



Social Impact Assessment of the Cambridge Road Estate

Summary

July 2025



About this report

This report summarises research carried out in 2025 into the impact of the regeneration of the Cambridge Road Estate. The research was commissioned by the joint venture between Royal Borough Kingston upon Thames and Countryside properties (part of Vistry Group). The aim was to establish a benchmark understanding of how residents from different tenures, backgrounds and areas within the estate have experienced the regeneration to help agencies and development partners improve their plans and services. It also acts as a baseline against which future change can be measured.

The report was written by Simeon Shtebunaev, Lavanya Karthik and Nicola Bacon.

The door-to-door survey was carried out by Face Facts. Walking interviews were carried out by Jessica Cargill-Thompson.

We want to thank the Community Board for their support and engagement in developing the survey questionnaire and sharing their views of the regeneration with us. We are grateful to the individuals and organisations who took time out of their busy days to support this research, take part in workshops or be interviewed in stakeholder interviews.

About Social Life

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

Introduction

In 2024, Social Life was asked by the Royal Borough Kingston upon Thames and Countryside properties (part of Vistry Group) to carry out a first social value assessment of the redevelopment of the Cambridge Road Estate, working closely with residents and organisations that are supporting them. The research explored the impact that the Cambridge Road regeneration programme has on residents living in the area, describing everyday life and the strengths and weaknesses of the local community. The report includes recommendations to the joint venture team to strengthen their future work on the estate.

We found in Cambridge Road a strong, long-standing and well-established community which expressed positive sentiments about their local identity, links with neighbourhoods, willingness to act and ability to influence the future of their area. This is something to be celebrated and protected. However, whereas the social dimensions of the estate appear strong, the physical condition of buildings and the public realm is poor. Although the reputation of the estate seems to have improved there are still concerns about safety. We heard that potential erosion of community cohesion in the future are at the forefront of resident's minds, with worries about the densification of the estate and the marginalisation of existing communities. Temporary residents in particular require better integration and support.

Cambridge Road Estate's regeneration is not happening in isolation; in the last decade there have been new developments to the north, east and south of the estate and another development is under construction to the west. The cumulative effect of new developments in the area risks overwhelming services, creating tensions between communities and putting a strain on local facilities if not managed and coordinated.



Figure 1: Delivery of new playground and flats in Phase 1

Key findings

Social & Cultural Life



Residents report that this is a place where neighbourly support and a sense of social solidarity have grown from the shared experience of living in the area. There are very strong feelings of neighbourliness 97% of respondents indicated that the estate is a place people from different backgrounds get on well together. Residents want to remain on the estate, with 76% expressing desire to do so, across tenures. People with temporary tenancies generally report a more negative experience.

While 85% of residents report feeling safe walking at night, a quarter of all respondents express fear of crime on the estate. Residents report generally good health and 91% are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Similarly, 81% of respondents are satisfied with their life overall. Both are higher than comparable areas.

Residents are generally satisfied with facilities in the local area Housing quality satisfaction is low at 47%, this is significantly worse than comparable areas. Almost half of those interviewed - 44% - indicate that their children do not have an outdoor space or facilities where they can play safely.

“My children were brought up here. They used to play on the street with other children. We all know each other. It’s quite nice really. They are very supportive neighbours.” - Walking interview



Figure 2: Informal social infrastructure in private yards

Voice & Influence



Majority (75%) of people interviewed agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, this is higher than in comparable areas. Private tenants are least likely to agree with this (34%). The majority - (82%) report that it is important for them to feel that they can influence decisions in the local area, higher than in comparable areas.

People report a greater willingness to act compared to similar areas. 90% of those interviewed agree that people in the neighbourhood pull together to improve it; 71% indicate they would be willing to work together with others on something to improve their area. 10% of people interviewed have given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity.

Stakeholders reported that there is a lack of clarity in the information available about the regeneration. Residents were receiving conflicting information, generating mistrust about the regeneration programme.

