

Community research in Walthamstow Report of a social listening exercise by Forest CLT

February 2022



This research was carried out by Forest CLT members, with the support of Social Life

Social Life

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Forest CLT

Forest CLT is a Community Land Trust for Waltham Forest. Our mission is to provide truly affordable, sustainable housing for local people and community spaces for everyone. We're a housing organisation with a difference: we're a group of residents creating genuinely affordable homes for local people to rent and buy, built by the community for the community, and not for profit. Forest CLT will be the long-term guardian of these homes and spaces, meaning they will stay affordable and accessible for future generations. We were founded in 2018 when local residents came together with a desire to tackle the housing crisis with people power. We're now a lively and growing organisation with more than 150 members, including an 11-strong board of trustees and a range of smaller teams that work on different projects, from architecture to outreach.

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The research

This report summarises the findings of a social listening exercise carried out in 2021 by Forest Community Land Trust (CLT) with the support of Social Life.

This is based on a street survey was carried out over the summer of 2021. 81 participants from the St James area answered questions about their thoughts on the local area and services provided. Stakeholder surveys were distributed to ten local community leaders to understand their experience of the local area and community.

The aim of this research was to help understand what the community valued in the area, what they felt was missing and what priorities there were in developing new spaces and facilities. It was important for Forest CLT to conduct this survey coming out of lockdown as this gave a unique perspective on services that locals felt that they needed during a time of unprecedented stress.

The findings offer insights into what services and spaces local residents found beneficial and, going forward, how they should be designed or adapted in the future to underpin a more resilient community that supports happy and healthy lifestyles.



Social Life worked with Forest CLT to develop the research questions and questionnaires, and trained CLT members in street interviewing and stakeholder interviewing techniques. Social Life also helped synthesise the data that came out of the research.

All interviews were carried out by Forest CLT members.

Who was engaged in the research

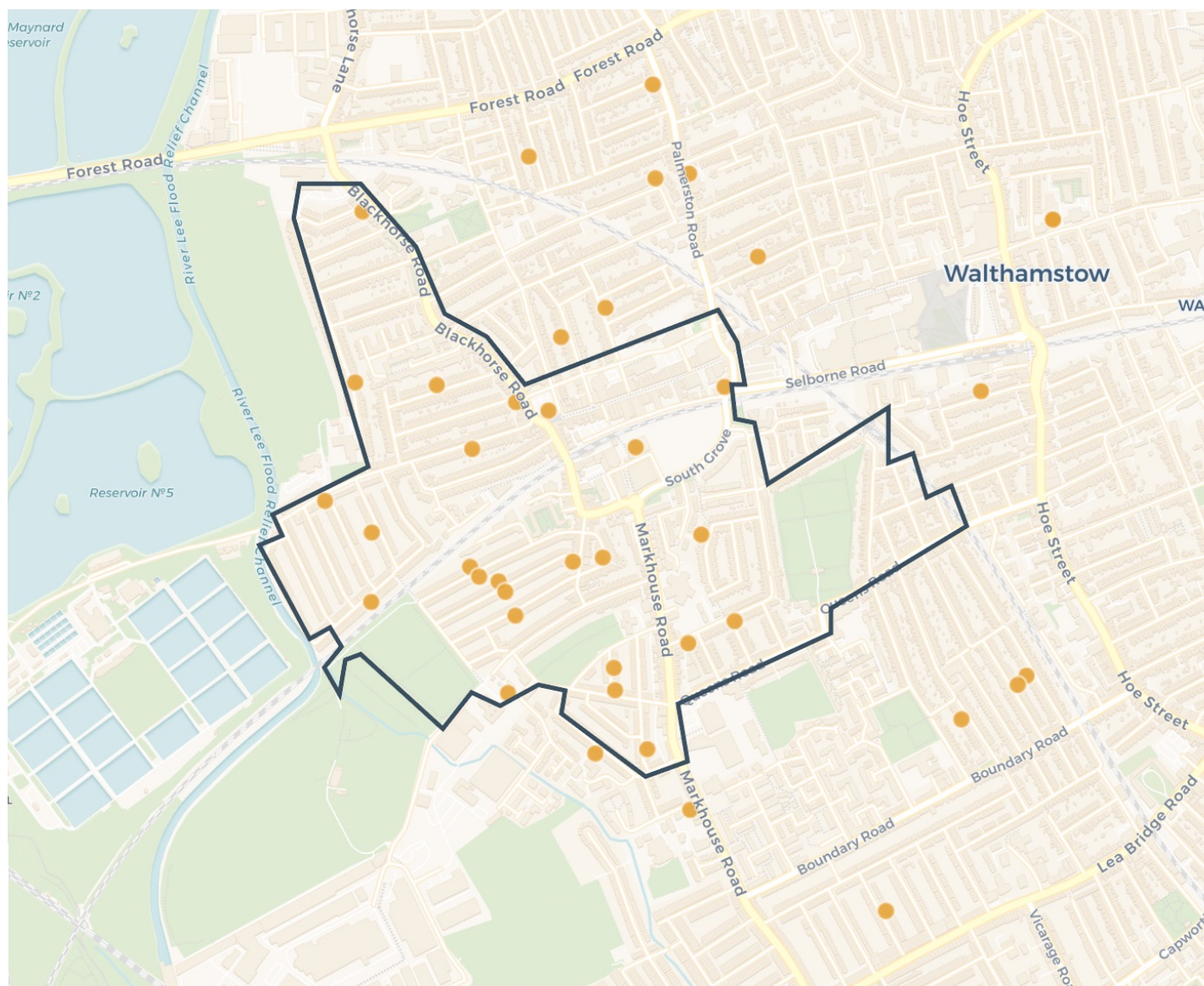
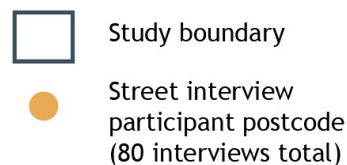
Street interviews

Between 29th May and 7th of June, 80 street interviews with residents were carried out in St James' neighbourhood of Walthamstow by members of Forest CLT.

The map shows where these residents live (some points reflect multiple participants).

Stakeholder interviews

12 stakeholders were interviewed, including food banks, cultural groups and groups representing residents from diverse communities.



1. Key findings

Key findings

Spaces, facilities and services

- **Green spaces** were extremely important to residents, and 73% of those surveyed described them as what they liked most about the neighbourhood. When residents were asked what they were most proud of, green spaces were the second highest response.
- **Green spaces** ranked first in terms of spaces residents **valued the most**, spaces where you spend time with people you know, and spaces where you spend time with people from a different background.
- **Schools, nurseries and children centres** ranked second in the list of spaces residents valued the most, and second in the places where people spend time with people from a different background.
- **Traffic congestion, air pollution and road safety** were described by 43% of residents as what they disliked most about the area.
- **Transport links** into central London was the third most liked aspect of the area, with 29% of residents mentioning it.
- Residents had a polarised views on **road closures**.
- The **arts and cultural** scene came up across a number of questions, and was a source of pride. The existing **Art Trai** was valued, and others wanted to see artistic workspaces and venues continue to grow.
- **Theatres, cinemas, music venues** and arts spaces were the spaces residents missed most during lockdown, alongside **cafes, bars and restaurants**.
- Over a third (36%) of residents felt **sports, leisure and park facilities** were missing. **Swimming facilities** were raised in particular as well as **skate parks and leisure centres**.
- **Activities and services for young people** were seen as missing by 29% of residents, with a call for more **youth centres and after school clubs**.
- Residents' sense of **community and belonging** was highly valued, 42% of residents said this was what they liked most about the area.
- **Neighbourliness and community links** were mentioned by 50% of residents when asked what they were most proud of in the area.
- 86% of residents agree **local friends meant a lot** to them: 77% would regularly **stop and talk to neighbours**, 88% were **willing to work with others** to improve the neighborhood, 76% felt they could obtain **advice locally** and 72% would **borrow things from neighbours**. These responses were all much stronger than what would be expected in comparable areas.
- 82% agree that people from **different background got on well together**, which was similar to comparable areas.
- Stakeholders described how Walthamstow has a **diverse community with many community led groups**. Many outlined how **cultural and creative groups are an asset to the area**.

