more pressures on school staff to provide emotional support.

"There is no easily accessible help for mental health for parents. Unless they are officially diagnosed it's difficult to seek out any support." (Stakeholder)

Some stakeholders mentioned that people within LGBT communities can be vulnerable, facing problems accessing housing, stigma and discrimination, and substance abuse. Pollution and air quality are a key concern, especially around Camberwell Green where the traffic moves very slowly and buses and lorries are idling.

Local assets and challenges

Like in the first phase of research, stakeholders described a strong community and many community organisations. Some commented on the lack of community spaces for young people, older people, and families, and saw this as an increasing problem.

"What is missing is having the connections between all the service providers and one place where all services can be brought together. There is a resistance to engage by some BAME communities. We should be taking services to the churches. We should be engaging with the Pastors and helping to normalise the user of services." (Stakeholder)

Some also noted that transport links could be improved.

"Camberwell only has buses and they are very slow. It didn't get the Bakerloo line extension - it went to Old Kent Road. TFL is reluctant to open Camberwell station." (Stakeholder)

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Stakeholders reported that the financial impact of job losses is affecting people from all backgrounds, noting that some residents face deficits in living costs up to £600 per month, after benefits. Residents from minority communities, and people with no recourse to public funds, are noted as having been hit especially hard. The lack of opportunities to socialise has affected everyone.

As schools closed again after Christmas, some children are reported as facing difficulties from not being in school. Stakeholders reported that many 16 to 25 year olds, who were already facing mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, are now faring much worse, with growing reports of self-harm.

Stakeholders told us that lockdown has highlighted the level of need among older people.

"Before the lockdown they were only just surviving, but they found a way of surviving. However now it is difficult for them to access services and the telephone assessment is not great." (Stakeholder)

Most of the stakeholders we spoke with had increased their online presence in order to continue to engage with their members during restrictions. Some were able to all offer most of their services and activities online, while others used social media platforms to keep in touch.

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A place to belong

Conversations in summer 2021 reflected earlier phases of research, residents described how they belong in the area, and reported having plenty of people to turn to for support. Many residents attributed this to the strong voluntary sector, local community organisations, and active TRAs. These groups worked hard to see that people were not excluded from support and that vulnerable people were supported. During the pandemic these social ties became more visible, and many residents spoke of the kindness of their neighbours.

"During lockdown, my neighbours always called to ask about my wellbeing. The kids in the area also used to check in." (Resident)

Residents perceived Camberwell to be home to a mix of people and reported some friendliness between different social groups. Some observe that during community events, such as TRA fun days, people from different backgrounds are seen to be getting on

Others characterised the status quo as polite, but not harmonious. While there were not many obvious signs of antagonism, many respondents admitted they were worried about the issues facing less visible groups. They voiced concern about black residents, especially in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, and about disabled and low-income people. Few people provided concrete examples of the problems they were referring to, but many described their sense that suffering was going on in their community behind closed doors.

Several residents characterised newer white residents as being the least likely to integrate with other people. Some people felt alienated by the presence of this newer population, perceiving them to have different interests.

"It's like the United Nations here ... People have more in common than not." (Resident)

"The area is changing a lot and the people are not the same. There are more tourists in the area and it doesn't feel like the same Walworth. You used to see familiar people now, it's mostly young people, in their mid-twenties and posh. More rich people have come into the area and because of that, there has been a change in interests whereas before, everyone used to like the same things." (Resident)

"I don't know. I sort of feel like I'm passing through and everyone has just been put here, doing their own thing, co-existing separately but peacefully." (Resident)

Traders reported having a varied client base, with most serving a wide range of groups. Many enjoyed having regular customers and said they could also rely on their fellow traders for favours. The more upmarket restaurants, pubs, and bottleshops said that they cater to an older, middle-class white clientele.

"We have everyone: British, African, Asian, we welcome everybody. We make jokes, we try to make everyone happy and laughing ... Customers come from everywhere, we welcome everyone." (Trader)

Local change and control

Camberwell residents were generally sceptical about their ability to influence what goes on in the local area. Many people felt that they are not consulted in planning decisions, particularly blocking off roads or building housing. They noticed how the built environment changed with no warning. Several respondents noted that most public engagement happens online, and that opportunities for face-to-face participation have been steadily withdrawn.

"Things are done at a level of government that I can't influence." (Resident)

"We used to have Community Council meetings, but they decided to suspend them, without consulting us. Now that just stops the council from being held accountable by the community. The odds of a councillor replying to emails are very slim. Some of it is down to COVID, but those cutbacks have happened before. The police officer barely made it to our neighbourhood safety meetings, even though he is supposed to attend them." (Resident)

Many residents reported negative experiences with the council. They mentioned slow response times, a refusal to take action, and lack of clear information. Some people are positive about the current pace of development. They describe how it "refreshes" the area and puts Camberwell "on the map", and are pleased to see greater awareness of the area and more people coming to visit. As in the earlier phases of research, others felt that these changes meant that longstanding residents will be displaced, unable to access social housing and hit by the rising cost of living. People from social housing estates described feeling that their homes were being neglected in favour of the new private housing units. They described a fear of the future, and a lack of security in their living situation.

Giselle.

The walk began close to Giselle's home in a tree-lined residential area tucked away from the main road. Since her experience of Camberwell has mostly been through lockdown, she led us around the routes she used for her daily walks and exercise.

We stroll down Church Street, an area known for its independent food outlets and increasingly upmarket pubs. The area has seen lots of new businesses opening recently, most of them catering to a middle-class white crowd and to tourists. Giselle likes the area and feels she fits in here, but worries about the negative impact of recent developments on its affordability.

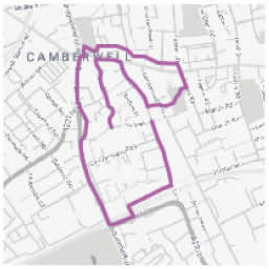
On our walk we see several signs of community activism. We pass a squatted fire station with signs protesting

police brutality. Giselle says that squatting is increasingly common in Camberwell. Giselle feels that people have control over small decisions, giving the example of a local trader whose tenure was under threat but saved by a local campaign. However, against bigger changes like large-scale development, she thinks the impact of local voices will be very small.

Because Camberwell has relatively few transport links, it can be difficult for Giselle's friends to visit her here. They often meet in Burgess Park, or socialise in her garden to keep costs down. Although Giselle's neighbours come

across as friendly, she hasn't had much chance to socialise with them during lockdowns.

"Camberwell is quite segregated in its built environment."



Many noted that the area is becoming gentrified, characterising this as a process of community erosion and ethnic displacement. Again, concerns were voiced about the negative impact this will have on Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and people from low-income backgrounds.

“The area is changing so much that the people who have been living in Camberwell for a very long time are now unsure of their place here. They are nervous about being pushed out of the area. There’s an underlying fear of the future.” (Stakeholder)

“Southwark is getting rid of public housing for private housing. This will affect working class people and people from immigrant backgrounds.” (Resident)

“It's middle-class gentrification and all about branding and banners, and not about safety and community. People will be priced out bit by bit.” (Resident)

The traders we spoke to were mostly disengaged from local change processes. Though a few worked with charities, for example by giving away food surplus, most were either uninterested in social issues or didn’t feel that their input would have any effect.

“We don’t have any control. Look at the mess they made of Camberwell Green and the traffic lights. It’s a shambles. They do what they do, when they want to do it.” (Trader)

“We contribute to the area, contribute to the ambience but we don’t have control over what happens. It’s not that we feel we can’t, we’re just not really into changing the area, so don’t get involved.” (Trader)

A healthier life

Residents described how the lockdown had affected their physical and mental health. They noticed how not moving and eating unhealthily has affected their bodies. They reported how problems like anxiety, loneliness, and loss of confidence were affecting people from all age groups, with younger and older people felt to be at most risk. However, there was optimism that lockdown lifting would bring a spirit of adventure and openness to trying new things.

"Young people have a depressed attitude: 'Is it even worth doing anything?' The pandemic has messed with their social life. And loneliness is a key issue for older people. It was a problem before the pandemic and COVID has highlighted it." (Stakeholder)

Many residents reported problems with noise, traffic congestion, pollution, and not enough bike parking.

Burgess Park and other green spaces were highly valued. These were important sites of social connection, as many people reported meeting friends and meeting new people in the park. There were several positive comments about the improvements made to Burgess Park.

"I really like the park regeneration. The wildflower garden looks great. Nice places attract people and are good for wellbeing. When you make places attractive, people are happier and the area becomes more desirable." (Resident)

Safety

Most Camberwell residents felt safe in the neighbourhood. They felt that there were usually people around, and an adequate police presence. They characterised the area as 'quiet,' though some think that a post-COVID-19 uptick in the night-time economy might increase anti-social behaviour on the streets. This was especially true of white male residents, who seem aware that their status makes them less vulnerable. Some people mentioned feeling concerned by reports of crime and anti-social behaviour in the news, but very few respondents feel personally targeted by these incidents.

"It is as safe as anywhere. I am familiar with the place, I know the neighbours and I feel safe. There are low crime rates and I feel like I am in a bubble of safety." (Resident)

"I feel safe here, despite it being the stabbing capital of London. Maybe it's my middle-aged cloak of invisibility." (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Camberwell has a distinctive local identity and was regarded affectionately by most of the residents we spoke to. As in the previous two phases of research, they characterised the area as peaceful, friendly, and diverse.

Multiculturalism was felt to be a major strength. Residents saw little conflict between ethnic groups, and liked the visibility of diversity. The wide range of places to eat was one example of how the many cultures present in the area make it a special place to live. People were protective of this diversity, but many saw it as under threat from gentrification.

"Like most of south London, it's like its own town. It's really busy, surrounded by local residents and people come for shopping, food, there's so much variety." (Resident)

"I moved here because the area is so diverse. I value the fact that Camberwell is known for good neighbourhood restaurants. But my concern is that those local businesses would be removed. I wouldn't want only affluent people. Here, it's diverse in income and ethnicity and in demographics. That's why I moved here in the first place." (Resident)

As in the earlier phases, local residents and stakeholders raised concerns that Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups tend to carry out the low paid jobs in the area. For people in service work and zero-hours employment, financial security has been a problem throughout the pandemic.

"Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in particular have suffered because they tend to be in lower paid jobs." (Stakeholder)

Most of the people we spoke to were concerned about the lack of opportunities for young people. People felt that there are not enough employment and leisure opportunities for young people, and that there needs to be more after-school provision.

"Young people are bored. Some have high aspirations and want to go to university. Others aren't bothered and just want to finish schooling at 18. They need something up and running, like a youth club." (Stakeholder)

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Camberwell residents and stakeholders reported that the area was coming back to life with the easing of the third national lockdown. People were glad to be able to return to community spaces, like mosques, markets, and pubs. Many were making efforts to support local businesses and restaurants.

