Everyday life in Surbiton:

How local spaces, facilities and groups build relationships, encourage participation and help tackle inequalities.

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Hawkins\Brown

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

SOCIAL LIFE

About this report

This report is based on research carried out in Surbiton looking at how local social infrastructure is supporting social integration.

Between December 2019 and June 2020, Social Life and Hawkins\ Brown spoke to local residents and agencies working in the area to find out how local spaces, services and groups support the local community. We hope the findings are useful to everyone working in the area.

The report was written by Ketki Mudholkar and Lucia Caistor, with additional research by Jessica Gatta and Imogen Bullen-Smith.

As part of his Good Growth by Design programme The Mayor of London has commissioned research on social infrastructure, building on the recognition that London's built enivronment plays an important role in enabling social integration. This included indepth research in three contrasting areas: Catford, Homerton and Surbiton.

The full report of the Inquiry will be available in early 2021 from www.london.gov.uk

The Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme seeks to enhance the design of the built environment to create a city that works for all Londoners. This means that as London increases, development and growth should benefit everyone who lives here. For more about the programme go to: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/advice-and-guidance/about-good-growth-design

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.
www.social-life.co

Hawkins\Brown is an internationally renowned practice of architects, urban designers, interior designers and researchers. People are at the heart of everything we do, from our design approach to the way our studio runs. We bring a wealth of experience designing and delivering innovative and socially sustainable places and spaces, with research underpinning our creative process and all our outputs.
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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all those in Surbiton who generously gave their time to speak with us, who took part in our workshop and shared their experiences and insights.

Contents

1. Introduction 3

2. Key findings 5

3. About the research 6

4. About the area 7

5. What we found 9

6. Profiles of local spaces 17

7. Creating successful social infrastructure.....26

1. Introduction

Social infrastructure – which includes many different facilities, spaces and places – is London's social glue. When we meet our friends in a cafe, go to a class at a community centre, take part in a tenants' and residents' association or a park friends' group, go to the library for information or get help and advice from people within our community, we are using the city's social infrastructure to support and enrich our lives.

Alongside places and spaces, like GP surgeries, gyms, parks and schools, social infrastructure is also made up of local groups and networks. Londoners support each other through friendships, families and wider networks. People in local neighbourhoods come together to respond to needs, to help each other and to get help, to share interests and have fun. They also organise into formal groups like school parents' groups, local campaigns, or action groups to improve their areas. This energy and the dynamism of communities' efforts is vital to Londoners' lives and has played out vividly in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have been looking at the role of social infrastructure in its many different forms and functions in enabling social integration. By social integration we mean the ways that public spaces, local amenities, groups or networks support relationships; how they encourage participation, allowing people to become actively engaged in their communities; and how they help tackle inequality and break down barriers.

> "Social integration is the extent to which people positively interact and connect with others who are different to themselves. It is determined by the level of equality between people, the nature of their relationships, and their degree of participation in the communities in which they live. "
>
> (All of us: the Mayor's strategy for social integration, 2018)

To understand how social infrastructure supports social integration that works at the local level, we have been looking into the role of social infrastructure in Surbiton as well as in Homerton and Catford. We chose these three areas to give a range of neighbourhoods, with different social profiles, diversity, housing types and regeneration.

In this report, we describe what we found in the area – how residents use different types of places and spaces and how these support local relationships, equality and participation. We highlight the lessons that can be learnt from Surbiton as well as

from our wider research. These help us understand how local groups and agencies can support social infrastructure to fulfil its potential in the future.

How we define social infrastructure

We use the term to include a range of local spaces and facilities: **formal spaces** such as libraries, GP surgeries, schools and community centres; and **informal spaces** which range from high street businesses that provide meeting places for local people, shops and cafes, cinemas and art centres. We also include local networks and groups, online and offline.

The Mayor of London's definition of social infrastructure is:

> "Social infrastructure covers a range of services and facilities that meet local and strategic needs and contribute towards a good quality of life. It includes health provision, education, community, play, youth, recreation, sports, faith, and emergency facilities."

> "Alongside more formal provision of services, there are informal networks and community support that play an important role in the lives of Londoners… Green infrastructure in all its forms is also a key component of social infrastructure."

(GLA, Draft London Plan, 2019)

2. Key findings

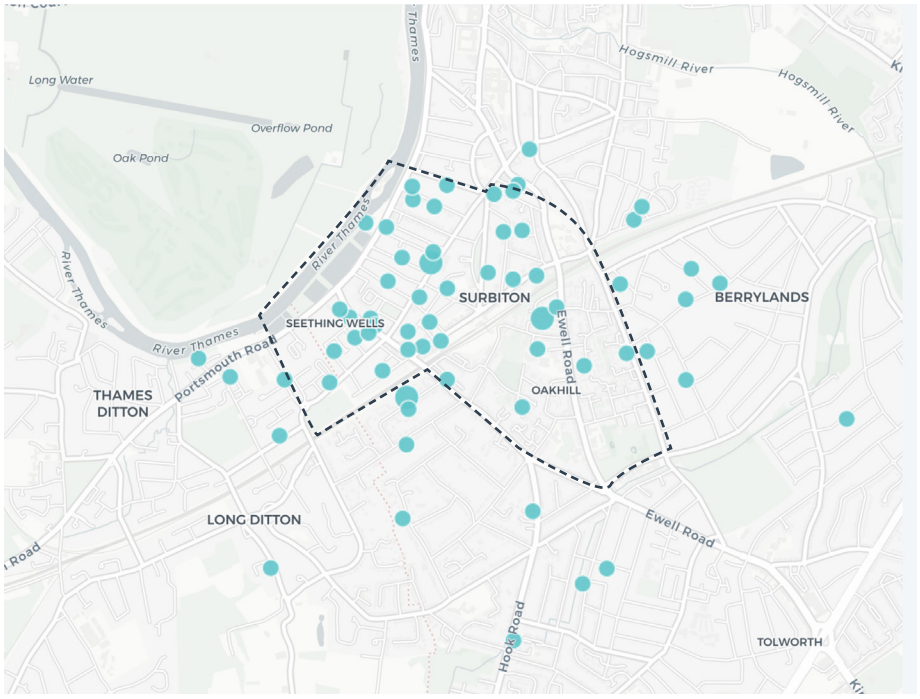
- A wide range of **formal and informal social infrastructure** enables Surbiton to thrive, held together by a strong network of individuals and organisations that invest in and support local networks and relationships.
- **Physical spaces** including local schools, pubs, faith spaces and cafes are important centres within wider local networks that also include community groups, services, local charities and networks.
- **Informal spaces** like pubs, cafes and restaurants tend to support people's relationships within their social circles, while formal infrastructure plays a stronger role supporting relationships between people from different backgrounds. Pubs and cafes are often important in providing information and signposting to activities and to support. The Lamb pub is an important local asset.
- **Social networks** come together around social infrastructure. Examples include relationships formed through the Giant Mouse Trap and the Surbiton Food Festival, as well as the relationships that come out of taking part in regular activities at Surbiton Boxing Club and CrossFit.
- **Groups and individuals** that encourage and enable others in the community to engage with the local area provide a critical role. They provide support and resources and maintain a dialogue with the local authority. The Community Brain is an example of this type of organisation which works between all the different networks, services, initiatives and businesses that support the local community.
- **The COVID-19** pandemic put a sudden unprecedented strain on local social infrastructure but in Surbiton, it brought people together, creating a dynamic network of local support. Community organisations radically adapted their ways of working to quickly plug the gaps in support. Underused resources have been activated and temporary hubs created; new street level initiatives have emerged and organisations are collaborating in new ways. Relationships that existed before the crisis were important to underpin these changes. Volunteering and engagement have been galvanised and there is a wish for this level of participation to continue, particularly to support the high street and community-led organisations.