Safety and wellbeing

- **Anti-social behaviour and crime** were mentioned by 30% of residents as their top dislikes in the area. This included **fly-tipping, drug-dealing, and knife-crime** (particularly in relation to young people).
- 48% of residents felt either '**very unsafe**' or '**a bit unsafe**' walking alone after dark. This was much weaker than the national average for comparable areas. There was also a **significant gender difference**, women were twice as likely to men to feel 'a bit unsafe.'
- 44% of residents reported feeling **lonely often or some of the time**. This was much lower than comparable areas nationally.

Key findings

Voice and regeneration

- Only 35% of residents agreed they could **influence decisions** affecting their local area, this was however similar to comparable areas.
- 17% of residents described **the cost of housing** and the councils **regeneration plans** as what they disliked most about the area.
- Some felt **planning decisions** were made too fast - quicker than residents could keep up with and voice their opinions on.
- Stakeholders voiced concerns at the **impact of gentrification**. They described how new investments in homes and businesses are **improving the aesthetics** of the area, however there are fears that **longer term residents are being priced out** and of a **growing gap** between poorer and wealthier residents.
- Stakeholders described how one of the biggest challenges in the area is the provision of **affordable housing and equitable spaces and facilities**.

Impact of the pandemic

- During the **pandemic and lockdowns**, 34% of residents felt that the community had become **more unified**; 21% felt the **use and appreciation of green spaces** had increased; 9% felt there had been increased **awareness of social problems** in the community.
- The community's response to the pandemic was mentioned as a **source of pride** by 10% of residents.
- Stakeholders reported that **mutual aid groups have provided support where it is needed** the most but there were many aspects of life where community groups could not help individuals in need.
- Stakeholders described how the impact of COVID-19 has added to **the is a widening health and social inequalities gap**.

Conclusion: Forest CLT's thoughts going forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has stress tested our environments and shown where we feel our local services are falling short. Interviews with both the public and our local stakeholders have given us a great insight into how people feel the environment has changed over the years and how it has affected us over lockdown.

Through our social listening exercise, we have come to learn that it is evident there is a real need for equitable spaces and services that give access for all communities. Quite often existing services are still not reaching the most deprived communities and there needs to be a rethink of how we can close the social and health inequalities gap that has widened due to the pandemic.

At Forest CLT, we are deeply invested in seeing the local area thrive. As a community-led project, we have the ability to identify local needs at a grassroots level and respond to them. We will be using these insights to further our work within the local area and help campaign for what we think should be equitable for all.

We will lead by example and bring a sense of positive renewal and optimism for the future, tackling deep-rooted exclusion and inequality.

2. The results of the street interviews

What people like about St James' neighbourhood

- 58 people mentioned **green spaces** (73% of responses), this was by far the most liked aspect of the neighbourhood.
- The **sense of community and belonging** followed second mentioned by 33 people (42% of responses).
- The **transport links** (29 mentions); **facilities/ schools for young people** (25); and **local shops** (25) followed closely behind the sense of community.

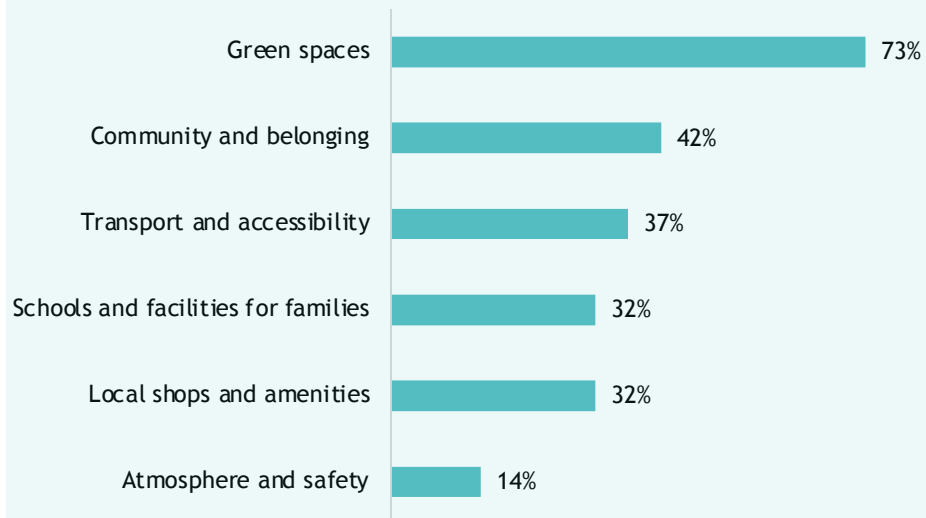
Residents views

"Green space, I have two kids, son goes to Barnscroft Primary school and there is easy access to the marshes. Air is cleaner."

"Accessibility of facilities, vibrant community with active members interested in improving facilities, everyone is very engaging. Also the diversity."

"Very good public transport infrastructure; green spaces, parks and allotments; good social mix of people with diverse demographics; the local area is very cosmopolitan and has a range of diverse food offer which is a reflection of people that live here."

What do you like about the area? (n=79)



What people dislike about St James' neighbourhood

- **Traffic** was mentioned the most (33 times, 43% of responses), in terms of congestion, air pollution and safety.
- **Anti-social behavior** and **crime** were mentioned 23 times (30%). This included drug dealing and **knife-crime**.
- **Housing affordability** and **regeneration plans** were raised by 13 people (17%).
- **Fly tipping and litter** were mentioned 18 times (17%). Included poor recycling facilities and fly-tipping in alleys and cul-de-sacs.

Residents views

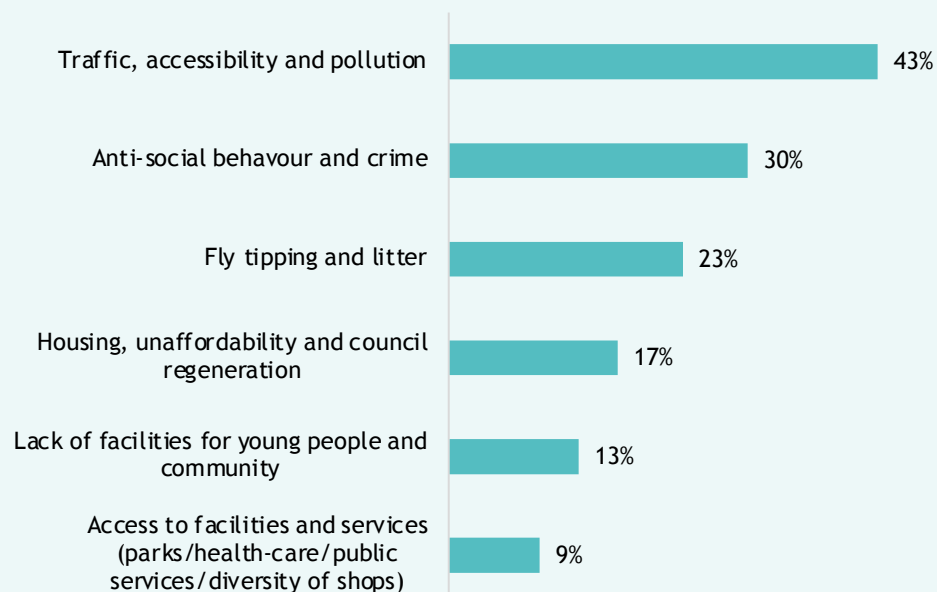
“Car circulation (more before the council did anything) was very bad. Cars would speed in areas that had lots of people around.”

“There is not enough information on council development in time to challenge them. Our councilors are good but the council itself as an organisation is not.”

“Gang related violence - (school children witnessing) stabbings and violence; not enough youth programmes.”

“Poor environmental management - flight tipping on Copper Mill Lane and dead ends; poor rubbish collection in general.”