“Other than networking, how do people find out what’s going on? A lot of people are isolated. How you persuade people to get involved in our community is difficult.” - Stakeholder

“People are excited. They get positive news that they are moving to new houses, Then they are delayed.” - Walking interview



Figure 3: Community notices in Impington block

Key findings

Amenities & Social Infrastructure



There is good street social life and the estate as currently designed is generally tenure blind. There is little social infrastructure or meanwhile provision, and what is there - benches, play and gym facilities - varies in condition. There is no indoor provision on site, however, there is a lot of evidence of past provision such as community rooms, sport infrastructure and a social supermarket. This contributes to a sense of dilapidation.

The estate's urban realm and built environment is often of poor quality and not well maintained. Wayfinding across the estate is difficult, there are a lot of uneven surfaces and poor definition between private and public spaces. There are numerous alleyways which are not maintained, contributing to concerns about safety and the perception is that construction is exacerbating this.

Better provision for active mobility across the estate area is needed. Disabled-friendly provisions need to be better signposted, and adaptations introduced. Waste management on the estate need to improve. There are good mature trees on the site.

“There must be a bunch of young people, teenagers, who I don’t ever really see. There was some youth provision for a while but I haven’t heard from that recently or whether they’re continuing. I’d love to see more investment in young people’s lives.” - Stakeholder



Figure 4: Outdoor gym and benches on podium

Views of the Regeneration



Majority (53%) of residents interviewed have a generally positive opinion of the regeneration, expressing enthusiasm for improvement in the quality of homes. Residents want the regeneration to lead to improvement of their living and housing conditions, better cleanliness, increased safety and better access to services and amenities. Residents are concerned that the sense of community is at risk of being eroded and want better places and facilities to socialise.

The majority of residents (53%) know little or nothing about the regeneration, this sentiment was corroborated by stakeholders and walking interviewees. Private and temporary tenants are least likely to be knowledgeable about the regeneration plans. Residents overwhelmingly agree (80%) that feeling that they can influence decisions about the Cambridge Road regeneration project is important to them.

“The huge physical change that does feel like something is really happening that hopefully will be a really positive outcome for all the residents.” - Stakeholder

It's long way to go . We are in phase 5. We are helpless [...] But it is not short-term process. It is long term process. - Resident

