

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

# **CONNECTIVE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

**HOW LONDON'S SOCIAL SPACES  
AND NETWORKS HELP US  
LIVE WELL TOGETHER**

**GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN**



**A  
BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT**

**FOR  
ALL  
LONDONERS**



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## MAYOR'S FOREWORD

London's diversity is a strength, not a weakness. I believe that social integration is the key to harnessing that strength. I want London to be a byword for mixed, cohesive communities and for our city to be known as a beacon for genuine social integration.

Social integration is about breaking down the barriers of class, ethnicity and religion that can sometimes separate us. It's about bringing Londoners together to enjoy shared experiences and a common life, and it's about building more open and equal communities, where all Londoners are included and feel like they can play an active part in their city.

If we better understand and trust each other, we can work together to improve the health and wellbeing of all Londoners, reduce crime, increase support for equal rights and create a safer, healthier and more harmonious city.

There are places, services and support structures throughout our city which give Londoners the opportunity to build these relationships. Some we use every day, such as our parks and barber shops. Some we use in times of need, such as our mutual aid groups and GP surgeries. And others we use for shared activities, such as our community centres and places of worship.

I know the difference these places can make to our lives. When I think about my experience of mixing with people from different backgrounds throughout my life, I think of my council estate, my school, my local boxing club, and my time at university. These places helped me to gain a better understanding of other people's perspectives and experiences and enabled me to form lifelong friendships with people outside of my immediate community.

The reality is that the spaces where our social connections are formed are crucial for living together well. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, this social infrastructure is crucial to our collective resilience in times of crisis. We have all had to deal with the impact of the restrictions and the closure of schools, places

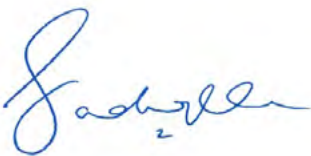
of worship and recreational facilities. This has been coupled with a renewed reliance on our hospitals, parks, mutual aid groups and online advice services. And it's often been the most vulnerable who have depended on these things the most.

As London continues to grow, these spaces are under pressure to serve a changing population in a climate of reduced funding and competing land claims. My New London Plan recognises the importance of understanding what is important in a place and how we must use this to plan for the future.

We know that accessible and well-designed buildings, spaces and public realm forms the foundation of our public life, but as we emerge from the pandemic, we must remember that resilience is also about the individuals, communities and service providers who use these spaces and adapt in times of crisis.

That is why I am very pleased to share this important new research. This work, drawn from evidence across London's neighbourhoods, shows how we can plan for, design and manage social infrastructure to deliver improved social integration for Londoners. It is my hope that we use this work to better champion and support services and facilities that meet local needs and contribute towards a good quality of life, particularly as we recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Promoting social integration is a matter for everyone because it affects us all and we all stand to benefit. We all have a part to play to ensure that the social fabric that holds our neighbourhoods together is recognised, strong and well supported. This is ultimately how we can truly live well together, united as neighbours, as citizens and as Londoners.



**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London





# INTRODUCTION



## ABOUT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

London's social infrastructure is one of its great assets. From bumping into friends and neighbours in the park café, to visiting a local nail salon, recycling unwanted furniture on a Facebook group, using the library to find information, or getting help from a community support network, social infrastructure plays an important role in supporting and enriching the lives of Londoners.

Social infrastructure depends on the people who use it to give it meaning. It can be thought of as an ecosystem of local organisations, networks and services, supported by different types of buildings and physical spaces. As well as formally recognised social infrastructure, such as health and education provision, informal spaces and services like barbershops, cafés and pubs are just as important to the social networks that make communities more connected and resilient.

To support agencies and individuals to increase social integration by providing, designing and operating social infrastructure, we need a broader understanding of social infrastructure to inform funding, needs assessments and evaluations. This expanded definition of social infrastructure complements the more focused definition in the London Plan, which is used to support decision making about planning and land use.

The definition is underpinned by the concept of the 'social infrastructure ecosystem', which recognises the relationship between formal and informal social infrastructure, and the importance of the relationships within communities in supporting social integration.

"Social infrastructure covers a range of services and facilities that meet local and strategic needs and contribute towards a good quality of life, facilitating new and supporting existing relationships, encouraging participation and civic action, overcoming barriers and mitigating inequalities, and together contributing to resilient communities. Alongside more formal provision of services, there are informal networks and community support that play an important role in the lives of Londoners."



## **ABOUT SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

Tackling inequality, building relationships and giving Londoners a voice and sense of control are key priorities for the social health and wellbeing of the city. The Mayor of London has set out his ambition that London becomes a socially integrated city. The Mayor's aim for social integration is to build strong communities where all Londoners can lead interconnected lives and play an active part in their city and the decisions that affect them.

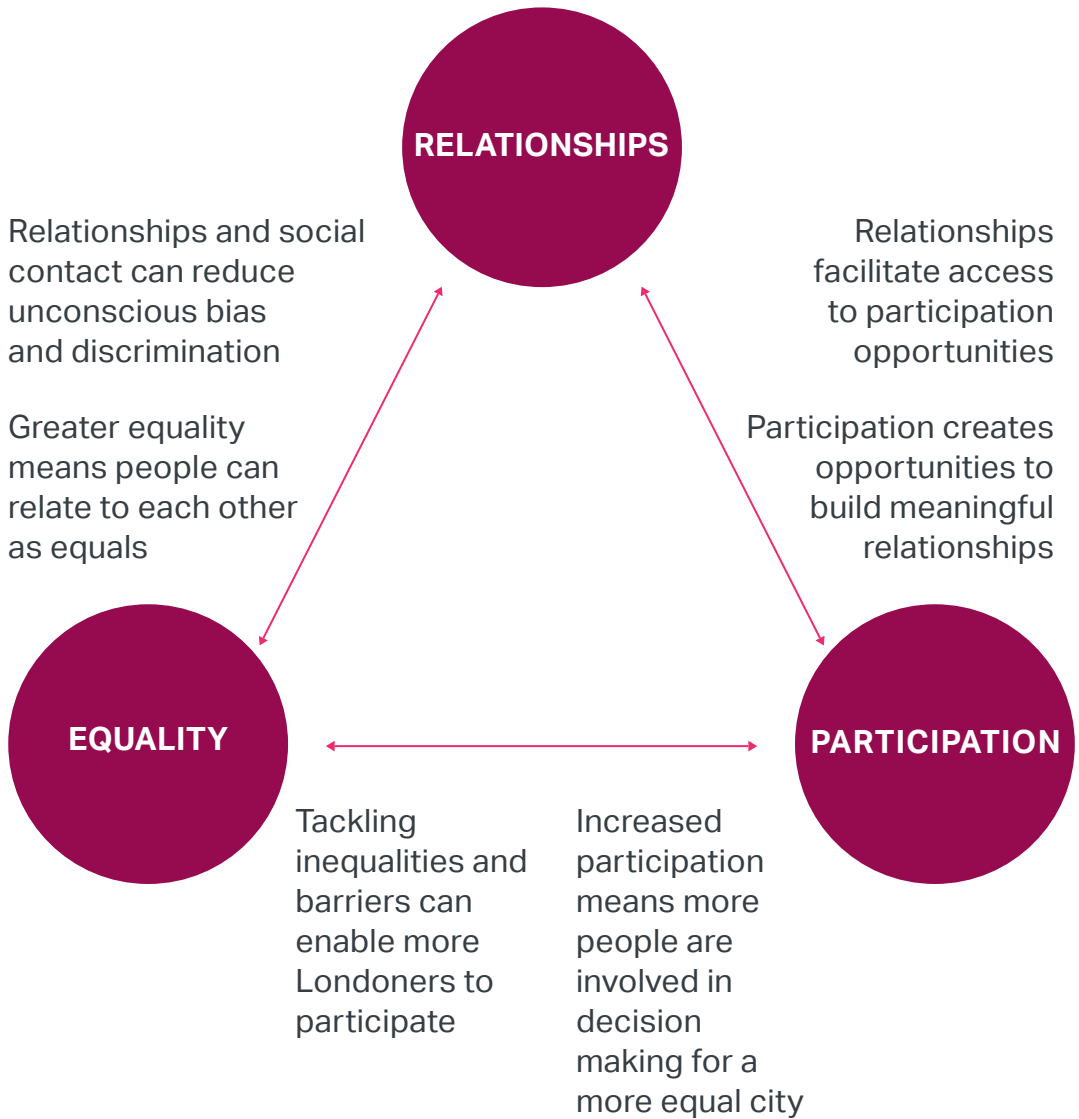
As a leading global city, London is often on the frontline of the world's social changes and challenges. Londoners' ability to embrace change and celebrate diversity is a source of pride. However, unless there is social integration, diversity can become a cause of division.