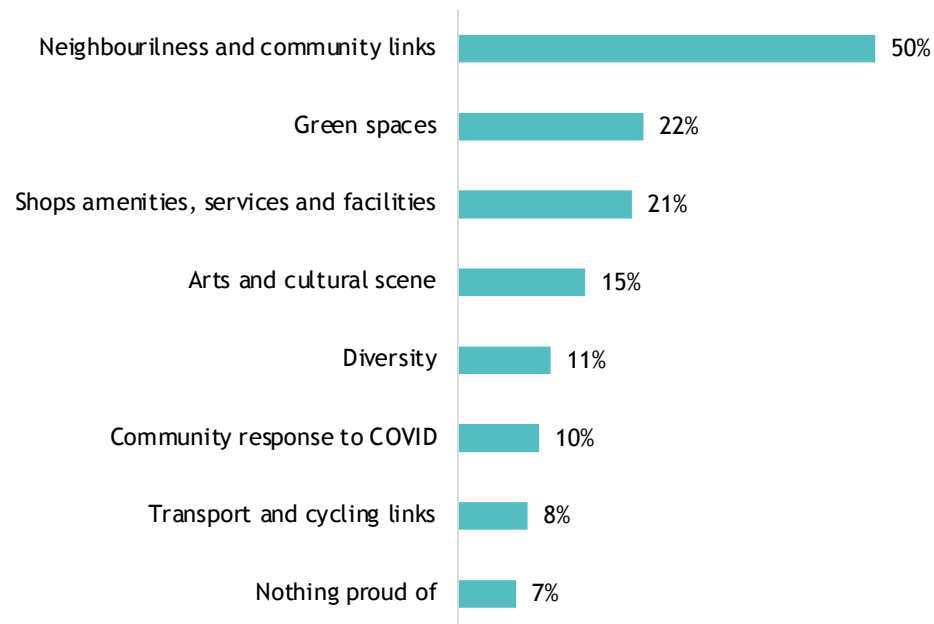
What do you dislike about the area? (n=77)



What people are most proud of

- **Neighbourliness and community links** were by far the proudest aspects, mentioned by 36 people (50%).
- **Green spaces** were once again very important, 16 people reported pride in them.
- **Arts & culture** was mentioned by 11 people.
- **Pride in community** was mentioned seven times in relation to the **pandemic and lockdowns**, reflecting how neighbours had supported each other.

Is there anything in the neighbourhood you are proud of? (n=72)



Some residents' views

"Our murals! That we have had money spent on making our end of the market smart and clean, welcoming and somewhere others want to come and shop/socialise in."

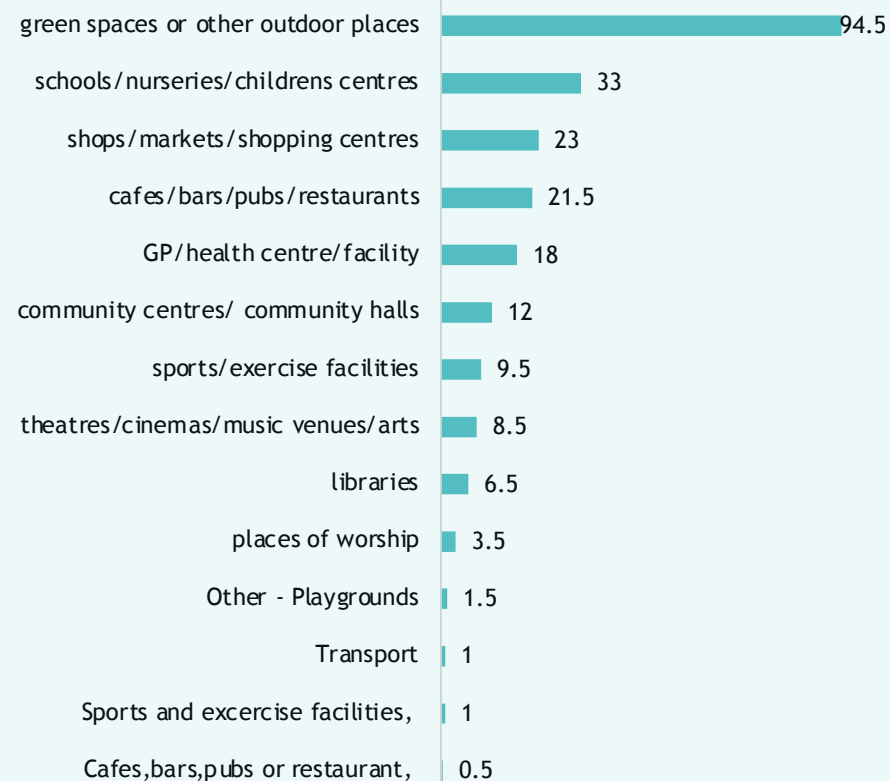
"The neighbourhood is really good. Been here since 2010. Good sense of community amongst lots of different cultures. We are good with each other and share things."

"Response to lockdown was good. Neighbours helping each other. Community response to COVID was great."

Spaces people value the most

- Residents were asked to rank the spaces they valued most from 1-3.
- In terms of spaces residents generally valued the most, **green spaces** came out on top by a large margin.
- Schools and children centres** were second, followed by **shops, cafes, health centres and community spaces**.

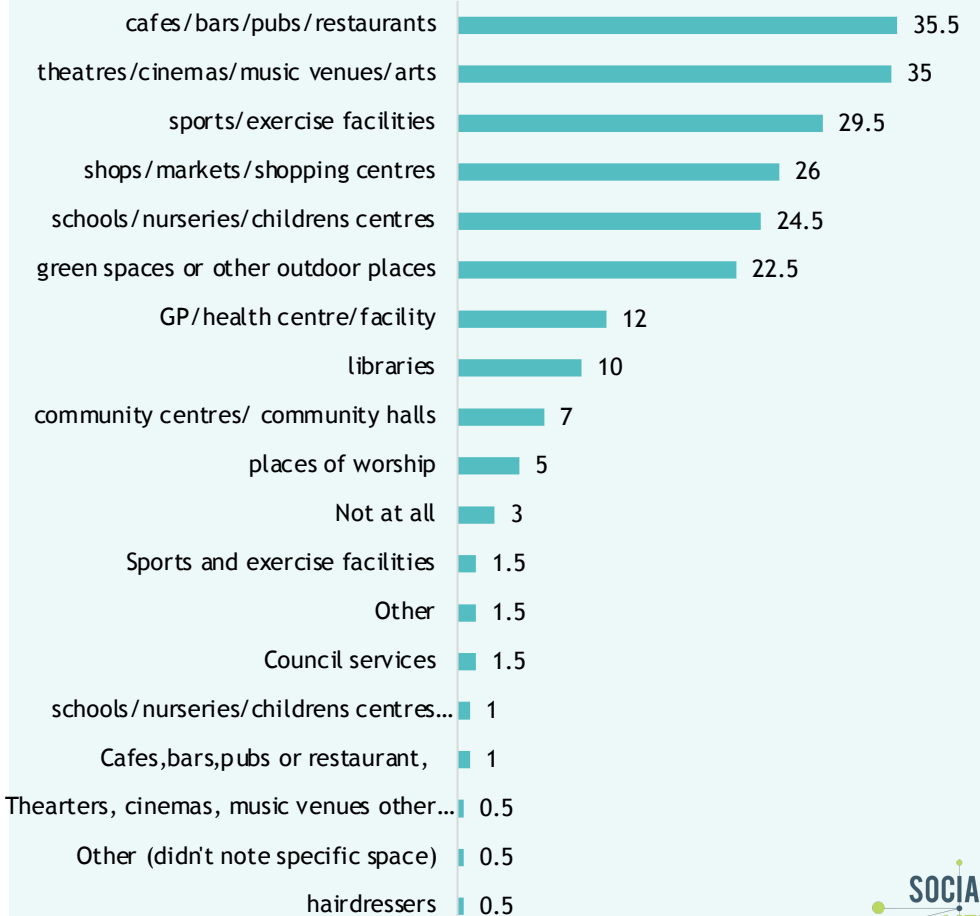
Which spaces and services do you value most in the neighbourhood? (n=82)