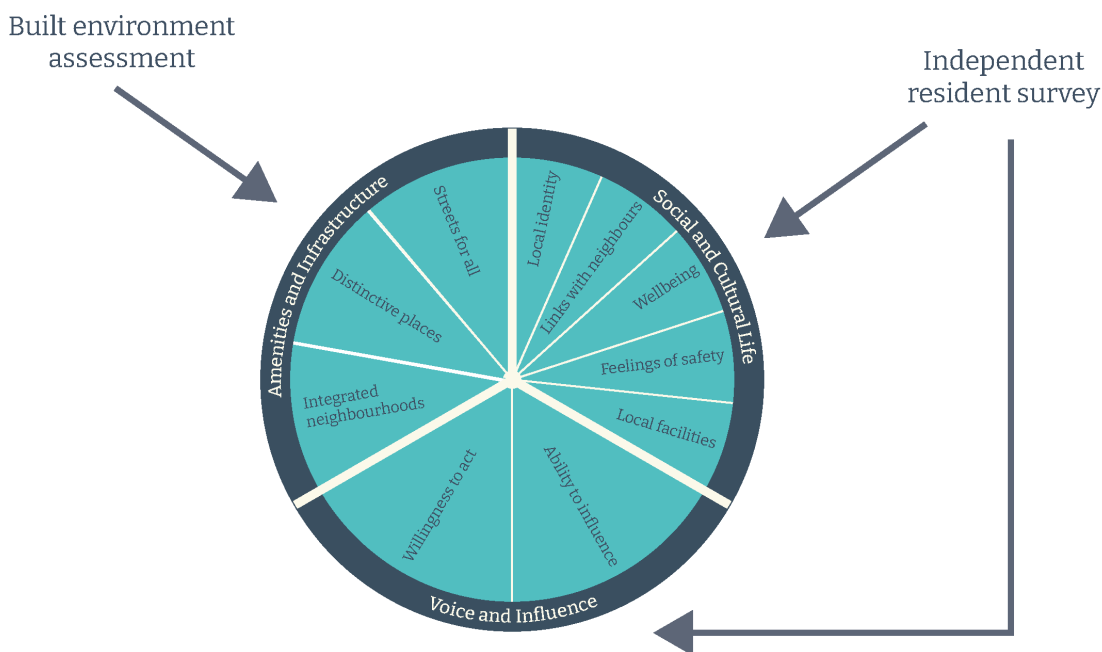


Figure 5: Delivery of Phase 1 Blocks with tower in background

The social sustainability assessment

This benchmark assessment uses the concept of social sustainability as a way to bring together and measure a wide range of factors that are proven to influence local quality of life and the strength of a community now and in the future. It is intended to provide the starting point for future comparison throughout the course of the regeneration.

The research draws on previous work, by Social Life and Professor Tim Dixon in 2012, to devise and test a social sustainability measurement framework for The Berkeley Group. The Berkeley Group framework organises these factors into three dimensions: Social and Cultural Life; Voice and Influence, and Amenities and Social Infrastructure. Ten indicators are used to assess social sustainability within this framework. The Amenities and Infrastructure dimensions were updated in 2025 following a revision of the built environment methodology.



Amenities & Social Infrastructure

This dimension describes the results of the Amenities and Social Infrastructure assessment. Indicators are based on Design for Healthy Homes Assessment 2020, adapted by Social Life.



Social & Cultural Life

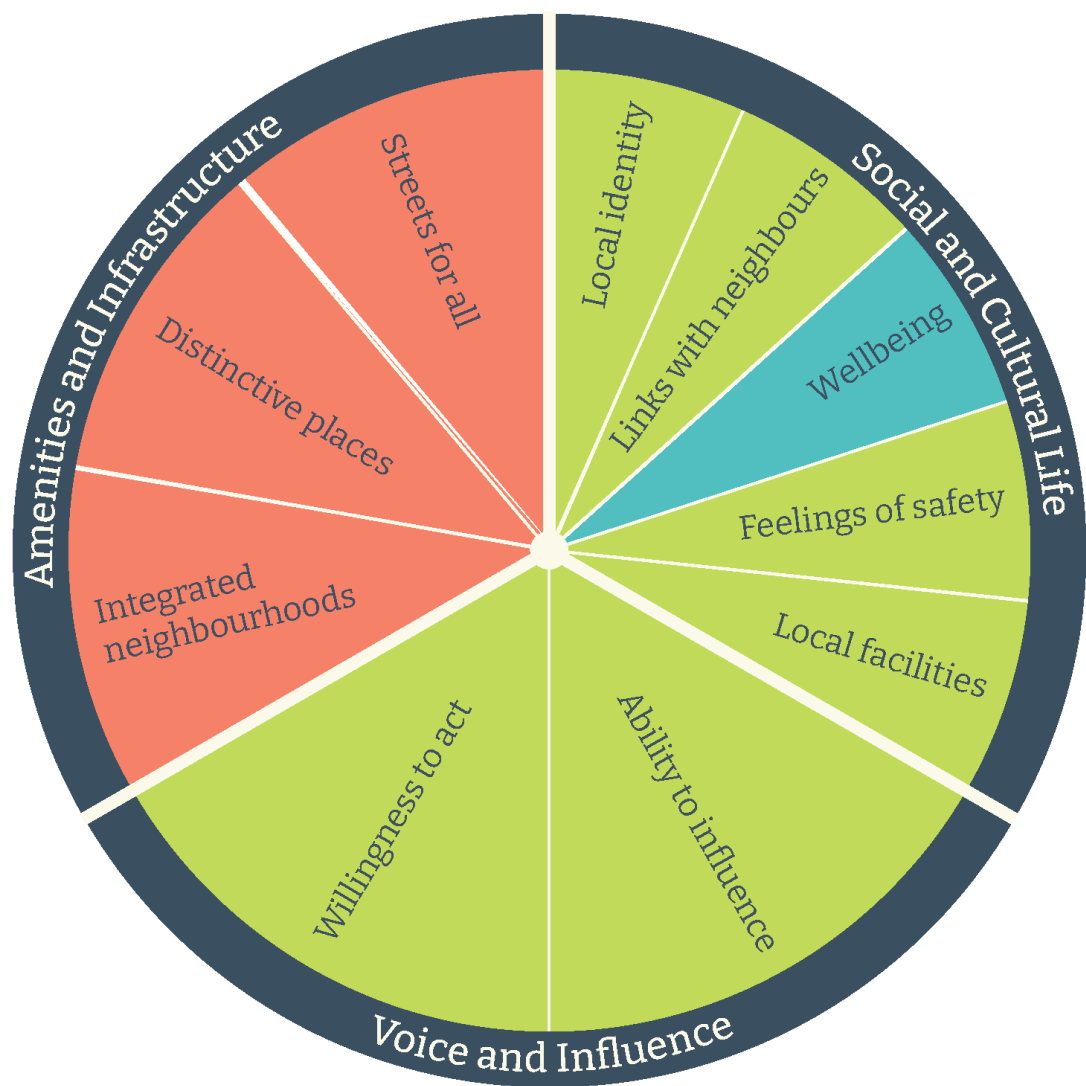
This section outlines how people feel about the social and cultural aspects of the neighbourhood. This section is based on the results of the household survey of people living on the Cambridge Road Estate.