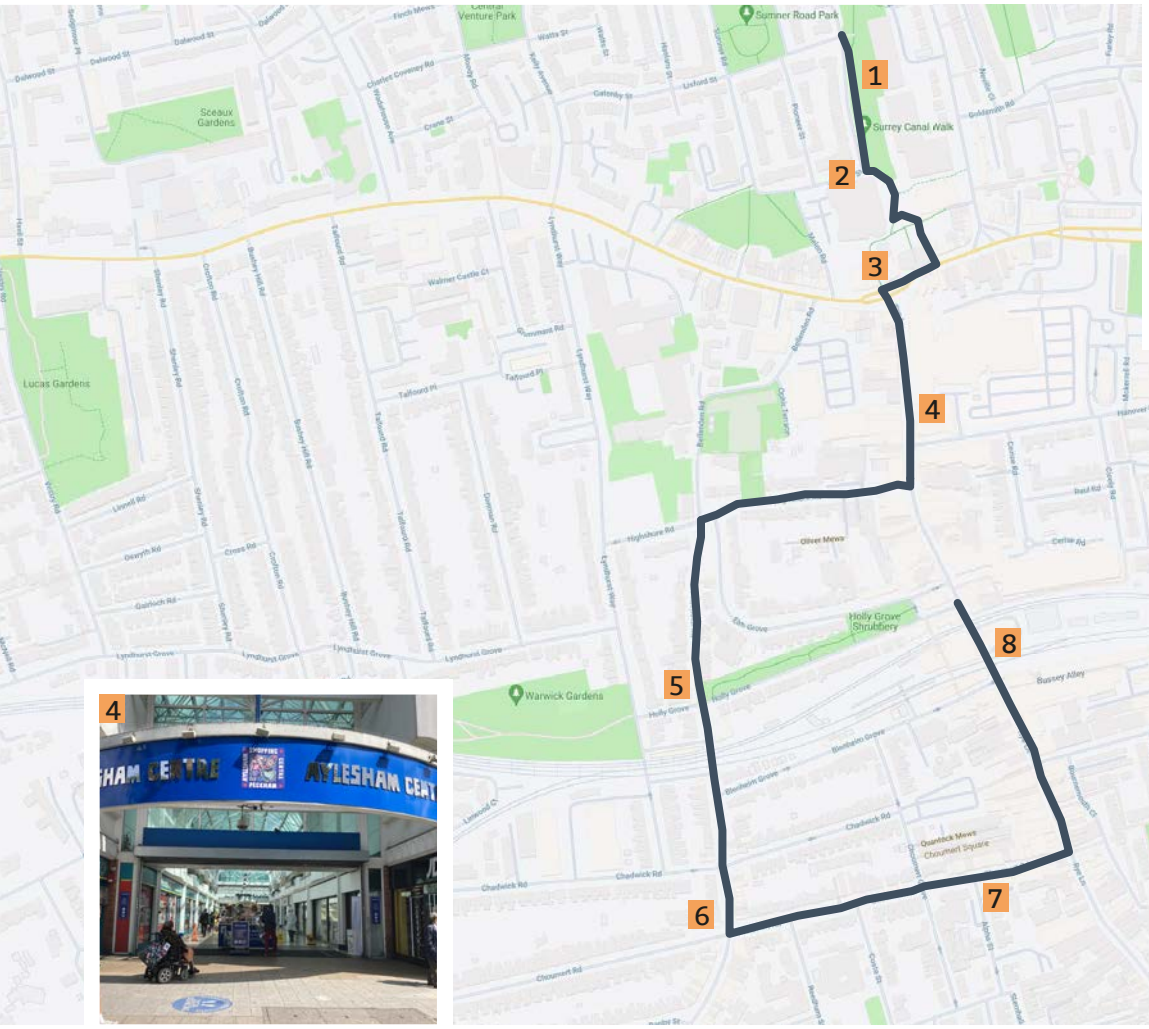
"It's been tough with the mosque and things not being open to socialise, but feel good now that everything is open so I can go to the pub and co-op. More people are going out to support the local market. There are more activities and we gather more with other families." (Resident)

"Nobody wants to work in catering any more. Before the pandemic it was getting very hard, now even harder. People are afraid to work in restaurants. During lockdown people were rethinking their lifestyle and in particular those that work in hospitality have decided that there are easier ways of making a living." (Trader)

Many traders mentioned that they were still struggling with the effects of lockdown. Some, including barbers, reported that the business was quiet because people have grown used to doing things at home. They sense a reluctance among their customers to come into the store. Businesses that depended on office or hospital workers were struggling to attract people back. Others were facing problems with hiring, finding it harder to recruit people into service positions.

Peckham

Peckham



The built environment of Peckham is very diverse, with a crowded market atmosphere on Rye Lane contrasting with the quiet estates of North Peckham and the even quieter streets of Bellenden Road.

Whilst Rye Lane is predominantly black African and South Asian, there are many different ethnicities using the space.

On Rye Lane, changes in the built environment are evident in the amenities available. Storefronts make this transformation noticeable, as the more high-end cafes and bar venues have plainer designs.

The public spaces around Peckham Square, Library, and Mountview have the strongest civic atmosphere, with a range of demographics crowded together.

The spaces are arranged to accommodate micro-spaces, which local residents use as meeting points, spaces to rest and drink coffee, or to queue in front of food trucks.

Peckham

This section sets out the findings of the research in Peckham, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Most people living and working in the local area reported strong positive feelings towards Peckham's communities, highlighting the benefits of their diversity, community links, and cultural life. Many noted the cultural richness of local groups, the variety of faith organisations and the thriving arts and cultural scene as contributing to the sense of community.
- Support networks are seen as a key feature of the longer-standing Peckham communities, and it was highlighted that people with strong local social support showed more resilience during the pandemic. But rising housing costs across Peckham are seen to be undermining family and neighbourhood networks, and there is fear that social isolation and feelings of exclusion will increase.
- Places of worship, particularly larger churches and mosques, were identified as important spaces for social mixing. Hair and beauty salons, shops and pubs were seen as key places for people from similar backgrounds to socialise.
- While diversity is seen as a local asset, and it is an experience shared by many Peckham residents, local groups are rarely reported to mix. Some mentioned the contrast between the predominantly white, high-income groups using Bellenden Road and the more ethnically diverse and lower-income communities using Rye Lane. People often reported that groups use different shops and facilities in Peckham. At times, awareness of racial inequality was expressed in connection with the new high street cafes and bars, which people felt catered specifically to wealthier white residents.
- There is agreement that more widely available open community spaces across Peckham would bring different communities closer together and support broader participation in the area's arts and cultural spaces. The absence of social spaces, such as community hubs, was also highlighted, as well as the fear over a further loss of recreational spaces, which are struggling to remain open.
- Residents and traders reported low levels of voice and influence in the area. Some stakeholders and traders highlighted the need for a formal traders' forum, with a dedicated point of contact within the council, to address trader issues in a sustainable manner.
- A majority of local people brought up concerns about ongoing and planned developments, particularly in terms of their impact on housing affordability, the local business landscape and rising income inequality. There is a desire among the people interviewed to avoid any consequences that would disproportionately affect or exclude more vulnerable residents and traders.
- There are strong activist and community groups in Peckham but stakeholders voiced concern that participation in community activism and the governance of voluntary groups is not representative of local demographics, especially Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and people from lower-income backgrounds.
- Most residents felt generally safe around local neighbourhoods during the daytime, but there is some concern related to young people becoming victims of knife crime, grooming and gang activity. Local people felt that these problems have been amplified by increased social isolation, lack of opportunities for work and career development, poor relationships with the police, and the reduction in youth services and activities.
- In the first months of the pandemic, there was an increase in neighbourliness at hyperlocal levels in Peckham, with residents devoting more of their time to their homes, neighbourhoods and local high streets. Online platforms and volunteering spurred new relationships between neighbours and became spaces of resource sharing, help, advice, and signposting. Although some local residents and stakeholders still noted that the pandemic had brought a renewed emphasis on community, by

spring 2021, the levels of engagement were reported to have decreased.

- With the gradual lifting of restrictions from May 2021 onwards, Peckham, and especially Rye Lane, experienced a return of its former dynamic atmosphere. However, mental health problems concerns in summer 2020 and winter 2020-2021 were ongoing, particularly for low-income families experiencing financial burdens, insecurity at work and overcrowding.

Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

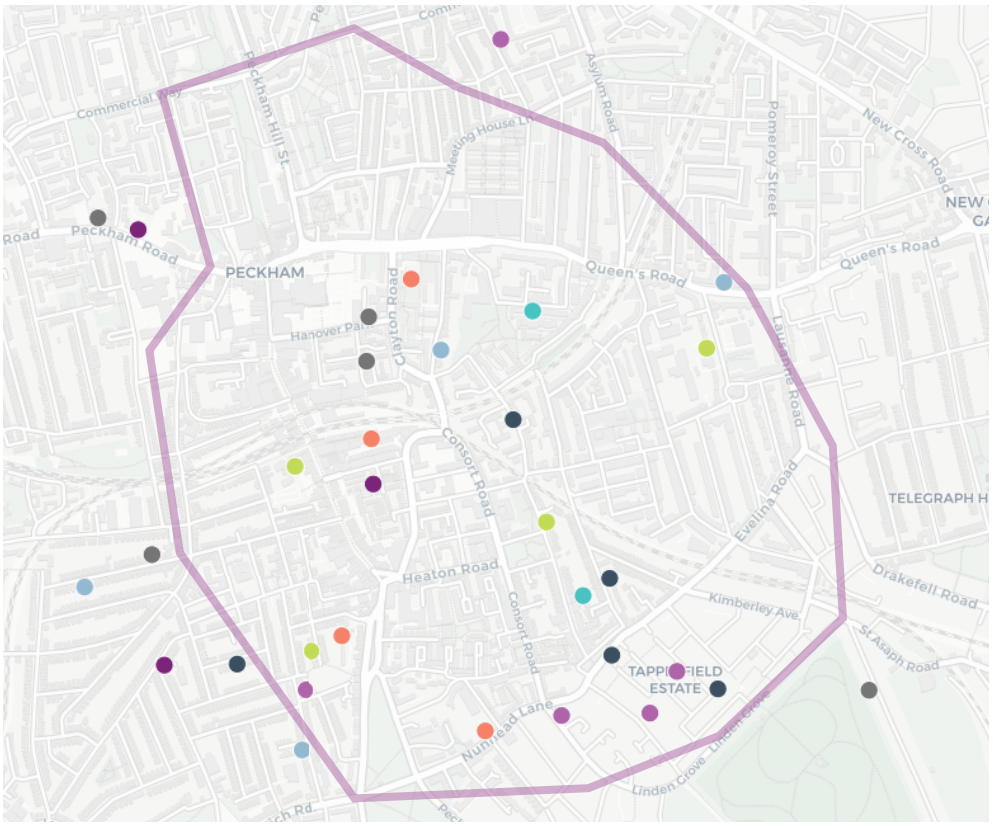
Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "up-and-coming" or "used-to-be-sociable") is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year- and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Word cloud: how people described Peckham in street interviews in summer 2020 (left) & summer 2021 (right)

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

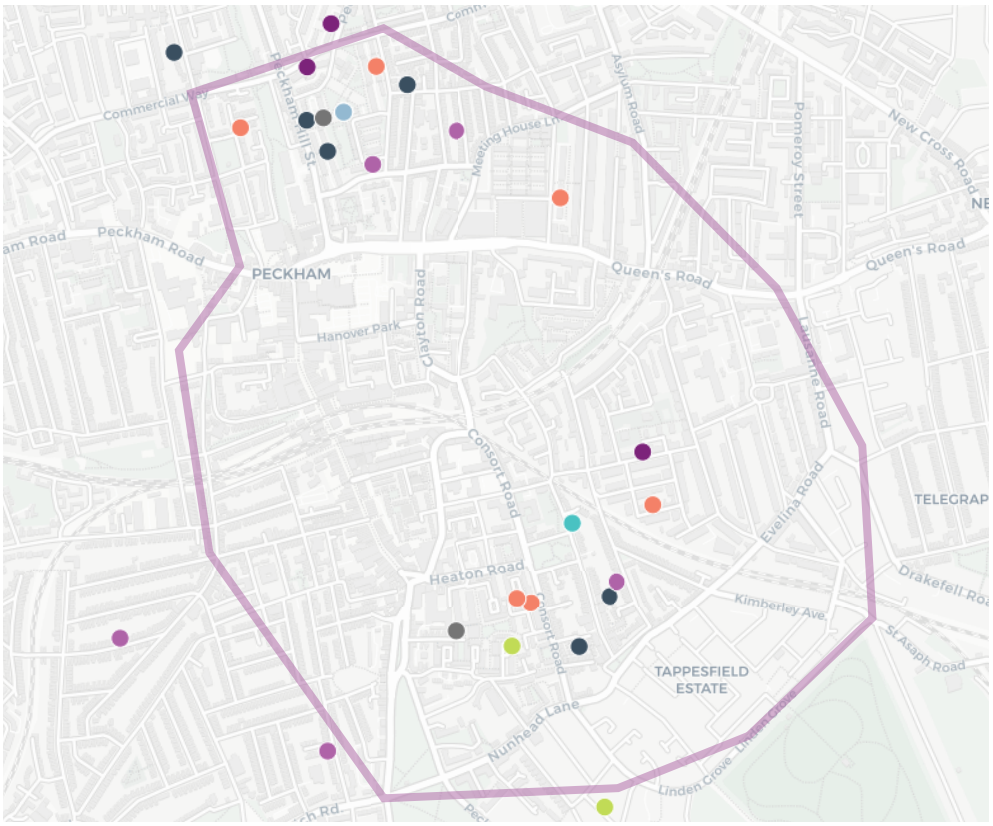
Summer 2020



Community
Parks
The green
Diversity
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Recreation facilities
Other

Incomplete postcode, not mapped
1

Summer 2021



Community
Parks
The green
Diversity
Shopping facilities
Transport connections
Recreation facilities
Other
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
2 1 1 1 1

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020

No
Don't feel safe all the time
Not safe at night
Mostly safe
Yes but the lighting is poor in the area
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcode, not mapped
1

Summer 2021

No
Don't feel safe all the time
Not safe at night
Yes but the lighting is poor in the area
Mostly safe
Yes
Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
1 1 4

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 28 in-depth interviews, 10 in phase 1, eight in phase 2 and 10 in phase 3, including conversations with TRAs, an artists' studio, church, local traders, mutual aid group, local agencies and activists, community centres, a foodbank, faith organisations and a school

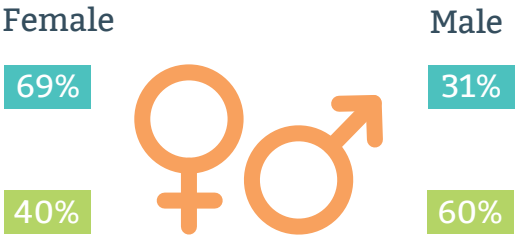
Traders: interviews with 15 traders, including ethnic hairdressers, café, restaurant, beauty retail store, vape store, barbers, bike repair shops, clothing store and a travel shop.