Spaces people missed in lockdown

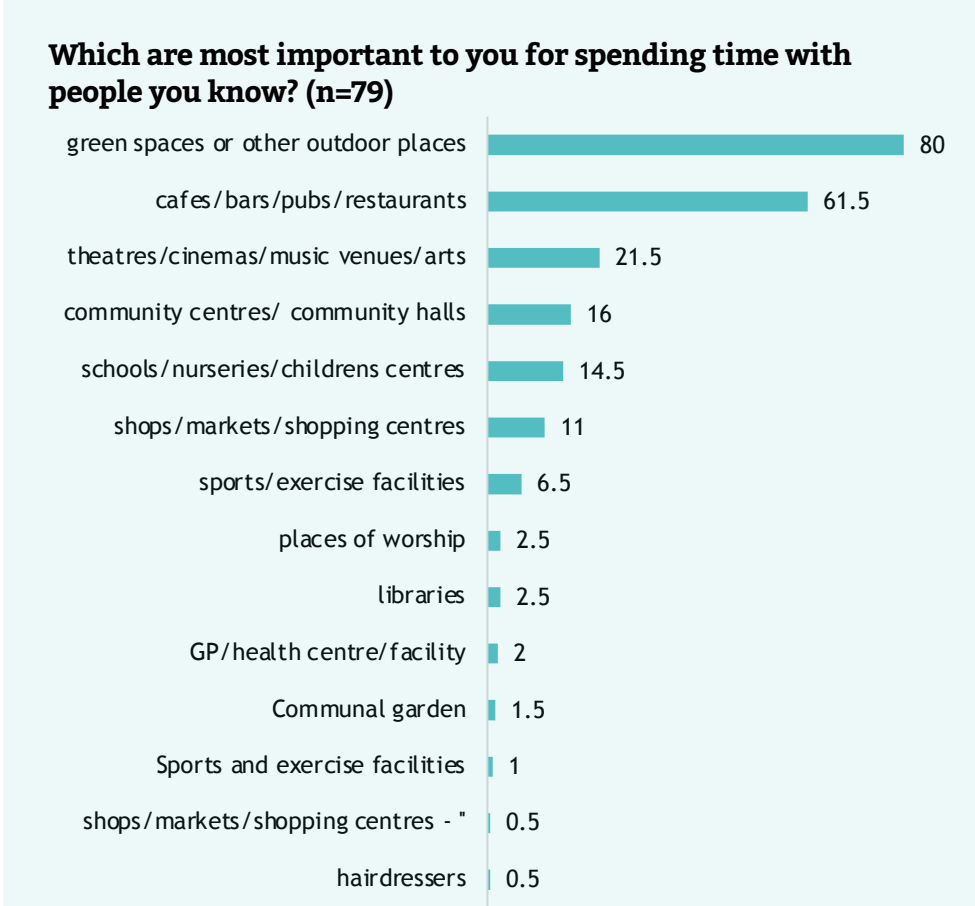
- This question on **spaces missed the most during lockdown** had a wide range of responses.
- Cafes, bars and restaurants** were the spaces that were most missed, closely followed by **cultural venues, sports facilities, shopping, schools and green spaces**.

Which spaces and services did you miss the most during lockdown? (n=82)



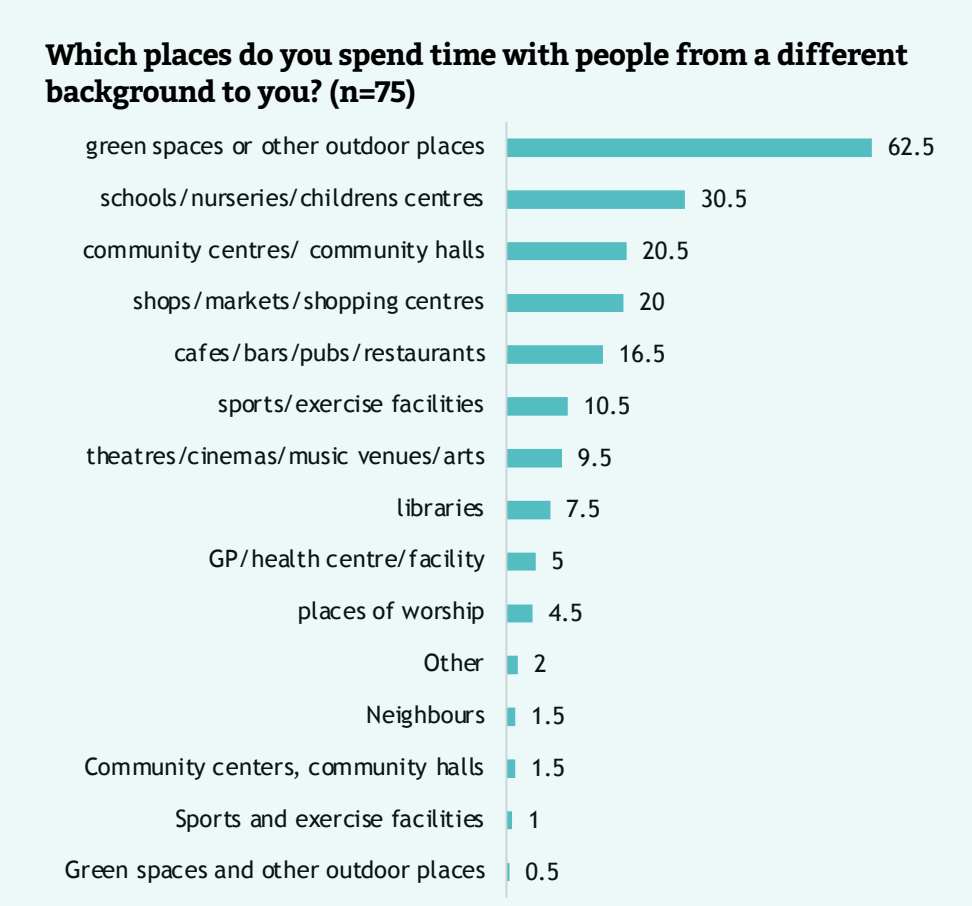
Spending time with people you know

- As with the question about the value of spaces, **green spaces** were the most common response.
- However this was more closely followed by **cafes/bars/restaurants**.
- After green spaces and hospitality there is a significant gap in their rating, followed by **cultural venues, community centres, and schools**.



Spending time with people from different backgrounds

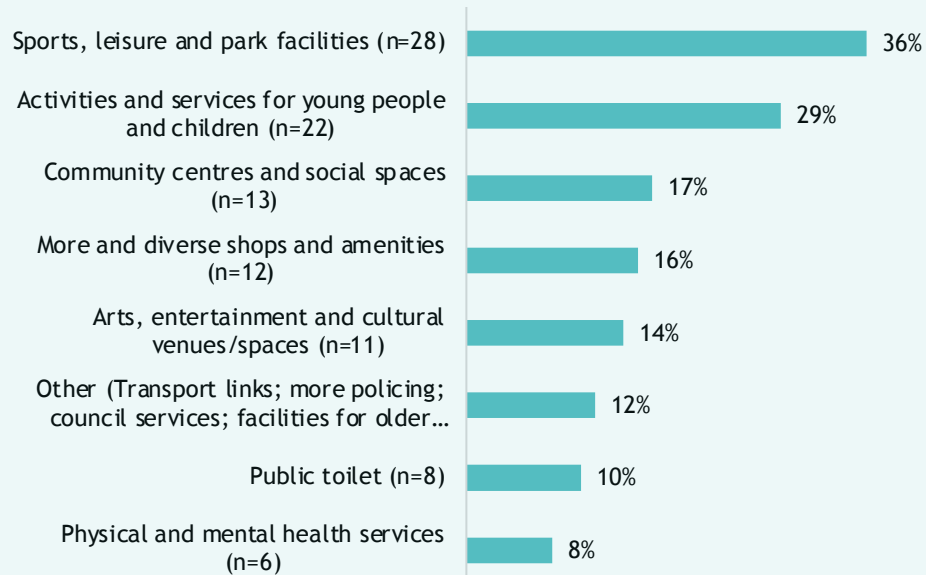
- **Green spaces** were where people were most likely to spend time with people from different backgrounds.
- **Schools and children centres** were the second most frequently mentioned place, followed by **community centres and halls, shops, cafes, and sports facilities**.



