



# Social & economic benchmark of the residential areas most affected by the St Thomas St developments

Summary report

## Summary

In Spring 2019, Social Life was commissioned by Southwark Council in partnership with Team London Bridge to carry out a social and economic benchmark of the residential areas most affected by the proposed developments around St Thomas Street. The aim of the research is to act as a baseline to inform a Social Regeneration Charter being prepared for the area.

The study explored the experiences and perceptions of residents in relation to a number of themes, including community life, work, health and wellbeing and the local area. It draws on a survey of 329 residents of local estates, as well as interviews and group conversations with residents and stakeholders. This summary brings together the research findings under Southwark Council's eight Fairer Future themes.

### A place to call home

- We found strong satisfaction with the local area, well above comparable areas. It is considered to have many assets, including its central location, its relatively peaceful environment, and its historical character.
- Overall, 82% of survey respondents reported that the area is changing for the better. Previous developments which showed clear social purpose were very positively received by residents.
- There are significant concerns about the nature of future proposed changes, these centre on questions around their scale and character, disruption caused by building works, as well as their social value.
- Housing affordability is a key issue for many residents, already high rents and housing costs in the area are increasing at a faster rate than the borough average. More affordable housing was the top local priority for residents surveyed. There are also some concerns around the quality of social housing stock locally.

### A place to belong

- Our survey found high levels of neighbourliness and belonging locally, although there is some sense of loss of the more cohesive community of former years.
- Residents surveyed were positive about the relationships between people of different backgrounds, yet there is felt to be little association between individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- High numbers of survey respondents feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area and there are strong activist and community groups locally, which provide forums for residents to participate. However, there is significant distrust and cynicism around consultation and the impact of local voices on the planning process.
- The area is characterised by high levels of inequality. Gaps between residents living on different incomes appear to be widening: between 2010 and 2015 deprivation increased in the parts of the area with higher stocks of social housing and has diminished in areas with more private housing.

### **A greener borough**

- The area has a relatively low amount of green space but local parks are well-used and were considered by 84% of survey respondents to be well maintained. The area is also characterised by many community gardening and greening projects.
- Environmental factors affect the health and wellbeing of many residents: 43% of survey respondents feel air pollution has a significant or moderate impact, while around a third of residents report similar effects from noise pollution, road traffic, and construction.
- Only 15% of survey respondents reported walking or cycling to work, well below the average for the area as a whole, where 38% reported walking or cycling to work at the 2011 census.

### **A full employment borough**

- There are jobs available locally and it is reported that employers in a number of sectors struggle to fill lower paid positions.
- The employment rate among survey respondents is below the Southwark average, driven by higher numbers of long-term sick or disabled, or respondents looking after home or family - a small portion of whom would like to access paid work.
- There is considered to be support to access work locally. However, there is reported to be a lack of coordination between agencies, as well as some difficulty catering to individuals with complex needs.
- There is a high demand for flexible work opportunities which is not currently being met by employers. This was considered the main barrier to accessing better work among survey respondents.
- Low wages are affecting a portion of residents: one in ten survey respondents reported earning below the London Living Wage.
- It is reported that employers would like to employ people living locally, but sometimes struggle understanding how best to do this.
- Only 10% of residents surveyed reported volunteering in the past 12 months in a formal or informal capacity, this is below comparable areas and well below the London average.

### **A healthier life**

- There are significant health inequalities locally, evidenced in lower life expectancy in parts of the area with high stocks of social housing.
- There are reports that mental health issues are increasing in the area, and that services are insufficient to meet needs.
- Survey respondents reported relatively low levels of loneliness, this was highest among long-term sick or unemployed individuals, while those in paid work were more likely to be isolated than retired individuals.
- Childhood obesity is high locally, parts of the area are in the upper most decile for childhood obesity rates in the country, this is linked to complex socioeconomic, cultural and geographic factors.
- Around a quarter of survey respondents do not feel they have the ability to be physically active or participate in sports, while 42% of survey respondents are doing less than 30 minutes of exercise per week, excluding walking.

### **A great start in life**

- Parts of the research area are among the 20% most deprived in relation to income deprivation affecting children, with poverty and hunger reported to be significantly impacting a portion of children at a local primary school.
- Primary schools in the area are Ofsted rated 'good' or 'outstanding'. There is no secondary school in the research area and young people attend a range of schools of varying quality within the borough.
- Local young people and schools benefit from a wide range of amenities and opportunities nearby, however schools struggle with capacity to coordinate enrichment activities.
- More facilities and activities for young people are a key priority for local residents, in particular a safe place for teenagers to spend time without the need to engage in structured activities.

### **A safer community**

- Residents surveyed report similar levels of safety to comparable areas and 91% feel safe when out and about. However, crime rates in the London Bridge area are above the borough average, driven by high levels of theft associated with growing numbers of visitors in the area.
- There are concerns around young peoples' safety, particularly in relation to knife crime, although this is not considered a localised issue within the area but part of wider patterns across London. Stakeholders and residents link the issue to reduced provision for young people.

### **A vibrant Southwark**

- Among survey respondents, 38% reported participating in a formal cultural activity in the past month, this is lower among social housing tenants than owner occupiers and well below the London average of 66%. However, local cultural amenities were reported to be well used and known by survey respondents.
- A significant portion of residents are not active online, 23% of survey respondents reported that they go online "never" or "rarely" - only a fifth of retired people and a third of those with long term illness or disability report going online frequently.
- Residents have good access to shops and other businesses locally. In terms of gaps, affordable supermarkets were a priority for residents surveyed, while it was commented that community shops with affordable prices are lacking locally.

**The full report of the research findings, as well as information on the St Thomas Street Social Regeneration Charter can be found here:**

<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/regeneration/borough-bankside-and-bermondsey?chapter=10>

# Residents survey: key findings

# OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED | **329**

## A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Satisfied with the local area



Feel area is changing for the better



## A GREENER BOROUGH

Satisfied with local parks and green spaces



Feel air pollution impacts significantly or moderately on health & wellbeing



Walk or cycle to get to work



## A PLACE TO BELONG

Regularly stop and talk with people with in neighbourhood



Feel they belong



## A HEALTHIER LIFE

Have a long-term health condition or disability



Feel lonely occasionally, hardly ever, or never



## A SAFER COMMUNITY

Feel safe when out and about in the local area



Feel they have ability to influence decisions affecting local area



Agree people from different backgrounds get on



Feel they have the opportunity to play sport



Feel they have the ability to be physically active



Feel safe when walking in the area after dark



## A FULL EMPLOYMENT BOROUGH

Employment rate among working age respondents



Earnings below the London Living Wage



Would like to access better work



Volunteered in the past 12 months



## A GREAT START IN LIFE

Consider activities or facilities for young people a priority



## A VIBRANT SOUTHWARK

Participated in a cultural activity in the past month



Feel local museums, galleries & theatres cater to them



Feel local cafes, restaurants & bars cater to them



Go online never or rarely



### KEY

- Above benchmark
- In-line with benchmark
- Below benchmark
- No available benchmark

## About Social Life

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.

[www.social-life.co](http://www.social-life.co)

Report commissioned by Southwark Council in partnership with Team London Bridge.

Published October 2019.