Local residents: walking ethnographies with seven residents. Street interviews with 81 residents, demographics below.

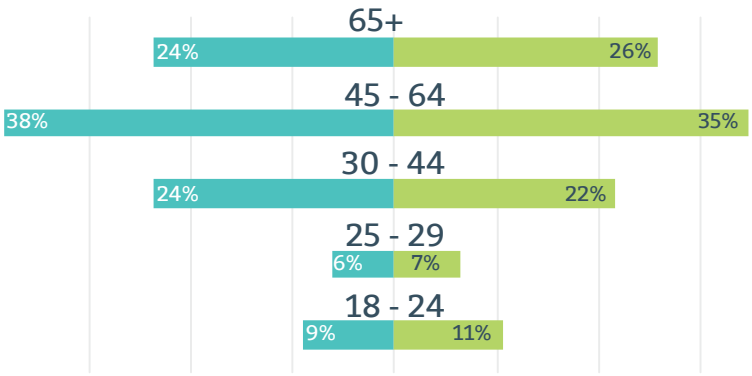
2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 35

2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 46

Gender



Age



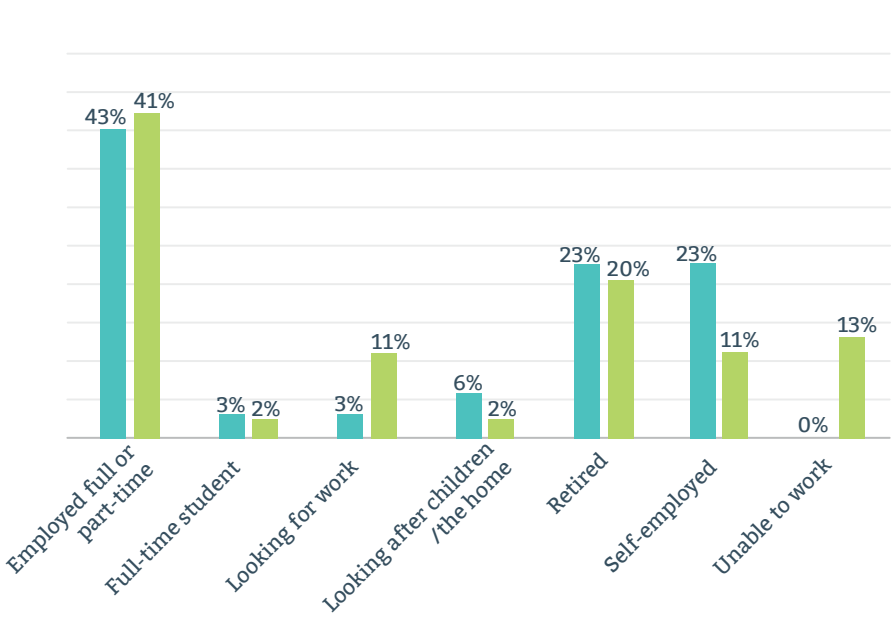
Lived in the area

3%	0%	< 1 year
9%	4%	1 - 3 years
6%	9%	4 - 5 years
17%	17%	6 - 10 years
23%	15%	11 - 20 years
43%	54%	20+ years

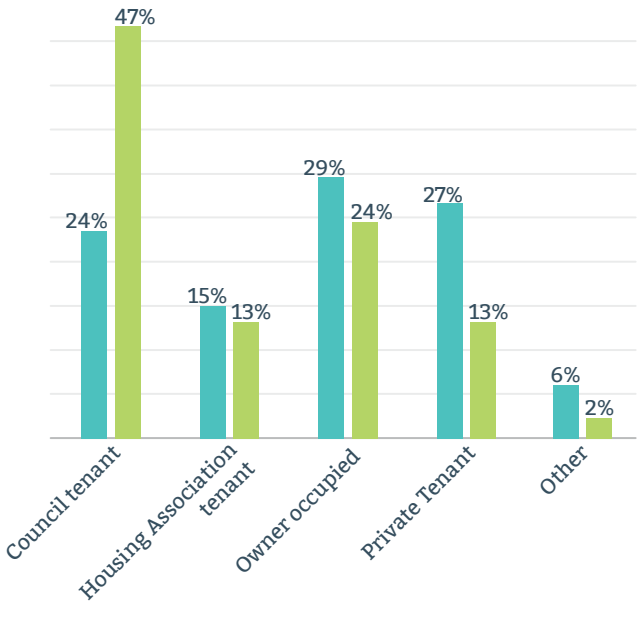
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	3%	4%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	20%	39%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	9%	9%
White	57%	39%
Other ethnic group	11%	9%

Employment



Tenure



Walk through Peckham

"Starting on Rye Lane, the hyper diversity of Peckham is immediately apparent. The texture of the neighbourhood is layered with overflowing shops, posters, promotions, sounds, music, smells and crowds. Rye Lane has been pedestriansied with cyclists and shoppers moving down its centre.

Walking northwards we get to Peckham Square with its large canopy providing shelter for mixed groups of people, and Peckham Library nearby. Just beyond that is Mountview Theatre, students are pouring into the square in a steady trickle to get to the theatre. It is also the first green space seen, a lot airier and fresher than Rye Lane.

To the south we arrive at the top of Bellenden Road, a tidy, neat street dramatically quieter than its closest neighbour. This road is lined with 19th Century terraced houses, maintained very sleekly suggesting affluence. The pedestrians on the street are few, but those that do pass are most usually white and well-to-do. Travelling further south you encounter a row of shops selling organic wines and vegetables, with street cafes alongside."

(Transect walk fieldnotes, Peckham, 9th August 2021)

Detailed findings

PHASE 1: summer 2020

A place to belong

Residents reported high levels of belonging to the local area, citing their local friendships, social networks, and satisfaction with the area as key reasons.

"Peckham is a place where there is a real sense of place which is so important in a big dehumanising city like London." (Stakeholder)

The majority of residents interviewed have local connections with people they can turn to for help or support. Stakeholders underscored the importance of these social networks, highlighting that people with strong local social support showed more resilience during the pandemic. However, rising housing costs are seen to be perpetuating the breakdown of family networks and stakeholders fear that social isolation and feelings of exclusion will increase as a direct result.

Residents generally reported that people from different backgrounds get on well together - the diversity and multiculturalism of the area are seen to support this. However, stakeholders also noted low levels of interaction between people from different backgrounds, with one local resident describing it as "harmonious coexistence."

"[Peckham has] relative parallel communities and economies that get on superficially well but occasionally differences between them cause problems ... we're a constellation of really quite separate communities." (Stakeholder)

Places of worship, particularly larger mainstream churches and mosques, were identified as important spaces for social mixing, while smaller churches, hair and beauty salons, shops and pubs were noted as important spaces for people from similar backgrounds to socialise. Stakeholders highlighted the lack of open access community spaces that could bring the community together, and that assets like Peckham Levels and Peckham Rye Park have untapped potential. Residents suggested more sports facilities like a basketball court, tennis courts and free wellbeing classes in the park, and more community events and activities to support broader participation in the area's arts and cultural spaces.

Local change and control

Residents and traders interviewed reported low levels of voice and influence in the area. The reasons for this were varied. Some residents were optimistic that they could have control if they became more involved. However, there is significant cynicism around consultation and the impact of local voices on the planning process. Some stakeholders and traders highlighted the need for a formal traders' forum, with a dedicated point of contact within the council, to address trader issues in a sustainable manner. Residents and traders responded to the pedestrianisation of Peckham Rye with a mixture of positive and negative sentiment. However, there was consensus that the decision was made without adequate public consultation and notice period.

"All we need is CONNECTION. We know the public are with us but we don't have the council on our side." (Trader)

"When you make change, you have a bigger outcry from those who lost and not from those who gained." (Resident)

Andy.

Starting at 'The Barrier', a closed off road that became a local landmark, we walk through Peckham Rye Park, past Harris Academy then to some of Andy's running and cycling routes.

Andy thinks the area is lively, with great indoor and outdoor spaces for socialising. He feels very strongly about having accessible green spaces. He is keen that younger people use local sports facilities. Especially for the students at Harris Girls Academy, as they do not have a playground.

"I think the park is in need of different amenities. People are living cheek to jowl but there are few places to encourage mixing in the park."

The local cycling club offers a strong support network for Andy, people of many professional backgrounds use this club and share advice.

He points out that the club, though open to everyone, is not ethnically diverse, which does not reflect the local area. The neighbourhood has a WhatsApp group which Andy is a part of, the group helped organise a street party that is held annually. This group later played an important role in distributing information during COVID-19 period,

which gave the community a sense of belonging.

Andy does not feel he has a say in the changes in the area, mainly due to his own lack of involvement. He is aware of many of the changes that has been made in the neighbourhood due to residents campaigning for them.

The changes to the local area are received positively, the parks, local libraries, community centre and shops have all improved, in his opinion. Even though Andy and his wife mostly shop online the local amenities are welcomed. Future changes M would like to witness in the area are more enclosed streets, more trees and flower beds along the streets and more free sports facilities.

"The Friends of the Park group don't want a basketball court which is ridiculous because they should be encouraging all to exercise."

There are strong activist and community groups locally, however stakeholders voiced concern that participation in community activism and the governance of voluntary groups is not representative of local demographics. Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and people with fewer resources (time and income) tend to be underrepresented.

“Being voluntary is exclusive because people who can get involved are people who can afford to give time for free.” (Stakeholder)

The arrival of the Overground was seen to be the biggest catalyst of area change. Developments with a social purpose that have genuine community involvement, and improvements to the public realm, are generally viewed positively. However, there are significant concerns about future proposed changes, particularly the impacts on housing affordability, local business makeup and rising income inequality. There is a desire to avoid negative consequences that would disproportionately affect or exclude more vulnerable residents and traders.

“The flood gates have opened to bad processes recently and prices escalated … some people are thrilled about the house price increases. Some people are alarmed, particularly those who don't own. They’re being squeezed out.” (Stakeholder)

A healthier life

Local stakeholders reported that health disparities in Peckham are entangled with environmental determinants, as well as wider socio-economic issues, including ethnicity and deprivation. They draw links between the wide availability of cheap, unhealthy foods and childhood obesity. Stakeholders also noted that the quality of healthcare is varied and connected to the ability to self-advocate. Childcare costs, the lack of affordable after-school activities, overcrowding and flats without proper outdoor space were also identified as contributors to more sedentary, unhealthy lifestyles.

“[Deterioration in] mental health in the borough is quite dramatic and is poverty driven … If you don't see hope, mental health suffers. If you don’t see a positive future, you lack hope and are depressed. This then triggers other issues and physical health issues. Psychological support is as important as medical interventions.” (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders reported the need for more culturally appropriate services, from mental health to employment.

“Accessing therapy services can be costly and lengthy … there is better support for people who can pay for it.” (Stakeholder)

Safety

The majority of residents interviewed reported feeling safe in the area. Long-term residents mentioned feeling safer now than in the past. However, some residents only feel safe during the day, and in certain areas, but not after dark. There are also concerns around young people’s safety in relation to gang and knife crime. Stakeholders and residents link this to the reduced provision of youth services in the area, and the UK more widely. Knowing people locally - "familiarity" - and “eyes on the streets” were important to people’s perception of increased public safety. Traders did not report major issues with local crime.

"Yeah, but I don't go out at night. During the day, there's always a lot of people sitting around and the area is well looked after - but not at night. I don't want any trouble." (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Local residents said that they value the area for its diversity and multiculturalism, its liveliness, its authenticity, transport connections, convenient access to other parts of London, the "friendliness" of the local community, as well as the wide range of local amenities from parks and green spaces, to sports facilities, independent shops, restaurants, bars, and cafes, cinemas, primary schools and libraries.

Gwen.

Walking past Peckham Place, Gwen talks about how important it is that new developments serve everyone in the community. She talks about how new developments are impacting local people,

giving the exmaple of a new small playground which has been welcomed and is well used by families.