What spaces are missing?

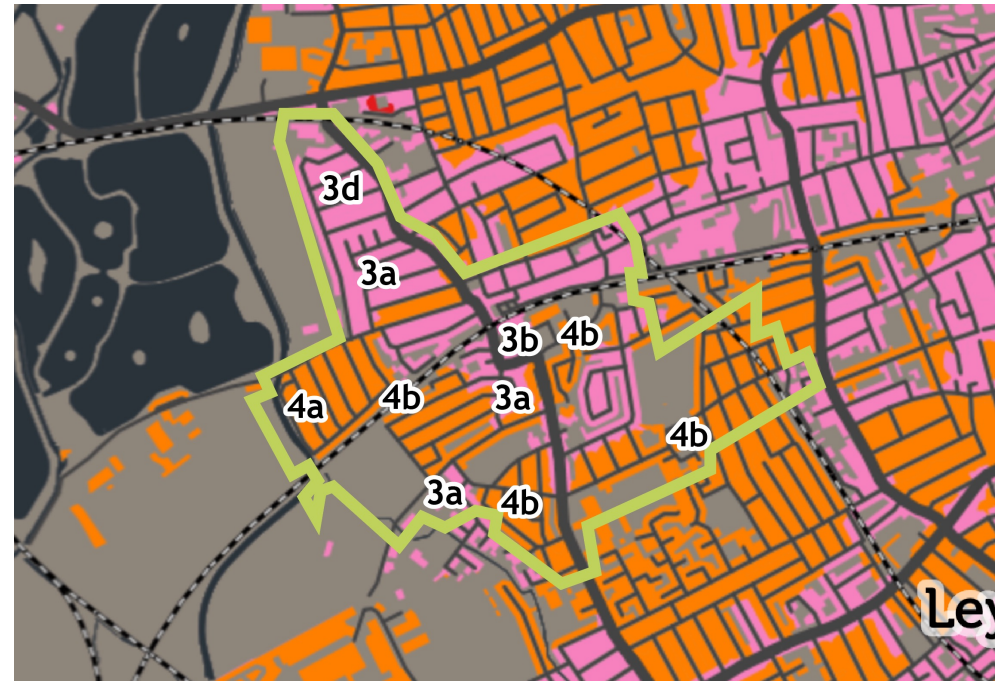
- **Sports and leisure facilities** were mentioned the most: 28 times. Swimming facilities were especially missed, as well as skate parks and leisure centres.
- **Activities and services for young people** were mentioned by 22 people.
- **Community centres and spaces**, and **social spaces** in general such as **bars and restaurants** were also frequently mentioned (13 times, 12% of responses).
- **Public toilets** were also specifically mentioned 8 times (7% of responses).

Are there any spaces, services or facilities that are missing in the area? (n=77)



Comparing the St James' neighbourhood to the UK

- Residents were asked nine questions that can be compared to data from residents across the UK.
- These questions are taken from the the Understanding Society Survey, which is run by the ESRC, and the Community Life survey which is funded by the government.
- These surveys are used to understand social trends.
- Social Life has developed a way of analysing data so that comparisons to be made between areas that share similar characteristics.
- This uses a classification of different areas that has been developed by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).
- The classification for St James' neighbourhood can be seen on the right (3a/b/d, 4a/b).



- Where the St James survey data is more positive than the comparable area it indicates the likely strengths of the neighbourhood
- Where it is more negative it suggests vulnerabilities.

For more information about this approach read 'Understanding Local Areas' http://www.social-life.co/publication/understanding_local_areas/

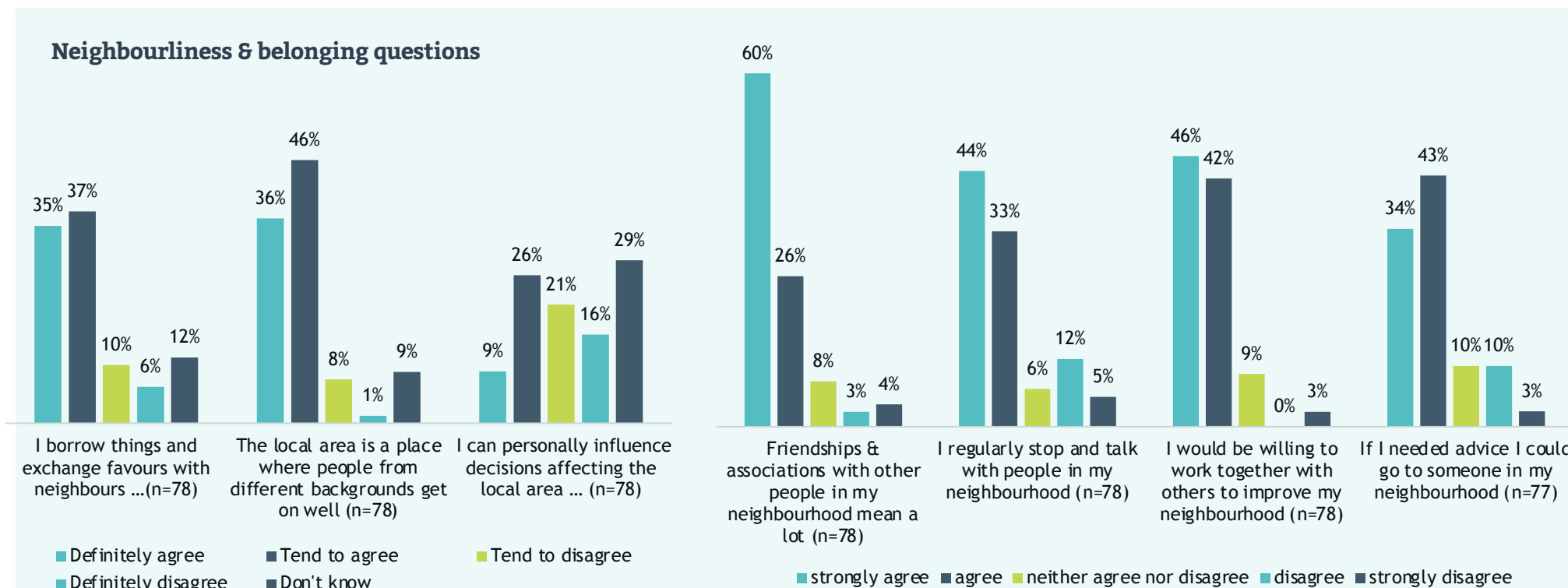
Comparing the St James' neighbourhood to the UK

- People living in the St James' neighbourhood **have more positive views and experiences that most comparable areas in the UK in many aspects of everyday life**. Loneliness is lower, relationships with neighbours and willingness to act to improve the neighbourhood are stronger.
- St James' neighbourhood scored **in line with similar areas** in terms of feeling like you can influence decisions, and agreeing that those from different backgrounds got along well.
- St James' perceptions of **feeling safe walking alone after dark** were weaker than in comparable areas.
- In the table below **green** means stronger than would be expected in comparable areas
- **Red** means weaker than in comparable areas
- Grey means similar to comparable areas.