The Mayor's definition of social integration brings together three pillars: relationships, participation and equality.

“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

**Understanding social integration.  
From 'All of us: The Mayor's social integration strategy'<sup>1</sup>**



1 Greater London Authority (GLA) (2018) All of Us: the Mayor's strategy for social integration

## THE VALUE OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social infrastructure plays an important role in supporting the three core aspects of social integration. It supports relationships within communities and between people from different backgrounds by providing places for people to meet friends and to make new connections. Successful social infrastructure depends on complex networks of relationships, which take time and care to build up.

It supports participation by giving people the opportunity to become involved in governance, management and volunteering, and by helping people who feel marginalised and powerless to gain more control over their lives. Finally, social infrastructure supports equality by providing access to support and services, particularly to those who are more vulnerable or disadvantaged.

We know that successful community responses are much stronger and more effective in areas with established social networks and greater provision of social infrastructure. The recent years of austerity have hit social infrastructure and local services hard. While investment in provision has fallen, demands on services that support local communities remain high.

Londoners have not experienced trends in the loss of social infrastructure uniformly and some groups have been at the sharp end of change. The stark impact of inequality and disadvantage can be seen in the way that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted on different communities, magnifying long term inequalities.

## **AREAS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION**

London's social infrastructure is one of its great assets. It is the responsibility of all Londoners, including local government, the wider public sector, businesses and developers, civil society and community organisations to protect what is working well and to design and develop new models and ways of providing services and programming.

### **Understanding local ecosystems to inform decisions**

London's high streets and town centres are its social glue. They are the setting for public life, conviviality and face-to-face contact. They provide cultural footholds and offer opportunities for Londoners to meet and build meaningful and lasting relationships with each other. They also provide access to vital information and support. As such, they have a key role to play in ensuring all parts of society, especially groups at risk of marginalisation or under-representation, are recognised equally at the heart of public life.

Thinking about social infrastructure in this way opens up opportunities to rebalance town centre commercial activities with community purpose, creation of social value, and new opportunities for civic participation. At a local level, this means developing a deeper understanding of existing networks and support, as well as the needs and desires specific to an area. This will allow us to plan for and protect places that bring people together and respond to local need.

### **Building the capacity of civil society**

In the last decade, against the backdrop of austerity and high pressures of social need, new models of social infrastructure have emerged. Interest in community-centred approaches to owning and managing social infrastructure has also increased. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted even more people to become actively involved in their communities. New networks of mutual aid have been established and businesses and communities have come together to support one another, demonstrating that innovative solutions to adversity are possible when people are given the opportunity to contribute.



While informal infrastructure is less dependent on public subsidy, it often depends on fragile relationships and the work of individuals. More support is needed to build the capacity of civil society, for example by developing viable business models, setting up fair governance structures, managing conflict, and encouraging power to be shared inclusively across diverse groups.

### **Embedding social value in development and renewal**

London's density and approach to development is changing, and the full impacts of how this affects social spaces and networks, and community resilience, are yet to be understood. Communities frequently prioritise creating, restoring or maintaining social infrastructure in their responses to local development. Successful social infrastructure depends on complex networks of relationships, which take time and care to build up and can be difficult to restore once lost.

More can be done to acknowledge, protect and embed social infrastructure in regeneration and redevelopment schemes in creative new ways that add social value to an investment. Opportunities are often missed to leverage the best of what is already in place and to work with existing social networks to better knit new communities into the existing social fabric of a place. Respecting local assets and providing new social infrastructure that addresses gaps can ensure that existing communities benefit from development and welcome investment opportunities.

### **Securing design quality**

Good design is critical to making the most of our social infrastructure and supporting the three pillars of social integration: building relationships, enabling participation, and tackling inequalities. It affects peoples' sense of belonging, enables different uses to function and co-exist, secures the longevity of a space, and fosters stronger relationships between people. It can also offer enjoyment and relief from day-to-day challenges.

There is a need to understand the physical, social, and financial ease of access to social infrastructure, ensuring that it is available for the widest range of people in the local community. The ambition





for inclusivity, however, can unintentionally result in characterless spaces that do not appeal to any particular group if not translated carefully into the design process. It is important that those delivering social infrastructure fully understand and communicate users' needs, so that social spaces can be both intentional and equitable.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This Good Growth by Design inquiry is one of a series of interrelated research inquiries commissioned by the Mayor of London that investigate key issues of urban design, to ensure we create a city for all Londoners. This report focuses on what can be done to make social infrastructure more effective in supporting social integration.

### Methodology

The evidence base was collected using a mix of research methods: a scoping stage including a literature review and discussions with stakeholders; detailed studies of three London neighbourhoods: Catford<sup>2</sup>, Homerton<sup>3</sup> and Surbiton<sup>4</sup>; case studies of social infrastructure models, and a survey of London boroughs and planning authorities.

In mid-2020, a follow up round of interviews took place with agencies involved in the case studies and in the three neighbourhoods to explore the impact of COVID-19 on local social infrastructure and to find out how social supports had adapted and flexed in response to the crisis.

The three areas that were chosen to look at in detail, Catford, Homerton and Surbiton, give different snapshots of London. Catford emerged as an area with strong social networks and well-established social infrastructure, with regeneration plans at an early stage. The Gascoyne Estate in Homerton is a relatively stable community, in a wider area that has been through substantial demographic change. Surbiton is a stable, affluent area where community life is driven by civil society organisations.

2 Social Life and Hawkins\Brown (2020), Everyday life in Catford

3 Social Life and Hawkins\Brown (2020), Everyday life in Homerton

4 Social Life and Hawkins\Brown (2020), Everyday life in Surbiton

## USING THE REPORT

This report is aimed at everyone involved in planning, designing, operating and funding London's social infrastructure. It sets out the findings and learning from this inquiry, based on primary research in London's neighbourhoods and wider evidence. From this, a set of actions and tactics have been distilled.

### **For local authorities, planners and funders**

The report gives direction and signposts good practice to support the use of strategic planning powers, convening power within partnerships, and investment to make sure that London's social infrastructure boosts social integration. It presents evidence to help the public sector better understand the wider ecosystem of community support, and enable the protection of vital assets by directing funding and resources to maximise impact.

### **For designers, housing associations and developers**

The report illustrates what can practically be done through the collective efforts of built environment professionals to increase social integration through the provision of social infrastructure. The actions and tactics point to ways that design and investment can drive innovation and ensure new development is better integrated into the city.

### **For community groups, civil society organisations and others operating or managing social infrastructure**

The report provides inspiration and ideas about practical ways to increase social integration and to advocate for the value of London's local social infrastructure, including informal elements and the networks of people between them, to landowners, funders and planners.