Gwen is involved in helping the community. She feels strongly about communicating and building relationships. She believes communication is more than notices and leaflets. She enjoys face-to-face conversations and talks about the way that COVID-19 restrictions have reduced physical interactions. However, Gwen is proud of how older people in her area have embraced technology to keep in touch with friends and family. She describes how local businesses have established relationships with the community, many are places where residents socialise. Several businesses have come forward to help the community through the first lockdown. For example, a local chip shop started a payment scheme for meals to help residents.

Gwen feels a strong sense of belonging to the local area. She is deeply involved in many services in the neighbourhood, through volunteering. She feels she is a 'middle person' for many who need support.

"What I like is the community, it's friendly and people are willing to communicate but need help. There's a mixture of progress, happiness, moving forwards. I love change."

"Because Peckham was a run-down area socio-economically for a long time it has kept itself protected from the ravages of the wrong approaches of development. It's still very humane in terms of its building structures." (Stakeholder)

Environmental issues such as litter, graffiti, fly-tipping and uncleanliness, noise, pollution, traffic, and road construction were the most notable things that residents dislike about Peckham. Crime, increasing house prices, loss of brand stores, and concerns about gentrification and its negative impacts on the existing community were also noted.

Stakeholders identified a lack of youth services and differences in quality between different secondary schools. The pandemic has also highlighted the digital divide and the need for more Wi-Fi hotspots and grants for young families to buy IT.

"There needs to be support for young people so they continue to be inspired and believe in things beyond their knowledge … Lack of money is a huge issue … Also, a lack of ambition especially for younger people and positive role models. The education system isn't set up to meet their needs. How do you engage people when they can't see a positive route out of it?" (Stakeholder)

Traders value Peckham for its access to a diverse group of customers, from the local area and further

afield. The area is described as “vibrant and buzzing” but also “residential” and “relaxed.” A few traders noted that it is a place where small, independent businesses are supported. Traders noted a variety of actions which could make the place better to do business, including lower rents (and rent relief during COVID-19), help with advertising, reducing loitering outside shops (as it's seen to scare off customers), additional parking areas and loading bays for deliveries, as well as clarity on social distancing protocols during the pandemic.

Sarah.

We walked by the primary schools Sarah’s children attended. At one of the local primary schools, her two eldest sons were the only students of colour in their year group.

Sarah recalls of instances in which she felt she was treated differently at school events. Her daughter

attended a different school, which is more diverse. Sarah describes how difficult it has been to get the learning support her daughter needed.

During the walk Sarah points out several features on the streets that she likes, such as benches, a small green area, and bike racks. She is sceptical about some other features the council has invested in, such as mosaics, street statues and ‘funky’ streetlamps. She is frustrated that the Peckham Rye station area has not been improved as part of the regeneration.

“There are some funky lamp posts, a mosaic which the council chose to spend money on which is questionable, and the poo looking street decorations which I think are Anthony Gormley? That’s their effort of doing up the high street.”

Sarah has used many of the local businesses in the area, most of the local shops cater to a wide variety of needs. She was grateful they were open at late hours when she needed to replace a door lock at 11pm. Although she welcomes the gentrification and the new business it brings with it, she is aware of the rising prices.

Sarah’s social group, mums from various backgrounds whose children go to the same primary school, became her support network through after March. During the Clap for Carers, Sarah would get involved and had a great sense of community.

She appreciates the night life and the buzz that gentrification has bought to the area. She feels proud to show off the night life to friends and family who visit.

However, Sarah feels she does not feel at home in the area. She says does not feel

at home anywhere; she would be happy to move again.

Impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Our research shows that the pandemic increased neighbourliness at hyper-local levels in Peckham, with residents refocusing their time to their homes, neighbourhoods and local high streets. Online platforms and localised volunteering spurred new relationships between neighbours and became spaces of resource sharing, help, advice, and signposting. Stakeholders reported strong levels of solidarity within the community, and an outpouring of support through donations, volunteer hours, and new networks. Voluntary sector organisations, the council and health service teams built a level of partnership working that did not exist before.

However, impacts of the pandemic were unequally felt. Some residents experienced disproportionately negative effects, particularly older people, people with underlying health conditions, parents juggling childcare, work and homeschooling, and people in precarious living and employment situations. Stakeholders reported rising rates of evictions among private tenants, in contrast to social renters. The government’s financial support programmes and the council’s flexibility with tenants over rent arrears were seen as important safety nets.

Some businesses, particularly those deemed ‘essential’ during lockdown experienced surging profits this year, while others struggled with changing government regulations and reduced visitor footfall. Many

community organisations faced challenges with the loss of face-to-face contact with their clients, and the existing digital divide became more apparent. Open access community spaces, which were highlighted as important for social mixing such as church halls and community centres, took longer to reopen than shops, restaurants and pubs, if they reopened at all.

"One thing [the area needs] is definitely spaces for the community to meet. This was a challenge anyway and COVID has made this more visible. Bars and pubs have managed to get up and COVID-secure because there is a profit motive (?), but many community centres and church halls have not … and bars, restaurants aren't suitable for certain religions." (Stakeholder)

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified the inequalities in the labour market, housing market, education system and how these issues play out in health disparities in Peckham. The pandemic has also raised awareness around food insecurity, social isolation, domestic violence and mental health issues, and the disproportionate toll they are having on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and those with no recourse to public funds.

Mutual aid groups and other informal community support like street-level WhatsApp groups are legacies of lockdown. However, stakeholders brought up concerns around financial sustainability and community fatigue, as well as how to address increasing economic need in the community. There is growing awareness of more severe economic and social vulnerabilities on the horizon. Many community organisations and service-sector businesses expressed uncertainty about the future and concern about the challenges they face from evolving government guidelines and changing consumer behaviour.

"The economic impacts now are really hitting and it's a conversation if the economic conditions were always there or [the pandemic] has just exposed it." (Stakeholder)

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

Stakeholders reported strong positive feelings towards Peckham's community, highlighting the huge benefits of its diversity, community links, and cultural life. This is on a par with the views expressed in the first phase of research. Many noted the richness of the West African and multicultural community, the large number of young people along Rye Lane, the many churches, and the thriving arts and cultural scene as contributing to the sense of the neighbourhood.

Many stakeholders noted the stark contrast between the predominantly white, high income groups using Bellenden Road and the more ethnically diverse and lower-income communities using Rye Lane. While direct tensions were not reported between these groups, they were not reported to mix, often using different shops and facilities. This creates barriers to community organising. There was also a wide and general view that higher-income residents were actively displacing people on lower incomes and making the area less affordable.

"I think the disparity between these two groups and the disconnection is a big thing. If you've got a room of white middle-class people, and then you have people without documents, with English as second language in extreme poverty - how do you get them working on the same issues together where the power dynamic is balanced?" (Resident)

Local change and control

As in the first round, many stakeholders mentioned that although the council seems to be making efforts to improve community engagement, the view remained that community views were not listened to enough. In contrast to the first round of interviews, however, stakeholders reported less engagement and interest in the regeneration, with other concerns about the pandemic and restrictions taking centre stage. The lack of social contact was cited as a strong factor in this.

"Engagement must be lower, it feels at the moment - there's no way to do promotion about it - going outside and talking about it - people are not able to engage so much." (Stakeholder)

Others felt this reduced engagement, compounded by continuing social issues, has intensified suspicion and uncertainty about regeneration efforts.

"Also, a big issue on suspicion, and people being scared of high-rise buildings, which plays on ordinary people's fears." (Stakeholder)

The complexity of policy documents and frameworks, and the time investment demanded was raised as a challenge to greater community participation. Some groups have been actively focused on summarising planning documents and sharing information through accessible channels such as Facebook and Twitter, and have reported a lot of success in engagement through this approach.

A healthier life

The absence of mental health services and support was mentioned widely by stakeholders. Many believed the impact of the second and third lockdowns have been much greater on mental health than the first, and particularly for younger and older people. Stakeholders pointed towards growing anxiety and depression brought about from lack of social contact, isolation, and growing work and school demands.

"Isolation and loneliness. In lots of ways young people are more connected than ever before - but to actually have meaningful interactions is really hard. Young people being so much more on social media than before. Physical aspirations, beauty standards, more prevalent than ever." (Resident)

The inability to provide face-to-face support is a continuing barrier. Many in need are put off by the lack of face-to-face contact, others prefer the anonymity of video or phone calls. Stigma about mental health

support, although reducing, was also an obstacle. There was also a view that more tailored services were needed, for example for those with autism.

"Definitely a lot of young people are still feeling stigma - not wanting to refer themselves. Southwark is one of the most diverse boroughs - and each culture has a different view on mental health. And there's a real lack of understanding between the difference between mental health and mental illness." (Stakeholder)

Safety

In terms of safety, the majority of concerns related to young people, in line with the first round of findings. This involved the fears for young people moving around the neighbourhood, knife-crime, grooming and gang activity. There was a view that these problems were being worsened by increased social isolation, lack of opportunities for work and career development, poor relationships with the police, and the reduction in youth services and activities.

"Jobs are a worry, particularly since COVID. Lack of jobs that can tip over into anti-social behaviour and crime problems. I guess everybody will have a bit of a feeling of powerlessness at the moment - how hard it is to make a difference in our lives." (Resident)

Many noted the disproportionate impact this was having on young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Some felt that this would best be tackled through schools, and although schools were making active efforts to engage with the police and community groups working towards ending knife crime, some felt much more could be done. Statutory obligations of schools and fears of safeguarding were believed to be barriers to this work.

Reputational damage caused by high-profile incidents was also seen as an ongoing issue.

"A lot of the fears that come out of the area around youth safety and relationships ... One of the primary schools went out every week and would do something positive and post about it, and also asked police to stop posting images of knives on social media." (Stakeholder)

Local assets and challenges

Although similar concerns to the first round of research were raised, such as access to open spaces, diversity in amenities, litter, and the increasing gentrification and unaffordability of social spaces, in this round much more emphasis was placed on youth and employment services.

"Most concerns are economic. A lot of it boils down to 'will we have enough money tomorrow', and 'how safe is our home.'" (Resident)

With the second and third lockdowns have come more concerns about employment, particularly about the loss of skills and opportunities for young people who are moving into the labour market. There was a renewed emphasis on the absence of social spaces, such as community hubs, as well as fears over the further loss of recreational spaces like leisure centres which are struggling to survive.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Although some still report that the pandemic had brought a renewed emphasis on community, this enthusiasm was noted to have reduced during the winter lockdowns. Many pointed towards shorter winter days, increased pressures of work and worsening mental health as reasons for reduced participation. Some stakeholders noted how support came from donations and charity, when what was needed was communication and participation between different groups.

“There have been a lot less offers of volunteering, this time around we did not see the increase like we saw last time, or as many donations in food.” (Stakeholder)

Concerns about the digital divide, and loss of face-to-face connections were widely raised as a challenge, particularly for younger people when home-schooling with insufficient equipment and broadband connection, and older isolated people with poor IT skills. Some stakeholders however noted an increased attendance in community meetings, as well as increased accessibility to services online.

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A place to belong

As with the previous two rounds of research, there was a strong view that Peckham was a culturally diverse, inclusive and welcoming space to live and work. While Nunhead was seen as having a more village atmosphere, Peckham Rye was dynamic and multicultural, and North Peckham residential and tight-knit.

"It's been interesting to watch the evolution of Peckham. It's a vibrant, dynamic place with so much happening, rich in resources, and an amazing place to live and work." (Stakeholder)

However, the division between the local community and the arrival of new, more affluent groups has continued to grow since the last two phases. The awareness of racial inequality was also more strongly expressed, with some reporting feeling increasingly 'othered' by the arrival of high street cafes and bars which they felt catered specifically to wealthier white residents. This division was seen to be more noticeable in the cafes, bars and restaurants operating in the evenings.

Tanya.

Tanya took us on a walk around Kelly Avenue Park, where she is involved with a community group that is working to renovate it. They are currently installing new signage, park benches, and a canopy to provide shade. Coming together to improve

the park has created a lot of community feeling, she tells us.

Tanya is passionate about involving children in community development. Kelly Avenue Park used to be very dangerous, and young people would sometimes get robbed or attacked there. She notes that the children from the local school have driven the changes to the park, as the local people have listened to their views on safety and access to green spaces. Tanya feels engaged in local decision-making through attending 'empowering community' meetings.

"For me, the key is persistence, people banding together, and being stronger together."

However, she sees a division between traditional North Peckham residents who don't feel listened to, and newer groups of middle-class residents who are more confident. She believes that sometimes development plans might seem well-presented and nice, but there are key people excluded from the consultation process.