3. About the research

How we went about it

- We conducted **street interviews with 79 residents**, asking them about which spaces they use, what they value locally, whether they participate in any groups or networks in the area, any barriers they face to accessing spaces, and how they perceive change locally. Respondents were over 18 and broadly representative of the local population in terms of tenure and age.
- We spoke with **ten local stakeholders**, from local groups, the council and the local library, to build a better understanding of how social infrastructure is supporting residents and some of the challenges it faces.
- In late May and early June, we spoke with eight community representatives and local agencies about **the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on their communities** and on the support they offer.
- We spent time and spoke with people using, or involved with, **four local spaces** – The Press Room cafe, Surbiton Boxing Club, YMCA Surbiton and The Lamb pub to gain a sense of how these social infrastructure sites contribute towards social integration locally.
- We **held a workshop**, bringing together local stakeholders representing different aspects of local social infrastructure, to explore the role of social infrastructure and how it can better be supported in the future.

Research focus area and the postcodes of street interview respondents (not all postcodes were given).



Map details

Boundary of research focus area

Frequency of postcode locations

4. About the area

Surbiton is a leafy, riverside suburb in south-west London, in the Royal Borough of Kingston and on the banks of the River Thames. The neighbourhood is based around a high street and mainline train station on Victoria Road, with smaller clusters of retail and local facilities, parks and green spaces, across its neighbourhoods. These local facilities are highly valued by local residents and enable the casual friendships and relationships that support the local community.

The area is very well connected to Central London. Surbiton station has direct connections to Waterloo in 12 minutes, and is often seen to be ideal residential neighbourhood for city workers and self-employed people. Interviews with local residents have highlighted that the closeness to Central London is highly valued.

Surbiton has not experienced large-scale regeneration or significant gentrification recently and is a comparatively stable neighbourhood. However, the arrival of Crossrail 2 is anticipated to bring about some change, and the area will also be affected by the impact of regeneration in Kingston Town Centre and in Tolworth.

Surbiton is known to have a generally affluent, middle-class population and most residents are of working age.[1] It has a high proportion of residents employed in professional and specialist jobs; local stakeholders report that there are high numbers of self-employed people in the area.

The grand, art-deco Surbiton Station building sits at the centre of Surbiton's town centre and is a valuable 'bumping' point for Surbiton residents

The Lamb Pub on Brighton Road plays host to a range of ommunity activities and is an important social hub

In our conversations with residents, Surbiton was labelled a "dormitory town" on several occasions, with one of the stakeholders suggesting that this informs the local character.

> "Dormitory folk are very local – they shop locally, they do everything locally." (Surbiton stakeholder)

It is also home to a large student population, and Kingston University's Seething Wells Halls of Residence is in the area. Many students choose to stay in Surbiton in other accommodation and stay after graduating.

There are concentrated pockets of older residents, often living in care homes. This is reflected in the lower proportion of households with children and higher proportion of one-person households, compared to the borough average.[2] However, local stakeholders suggest that Surbiton is bucking the borough-wide trend of a fast-ageing population – with large numbers of young families moving to the area.

Compared to London averages, Surbiton has relatively low levels of deprivation; it is in the 8th decile of IMD, meaning that it is in the 20 percent most affluent areas nationally. It has relatively low levels of diversity; 2011 Census data suggests around 75 percent of the local population were born in the UK. Around two-thirds of the population identify as white British, with 10 percent identifying as "white other". Surbiton neighbours more diverse areas in Tolworth and New Malden which are home to prominent Tamil and Korean populations.[3]

The Thames riverside is highly valued and well used by local residents and workers

1. Census, 2011.
2. Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019.
3. RB Kingston, Surbiton Neighbourhood Profile, 2011 Census Series, Part 2.