Benchmarked question (2018)	Social Life predictive data (research area OACs)		Street interview responses (St James' neighbourhood 2021)
	3a/b/d	4a/b	
Often feel lonely	70%/71%/74%	71%/72%	44%
Can borrow things from neighbours	34%/28%/47%	39%/39%	72%
Can obtain advice locally	45%/43%/47%	43%/47%	77%
Are willing to improve neighbourhood	61%/62%/74%	64%/66%	88%
Talk regularly to neighbours	54%/57%/59%	60%/57%	77%
Local friends mean a lot	53%/51%/52%	48%/56%	86%
Feel can influence decisions affecting your local area	33%/32%/37%	27%/34%	35%
Agree that this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?	78%/81%/87%	76%/78%	82%
Feel safe walking alone after dark	70%/84%/81%	75%/71%	52%

Sense of neighbourliness & belonging

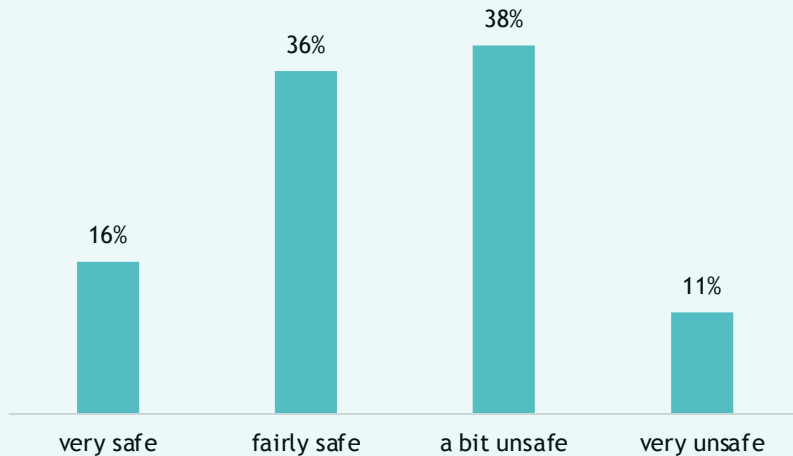
- The results of four questions on neighbourliness were all significantly above the national average for similar areas.
- 86% of residents agreed that **local friends meant a lot to them**.
- 77% of residents **regularly stopped and talk with neighbours**.
- 88% of residents would be **willing to work with others** to improve the neighbourhood.
- 76% felt they could **obtain advice locally**.
- 72% of residents agreed that they **borrowed and exchanged things with neighbours** (stronger than comparable areas).
- 82% agreed that people from **different backgrounds got on well together** (similar to comparable areas).
- 35% of residents agreed that they could **influence decisions affecting their local area** (similar to comparable areas).



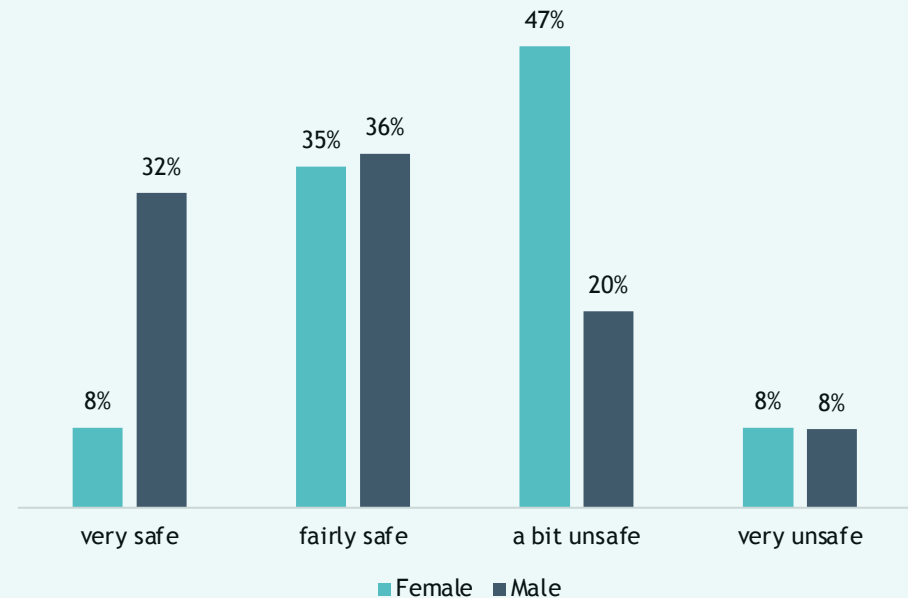
Safety

- **52%** of residents felt either very safe or fairly safe walking along in the area after dark.
- This was **significantly lower than comparable areas**.
- There was also a **gender difference**, with those who identified as female being more than twice as likely to feel 'a bit unsafe'.
- And 32% of males feeling 'very safe' as opposed to 8% of females.
- The one participant who identified as **non-binary** selected 'very unsafe'.

How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?
(n=76)



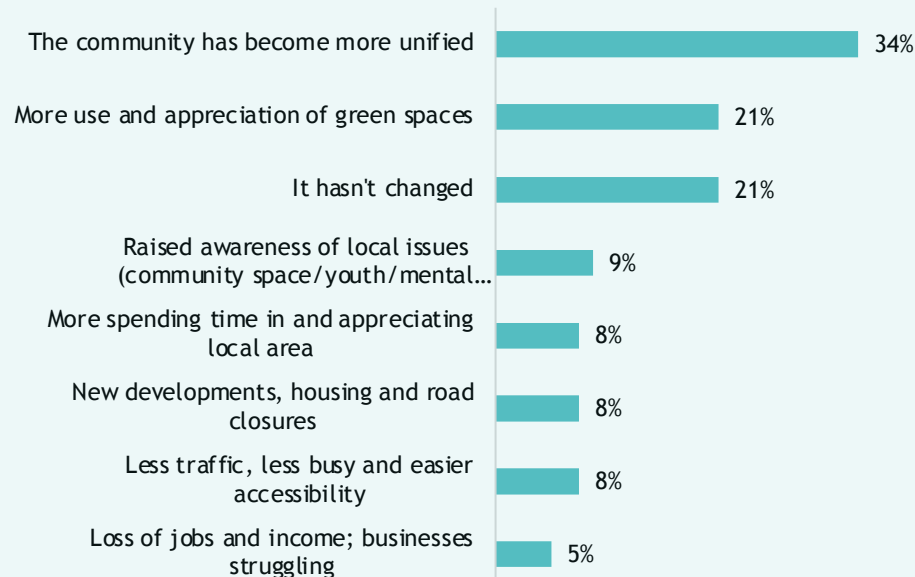
How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?
Gender comparison (n=76)



What changed during the pandemic

- This question brought out the most varied set of responses: whilst some people valued the road closures, others didn't; whilst some felt the area had become more safe, others felt less safe.
- The most common change reported (by 34%) was a more **unified community**. Increased use and appreciation of green spaces was raised by 21%
- 16 people (21% of responses) didn't feel there had been any change.

How do you think your area has changed during the pandemic? (n=77)

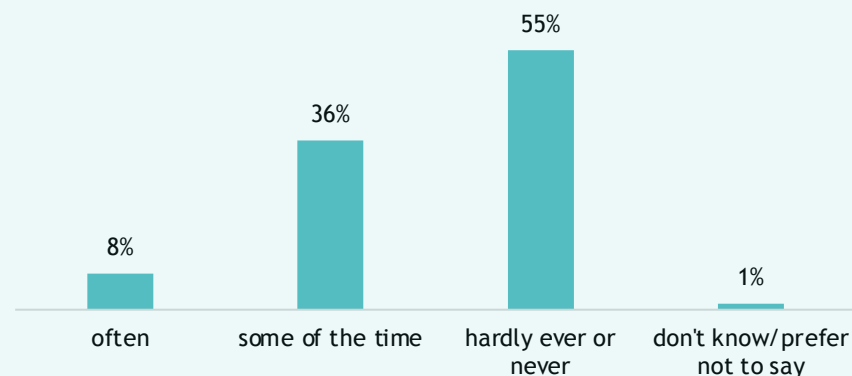


"The attitude towards the neighbours changed, feeling more close with the neighbours."

Social isolation

- 44% of residents reported feeling **lonely often or some of the time**. This was much lower than comparable areas nationally.
- **Younger people** appeared to report feeling more lonely than older groups.

Have you been feeling lonely recently? (n=78)



"People have been talking more to each other, especially on community WhatsApp. Raised awareness of things that need to change, eg community centres. Highlighted importance of green spaces, especially for children."

"People are a lot more interested in giving back. A lot of local initiatives have sprung up, developments, network or communication. People appreciate outdoor amenities, people are more conscious of mental and physical health."