There was a general view that the pandemic had brought neighbours closer together, particularly through children playing together in communal spaces, as well as organisations and charities taking a more proactive approach in engaging with the community.

"Definitely [feel like I belong], particularly due to my neighbours. One waters my plants, and the other is an activist that tells me what's going on." (Resident)

However, there was a view that social spaces and activities were missing for some groups, particularly the elderly, with many community halls and centres having closed in recent years.

"There's no spaces as an elderly black Afro-Caribbean that you can go to. My mum used to go to the one on Bellenden Road that was closed down. You would play dominoes, have lunch and socialise." (Resident)

Local change and control

Like in the first phase of research, there are some who welcome regeneration efforts in parts of the neighbourhood they feel are in need of improvement, but not at the expense of local residents and affordability. Compared to the first and second round of research however, there was a growing view that development decisions are being taken without residents being properly informed, that consultations are one-way, and that most development plans have been decided before consultation begins. The community

response to the Aylesham redevelopment has been viewed positively by some however, and has added confidence to some voices.

"I think things like planning decisions and consultations always feel mysterious, you can feed back but it doesn't affect the outcome, it's predetermined." (Resident)

Many faith groups reported that the council's inter-faith network has been a successful initiative, helping form relationships and coordinate with other faith groups. Some charities and community groups feel this would be valuable in other sectors such as migration and asylum support. These stakeholders often felt the council's approach was not in line with the nature of their work. Others felt that growing legal requirements in running community enterprises was shrinking the sector.

"We are very front line, and they are very strategic. I think for us it's hard to marry what we're saying with what they're policies are."; "You need such a big administrative capacity to run even a small group, that these smaller ones that are in touch with the grassroots are getting lost, and don't receive the funding." (Stakeholders)

Many reported positive relations with local councillors, but felt they were not able to have a big enough impact at the council level. There was also a common understanding that local budgets and capacity were under huge pressure, but that the local community still had to be prioritised by the council in spite of this.

"I do appreciate that the council's budget is half what it was in 2010. But they need to keep in touch with their people." (Stakeholder)

A healthier life

While the findings from the first round of research in summer 2020 focused more on physical health and life-style factors, the findings from winter 2020 showed a much stronger concern about the lockdowns impact on mental health. In the third phase, many felt the end of lockdown had brought some relief. However the crisis in mental health is widely reported to be ongoing, and increasingly linked to other dimensions, such as poverty, job insecurity and racism. Older groups are also still widely seen as suffering from social isolation and reduced mobility, either due to fear of the virus or due to the closure of dedicated social spaces.

"Isolation is a big problem. They are much less active and lively as before (older residents) time for them is different, one day can be very different. The question is do you want to stay sane or do you want to be safe." (Stakeholder)

While the reopening of schools has been seen as positive, the impact of their closure is still widely felt, particularly as many are still routinely sent home to self-isolate. The closure of many youth centres and spaces and the lack of activities continues to put pressure on families, with those having to work from home while juggling childcare causing significant stress. Some stakeholders valued the increase in funding for mental health services, but still saw them as severely underfunded. The integration between mental health services and schools was seen to need improvement, with some advocating for a trauma informed approach to behavioural issues rather than exclusion.

"We ran a junior apprentice youth project, and some of the kids hadn't been back to school much since March, and some didn't even have the confidence to stand up and say their name." (Stakeholder)

Many felt the impact on mental health was disproportionately felt by the black community, and particularly the black LGBTQIA+ community, as their already small support systems shrunk during the pandemic.

Safety

Like the first and second round findings, most residents felt generally safe around the local neighbourhood in the daytime. At night however, there were increased concerns, particularly for women. Others reported

issues with communal lobbies in flats, where drug use or rough sleeping could occur. While there was a general view that Peckham had improved over the decades, there was still a common perception of drug dealing and organised criminal activity in the area.

Like the previous two rounds of findings, the most prominent concern related to young people becoming victims of knife crime, and there is a perception by some that cases are not being reported as much as they once were. Discrimination against the black community by the police was also raised widely, and more so than the previous two rounds of research.

"BAME communities in the area are facing issues of racism - same as they have been before the pandemic, more so during the pandemic." (Stakeholder)

"Black Caribbean people have it the worst. My grandson is 13 and last week coming home from the music studio he was stopped three times … why? My son tells him he should be prepared to be stopped, it's heart-breaking." (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Many residents valued the transport links, green spaces, and diverse local businesses. But as in the first and second round findings, increasing inaccessibility of spaces were a growing concern. There was a view that spaces in the neighbourhood, either for homes, businesses or social spaces, were increasingly catering to new and higher income groups, rather than the growing need for local community spaces. Food banks, community groups and charities also noted the growing number of residents facing in-work poverty through precarious employment, particularly single mothers.

"With families, there's huge amounts of in-work poverty, barely making enough to make ends meet. Majority are single parent households. In-work poverty is worse, due to not being protected, or having really insecure working conditions." (Stakeholder)

While there was a significant response by the local community at the beginning of the pandemic to volunteer time in supporting vulnerable residents, as furlough schemes have come to an end many community groups noted the need for more funding to continue this work.

Many local businesses, while valuing the location for business, felt more support by the council was needed in terms of business rate relief and marketing. Road closures have also had a significant impact on deliveries and customer footfall.

As in the first and second phase findings, spaces and opportunities for young people were widely seen as absent. This has continued in the third phase, with an educational attainment gap from school closures being felt much more strongly. The difficulty in accessing early-years childcare was also widely mentioned as a big issue for parents, particularly for those trying to work.

"Added anxieties [for young people] of struggling to go back to school, back to the classroom. I think suddenly lots of schools are like 'aah!'. Young people aren't necessarily out of control or badly behaved, but some are really far behind." (Stakeholder)

There has also been a large back-log in cases for migrant legal support, with many struggling to renew leave to remain status. Some stakeholders called for a borough-wide network for migrant-support agencies, with one example being Lewisham Borough's current approach.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

With the gradual lifting of restrictions from May 2021 onwards, many residents and stakeholders noted the feeling of positivity this has brought. This was particularly so on Rye Lane, where the return of a dynamic community atmosphere was most clearly felt.

"Very nice to see Rye Lane now. Different types of music blaring out everywhere, seeing Peckham come back to life, and the music come back, and it feels like good old Peckham." (Stakeholder)

"There's an air of positivity, I live near outdoor beer gardens and there's a normality, I can swim on my lunch break." (Resident)

Others however have felt more anxiety towards this change, with a more varied response to COVID-19 guidelines causing concern for vulnerable groups still at risk. The mental health crisis reported in the first and second phase findings were still widely reported to be ongoing, particularly for low-income families experiencing poverty, work-insecurity and over-crowding.

Chioma.

We started the walk at Peckham Library and walked down Rye Lane, to Peckham Rye in the south. This is a

route that Chioma takes daily, and she often comes to Rye Lane to do her shopping. She loves the wide range of activities, green spaces, and shops available in the area, explaining that 'everything is here!'

She points out all the new shops and restaurants on the street, including a Nando's and a Co-op. These have made it easier to get the everyday things she needs. However, as we were walking, she added that the new arrivals are pricier than the stores they replaced, making the cost of living higher.

Chioma feels that she has little control over these changes, and that in Peckham, 'things just happen!' She gives the example of Rye Lane recently becoming pedestrianised, which has negatively affected her use of the street. She would like to see a better council website available to residents, to inform them of the changes taking place in their neighbourhoods.

Over lockdown, Chioma and many of her classmates struggled with online learning and mental health issues. She found it difficult to access support from her teachers or in the local community.

"There is no easy access to mental health support in Peckham."

"Southwark council website is poorly designed and difficult to use."

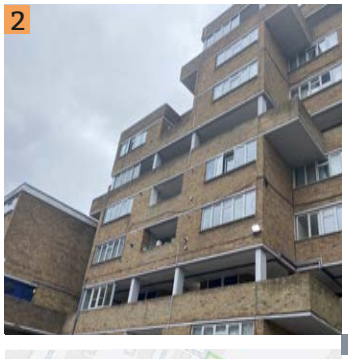
While the first and second phase findings reported a welcome support from national and local government for individuals, businesses and community support groups, this funding has been seen to be drying up in the third phase, causing great uncertainty about the future. This is particularly so for the availability of spaces to continue support activities such as food banks, which need sufficient time in a large space to run effectively.

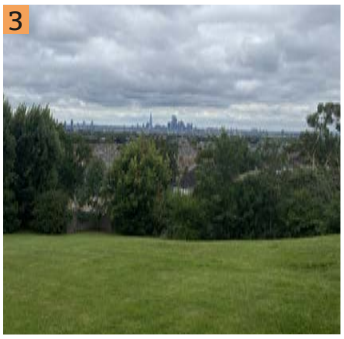
While face-to-face contact has brought huge benefits in terms of providing effective support and social contact, some residents are still preferring online engagement due to vulnerability or mobility issues. Many support organisations are therefore having to find new ways in balancing these two forms of engagement to remain inclusive and accessible.

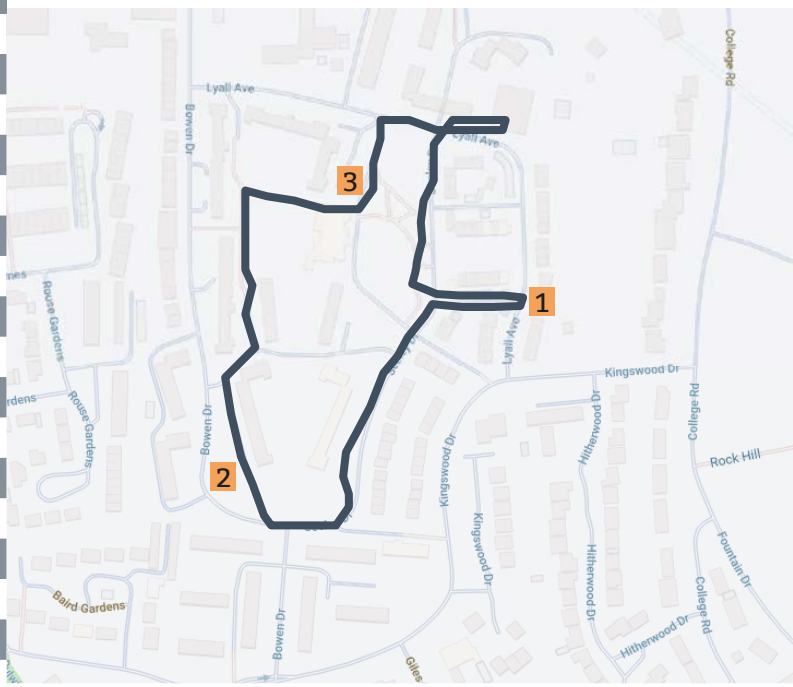
"Some young people are still choosing to do online work, because it makes them more accessible/confident, and hopefully can build them up so they do eventually come in. But poses new challenges - difficult to reach out." (Stakeholder)

Dulwich

Dulwich







The Kingswood, Lordship Lane and Dawson's Heights Estates are large social housing estates. Dawson's Heights, positioned on top of a hill, and Kingswood, in the very north of Southwark, both dominate their local areas.

Lordship Lane and Dawson's Heights have distinctive yet homogeneous architecture, Kingswood is a mixture of different building styles.

They incorporate green areas and are close to open spaces. Many residents grow plants and flowers on balconies and in gardens.

On the Kingswood Estate, there are signs of poverty and the difficult circumstances that some residents face.

This contrasts with the homes of more affluent residents who have invested in the external appearance.

Dulwich: focus on social housing estates

This section sets out the findings of the research in Dulwich's social housing estates, drawing on interviews with residents, traders and stakeholders carried out in three phases, in summer 2020, winter 2020-21 and summer 2021.

We summarise what was found, and map residents' perceptions of assets and places that feel unsafe. The section then describes Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research and what emerged most strongly over this time. Walking ethnographies and detail from the transect walks are also included.