Voice & Influence

This section describes the extent to which people living and working in South Acton feel they have a say and can influence decisions affecting their local area. This section is based on the results of the household survey.

Cambridge Road Estate in 2025



Scoring explained:



Significantly better than comparable areas



Performs as expected (equal to comparable areas)



Significantly worse than comparable areas

Comparing Cambridge Road Estate to similar places

We have compared the results of the 2025 Cambridge Road Estate door-to-door survey to similar areas. The data shows us where residents attitudes and experiences are stronger or more positive than in comparable areas (indicating strengths), or more negative (indicating vulnerabilities).

The residents' survey data was analysed using an approach that Social Life¹ has developed to compare data from small areas to "comparable areas" - other areas nationally with similar social and physical characteristics. This uses national survey data from the Research Councils UK and Office for National Statistics (ONS) Output Area Classifications.

Better than comparable area



Worse than comparable area



1. This approach has been developed by Social Life to help understand how areas are faring. For more information see: <http://www.social-life.co/publication/understanding-local-areas/>

Recommendations

The proposed recommendations are focused around the key areas that emerged from the research - communication, quality of the physical realm and strengthening the community.

In the long term, maintaining the strength of the existing community is critical for the success of the regeneration. In the medium-term, upgrading public realm, quality of homes and social infrastructure, are priorities. In the short-term, residents want to see improvements better communications, diversity of events and activities. Temporary residents are underserved and require attention.

Communication with and within the community

1. Improve communications with diverse groups of residents about the regeneration, especially private and temporary residents and establish a clear mechanism for engaging new arrivals with the existing and wider community. Involve a broader spectrum of residents in the decision-making process to prevent erosion of trust and future tension. Simplify communication channels, reduce duplication, and use multiple methods of communication.

Providing better physical and social infrastructure

2. Encourage the creation of more formal and informal social infrastructure on the estate and meanwhile use - this includes hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure, prioritising youth engagement and provision of safe, inclusive spaces for children and teenagers.
3. Develop and deliver an urban realm and ground plane plan to improve wayfinding, tackle maintenance, improve lighting and safety provisions and promote an inclusive and accessible environment. The plan could address cycling lane provision, micro-mobility and accessibility, better waste management and re-activate ground plane. All phases of the development should be considered.
4. Improve housing quality across the estate, especially in later phases of the regeneration, including better repairs and maintenance.

Strengthening the community long-term

5. Recognise and celebrate the existing strong community and oral histories of the estate by introducing estate-wide events and diversifying activities on the estate to cater for different groups, especially young and elderly people. Create activities that specifically cater for temporary tenants and that address issues of affordability and access.
6. Increase opportunities for volunteering on site and proactively promote those by encouraging and supporting the creation of diverse groups on litter picking, food sharing and growing, gardening or other. Create opportunities for informal and formal skill and support exchange on the estate.

About the research

The research has two key aims. We wanted to establish how residents are faring, understanding their perceptions of the estate and their daily life, their wellbeing, how they relate to neighbours and different local communities, and their views about the regeneration to date. And secondly to develop a short set of recommendations to inform the next stage of the regeneration and the spending of the Social Value budget.