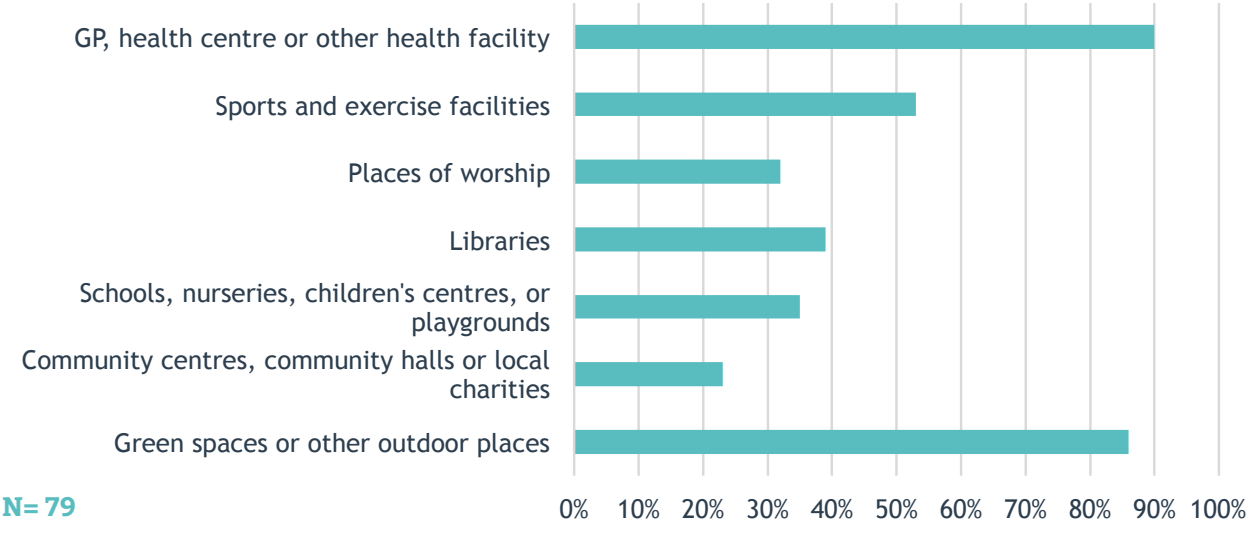
5. What we found

Health provision in the area was praised by most of the residents who were engaged in the research: the high level of care available in the area made it a better and easier place for them to live.

Green and open spaces also seem to be widely and highly valued by the people interviewed, particularly the riverside walk. Sports and leisure facilities were also well-used, the open access to green and open spaces allows them to be well shared by the community.

Formal infrastructure was less well used than informal infrastructure, which plays a much bigger role in supporting Surbiton's social networks. Community centres and places of worship do not appear to be as widely used as they are in Catford or Homerton, the other focus areas for this research.

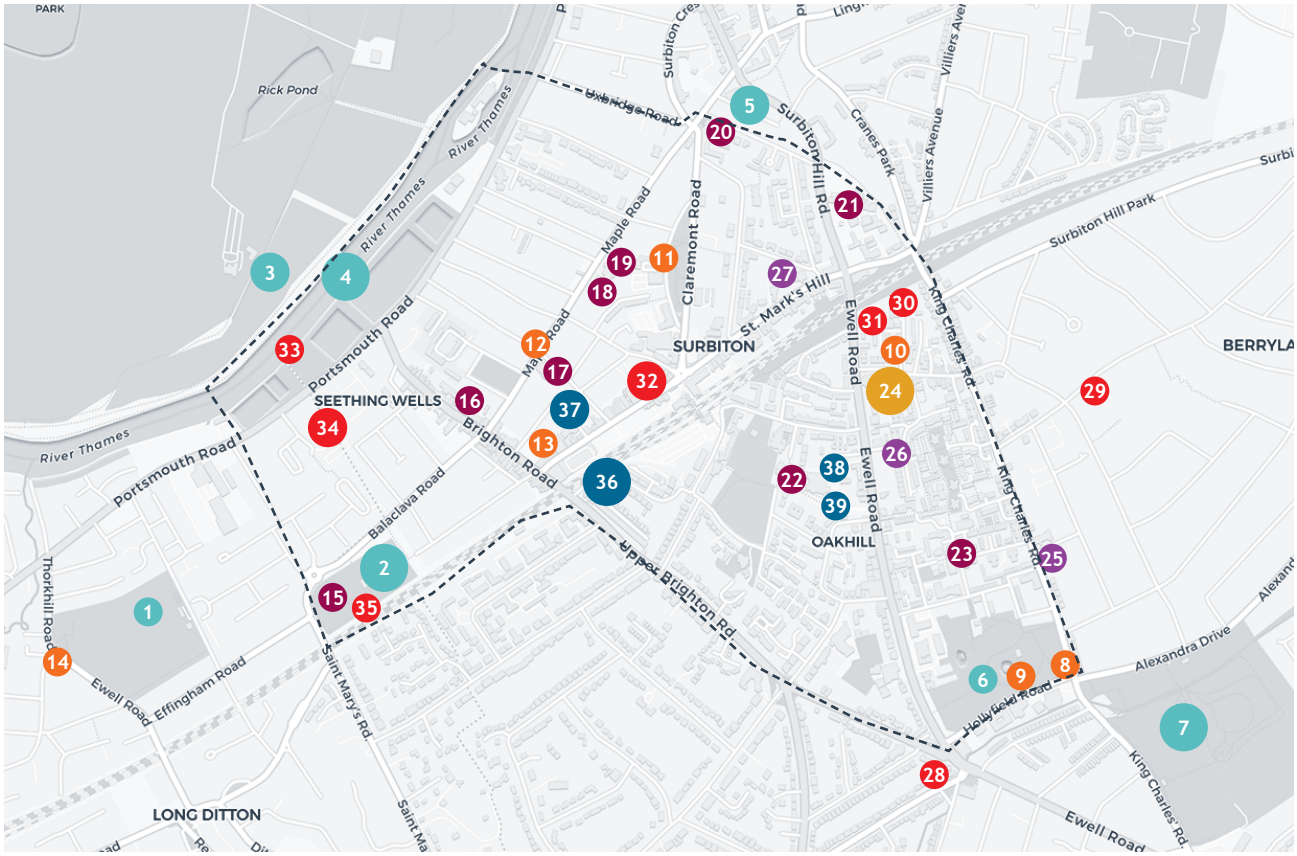
Which places have you gone to in your local area in the last few months?



N= 79

Use of local spaces in and around Surbiton

This map shows the formal local spaces and facilities which the people interviewed reported using in the past few months. More people said that they use Surbiton's parks, health facilities and the library than other facilities. However, sports and leisure, andn children's facilities were also well used.