Summary

- Parks, open spaces and the local woods were among the features enjoyed by Dulwich residents living on social housing estates. A majority of residents thought that parks and green spaces provide a range of leisure spaces and outdoor sports, and make the area feel peaceful and child-friendly. Residents also noted the importance of having clean and well-maintained outside spaces on their estates.
- Neighbourliness is seen as a key local asset that contributes to social integration across age groups. Residents reported that they value the longstanding and supportive relationships they have developed over time with their neighbours and the opportunity to take part in local community groups. Church gatherings, community centre activities and local volunteering were described as anchors of community life before the COVID-19 pandemic. When these shut after March 2020, isolation became a problem for many residents.
- Since March 2020 stakeholders and residents from all the Dulwich social housing estates included in the research reported that both estate facilities and some of their shops shut. They observed that these closures had a significant impact on their neighbourhoods' social life. Stakeholders located on the smaller social housing estates in Dulwich, with access to fewer facilities, described feeling isolated, as social centres closed.
- Residents have mixed views on whether they have control over change in their area. Whilst some reported that they feel involved in the decisions about development through their local TRAs and communications with their MP, others described frustration at not having their voice heard - for instance, some residents complained about protracted repairs on estates and delayed maintenance work.
- The lack of services and provision for young people was a common concern for residents and stakeholders. Some added that young people are left with nowhere to gather but outdoors, which sometimes has negative consequences for the relationships between young people and their neighbours.
- Most local people reported feeling at ease in their neighbourhoods and did not raise concerns about safety during the day. However, a number of residents and stakeholders noted that they have some concerns about walking alone at night on their estate. They also noted an increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, especially during the first lockdown.
- Stakeholders noted that people lacking digital skills, digital infrastructure or internet access have been the hardest group to engage during lockdown. There is increased awareness that these groups have been left out of online community meetings and activities. Faith organisations and statutory early learning providers mentioned that they had been unable to run their usual programmes that bring different groups in the community together.
- The first and second lockdowns increased residents' engagement in volunteering on the different estates. Stakeholders and residents thought that this created an opportunity for older people to get to know their neighbours better, which strengthened local relationships.

- Traders with premises on or close to social housing estates whose businesses stayed opened after March 2020 emphasised that most of their footfall came from a very local and regular customer base. They added that these residents had continued to be loyal customers throughout the pandemic.

Word clouds illustrate how residents described their local neighbourhoods in summer 2020 compared to summer 2021. These visualisations are based on responses to the question ***"If you were to describe your local area to someone unfamiliar with it, what three words would you use to describe it?"*** asked in street interviews in summer 2020 and summer 2021.

Each of the three words (or sometimes phrases such as "I-love-it" or "gone-downhill-under-Southwark") is counted once and the size of each word indicates its frequency. The words mentioned most frequently by residents are represented by larger size words and those mentioned only once appear smallest. These visualisations give a glimpse into how residents' perceptions changed during the year- and how different areas fared through a time of considerable stress.

Dulwich 2020

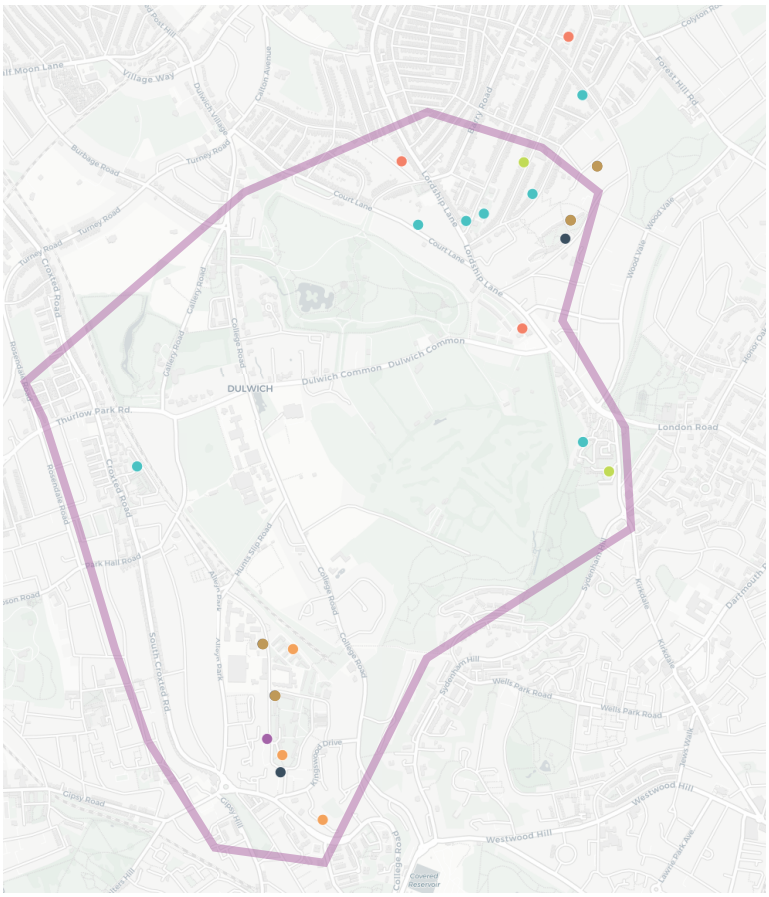
Dulwich 2021

Word cloud: how people described Dulwich social housing estates in street interviews in summer 2020 (left) & summer 2021 (right)

Local Assets

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and what they identified as assets in their areas (visualised in different colours).

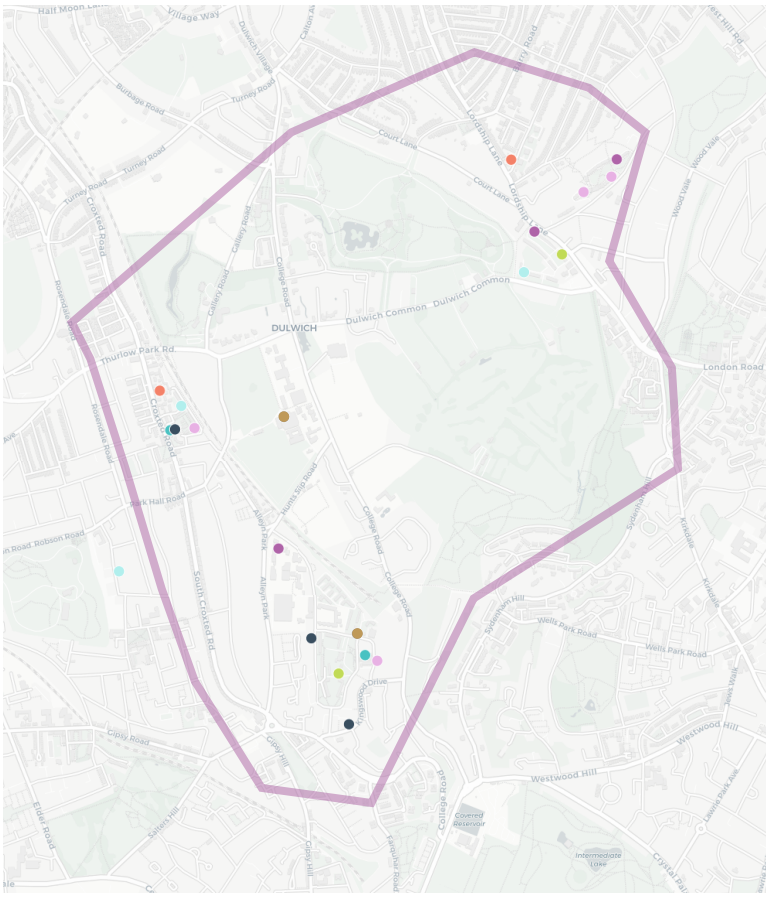
Summer 2020



Incomplete postcode, not mapped
1

- Community
- Parks
- The green
- Shopping facilities
- Transport connections
- The cleanliness
- Other
- Research area boundary

Summer 2021



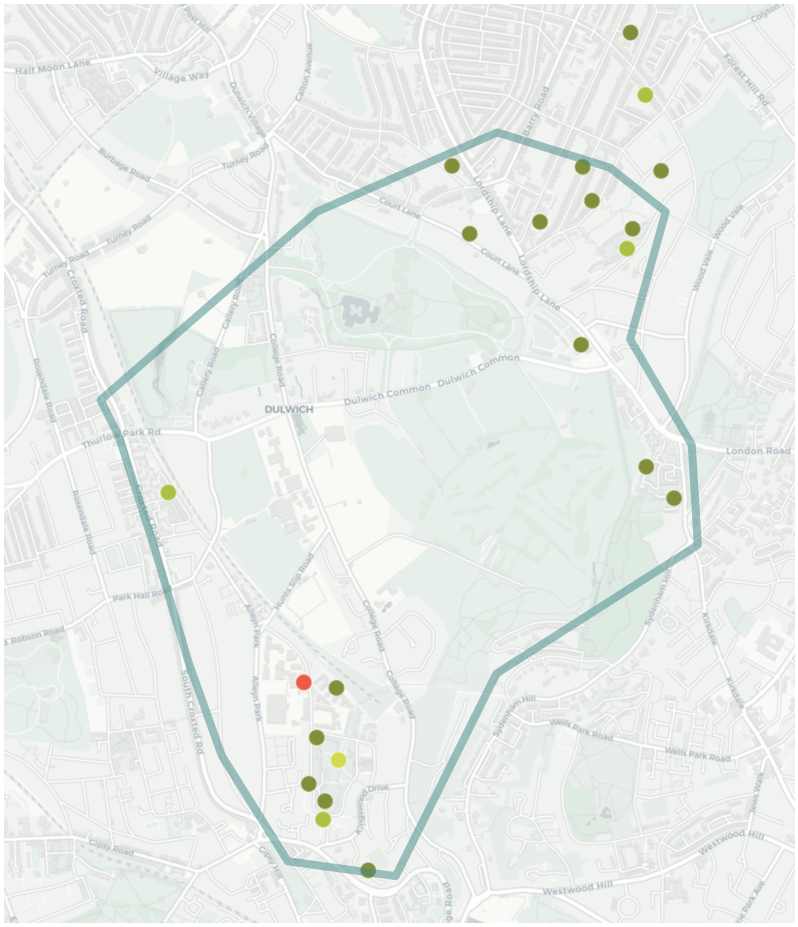
Incomplete postcodes, not mapped
2 1 1 1

- Community
- Parks
- The green
- Quiet area
- Shopping facilities
- Transport connections
- Location
- Other
- Research area boundary

Do you feel safe in your local area?

This map shows the location of street interview respondents' postcodes and their views on local safety (visualised in different colours).

Summer 2020



No

Yes the lighting is good in the area

Mostly safe

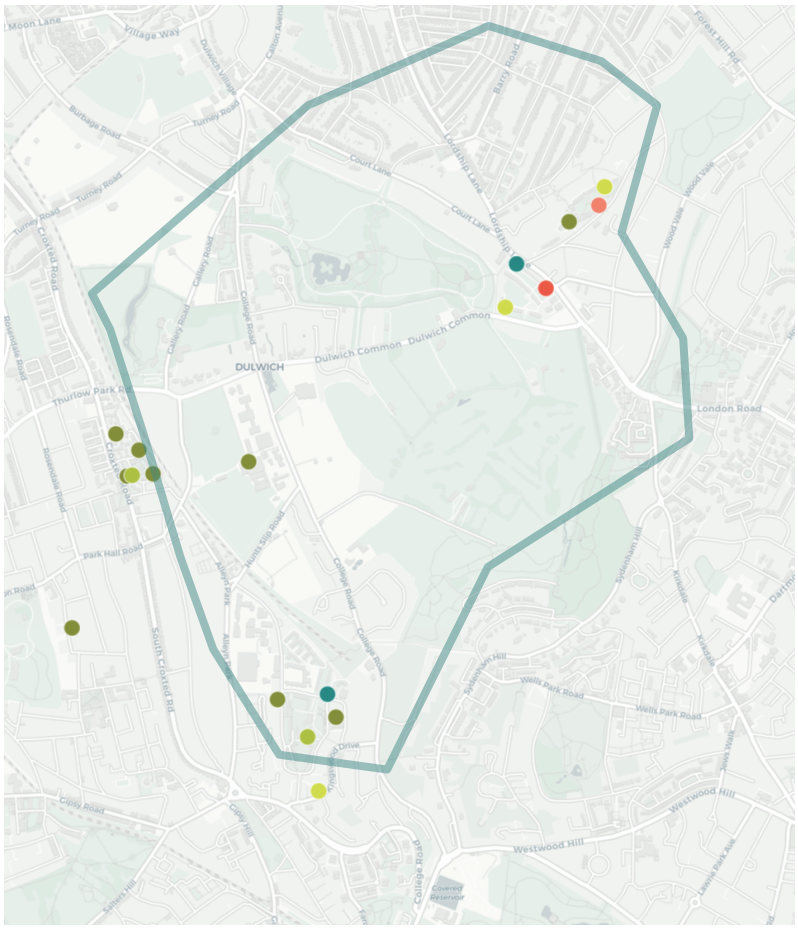
Yes

Research area boundary

Incomplete postcode, not mapped

1

Summer 2021



No

Don't feel safe all the time

Not safe at night

Yes but the lighting is poor in the area

Yes the lighting is good in the area

Mostly safe

Yes

Research area boundary

Incomplete postcodes, not mapped

2 1 2

Who we spoke to

Stakeholders: 23 in-depth interviews with stakeholders: eight in phase 1, eight in phase 2 and seven in phase 3. These included a TRA, a GP, faith organisations, a children's centre, a community space, a community organisation, a museum, a local councillor

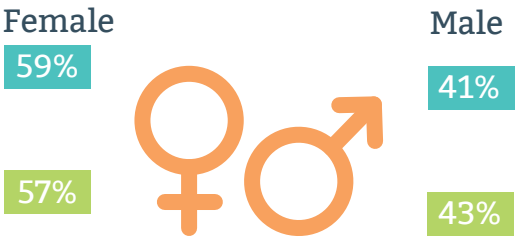
Traders: interviews with five traders, including a convenience store, a newsagent, cake shop, and flower shop.

