



Measuring the social impacts of regeneration in South Acton

Summary Report



About the research

Acton Gardens LLP, a joint venture between Countryside Properties and L&Q, commissioned research from Social Life and the University of Reading to explore how the Acton Gardens regeneration programme is affecting people living in the local area.

The purpose of the research was to explore the social impacts of regeneration, better understand local priorities and needs, and to influence the planning, design and management of future phases of development. The research findings are a snapshot of how residents are experiencing regeneration relatively early on in the process, when the first phase of new housing has been developed at Acton Gardens and some areas of existing housing are still empty.

This is innovative work undertaken at a time when there is growing interest in measuring the social outcomes of regeneration and urban development in the UK and internationally. Several recent publications, including from the UK Government's What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, have highlighted the need for urban planning and development to pay greater attention to social outcomes, arguing that investments in the built environment can be more effective if there is a greater understanding about the interaction between the social and physical aspects of place.

The research findings are based on a survey of 544 households living on the South Acton Estate, the first phase of Acton Gardens and the streets immediately surrounding the estate. Ten local community groups were also interviewed, and a site survey carried out by an independent architect. The fieldwork was carried out in spring 2015.

Acton Gardens LLP will repeat this assessment every two to three years throughout the regeneration programme.

The project has used a research framework designed for measuring the social sustainability of new housing and mixed-use developments. This was developed for The Berkeley Group by Social Life and Professor Tim Dixon of Reading University¹.



Fig 1: New homes at Acton Gardens

ABOUT THE SOUTH ACTON ESTATE

South Acton Estate is the largest council estate in Ealing. It includes over 1,800 homes in a variety of architectural styles, ranging from 17-storey tower blocks to low-rise brick-clad blocks.

In 1999, Ealing Council began a major regeneration programme following consultation with the community. This will involve the redevelopment of all the existing homes on the estate, which will be replaced with 2,517 new homes, built in 21 phases between 2011 and 2024. 167 new homes in the first phase had been completed at the time of this research.

Key findings

The research paints a picture of a strong, tolerant and supportive community in South Acton where people from a wide variety of backgrounds feel like they belong, and benefit from local services.

Residents recognise that regenerating local housing and the public realm is much needed to improve the South Acton Estate and its immediate surroundings, in particular to tackle over-crowding, poor quality housing and to improve safety. However, there is also a recognition that a coherent approach to understanding and tackling underlying social and economic issues is needed, a key aspect of this is recognising and valuing the less tangible and less visible aspects of local social life in South Acton.

The work also illustrates the impact of the changes that have already taken place. Improvements to the open and green spaces and the street network have made people feel safer. However, people living in new housing at Acton Gardens report much lower feelings of belonging and interaction with neighbours than those living in older parts of the South Acton Estate and in the wider area. This may be expected given the short time that these residents have lived in their new homes.

The key findings fall into three categories:

- Living in the local area
- Influencing decisions
- Feelings about the regeneration.



Fig 2: Wall art gives new life to the public realm

Living in the local area

- Local relationships matter: three quarters of people living on the South Acton Estate say they regularly stop and talk to their neighbours and over 80 per cent say they could turn to someone in the neighbourhood if they needed advice. However, these figures are much lower for people living in the first phase of new housing in Acton Gardens.
- Many people take pride in where they live and over 90 per cent say where they live is important to their identity.
- Overall, there are high levels of wellbeing and satisfaction with the area as a place to live. People living in Acton Gardens and the wider area reported higher levels of wellbeing and satisfaction than people living on the South Acton Estate.
- Good local facilities such as schools, health services and transport connections, are recognised as important and help to make South Acton a good place to live.
- The community feels safer to residents than in the past, although there are still problems, but some people feel frustrated about the time it is taking for the estate's reputation to improve.



Fig 3: Neighbouring housing



Fig 4: Artworks brings colour to existing buildings

Influencing decisions

- Overall, 69 per cent of the 544 people interviewed said it is quite or very important to them to feel they can influence decisions about the regeneration programme.
- People living in Acton Gardens were most likely to say that being able to influence decisions matters to them. 73 per cent of Acton Gardens residents said this is very or quite important to them personally, compared to 67% of people on the South Acton Estate.