Green and outdoor spaces

1 Long Ditton Recreation Ground
2 Victoria Recreation Ground
3 Hampton Court
4 River Thames
5 Claremont Gardens
6 Fishponds Park
7 Alexandra Recreation Ground

Community and charity spaces

8 King Charles Centre
9 The Royal British Legion
10 Alfriston Day Centre
11 Glenmore House
12 St Andrew's Church Hall
13 YMCA
14 Long Ditton Village Hall

Children's facilities

15 Victoria Recreation ground playground
16 Dicky Birds Nursery
17 Saint Andrew's Church youth activities
18 Maple Infant's School
19 St Andrew's & Mark's Junior School
20 Surbiton High School
21 Hollyfield School
22 Lime Tree Primary School
23 Surbiton Childrens Centre

Libraries

24 Surbiton Library and library hall

Places of worship

25 Christ Church Surbiton
26 Surbiton Hill Methodist Church
27 St Mark's C of E Church

Sports and exercise faclities

28 Up and Running Surbiton
29 Surbiton Racket & Fitness Club
30 Surbiton Boxing Club
31 CrossFit Surbiton
32 YMCA gym
33 River recreation
34 Nuffield Health
35 Victoria Recreation Ground

Health facilities

36 Claremont Medical Centre
37 Churchill Medical Centre
38 Berrylands Surgery

Map details

Boundary of research focus area

Frequency of mentions

Number of respondents = 79

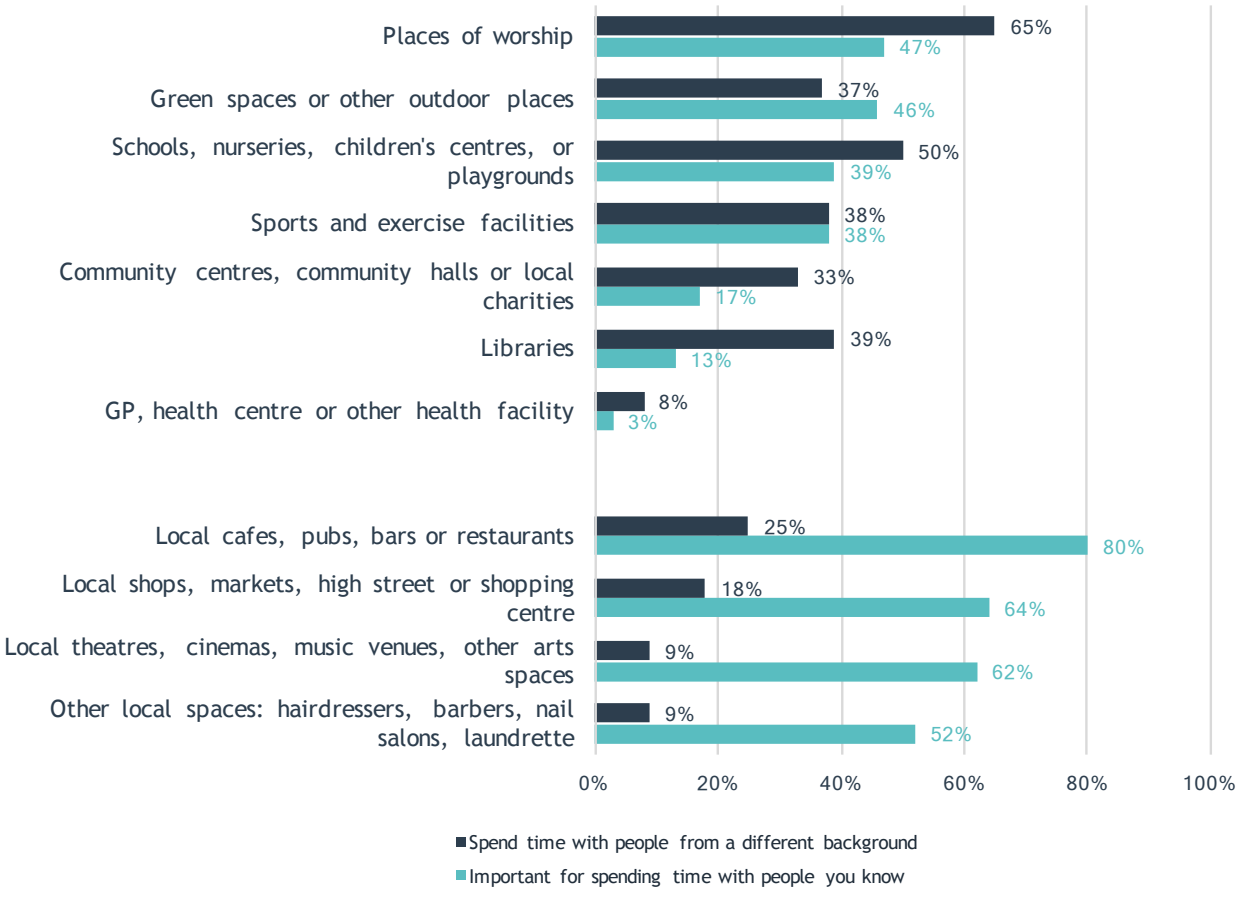
Relationships

High streets play a strong role in supporting relationships locally. 80 percent of those interviewed mentioned cafes, bars, and restaurants as important for spending time with people they know. Many of these spaces are visited on a daily or weekly basis, and there are many examples of strong relationships developing between customers and staff. These spaces tend to support relationships between people who already know each other and are from similar backgrounds and social circles.

Formal social infrastructure seems to encourage more social mixing than cafes, bars and restaurants. Places of worship, schools and playgrounds were generally considered more important for spending time with people from a different background than with friends or family. Sports facilities and children's facilities are recognised as places that bring together people with similar circumstances, such as having children the same age or shared interests, such as boxing.