Local residents: walking ethnographies with four residents and an in-depth telephone interview with a resident with a visual impairment disability. Street interviews with 57 residents, demographics below.

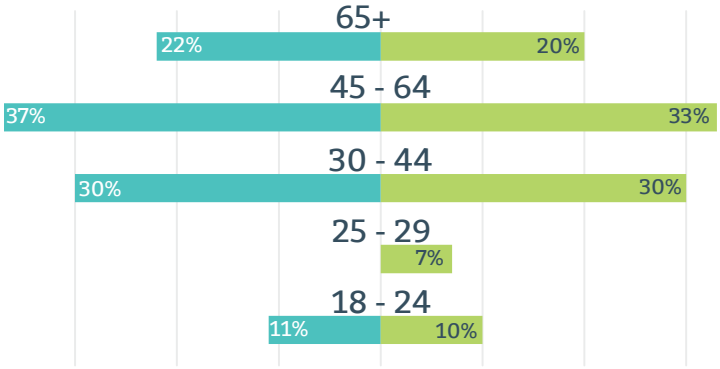
2020 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 27

2021 # OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | 30

Gender



Age



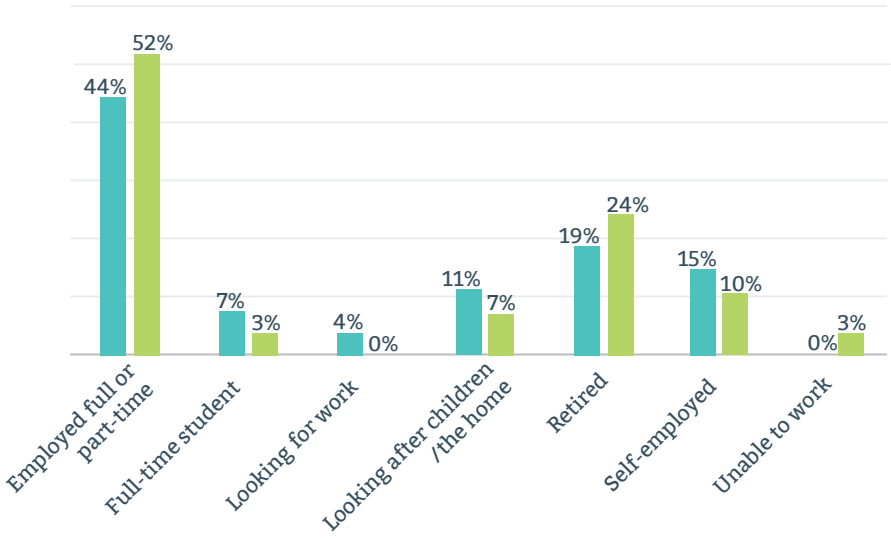
Lived in the area

4%	10%	< 1 year
7%	13%	1 - 3 years
7%	10%	4 - 5 years
15%	10%	6 - 10 years
15%	27%	11 - 20 years
52%	30%	20+ years

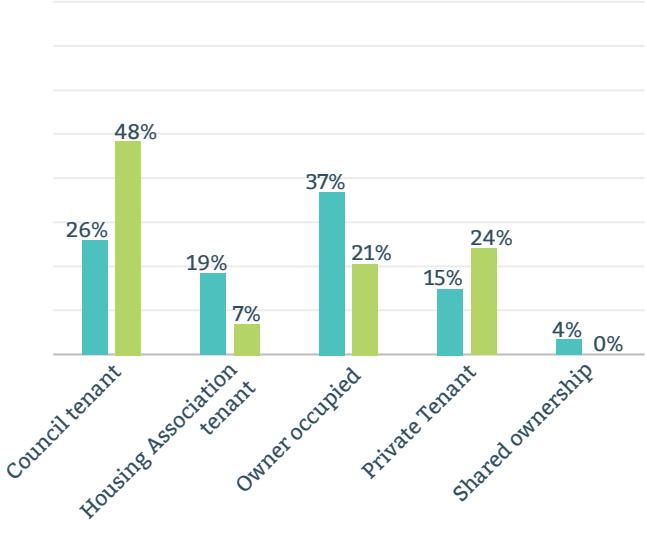
Ethnicity

Asian/Asian British	4%	3%
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	11%	20%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	15%	7%
White	56%	70%
Other ethnic group	15%	0%

Employment



Tenure



Detailed findings

Phase 1: Summer 2020

A place to belong

In summer of 2020, the majority of residents living on Dulwich's social housing estates described feeling a strong sense of belonging to the area, and to the social housing estates that they call home. Residents reported being involved in community life, including the TRAs and other community groups.

"I'm part of the TRA hall and we have kids' activities. It's the hub for the estate." (Resident)

Families describe long-term neighbourly relationships, seeing these as networks of support and important to everyday life. Neighbourliness was also seen to be as contributing to social integration across age groups. Church gatherings, community centre activities and local volunteering were described as important in community life.

"Yes, because I lay down roots. Also, my church is important. I do feel like I belong. I feel that I have stability and security." (Resident)

"I have the support of the community centres which is a good place to get to meet and get to know people." (Resident)

Several stakeholders noticed a number of discrete communities, identifiable by their wealth or poverty. One church minister described the difficulties in bringing together people from different backgrounds, as their congregation is overwhelmingly white and wealthy, "though warm and welcoming". Another church minister, with a more ethnically mixed congregation, highlighted how their black church members are worried about their children being involved in knife crime, whilst white members see it as a distant problem.

Several stakeholders said that there is a lack of provision for young people and that many youth clubs had closed, leaving young people with nowhere to congregate. This was echoed by some residents who complained about the behaviour of groups of young people.

"There's nothing for kids 16 years old and over, you just see them hanging around in groups, they sit in the square and Diamond Park chatting away." (Resident)

Local change and control

Residents appear divided on whether they have control over change in their area. Whilst some reported that they feel involved, through their local TRA and communications with their MP, others report frustration at not being listened to by the council. One resident commented that, although they have input, they do not have control. On one estate, fears about building more homes galvanised a successful community effort by the TRA to resist this. Local stakeholders report that some residents feel intimidated by council representatives.

"Council officers are pushing the regeneration in a very intimidating way. They are using residents by telephoning them and asking them to take part in a survey about regeneration. They are saying it's from the housing office but it has nothing to do with housing. People are feeling intimidated." (Stakeholder)

Since March 2020, estate facilities and all but a few shops on one of the largest estates have closed, this was viewed by residents and stakeholders as a major loss to social life.

"The laundry was a place that you could hang out and meet people while you're waiting for your washing to be done." (Resident)

"The shops are the most important part of the estate apart from the station. You can get your basics milk, bread, potatoes but it's not what it used to be. All the shops are shut now and that's even before COVID, only three shops remain open: the community shop and the two corner shops." (Resident)

Donna.

Donna described her local area on the phone, as she found navigating her local area difficult since the COVID protocols were introduced.

Donna loves her local area and describes it as safe and very clean. She feels that she belongs as she has laid down roots and has stability and security. Donna has very good friends in the sheltered housing where she lives.

Donna appreciates how close she is to to train stations, buses, supermarkets and parks and says she feels "very lucky and privileged".

"The church is very important for socialising."

" I do feel like I belong. I feel that I have stability and security."

Donna is a very active member of her local Methodist church where she regularly socialises. Donna also goes to local cafes and pubs to meet friends.

Donna finds crossing roads can sometimes be difficult and confusing as not all the crossings have the sensor for visually impaired people.

Donna hopes that that she has control over what happens in the area, but feels that the people who have influence and money and power probably decide what happens.

A healthier life

Stakeholders reported a stark divide between people living in privately owned or rented housing and people living in social housing on the estates. They noticed that many people living in social housing experience poorer health outcomes. Overcrowded housing, a lack of provision for mental health at community level, a rise in domestic abuse during lockdown, social isolation of both older people and hard to reach communities, and a shortage of accessible GPs and health centres were all cited as having an impact on residents' physical health and wellbeing. These issues were exacerbated by poor quality housing. Overcrowding in social housing was perceived as contributing to depression and other mental health problems.

"Mental health [problems seem] to have risen across all sections especially in younger people, however provision is concentrated at acute level - so medicalised, rather than focusing at community level." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders noted that the lack of support for people experiencing mental health problems disproportionately affects young mothers with young children, older people and young people. Older people, in particular those with long-term health conditions, are believed to be vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness. Stakeholders highlighted that access to services and support is difficult for people with mobility impairments. Residents with no recourse to public funds were described as experiencing poorer health, in part because of language barriers, which makes it difficult to access information and services. Stakeholders also mentioned that domestic abuse has a significant impact on families and healthcare provision, and how this problem has increased during the pandemic.

"Domestic abuse - women don't access services because they are not allowed to. We see more than before COVID-19 as women can't leave their home and this also has a big impact on children." (Stakeholder)

Safety

The majority of residents reported feeling safe, attributing this to good lighting, no visible violence, a sense of calm and quiet and a low crime rate. When residents brought up incidents of crime, they noted that these were not common.

"I don't feel under threat as a woman. In 10 years I've only seen one lady get mugged." (Resident)

"Yes, it's well lit. Low crime rate. People are friendly and check in with each other". (Resident)

Stakeholders mentioned a lack of CCTV and police presence on the estates, alongside a rise in drug related activities. A recent murder on one estate was described as very traumatic for the local community.

Anne.

The walk started at Kingswood House and went past Sydenham Hill train Station, Dulwich Wood Primary School, and the Kingswood Estate Community Hall.

Anne says she likes living in the area. She describes it as quiet, clean and green, with a good mix of people. Through her daughter and volunteering on the estate, she had got to know lots of people over the years and she very much appreciates the sense of neighbourliness that this has given her.

Anne feels a sense of belonging to her area because she feels local people care about her, including teachers at the local primary school that her daughter goes to.

The social aspect of life on the estate matters very much to Anne and she volunteers at the local community centre, as well as taking part in activities that are run there. She says one reason she volunteers is that she wants to give back.

Walking past the shops, Anne explains how important these are for the estate. Most of them are shut because of COVID, with only a couple open for basic shopping. Anne misses meeting up with other residents at the launderette, for a natter, as these too are closed.

"So you have a mix of people on the estate. Some people who have lived here all their lives and others who have moved in more recently. In all I'd say most people get on."

Local assets and challenges

Residents and stakeholders all praised the many open spaces, parks and woods in the area, describing how these make the area feel peaceful and child friendly, how they are used for leisure and a place to spend time and relax. Residents described the importance of clean and well-maintained outside spaces on the estates.

"We go for walks and to the local woods, it's still in the community." (Resident)

"Plenty of places for dogs, it's a lot greener than other parts of Southwark, there's a local forest up the hill." (Resident)

Public transport was described as good by some residents, whilst others complained of erratic trains and the distance from the Underground. Traffic and air pollution on the South Circular were frequently mentioned, as was litter and fly-tipping. Stakeholders reported the connection between poverty and poor outcomes in education. Some noted low levels of aspiration amongst young people. One church minister flagged the lack of black role models.

"Members of the congregation say: 'If all people in leadership are white, what does that say to my child?'" (Stakeholder)

"What's missing is help on the estate to get people into employment to get them help with job applications." (Stakeholder)

Danielle.

The walk began at Kingswood Community Centre, as Danielle did her food bank deliveries, then through Bowen Drive and Seeley Drive.

Danielle enjoys volunteering and feels she is giving back to the community, after she needed help from the food bank when she lost her job in March. She says she loves the area and describes it as friendly and safe, where children can play outside and neighbours look out for them. Danielle feels that there is not enough for older

teenagers on the estate. When boy from the estate was murdered, the whole community united to search the area for weapons.