# AREA SNAPSHOTS

# METHODS

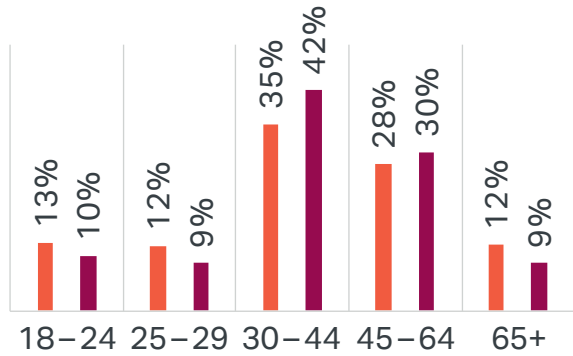
## Street interviews

Who we spoke to:

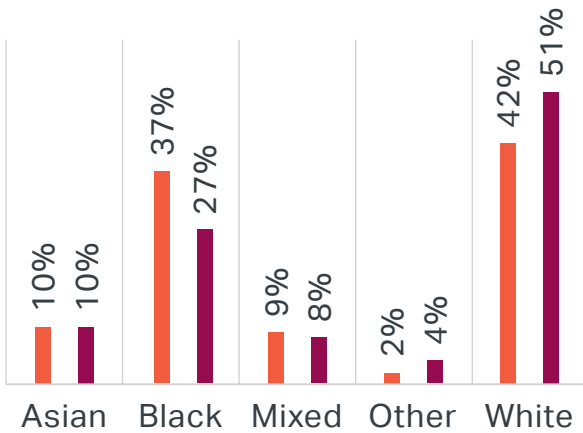
**77** local residents

- Area average (Census 2011)
- Street interview respondents

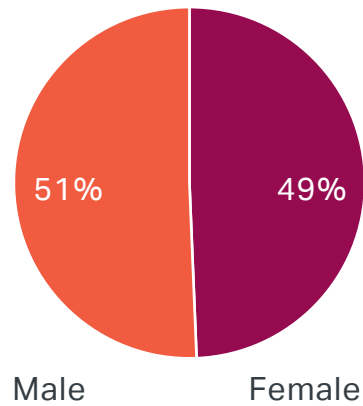
### Age



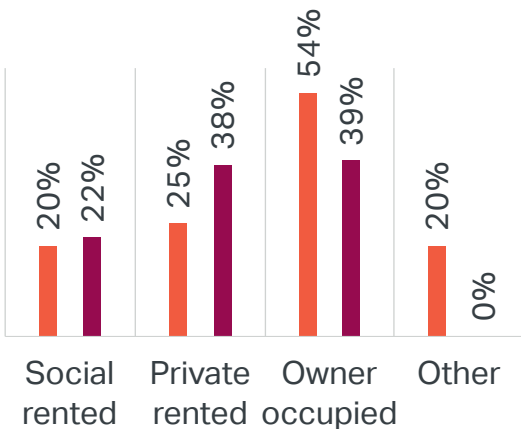
### Ethnicity



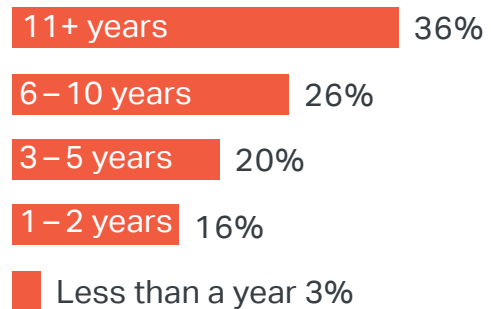
### Gender



### Tenure



### Length of time living in the area



## CATFORD

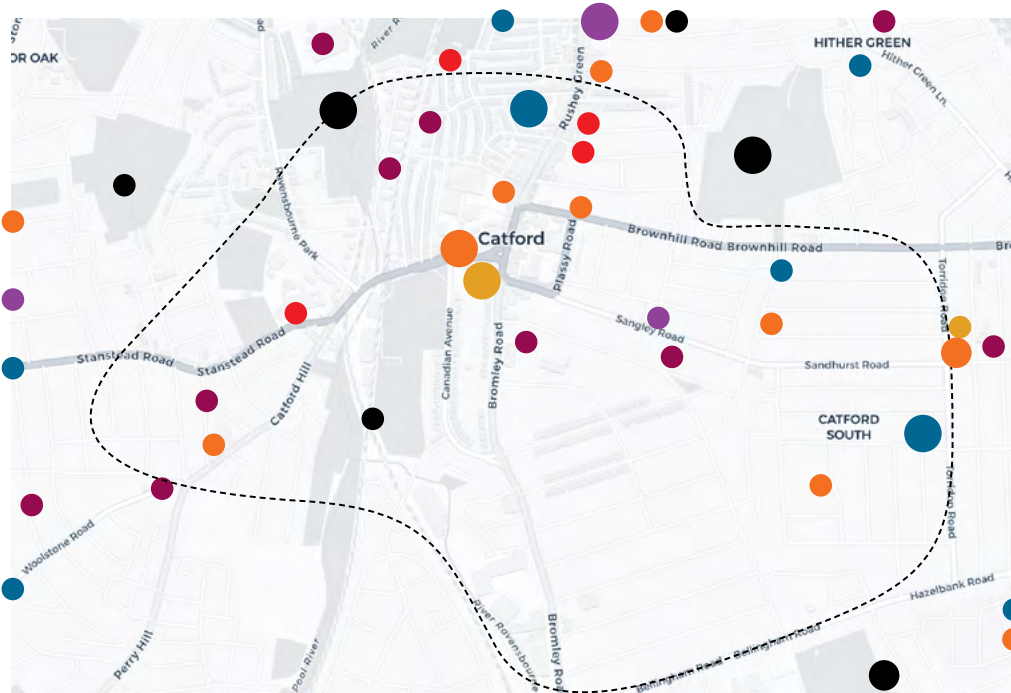
Catford is the civic centre of the London Borough of Lewisham. It is a culturally diverse area, with over half its population from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and one of the largest Black Caribbean populations in London. Residents describe distinct communities within Catford, few tensions are reported along ethnic or racial lines, and residents say that local diversity is one of the area's important attributes.

There are stark disparities in income among residents. While many residents in Catford are struggling on low incomes, rising housing costs highlight the attractiveness of the area for increasingly affluent residents. Many moving into the area are families with young children, often with higher incomes. Divisions of social class are slowly becoming more visible as local businesses change and respond to the shifting demographics.



There is a rich ecosystem of social infrastructure in and around Catford that supports the local community. In this ecosystem, there is a mix of both inclusive and exclusive spaces – more neutral spaces like Ladywell Fields and local GPs are open to all, while places like the Calabash Day Centre support particular groups, creating trusting relationships and networks of support.