"

3. What emerged from interviews with stakeholders

Findings from the stakeholder interviews

Many stakeholders outlined how the various cultural and creative groups are an asset to the area.

- Walthamstow boasts many resident and community led initiatives. The diversity of these groups, which include groups from different religious and cultural backgrounds, means that activities and skills that are offered are unique and enriching for everyone within the community.
- There are still gaps in reaching some of the most marginalised communities within the area. More effort is needed to find out the best way to reach the communities that do not have the resources or financial backing to join local community groups.

A clear move towards gentrification.

- More new homes, new shops and people are moving into the area which is pricing other people out. The aesthetic of the area is improving as a result of these new investments but the income gap between the poorest and richest seems to be increasing with the cost of land, not getting any cheaper.

One of the biggest challenges in the area is the provision of affordable housing and equitable spaces and facilities.

- It is becoming increasingly difficult to access community facilities such as art venues and storage spaces. People struggling with lack of space at home may need more storage.

Widening inequalities

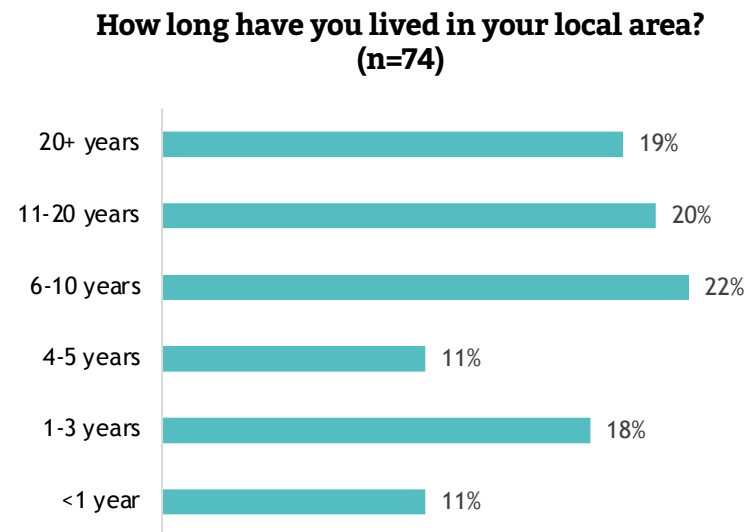
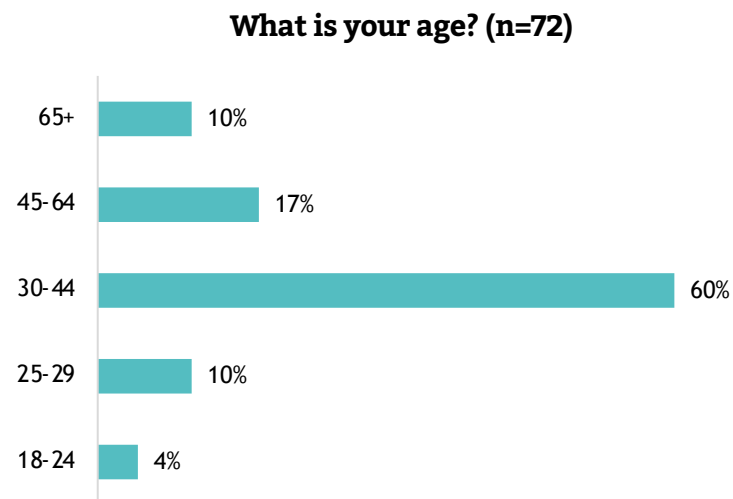
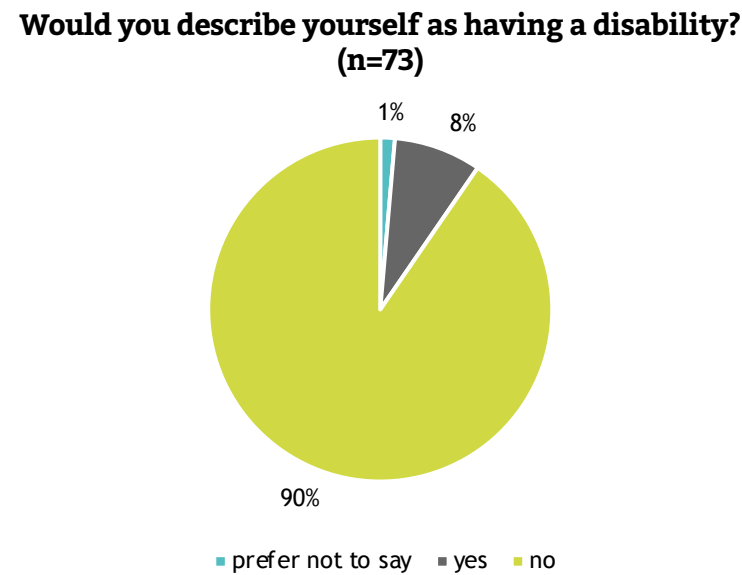
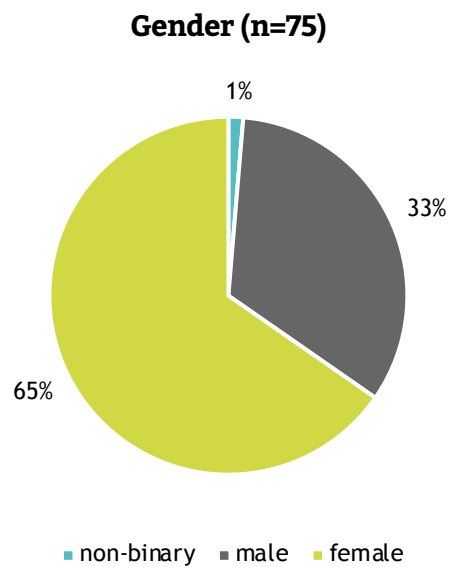
- The domino effect of gentrification in the area means that **there is are widening health and social inequalities gap and the impact of COVID has added to the severity of the problem.**
- COVID has presented new challenges for many individuals and the area has been lucky to continue some of its community activities. Mutual aid groups have provided support where it is needed the most but there were many aspects of life where community groups could not help individuals; putting a strain on the general health and wellbeing of all.

Lack of funding for services that improve the quality of life for all residents.

- People and businesses that are in the most need of financial support are not being supported properly. This is made more difficult by the lack of communication between organisations and the local council.
- There was a **big interest from the local leaders to connect many community groups to offer various skills share opportunities.** There are many under represented groups in the area who find access to skills difficult. An easily accessible option to link up community groups to signpost opportunities and individuals offering skills would be beneficial.

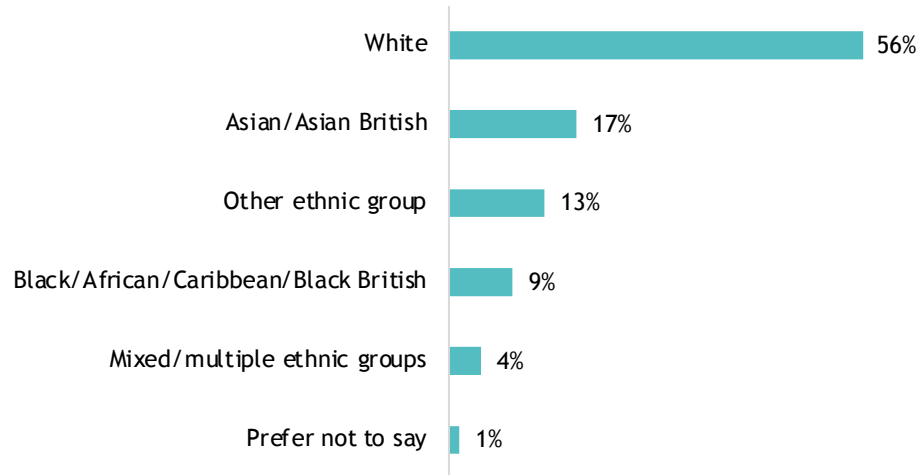
4. Profile of residents engaged in street interviews