Danielle described how COVID-19 has damaged local social life as everyone is inside. She lamented the loss of the library, and feels lost without it.

Danielle relies on KETRA and the Community centre for information and without them says she wouldn't know where to turn. She thought that empty buildings, like the Kingswood Housing Office could be used for community activities for different groups of people.

"I felt so overwhelmed and was helped. My way of giving back is through this volunteering. I now do deliveries."

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Stakeholders reported that COVID-19 has severely affected residents' ability to engage with their services. One early years provider told us that during the first lockdown they were able to engage with only five percent of the 4,000 people who regularly visit. Even when stakeholders were able to move some services online, many people are unable to access these. Digital poverty – the lack of equipment and connectivity - also affects some children and young people stopping them joining online lessons.

Black, Asian and ethnic minority residents were believed to be more likely to exclude themselves from services because of fears about COVID-19. Some residents did not know how to find help because of language barriers. People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are perceived to be disproportionately affected by the closure of places of worship and restrictions on funeral gatherings.

"People had to grieve alone with tiny funerals. West African funerals are usually huge, so this has had a big emotional impact. West Africans sing and dance together and you cannot underestimate how this will take its toll as it's so important to them." (Stakeholder)

The research shows that many older people in the local area were anxious and, for a long period of time, fearful of leaving their homes. Some stakeholders noted that lockdown meant that some older people were able to get to know their neighbours better, strengthening local relationships. Stakeholders also reported that families, especially those living in overcrowded homes, struggled with everyday life. Stakeholders commented on the difficulties faced by families unable to visit grandparents and their extended family.

Residents with disabilities spoke about additional difficulties in navigating public transport and shopping, increasing the stress of dealing with everyday tasks.

"As visually impaired people, we need to touch much more and need to use the handrail and we need to pick items up in shops. We are told not to handle stuff because of the virus but we can't not do that!" (Resident)

The loss of work as a result of lockdown has affected mental health and relationships.

Stakeholders engaging with wealthier residents in the area described a generous and active community, which worked with the local food bank during COVID-19 lockdown, sharing food and resources.

PHASE 2: Winter 2020-21

A place to belong

In our research in winter 2020-21, some stakeholders described the neighbourhoods as strong and organised - coming together to support the most vulnerable in their neighbourhood. Others spoke of 'disjointed' and isolated communities.

Stakeholders located on estates with fewer facilities described feeling isolated, especially as social centres have closed during the pandemic.

"I feel like we are forgotten [on the estate]. It's a lovely estate with green spaces. The residents take care of it and have invested in it. For example, they have beehives all over the estates and have carried out planting and tree preservation." (Stakeholder)

It was noted that, though people get on locally, the diverse groups active in the local churches do not interact much. Some stakeholders also reported an increase in tensions between people in the neighbourhood, compared to previous months.

"There is less social cohesion, less patience and you hear more racist outbursts on the street." (Stakeholder)

Local change and control

Stakeholders tended to focus on the developments proposed on some of the larger estates in Dulwich. They reported mixed feelings about change among local residents. Some local people are in favour of the regeneration as it brings more housing and bigger flats, others however do not want the appearance of their estate to change. Residents are worried about new people moving into the estate and the effect that this will have on the estate. Some stakeholders also noted that they felt the council's consultation process can be improved.

"The council met the TRA and residents to present the regeneration of a new development and they have been quite forceful! They are proposing to knock down [buildings] on the estate and they will be disturbing an estate that is peaceful." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders reported poor communication and information from the council, especially about services available to residents on the larger estates. Some noted that it is not always easy to get in touch with the council. This was seen as a problem for more vulnerable residents.

"[There is] a lack of distribution of leaflets outlining support on offer for residents. These need to be more targeted through the housing officer, especially for older people." (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders told us that they felt the council should find places that are safe for agencies to deliver services while the usual venues were closed.

The recent road changes to implement the low traffic neighbourhood were described by some stakeholders as creating traffic problems, and difficulties for local shopkeepers, as people were less able to stop and shop.

A healthier life

Stakeholders reported an increase in mental health problems amongst residents across all groups since the first phase of the research. They noted how closing children's centres and primary schools in the first part of 2020 had affected local families. People without outdoor spaces and places for young children to play were thought to be especially affected by this. Fear of the pandemic was flagged as high, especially for some from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups who have been disproportionately affected. Language barriers could increase feelings of anxiety.

"There is anxiety and this is a key issue, which is very difficult to bounce back from. Some people cannot rationalise the pandemic and it throws up a lot of issues. Resilience is quite low for a lot of adults." (Stakeholder)

Some stakeholders told us that tensions in families have been growing with people sharing the same space day after day. They saw this as linked to declining mental health and incidents of domestic abuse.

"There is domestic abuse and loneliness and isolation. We all hear shouts and screams and people arguing." (Stakeholder)

Local assets and challenges

Many stakeholders described the estates as having accessible green spaces. Local schools were described as good. However, some of the larger estates, further away from shopping centres, are seen as lacking amenities and services. The COVID-19 restrictions have left some older people particularly vulnerable. Several stakeholders also noted the lack of facilities for young people between 16 and 25.

"The challenges are to do with meeting people's social needs. There is nothing here to stimulate the young and the old and babies. There isn't even exercising equipment, or specific outdoor spaces for people to meet." (Stakeholder)

"Older people need other types of support such as dance classes and music and other stuff. There is not enough provision and their needs are neglected - there needs to be more support. Those that are not under the care of social services and are living independently haven't had any checks by anybody." (Stakeholder)

In spite of this, the community itself was described as strong in this phase of research.

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Stakeholders from statutory services and community services and groups agreed that COVID-19 affected their ability to engage with their members. Several expressed worry and frustration at not being able to meet service users in person. Some were particularly worried about some families from more marginalised backgrounds who may struggle to access services online.

"There are also families that are not identifying themselves - they are invisible. There is very little way of finding these people - families that we were seeing weekly, because they would put themselves forward for ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages], for example. Now ESOL is run virtually but many people cannot access as they have no Wi-Fi or digital equipment." (Stakeholder)

Job losses, especially among self-employed people were said to be as high. Local schools have been offering packed lunches (from the Fair Share food bank) to local families.

"We do try to coax all families out - offering packed lunches to entice out the families and check-in with them." (Stakeholder)

Some stakeholders have been able to move part or all of their services and activities online, and some communicated through social media and WhatsApp. Overall, stakeholders noted that people who lack digital skills, digital infrastructure or internet access have been the hardest group to engage during lockdown, and how they have been left out of online community meetings and activities.

PHASE 3: Summer 2021

A place to belong

Echoing the first phase of research, most of the residents living in the social housing estates that we spoke to in summer 2021 continue to feel a strong sense of belonging to their estates and their immediate area. People reported that they value the longstanding and supportive relationships they have developed over time with their neighbours and the opportunity to take part in local community groups. Community halls were greatly valued and some residents without access to one voiced their frustrations at the impact this had on their social lives.

"Yes, I feel like I belong. Just seeing people you recognise on the pavement - even the bin men and the council workers and the shop people." (Resident)

"I know a lot of people in my estate, and there are good community groups here, for example the gardening group." (Resident)

"I'd feel like I would belong more if we had the tenants' association hall as it not being there has deprived us of communication the bond of relationships would help solve issues like loneliness but we don't have the space to be together." (Resident)

Local traders on or close to social housing estates told us that most of their footfall came from a very local and regular customer base and that these people had continued to be loyal throughout the pandemic. One of the traders we spoke to, who had opened in the middle of the pandemic, described a supportive and helpful local community.

"We are new to the shop been here for eight months. There has been a good response from the community. They are helpful and come to us rather than go to the supermarket." (Trader)

Some of the stakeholders we spoke with, such as churches and statutory early learning providers told us that they had been unable to run their usual programmes that bring different groups in the community together.

A healthier life

The majority of the residents we spoke with appreciated the walking and cycling opportunities available to them in the parks and woods, and in the many green spaces close to their homes. However, we also heard from residents on estates close to main roads, who complained about heavy traffic and air and noise pollution. Some of these residents spoke about what they perceived as additional and displaced traffic, because of recent road closures, and the negative effect this was having on their family's health.

"My son is asthmatic and we can taste the air pollution. The traffic has cornered the whole estate. Displaced traffic - noise pollution." (Resident)

Stakeholders told us that the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions continued to affect residents' mental and physical health and that this was true across all groups in the community. Stakeholders also noted that the effect of the pandemic restrictions on people's social life had resulted in an overall change in people's outlook.

"Loneliness is a problem and there needs to be more understanding around how important social interaction is. People are generally more 'flat' and lack enthusiasm for life. People are anxious and talking therapy referrals have soared." (Stakeholder)

One GP practice manager mentioned that the lack of exercise and healthy eating had resulted in what they described as "an element of neglect", that people were feeling less confident overall. They also described the ongoing effects of the pandemic restrictions on people's mental health, despite the recent restriction easing.

“There has definitely been an increase in anxiety and an increase in depression and mental health problems. With the easing people are all trying to get back to normal but people are moodier and the roads are busier.” (Stakeholder)

Safety

Like in the first phase of research, local residents reported feeling at ease in their local area and did not raise concerns about safety during the day. However, some residents and stakeholders flagged anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and concerns with safety at night. There were more worries about drug-related crime than in the first phase of the research.

“I don't feel that safe, especially at night. There have been incidents with youngsters, where a lot of police had to come.” (Resident)

“People are selling drugs, which causes violence and anti-social behaviour. With my sons living at home, I always felt fine. Also, there is a lot of domestic violence here, I've witnessed it.” (Resident)

Local assets and challenges

Residents described a very diverse and family friendly area, with plenty of green spaces that are easily accessible with young children. Residents also value highly the local schools, which they describe as good, and the local transport links.

"It's near to the park, so that I don't need to go far with my kids.” (Resident)

“It’s a diverse area and I don't see any segregation - there's always lots of people chatting to each other.” (Resident)

Some residents complained that their estate was not clean and was poorly maintained and that this affected how they felt about their estate.

“The conditions of the building -it doesn't feel nice …. bins not washed, repairs not carried out, lawn not cut.” (Resident)

Stakeholders who were endeavouring to continue to run programmes for families and children during the pandemic told us that there were few buildings with proper ventilation. Stakeholders also mentioned a lack of provision for older people with dementia, and their carers.

“Day centres are missing for older people - places where they can integrate. All of them are isolated and they can wander - there is lots of stress on the carers and on the individual too.” (Stakeholder)

The impact of COVID-19 on everyday life

Views on the easing of the pandemic restrictions amongst residents from the social housing estates in Dulwich were mixed. Some residents observed that people were being more social, and were outside more and that people seemed more positive.

“I'm waiting for my church to open again. My neighbours came to check on me at the beginning of the pandemic, but they're not doing it anymore.” (Resident)

Ade.

We met outside Dulwich Children & Family Centre, then Ade led the way around the estate.

Kingswood Estate is surrounded by green space, with Crystal Palace just around the corner, and buses that take you to Brixton and Croydon. Ade notes that there is a mix of ethnicities and people mostly get along. There are lots of friendly families on the estate and people tend to greet one another and stop for a chat, she adds as we cross the estate.

Ade mentions that two key concerns local residents have about the estate are the presence of drugs and occasional acts of violence. Ade feels that young people are especially at risk, and that there isn't enough for teenagers to do. 'They just hang around, and it's intimidating,' she says. Ade doesn't even like her children playing on the local playground as she feels it is dangerous.

"The station entrance is less overlooked than other parts of the estate...[Residents] have also asked the council for CCTV cameras in the more hidden areas of the estate."

There have been several shop closures on Seeley Drive recently. Other facilities, closed due to COVID-19, are sorely missed. Ade is looking forward to the return of a coffee morning at her local church. She is also an active member of the Kingswood Estate Tenants and Residents Association (KETRA). Over lockdown they have been delivering food to vulnerable residents, and they also provide a meeting space and information about changes to the area.

[About the recent easing of the COVID-19 restrictions:] "We are finally coming out again!"

Other residents told us that there was still a lot of anxiety around socialising, especially amongst older people, who felt that they were being supported less. The continued closure of some local groups was reported as adding to people's sense of isolation. Quite a few residents were unaware of support groups in the area.

"People are gradually coming out you can see the positivity is in people's mental health and you can make acquaintances now easily." (Resident)

"It's just the same for me. The restrictions made me feel very depressed - I sit on my own. There are no support groups that I know of - not from the council either." (Resident)

Social Life is an independent research organisation created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. Our work is about understanding how peoples' day-to-day experience of local places is shaped by the built environment - housing, public spaces, parks and local high streets - and how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas.

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