**Formal and informal local spaces and facilities which street interview participants reported using.**



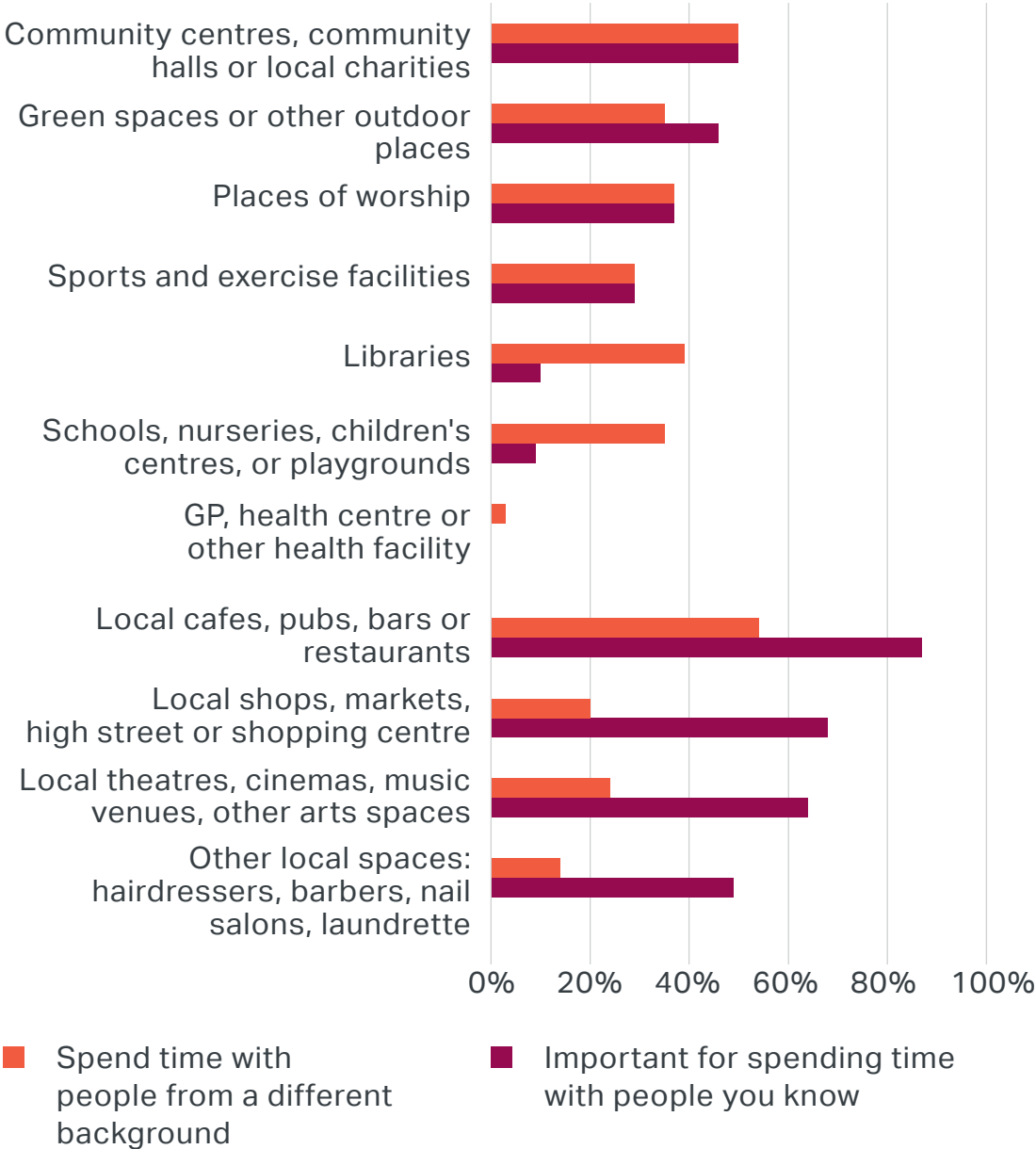
- Green and outdoor spaces
- Libraries
- Community and charity spaces
- Places of worship
- Children’s facilities
- Sports and exercise facilities
- Health facilities

In Catford, formal social infrastructure that offers free and accessible activities, such as community centres and libraries, is most successful in building relationships between people from different backgrounds. Informal spaces, like pubs and cafés in the town centre, are most important for supporting existing relationships.



The COVID-19 pandemic put unprecedented pressure on local social infrastructure and has exacerbated exclusion and inequality. Food solidarity has been the driving force of new networks and the numbers of volunteers have increased, engaging people from a variety of backgrounds.

**The importance of local places for relationships**



# METHODS

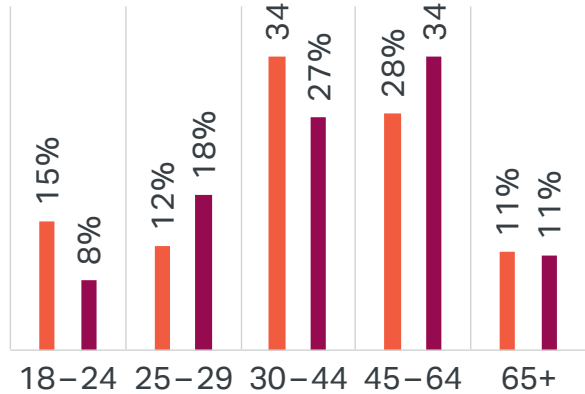
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Who we spoke to:

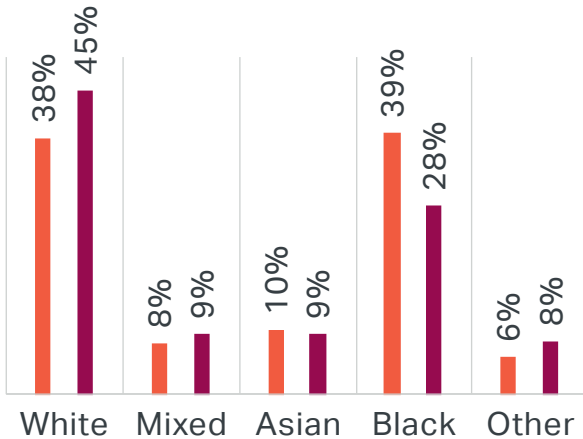
**76** local residents

- Area average (Census 2011)
- Street interview respondents

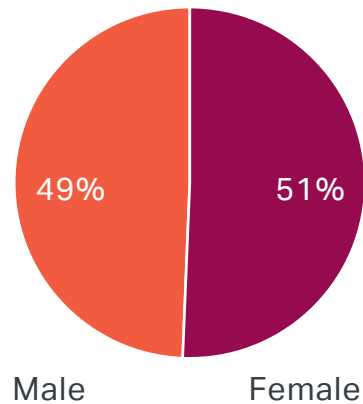
### Age



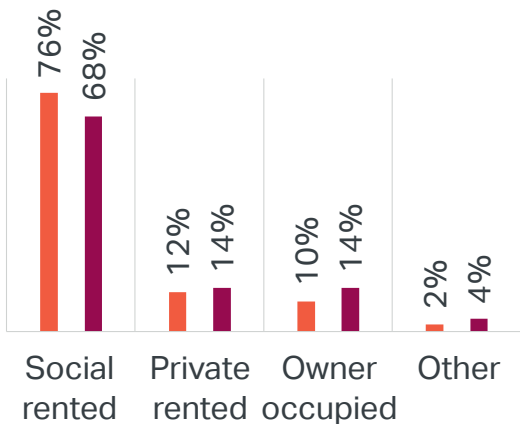
### Ethnicity



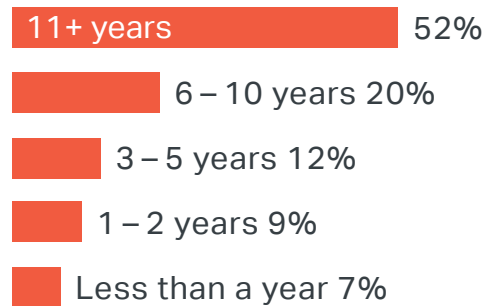
### Gender



### Tenure



### Length of time living in the area



## **GASCOYNE ESTATE, HOMERTON**

The Gascoyne Estates lie within Hackney Wick ward in an area referred to by some residents as south Hackney, and by others as Homerton or Hackney Wick. Residents benefit from good access to green spaces, including Victoria Park and Well Street Common.

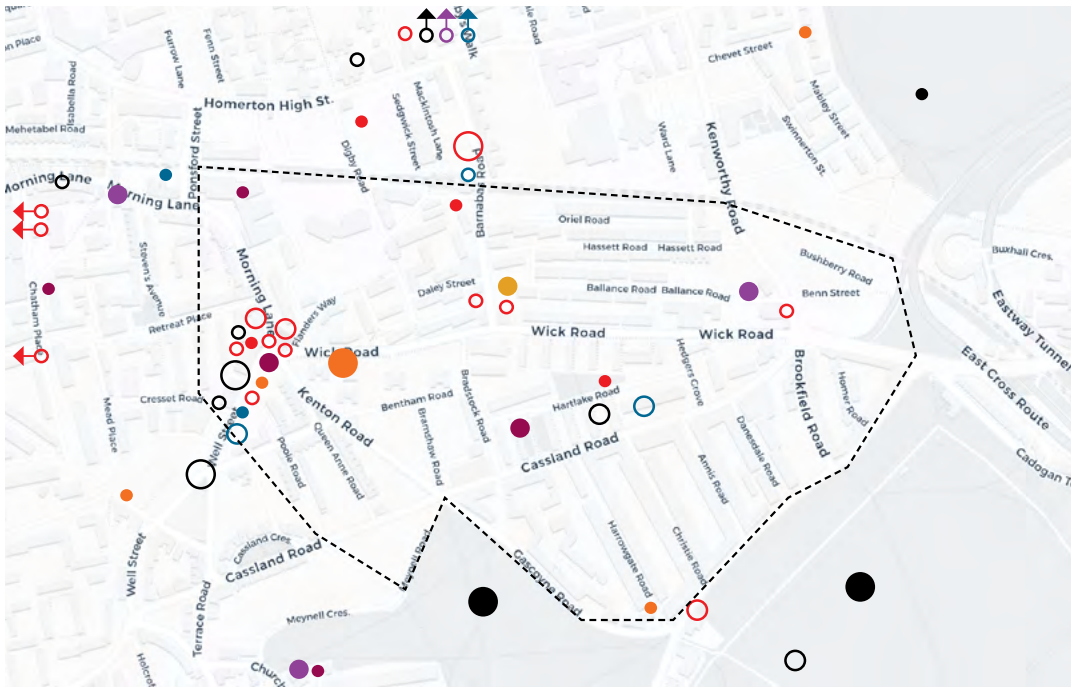
Nearby Well Street and Homerton High Street have a range of shops, cafés and other amenities, while Mare Street with its library, cinema and the Hackney Empire theatre is slightly further away. Both estates have their own recently redeveloped or renovated community halls, Wentworth Children's Centre is located at the base of one of Gascoyne 2's blocks, and its nursery is adjacent to Gascoyne 1.