Interviews with local residents highlighted that they put less value on formal facilities, compared to informal spaces. Formal spaces

The importance of local places for relationships



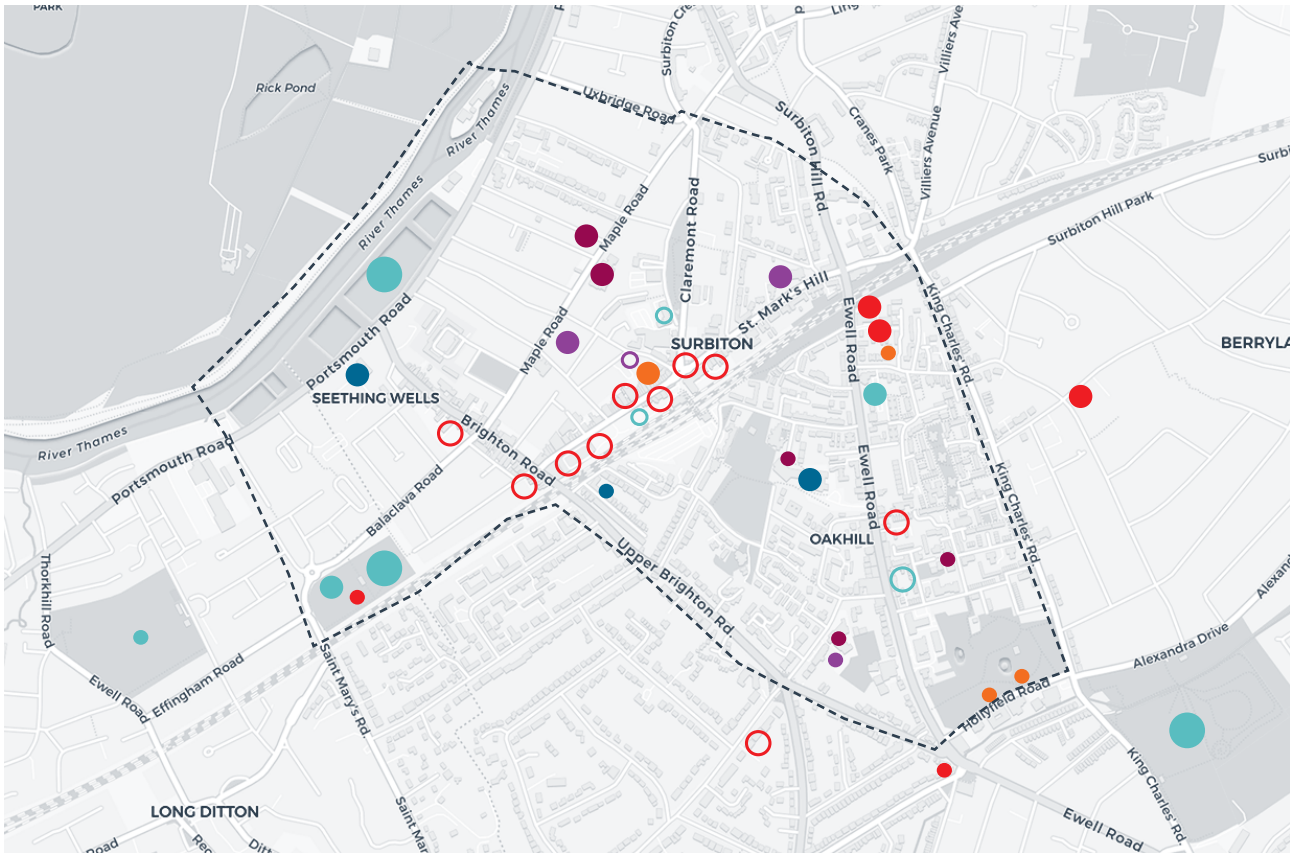
For question 'spending time with people from a different background, N=77 for formal, and N=68 for informal. For question 'spending time with people you know', N=77 for formal, and n=79 for informal.

are important in encouraging people from different backgrounds to meet. Students and long-term residents rarely spend time in the same place, they are usually separated by the cost of going to cafes or bars. This highlights the importance to social mixing of both affordable and free spaces, and formal provision.

The role of different facilities in supporting relationships varies. Places of worship, green and outdoor spaces, and schools and nurseries tend to have a stronger role in supporting relationships, while health facilities play a weak role in this.

Local places where people from different backgrounds meet in Surbiton

This map shows the formal and informal local spaces where street interview respondents reported spending time with people from a different background to them. It highlights the important role of parks, as well as local businesses.



Map details

Boundary of research focus area

Frequency of mentions

Number of respondents:
Formal social infrastructure = 77
Informal social infrastructure = 68

Formal social infrastructure

- Green and outdoor spaces
- Community and charity spaces
- Children's facilities
- Libraries
- Places of worship
- Sports and exercise facilities
- Health facilities

Informal social infrastructure

- Bars, restaurants and cafes
- Shops, markets, high-street uses
- Art and cultural venues
- Other

SIgn outside the Lamb pub.

Participation

Several local spaces offer opportunities for volunteering and active participation, and organisations like The Community Brain encourage and enable people to engage in the local area through events and various activities. Among street interview respondents, 30 percent reported helping out, mainly by taking part in community groups or being involved with places of worship, schools and community facilities.

A similar proportion of respondents were involved in local groups or clubs, generally connected to hobbies or sports. Taking part in these groups was often enabled by community networks; around 40 percent of respondents became involved in groups through friends or family. Around 20 percent of respondents got involved after finding out about groups online, this is also is an important way for people to find out about volunteering. Some groups or networks only exist digitally, and these play a crucial role when people cannot use facilities in person, such as during the COVID-19 lockdown when social infrastructure could not be used in the usual ways.

These groups, place-based or digital, play a significant role in social mixing. 90 percent of the people interviewed who are engaged in voluntary activities or groups said that they have met new people and people from a different background through these networks.

Time was said to be the key barrier to participation and use of local spaces, particularly for families with younger children and students. Cost of facilities was also seen to be a barrier, this mainly related to sports and leisure activities.

Equality

Formal social infrastructure provides the direct services or referrals people need to access support, including crisis services. In Surbiton, this role is often filled by local places of worship and organisations such as the YMCA. which helps and supports some of the most vulnerable members of the community, offering accommodation, access to food and advice. These spaces are generally used by a range of different groups and support people from different backgrounds to get to know each other.