This first assessment of the social impacts of regeneration at Cambridge Road Estate provides a benchmark for measuring change and impact in the future. The assessment will be repeated at regular intervals, as phases of the regeneration are complete. We recommend the next assessment to take place after the completion and occupation of Phase 1. This work will continue to will feed into practical recommendations for the joint venture partners and for other agencies working in the area. We recommend the Joint Venture reports back annually to residents on how their feedback has influenced delivery.



Figure 6: Children's play area in front yards of Barwell

The Cambridge Road Estate

Owned and managed by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council, the Cambridge Road estate was built during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and includes a mix of low-rise, high-rise apartments and houses. In 2020 the community voted to support of the regeneration plans put forward by the council. There was a 86% turnout and 73% 'yes' vote to regenerate the entire estate. Planning permission was granted in July 2022 with the first phase of the build starting in 2022.

The regeneration will deliver 2,170 new homes, including 941 affordable homes, of which 871 will be council-rented, improved community facilities, green streets, play areas and other outdoor spaces, new jobs, local training opportunities and an enhanced estate layout. The regeneration is anticipated to take between 12 to 15 years, over five phases.

“To the station it’s 7-10 mins walk. 131 bus and N87. Kingston is walking distance, approx. 10 mins. Richmond Park is 15-20 mins walk. Fairfield to walk the dogs is 5 mins walk. And the cemetery. It’s like a forest” - Walking interview



Figure 7: Cambridge Road Estate, visit in 2024

Who we spoke to

In total, interviews with 178 different residents on the estate, 11 stakeholders and 10 walking ethnographies carried out. We also engaged in discussions with the Community Board to develop the survey and approach.

The main research findings were taken from in-depth street interviews, walking interviews and in-depth interviews with local agencies and stakeholders.