Referrals and signposting between services and facilities work best where there are strong formal and informal links within the local social infrastructure ecosystem. The physical spaces, such as the two Gascoyne community halls or the Morningside, Kingsmeade and



Gascoyne youth centres, are important centres within wider local networks or ecosystems of support.

**Formal and informal spaces where people interviewed reported spending time with people from a different background to themselves – highlighting the important role of parks and local businesses**



**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**

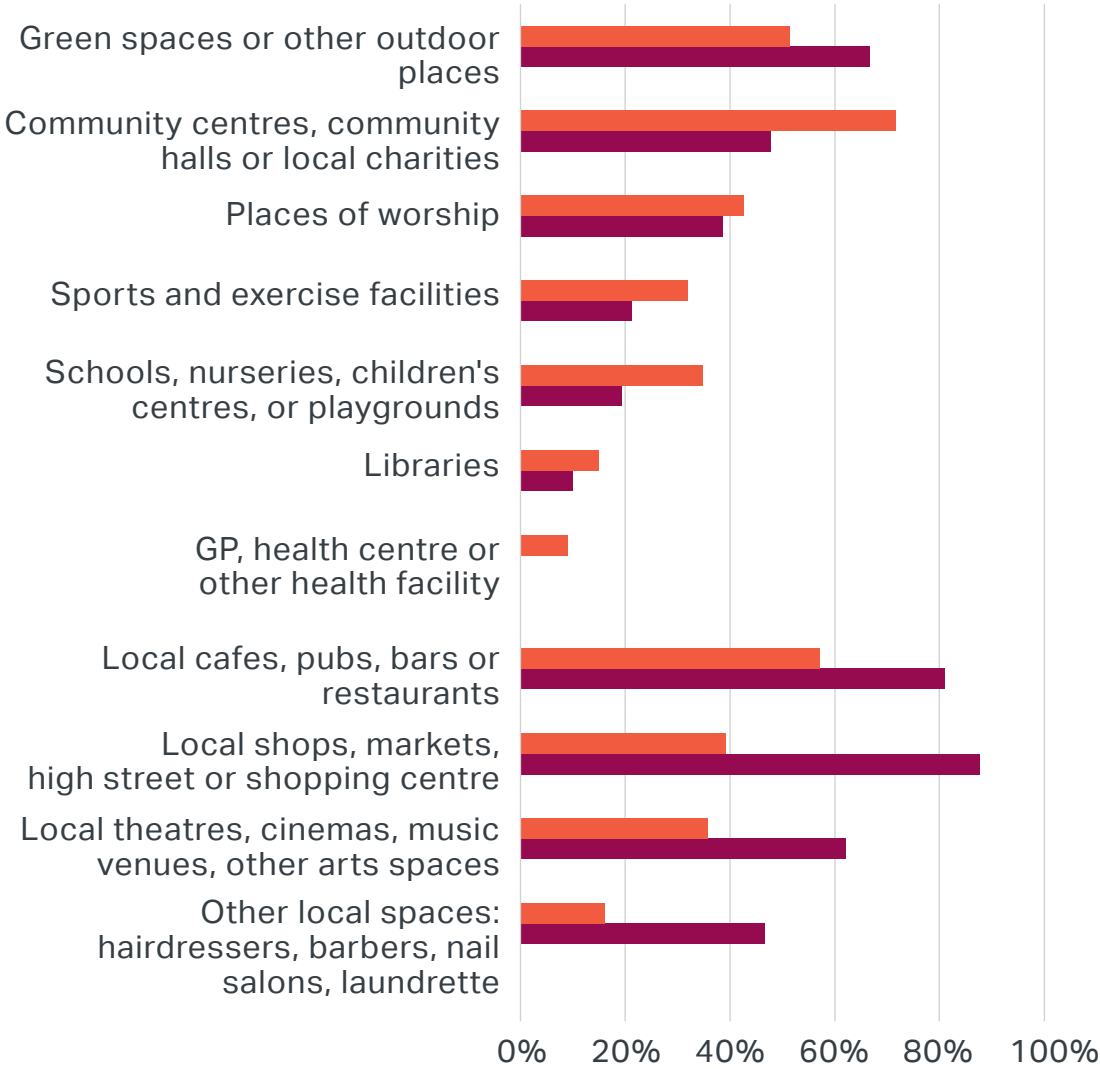
- Bars, restaurants and cafés
- Shops, markets, high-street uses
- Art and cultural venues
- Other

Community spaces rely on residents' energy, effort and networks to succeed. In practice there can be tensions between providing the range of supports and activities that meet the needs of the whole

community, income generation, and keeping residents fully involved over time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the strength of these relationships in Homerton, cementing existing relationships and galvanising new ones.

**The importance of local places for relationships**



■ Spend time with people from a different background
 ■ Important for spending time with people you know

# METHODS

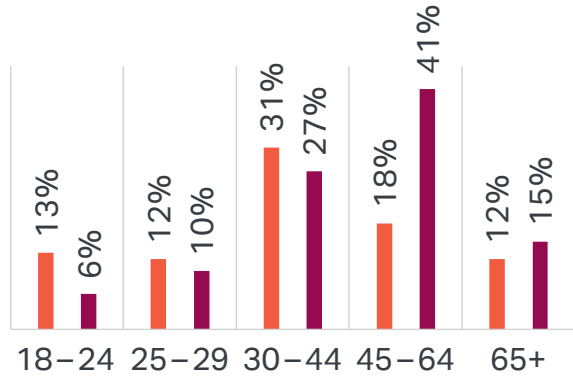
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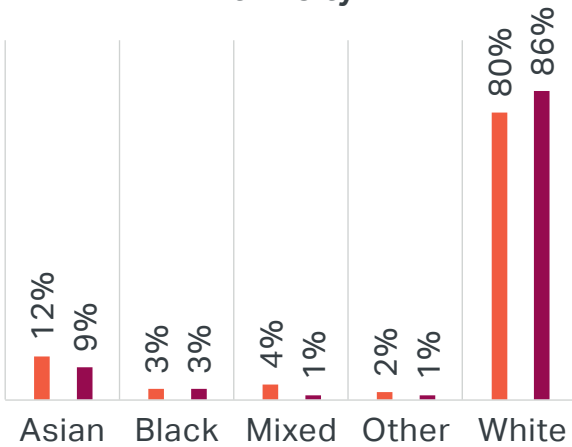
**79** local residents

- Area average (Census 2011)
- Street interview respondents

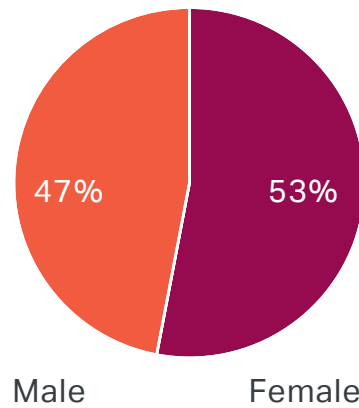
### Age



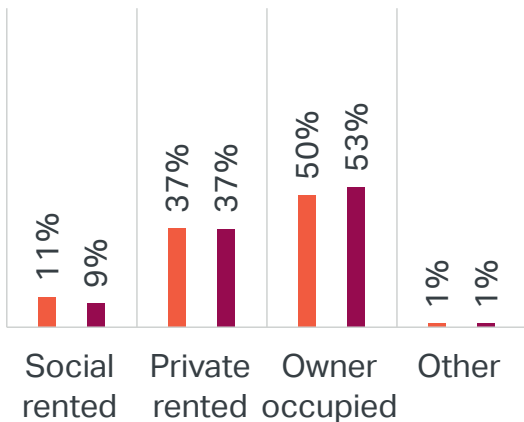
### Ethnicity



### Gender



### Tenure



### Length of time living in the area



## SURBITON

Surbiton is a leafy, riverside suburb in south-west London, in the Royal Borough of Kingston. 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.