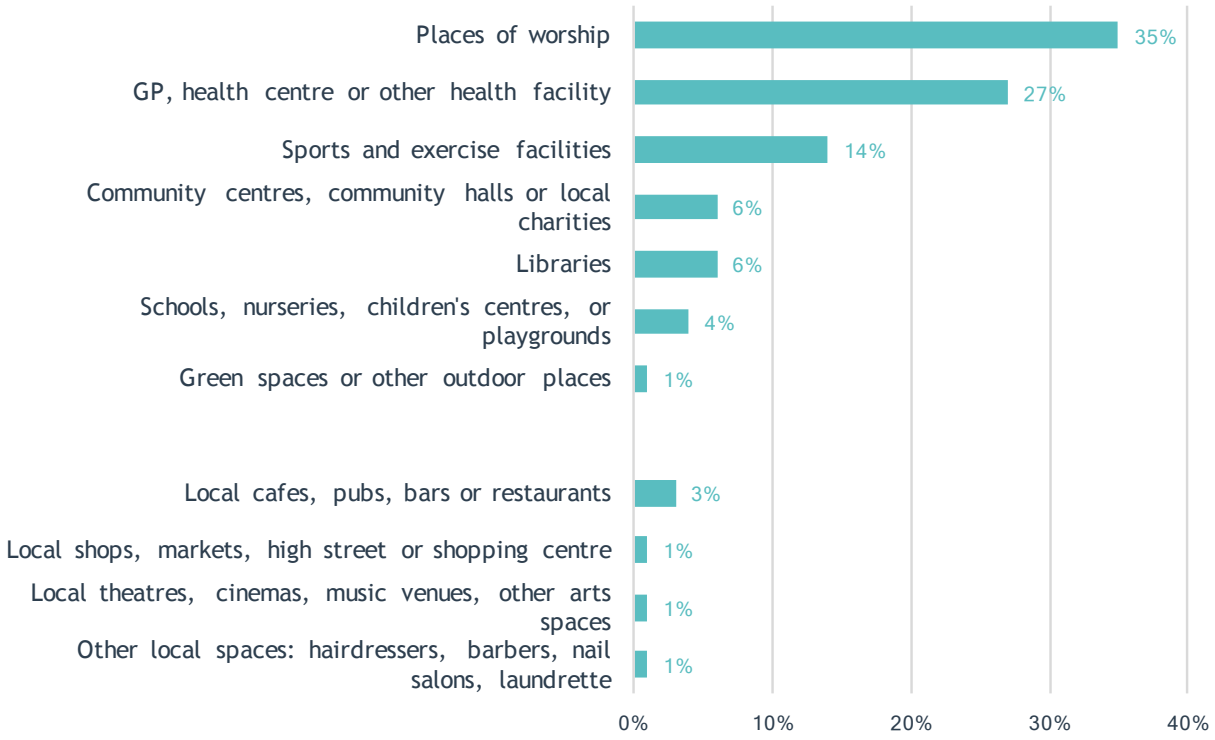
Some types of social infrastructure provide help and advice for people if they have a problem. 27 percent of respondents say they would go to GPs and health facilities for help; 35 percent would look to places of worship for support and advice. Only a few people interviewed reported they would use libraries, charities or community centres for this. Relationships are important in making somewhere a trusted source of advice.

Local businesses and other informal infrastructure can play a role both in addressing and reinforcing a sense of inequality. Some cafes open their doors to the more vulnerable members of the local community, however local cafes are reported to be too expensive for some local residents – including students.

For many people interviewed, the main feature of change in the neighbourhood was changing demographics, including the relatively recent arrival of the student population and a gradual cultural diversification. These changes were generally seen as positives, making Surbiton more attractive to its residents. However, the increasing cost of the area was raised as a threat to accessibility for some groups.

The loss of formal social infrastructure, such as affordable children's centres and adult learning facilities, was highlighted by several residents. The role that these spaces play in bringing together people from different background in a diversifying neighbourhood is important.

Where residents go for help and advice



N=77 for formal, and N=68 for informal.

Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic put a sudden unprecedented strain on local social infrastructure but in Surbiton, it also bought people together, creating a dynamic network of local support.

Community organisations managed to radically adapt their ways of working to respond to the crisis and to quickly to plug the gaps in support for people who needed to self-isolate, for key workers, and for people who no longer had access to vital support, services or food.

Some dormant or underused resources were activated, and existing resources pooled. There was a surge in informal co-location of services, and spaces were transformed into temporary hubs to support a range of needs and groups in one space. Smaller local organisations were able to be more agile than larger institutions and the council.

Some local facilities rapidly adapted to closure, finding new ways to connect with their users in spite of physical distance. The street, doorsteps and the entrances to cafes offering takeaways quickly became public spaces offering new ways of connecting people. New micro-social infrastructure and hyper-local networks emerged, including informal resident-led initiatives. The Street Champs network of residents became food collectors, setting up collection points outside their homes and taking donations to food banks. Online spaces became a very important way to come together.

Pubs, sports facilities and independent businesses could not keep their activities going and stopped all activity, some reopened from July. The closure of these spaces was seen to have a big social impact.

> "Pubs are places that people come because they want to connect with someone…How do we continue to offer that listening service to people from a distance?"
>
> (Stakeholder, Surbiton)

Pre-existing relationships were crucial in helping to organise and respond quickly, supported by online platforms. Existing social groups like the Scouts and youth football were re-purposed by parents as support networks.

There was collaboration between different groups that previously did not work together, bringing together people from different backgrounds. For example the food bank set up by The Point Church was supported by the Islamic Centre, which stored food in their fridges.

Some residents were affected by lockdown more than others, particularly those isolating alone, older people and young people. People unable to access services, information and networks online were adversely affected and found it difficult to find help.

Community organisations and local hospitality businesses in Surbiton reported anxieties about the future, worrying that there will be challenges to face on multiple fronts.