167

street interviews
with residents

14

in-depth interviews
with agencies and
local stakeholders

11

online surveys
completed

1

built environment
assessment

10

walking
ethnographies with
residents



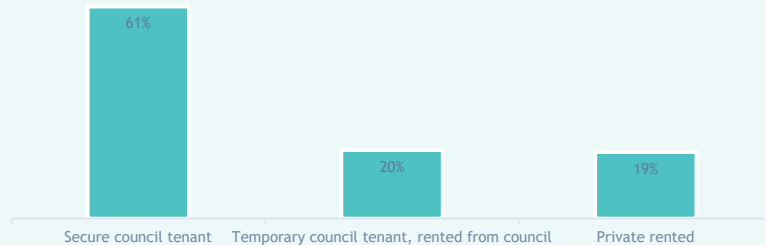
Number of people interviewed

178
TOTAL

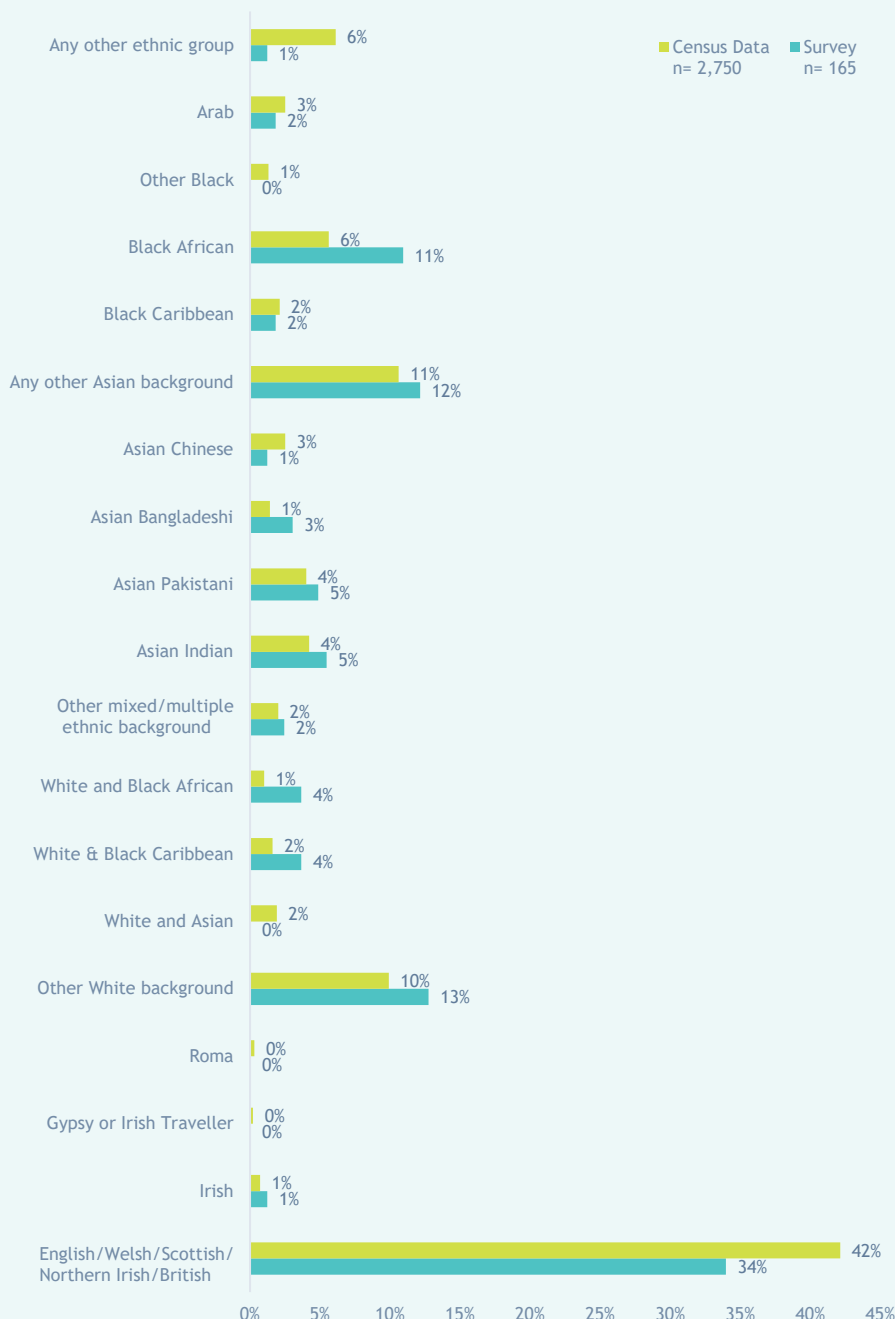
167 door to door*
11 online surveys

**demographic data breakdown based only on door to door*

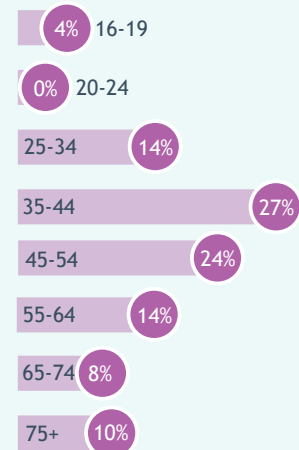
Tenure



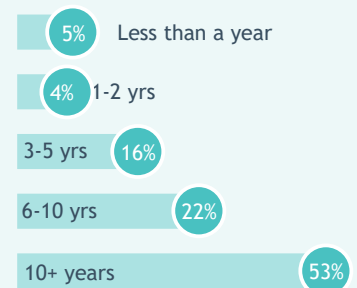
Ethnicity



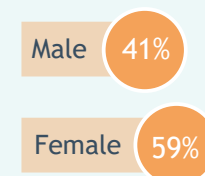
Age



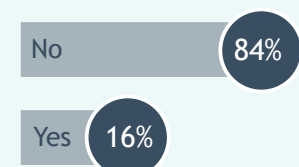
Length of time living in Cambridge Road



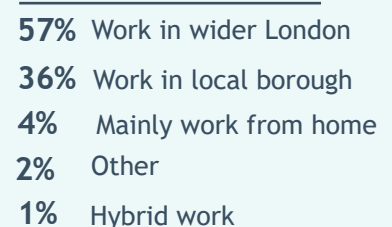
Gender



Disability



Location of employment



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