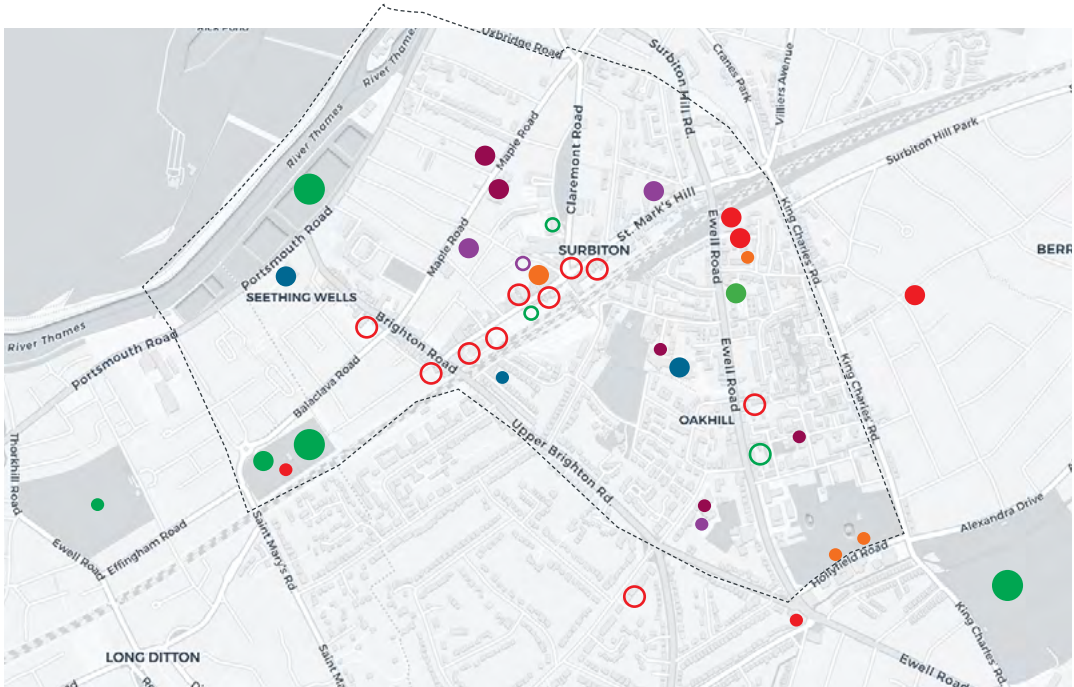
Informal spaces like pubs, cafés and restaurants tend to support people's relationships within their social circles, while formal infrastructure plays a stronger role supporting relationships between people from different backgrounds. Pubs and cafés are often important in providing information and signposting to activities and to support.

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.

### Formal and informal spaces where people interviewed reported spending time with people from a different background to themselves



#### 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

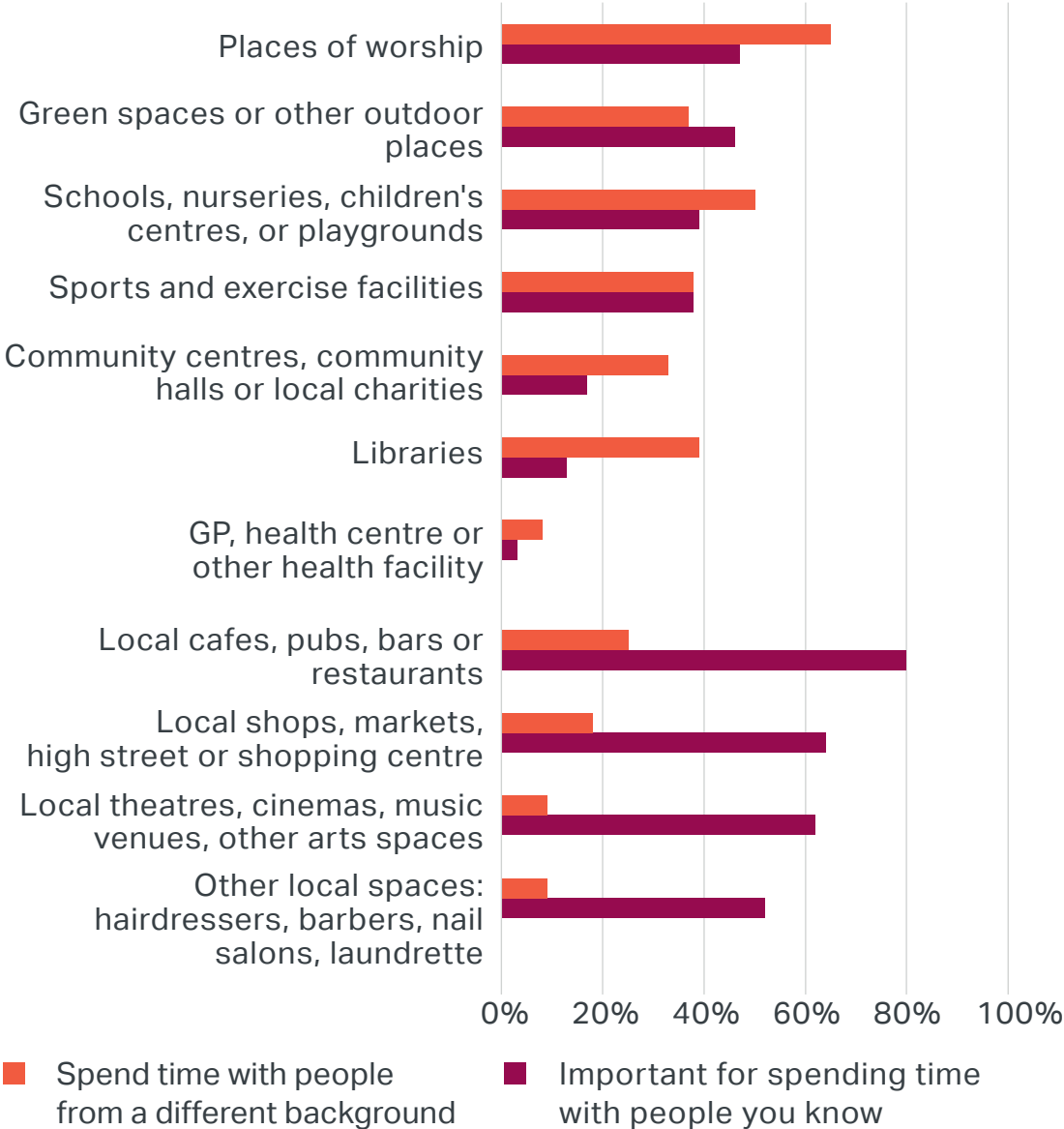
- Bars, restaurants and cafes
- Shops, markets, high-street uses
- Art and cultural venues
- Other

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 were activated and temporary hubs created; new street level initiatives emerged and organisations collaborated 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.