> "It's brought an incredible fragility to what we do… it's introduced a whole load of financial concerns about how we'll survive…but it has highlighted that the need for what we do has never been greater."
>
> (Stakeholder, Surbiton)

Many people working in professional jobs and in the service economy managed to work from home and spent much more time in the local area during lockdown and after. There is a hope that the culture of working from home and of volunteering that has emerged will continue and will become the trigger for more sustained community involvement. Stakeholders believe this could have a transformative effect on the character and economy of the area. Members of Surbiton Together - a partnership exploring community-led high street regeneration - saw this as a great opportunity to revive their high street.

Before the crisis there were fairly low levels of civic engagement in Surbiton but lockdown galvanised volunteering and engagement, and there is a desire for this level of participation to continue.

6. Profiles of local spaces

We visited four places in the area to find out how they contribute to social integration and the lessons that can be learnt from them.

YMCA

The Lamb pub

Press Room cafe

Surbiton Boxing Club

Formal social infrastructure

- Community and charity spaces
- Sports and exercise facilities

Informal social infrastructure

- Bars, restaurants and cafes

Surbiton Boxing Club

About

Surbiton Boxing Club is a community-based sports club which aims to get local people involved and engaged in amateur boxing, to offer a safe and productive environment for training and coaching competitive Olympic-style Amateur Boxing. Surbiton Amateur Boxing Club is affiliated to the national governing body - England Boxing. They also open their doors to recreational boxers, local schools, youths and beginners, promoting the principles of “no nonsense” boxing and fitness training at the club. The management of the club changed hands in 2016 however some of the existing coaches and staff have remained.

How does it support social integration?

People engage with the sport for different reasons but their shared approach can become the basis of friendships and relationships. For many, it may just be the love of the sport that brings them together and encourages them to engage with others in the club community.

> "They just mix and we make it fun and they get talking to each other... they build friendships – brand new friendships."
>
> (Stakeholder)

Conversations with the coaches suggests they feel a great sense of responsibility for the young people who use the club, many young people using the club confide in and depend on their coaches.

The club mainly runs on weekday evenings and during the daytime on weekends, and a wide range of activities and training sessions are squeezed into a few hours. This allows overlaps between activities, such as between the junior and the senior sessions, encouraging different groups to interact, or just to observe if they prefer.

Despite being located in a fairly affluent neighbourhood, the coaches and manager want to be accessible to less well-off communities in the wider area, including their members in Tolworth. Junior users are expected to pay £5 for a session and competitive boxers pay a monthly membership fee. Student rates are offered and discretionary discounts are offered to members facing hardship, enabling a wider group of young people to access the club facilities.

> "The gym can change a lot of people. It helps if you've had a bad day at school and it builds relationships." (Stakeholder)

Lessons

The coaches have to undergo specific training about sport, safeguarding and working with young people – this better prepares them to deal with the challenges some young people face.

Enabling different forms of involvement, depending on individual needs and preferences, allows a wider range of users to get involved in boxing and other activities at the gym.

Because of spatial and time constraints many activities overlap, this has the benefit of informally encouraging interactions between different groups and activities – and as a consequence some new relationships have been made.

YMCA

About

YMCA Surbiton is at the southern end of the high street on Victoria Road. It acts as a community hub, offering children's activities, health and wellbeing facilities, release counselling, community clubs and activities, a community cafe, rooms and meeting spaces for hire. It is also a hostel, providing both targeted and universal support to single people over 16 in housing need; people who are homeless, vulnerable or at risk; people living with mental illness, learning disabilities or recovering from substance misuse; or those who are fleeing domestic violence.

How does it support social integration?

Much of the interaction between groups from different backgrounds happens through programmed activities, such as classes in the gym or around the children's play area. This can lead to relationships starting based around shared circumstances. The cafe is the space that is used by the widest range of groups. Its informal role supplements formal service delivery and support that the YMCA provides. The low cost of the YMCA's facilities and services make it an exception in Surbiton, where other facilities tend to be more expensive.

The presence of the YMCA, along with an increasing homeless and transient population visible on the high street, has made many of the residents of Surbiton increasingly aware of the needs of more vulnerable people. Many residents expressed an interest in getting involved.

Lessons

When social infrastructure is provided and then rapidly lost it can create tensions within the community - particularly when these temporary services or facilities catered to a specific community.

The informality of the cafe helps it bring people together. It is used by people to socialise before and after going to the gym, by mothers who bring their children to the play area, by the older people's groups who would like to have somewhere to go during the day and also by the vulnerable people living in the hostel.

The location of the YMCA within the town centre, immediately next to a bus stop, makes it accessible from the surrounding neighbourhoods. It is immediately next to a Sainsbury's, and its marketing and signage is visible when people are waiting for a bus or on the way to or from the shops. this encourages passers-by to come in and get involved.

The Press Room cafe

About

The Press Room cafe is an independent artisan coffee shop and cafe opposite Surbiton Station on Claremont Road. It opened four years ago, is well loved by residents and recommended by many as a great place to work and spend time.

How does it support social integration?

The intimate setting of the cafe, as well as the number of regular customers, means that the cafe space facilitates familiarity between customers, with frequent conversations between regulars.

> "We don't interfere with each other [in the cafe]. I hadn't seen him for weeks and when I saw him I said 'where you been?' 'New Zealand', he said."
>
> (Stakeholder)

The cafe takes part in schemes like the "Suspended Coffee Scheme" (customers pay in advance for a coffee for someone who cannot afford one) and "Well Grounded" (training for vulnerable people to work in the speciality coffee industry) and this opens it up to the more vulnerable members of the community. The cafe encourages interaction between everyone using the space, bringing paying customers and vulnerable people together – something that is strongly discouraged in most local cafes and restaurants.

Lessons

The cafe provides a "third space" - a place to be that is not work or home - in the neighbourhood. This is particularly useful for the self-employed workers in the area

The social initiatives that the cafe takes part in bridge social boundaries by inviting people into spaces where they may not usually be welcome. This creates a shared experience, the transient person who regularly gets a free coffee through the suspended coffee scheme has a similar relationship and experience of the cafe and the staff as someone who uses it everyday for work.