Who responded to the survey



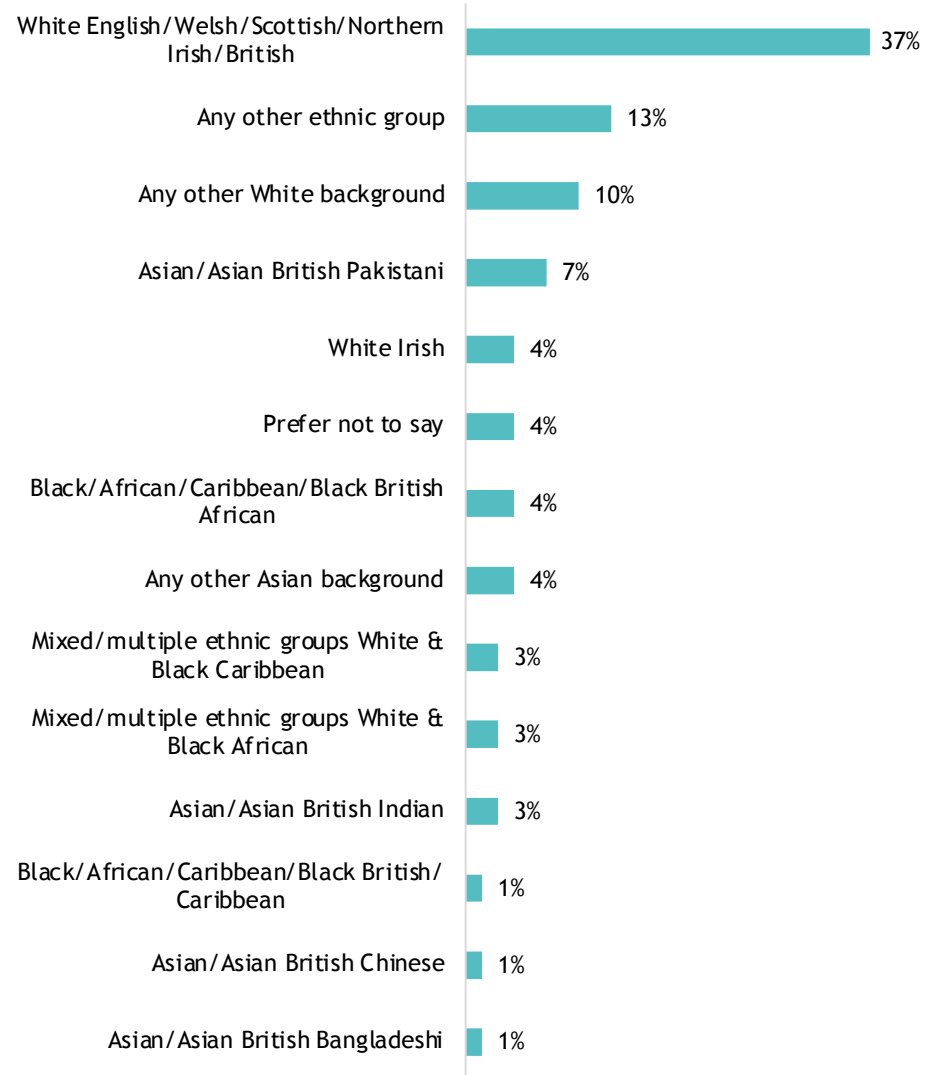
Who responded to the survey

Ethnicity (broad categories) (n=70)



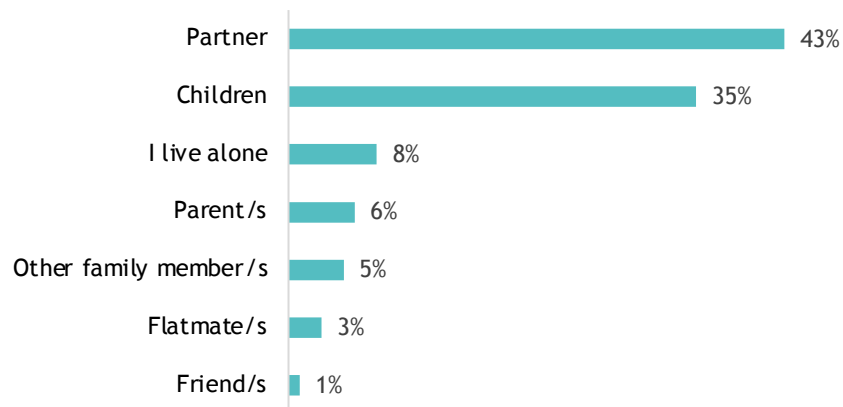
Other ethnicities mentioned included: Afghan, Bangladeshi, Bulgaria, German, Greek, Greek Irish, Kenyan Yemeni, Lapsed Jewish, Latin American, Moroccan, Norway, Polish, Sri Lankan, White African, White Asian, Japanese and European.

Ethnicity (sub-categories) (n=67)

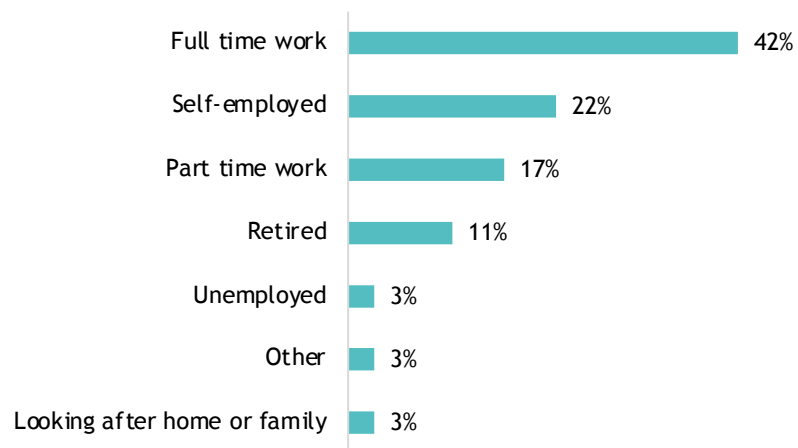


Who responded to the survey

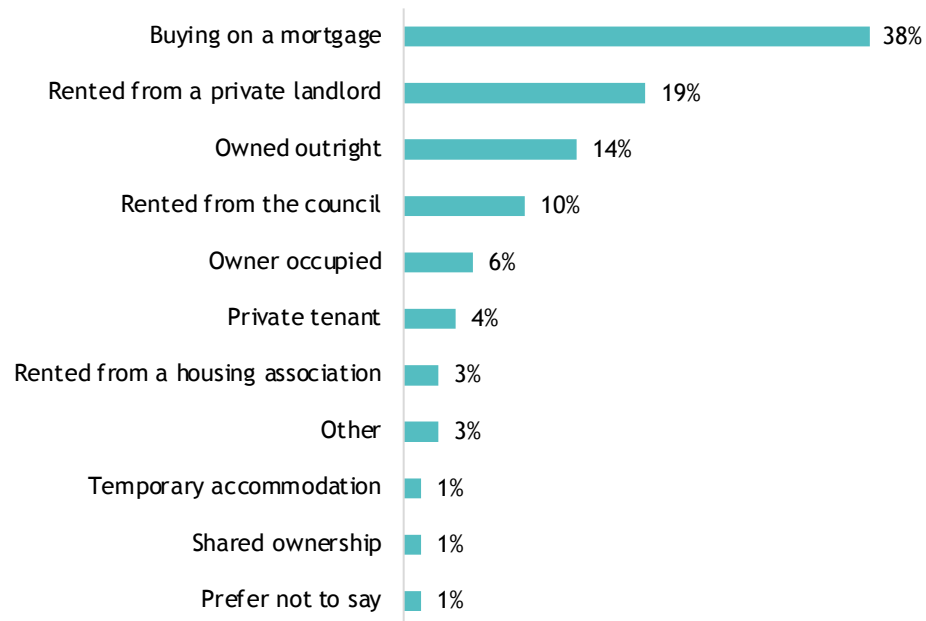
Who lives in your household? (n=73) (multiple responses possible)



What is your current employment status? (n=72)



What is your housing situation? (n=72)





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12a Peacock Yard, Iliffe Street, London SE17 3LH

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