**The importance of local places for relationships**





# KEY FINDINGS



**Polite Notice**

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0.50 / 100g



**1. Informal social infrastructure plays a critical role in the lives of Londoners, alongside recognised formal social infrastructure**

Formal provision of services is widely recognised as playing an important role in the lives of Londoners. The informal spaces, networks and support that Londoners access are also critical to daily life; in contributing to community resilience, providing a secure and social base to participate in society and offering vital services and social spaces. Where there is a lack of formal social infrastructure, informal social infrastructure, including independent businesses and social enterprises, takes on an even more important role.

**2. Social infrastructure is an ecosystem, where different types of provision form a community of interconnected support**

Londoners rely on an ecosystem of local structures, networks and services, supported by different types of buildings, facilities and organisations. These local ecosystems are distinctive and specific to each neighbourhood. The role of individual spaces, the relationships between groups and agencies and the needs or expectations for social infrastructure vary across different parts of London.

**3. Formal social infrastructure brings people from different backgrounds together**

People are more likely to meet people from different backgrounds at formal social infrastructures such as health care centres, places of worship, sports facilities and playgrounds. There are opportunities to promote social integration through the design of new developments or when planning high street and town centre renewal. Informal social infrastructure is important in supporting and bringing together people from similar social backgrounds to form supportive relationships and build confidence.

**4. A range of local social infrastructure supports greater participation and civic engagement**

Access to different types of social infrastructure allows more people to become involved and active in their community. 30 percent of people interviewed volunteer or help run local social infrastructure, with people aged over 65 most likely to be involved in their local spaces, places or facilities.

**5. Inclusive social infrastructure helps to tackle inequalities by providing Londoners with support, help and advice**

Being able to access a welcoming and inclusive social infrastructure ecosystem provides Londoners with support, help and advice. This builds confidence and strengthens opportunities to participate in wider systems and structures, and to connect with others as equals.

**6. In rapidly changing neighbourhoods, change is most often noticed through the arrival of new informal social infrastructure, such as shops, cafés and pubs**

78 percent of Catford residents surveyed reported that their local social infrastructure was affected by recent changes to the neighbourhood. Many residents reported feeling alienated and excluded from new social infrastructure.

**7. There is a lack of consistency in how social infrastructure is understood, assessed, planned and delivered across local authorities**

Local authorities do not have access to consistent data and guidance to inform decision making. This makes it difficult to ensure that local social infrastructure meets the needs of the community and can cause some local provision to be overlooked.

## **8. Community ownership increases social integration and boosts social capital**

A sense of community ownership can boost social integration in a space or facility, and ensure long term sustainability through participation in governance, decision-making or consultative forums. However, when this sense of ownership is held by one group it can undermine inclusiveness. Community businesses and models such as community shares can help increase local ownership and promote inclusive governance.

## **9. Successfully programmed and well-managed social infrastructure builds and develops relationships**

How different uses and users come together to use the spaces of social infrastructure is as important as the spaces themselves. Programming, shared activities and interests and the actions of key individuals are vital to shifting relationships from co-presence to conversations and deeper relationships. For example, children and children's activities can both provide the common ground to bring adults from different backgrounds together.

## **10. Social infrastructure supports the resilience of London's communities and responds rapidly to change**

Social infrastructure has a crucial role to play in times of crisis, nurturing local relationships and providing support to communities. Social infrastructure has been at the heart of London's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown just how much social infrastructure supports the resilience of local communities, businesses and neighbourhoods.

These 10 key findings are based on the research findings from a range of different activities, including a review of existing literature, interviews with over 250 residents and stakeholders across three neighbourhoods and a survey of London boroughs. The primary research undertaken for this report will be available on the London Datastore.

# 1

## **Informal social infrastructure plays a critical role in the lives of Londoners, alongside recognised formal social infrastructure**

Formal provision of services is widely recognised as playing an important role in the lives of Londoners. The informal spaces, networks and support that Londoners access are also critical to daily life; in contributing to community resilience, providing a secure and social base to participate in society and offering vital services and social spaces. Where there is a lack of formal social infrastructure, informal social infrastructure, including independent businesses and social enterprises, takes on an even more important role.

- Education and health services; libraries and community centres; play, recreation and sports facilities; places of worship; green infrastructure and outdoor spaces – including community gardens, green spaces, public spaces, and shared areas in housing developments – are all reported to support different aspects of social integration.<sup>5</sup>

5 Slocock, C., (2018). Valuing social infrastructure. Community Links; Schifferes, J.,



- High Streets have also been identified as important sites for social integration, particularly relevant for London as a dense urban city made up of smaller centres<sup>6</sup>. Social infrastructure, alongside public spaces, is as a key driver of high street economies and an important aspect of public life.
- Informal spaces – like cafés or hairdressers – are often more important for supporting relationships between people who see themselves as similar, while more formal social infrastructure – such as schools or GP surgeries – tends to be more important in supporting mixing between people from different backgrounds.

(2017). Scale to change, building inclusive neighbourhoods through London's largest new housing developments. RSA; Carnegie UK Trust., (2017). Public libraries across the UK and Ireland; Furbey, R., et al., (2006). Faith as social capital. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Living Cities 2018; Harvey, A., (2017). Building homes, growing communities. New Local Government Network; Social Life (2016) Shared outdoor space: what works? London: L&Q, Social Life

6

GLA (2019), High Streets and Town Centres: Adaptive Strategies



- Across Catford, Homerton and Surbiton, residents valued both cafés and faith spaces for their role in supporting their friendships and relationships.

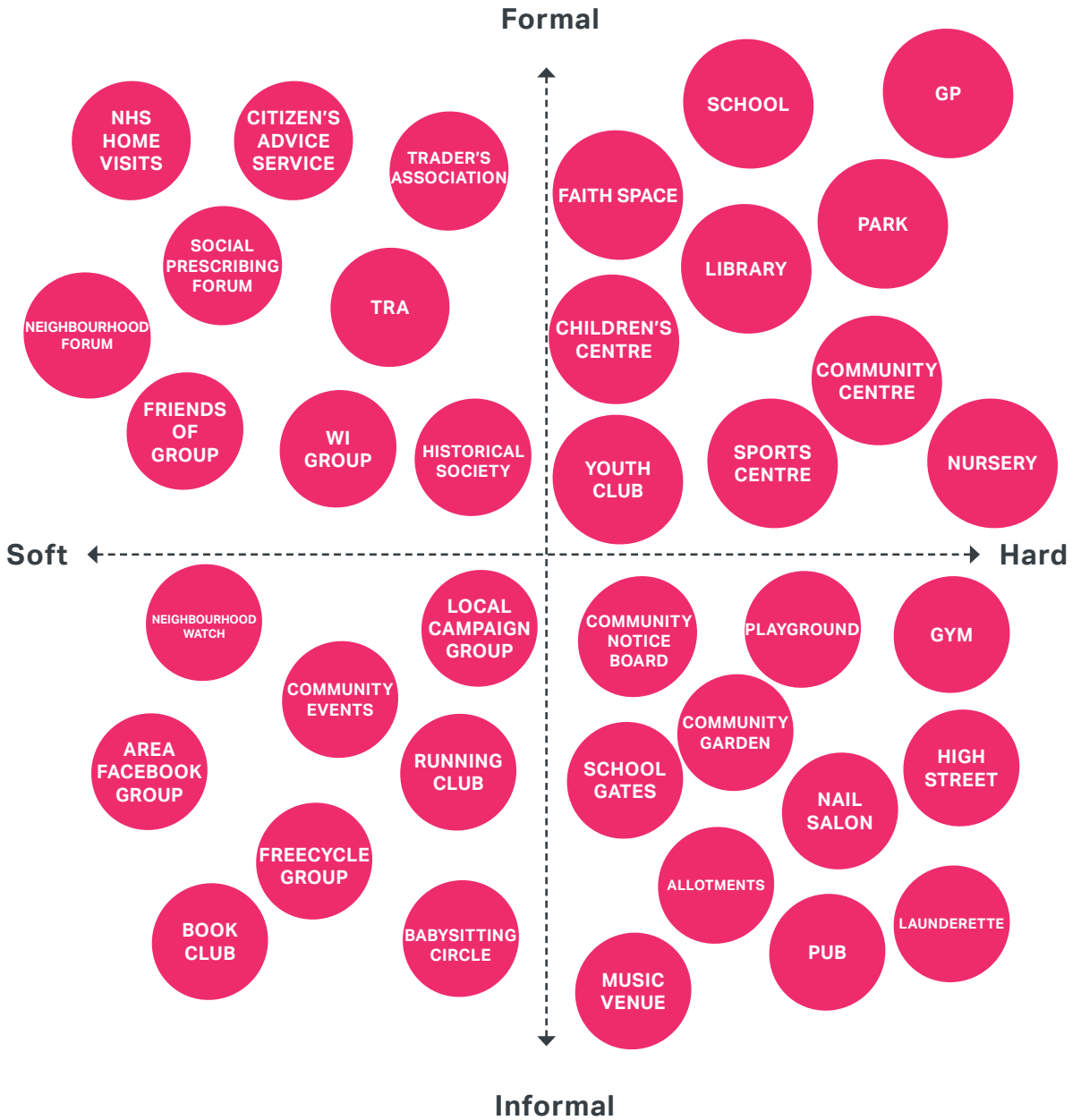
**“I like the café on Morning Lane... I know the people there, we have a natter, sit down and meet people.”**