The Lamb pub

About

The Lamb is a family-run free house pub on Brighton Road, a five-minute walk from the high street. The landlords have owned the pub for around 12 years, and they live upstairs with their two daughters. The pub acts as a living room, in the most traditional sense, for the whole neighbourhood. There is a garden at the back of the pub, which is also used often by children.

The pub itself plays host to an array of events, aiming to engage users who wouldn't necessarily come to the pub. This includes activities aimed at across the community, from life-drawing sessions to regular live music. During the day, a mix of regulars can be observed just passing time in the pub playing board games, including families with children as well as older people.

How does it support social integration?

The conversational ethos of the pub is demonstrated by the staff, who engage in small talk with customers, sometimes having multiple customers in the same conversation. Some of the bar staff have other professional jobs, but take on a few shifts at the pub for the sheer enjoyment and opportunity to be part of community activity.

"All the customers interact with each other, we have rules at the bar though. It's open for conversation but no talk about politics at the bar – they must take it to a table."

(Stakeholder)

Conversations with many of the customers highlight that the pub is seen to be an inclusive and child-friendly space. The managers' children use the pub freely for playing and this encourages other families to let their children play as well. It provides many opportunities for people to get involved in events, either within the pub or in the wider neighbourhood.

Lessons

The crucial role of the pub landlord as facilitator – they become the connector between different networks of the community, building personal relationships with customers.

The programming of the space, as well as its "living room" feeling, are key to drawing a range of different groups to use the space in different ways. Many pubs are facing tumultuous times as lifestyles change, hosting community activities is a way of making them more relevant again in the day-to-day of many people's lives.

Engaging with neighbourhood-scale events or big festivals, or events with a wider catchment, allows the pub to become embedded in a wider network of social infrastructure. It makes it part of a community offer on a larger scale, cementing its permanent role in the heart of Surbiton's community.

7. Creating successful social infrastructure

In this section we draw together lessons learnt from Surbiton and our wider research, illustrating how social infrastructure can successfully support social integration.

1. Build an understanding of the local social infrastructure ecosystem and support connections within it.

At a neighbourhood level, social infrastructure should be understood as a dynamic and complex ecosystem, a mix of spaces, facilities, groups, and networks. These systems will vary significantly from place to place, with individual spaces or groups taking on different roles and hosting a unique set of relationships. In Surbiton informal infrastructure such as pubs and cafes play a crucial role in supporting the local community. These spaces and individuals are often plugged into formal services, signposting to advice and support, while building social relationships.

A dense web of connections is vital to the health and success of the system as a whole. In Surbiton this is defined by human relationships, with spaces and services supporting these connections.

Action

Mapping local social infrastructure can identify informal provision and local networks. This can help understand what is supporting the community, help channel funding and investment to where it is most effective, and help protect existing assets, formal and informal, that may be put under threat in the future. Local agencies and the council are well positioned to take this forward.

2. Recognise, value and support the contribution of individuals.

Individuals are key connectors within the ecosystem. In Surbiton, a number of activists, dedicated volunteers and passionate individuals work within local groups and drive many of the activities which

animate local spaces. They often also push for improvements or greater community ownership of social infrastructure, share information and coordinate local action.

Social integration with local spaces is often realised through the attitudes of individual staff members or volunteers, who contribute by creating a welcoming atmosphere, facilitating interactions, building trusting relationships with users or providing personalised signposting. At Surbiton Boxing Club and at The Lamb, these attributes are incorporated within the roles of staff members and supported by individuals who have been in post for a long time.

Action

Local community organisations and agencies should acknowledge and value volunteers, staff and activists who make particular contributions to social integration and community relationships. The effort made to support local relationships should be made visible to encourage others to work in this way.

3. Ensure change is carefully managed

Change presents both challenges and opportunities for social infrastructure. In Surbiton, where change is gradual and not always obvious, small but impactful changes can go unnoticed. This can be seen in the creeping loss of formal social infrastructure, in spite of its capacity to bridge social barriers. At a smaller scale, this can be seen in the decline of services or loss of specific facilities, such as the canteen in the YMCA, which in the past played a crucial role in supporting a cross-section of the community.

The value of these services and facilities needs to be captured and communicated to protect and enhance them, and support them to take up opportunities unlocked through change. This is increasingly important as the area becomes more multicultural and anticipates change through Crossrail. In order to succeed, physical improvements must be accompanied by strong and ongoing community engagement.

Action

Venues or facilities going through change, and agencies managing change, should audit social integration in the area, assess how this could be affected by change, and put mitigating measures in place to limit any negative impacts.

4. Balance inclusiveness against the ability of spaces, groups or activities to effectively support individuals.

The cafes and bars in Surbiton are immensely successful in supporting social relationships. However, these spaces are not accessible to all. There are few spaces (both formal and informal) that are accessible across the local population to provide a shared resource for people from different backgrounds.

Agencies and groups must balance these factors and acknowledge that the most effective programming or support will be grounded in genuine community demands and interests. The web of social infrastructure that supports local areas needs spaces that are specific to different groups, as well as spaces that bring those different groups together.

Action

Spaces and places should assess how their activities support relationships between people from different backgrounds, and between people from the same background, and find an appropriate balance between these two outcomes (recognising that this will vary in different areas).

5. Animate and realise the potential of existing spaces.

The softer aspects of programming, facilitation and activities, and how they are used by local groups and networks, helps them realise their social integration potential. Without these relationships, spaces on their own are unable to build social integration.

However, many of these activities can be restricted - particularly in formal infrastructure - by institutional constraints. Short-term projects, a lack of core funding, complex applications, and excessive monitoring requirements, are all felt to undermine the capacity of groups to deliver and build momentum around social integration goals.

While the delivery of activities is often best done by community groups, local authorities and public bodies play an important strategic role.

Action

Community groups should develop a range of different activities for different groups in their programming. Councils can support this through support and capacity-building, bringing together local actors and creating forums for collaboration, information-sharing and accessing external funding.

Useful information

All of us: the Mayor's strategy for social integration, 2018
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_social_integration_strategy.pdf

Good Growth by Design programme
https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/advice-and-guidance/about-good-growth-design

New London Plan
https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/what-new-london-plan

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