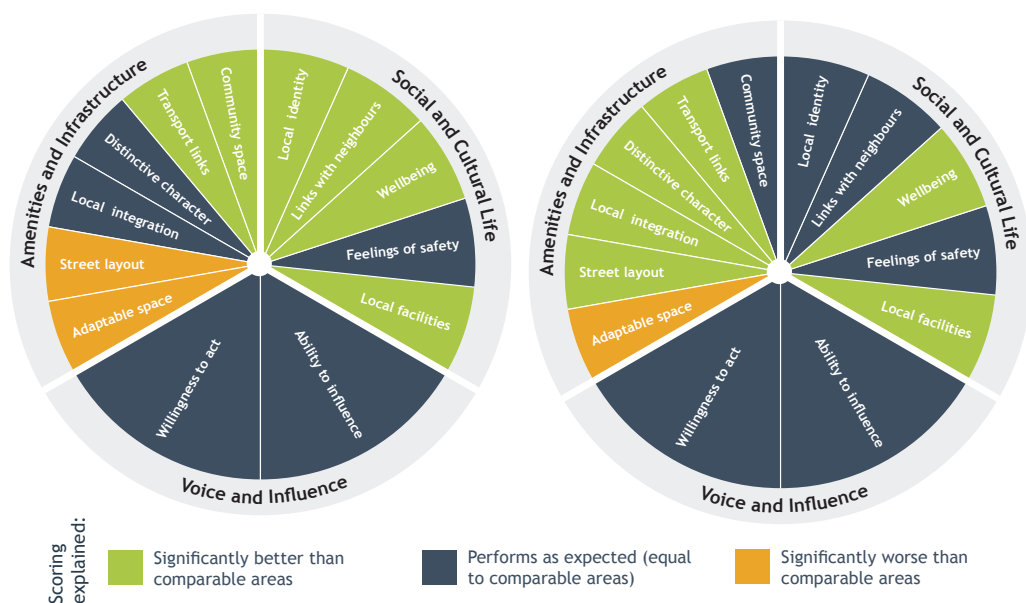
Feelings about the regeneration

- More people were in favour of the regeneration plans than were opposed, although many were unsure. Less than 40 per cent of residents said they felt “overall positive” about the regeneration. People who were in favour were positive about the design of the new housing at Acton Gardens.
- Many residents have mixed feelings about the regeneration proposals: some said they feel hopeful and positive, while others are worried about the disruption and how changes will impact on more vulnerable members of the community.
- People living in sheltered housing were particularly concerned and anxious about how their friendships and relationships would be affected.
- People living in the Redbricks area of the estate reported the most negative feelings about regeneration.
- Housing affordability, new housing for existing residents and improvements to housing were the most important aspects of the regeneration for residents.

Social sustainability assessment

The social sustainability assessment shows that the new housing in Acton Gardens is performing better than the existing estate in terms of its “amenities and infrastructure”, reflecting improvements to the built environment. However it lags behind the longer established South Action Estate in terms of “social and cultural life”. “Voice and influence” scores are as would be expected in comparable areas.

Fig 5: The South Action Estate (left) and Acton Gardens phase 1 (right)
Source: Social Life/University of Reading household survey, 2015



The findings point to four main areas that Acton Gardens LLP will act on in coming years:

- Supporting residents in new housing to help them settle in the neighbourhood, meet people and take advantage of local facilities and services, in order to maintain the sense of neighbourliness that so many South Acton residents value
- Ensuring that existing residents of the South Acton Estate fully understand the re-housing process
- Accommodating local organisations that offer informal but very important support services to the community, without upsetting sensitive dynamics that have evolved over time
- Recognising the value that residents place on their relationships with friends and neighbours in the area, and the role these play in providing social and emotional support.

The research team

Social Life was established in 2012 by the Young Foundation. All its work is about the relationship between people and places, for more see www.social-life.co

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¹ The social sustainability framework that has been adapted for this project is set out in the report Building Strong Communities (2012, The Berkeley Group) which can be downloaded at: <http://www.social-life.co/publication/creating-strong-communities/>



Boundary of the South Acton Estate development area



ACTON GARDENS

LONDON W3