(Homerton resident)

- Much of the social infrastructure used by people on low incomes is fragile, depending on scarce grants or insecure income. Informal infrastructure, such as markets or cafés used by particular groups, can be resilient to change in public sector funding, however it often depends on fragile relationships and the work of individuals.
- The research found that informal spaces often act as sources of support and advice, complementing more formal provision. This has been evident in responses to crises, with food banks offering financial advice in community centres and local businesses offering free meals for children during school holidays.
- Many independent businesses including shops and cafés provide material and social support, often to specific communities. Local businesses are often an important part of this less visible network of social support.
- Traders and businesses serving minority ethnic communities sometimes provide support far beyond their primary business purpose, for example helping to fill in forms, navigating bureaucracy or assisting with housing and immigration issues.<sup>7</sup>
- Social infrastructure covers a range of services and facilities that meet local needs and contribute towards a good quality of life. In practice, there is a dynamic and interdependent relationship between “formal” and “informal” provision, and tangible “hard” provision and “soft” supports.

7 Social Life (2014). Trading Places: Research at the Elephant and Castle shopping centre

# Understanding different types of social infrastructure



## 2

# **Social infrastructure is an ecosystem, where different types of provision form a community of interconnected support**

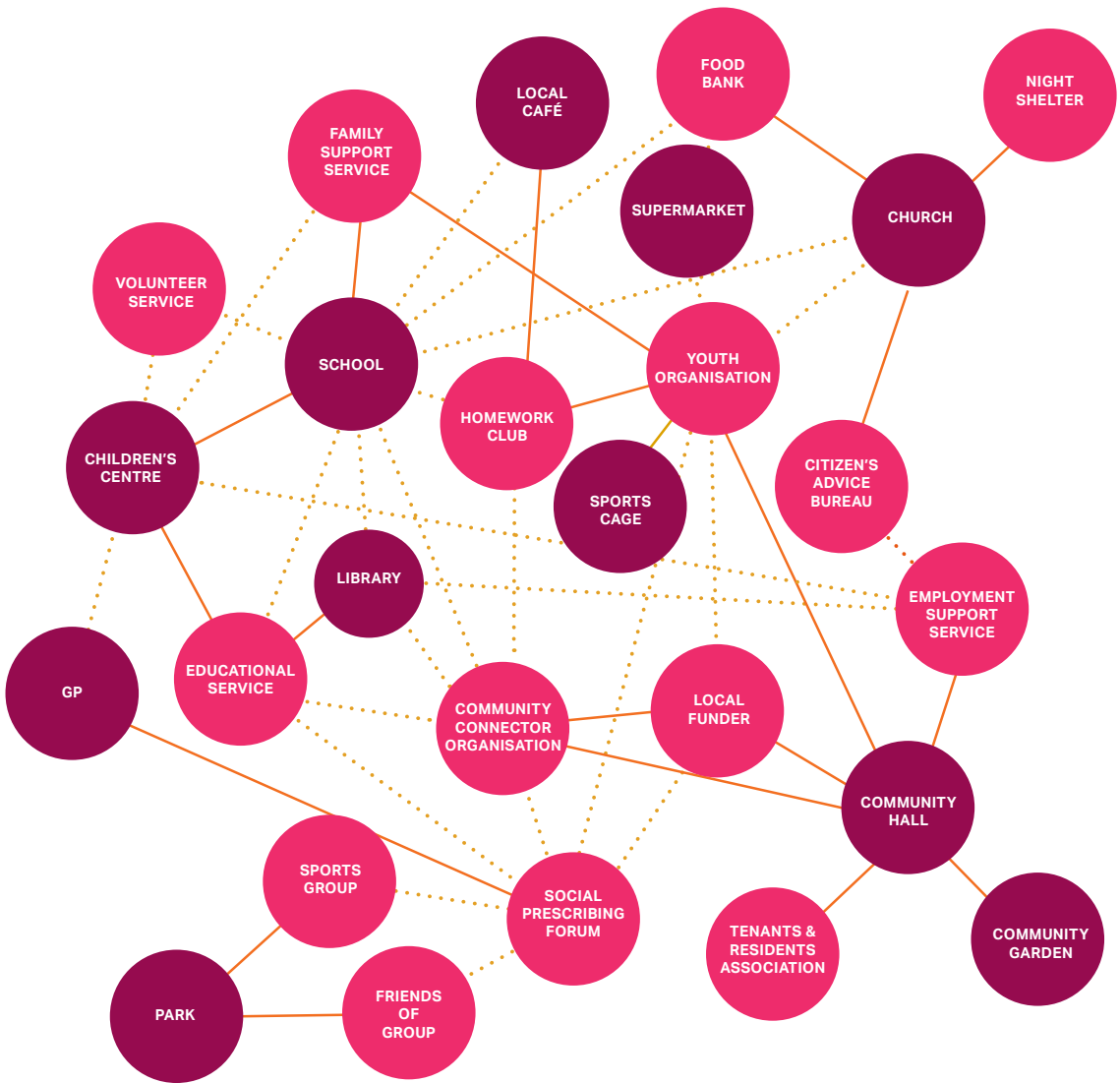
Londoners rely on an ecosystem of local structures, networks and services, supported by different types of buildings, facilities and organisations. These local ecosystems are distinctive and specific to each neighbourhood. The role of individual spaces, the relationships between groups and agencies and the needs or expectations for social infrastructure vary across different parts of London.

- Social infrastructure cannot be understood solely as places and services. The relational aspects – how individuals and groups use places and give them purpose – is critical.
- Social infrastructure is vital to social integration, helping Londoners to build meaningful and lasting relationships with each other. The success of social infrastructure in boosting social integration depends on a complex network of relationships, individuals, programmes, activities services and spaces.

- The ecosystem is a mix of “hard infrastructure” – buildings and other spaces – and “soft infrastructure” – the groups, networks, online forums and individuals which bring the physical facilities to life.
- The way that social integration plays out in London’s social infrastructure – for example in relationships between parents at the school gates, negotiations between young people and families about using parks and skateparks, and the co-existence of cafés and bars aimed at different social groups – is complex, nuanced and constantly shifting to adapt to changing needs, demands and external pressures.
- Social infrastructure is not evenly distributed across London. London boroughs have different approaches to supporting social infrastructure and social integration. Some areas, for historic reasons, are home to more services and support; and some communities have more resources, both financial and social, that have helped them self-organise and provide mutual aid.



## An illustration of a local social infrastructure ecosystem



- Hosts or runs service or activity
- ..... Referrals, sign-posting, support or information-sharing
- Hard social infrastructure (Local spaces or facilities)
- Soft social infrastructure (Groups, networks, forums or services)

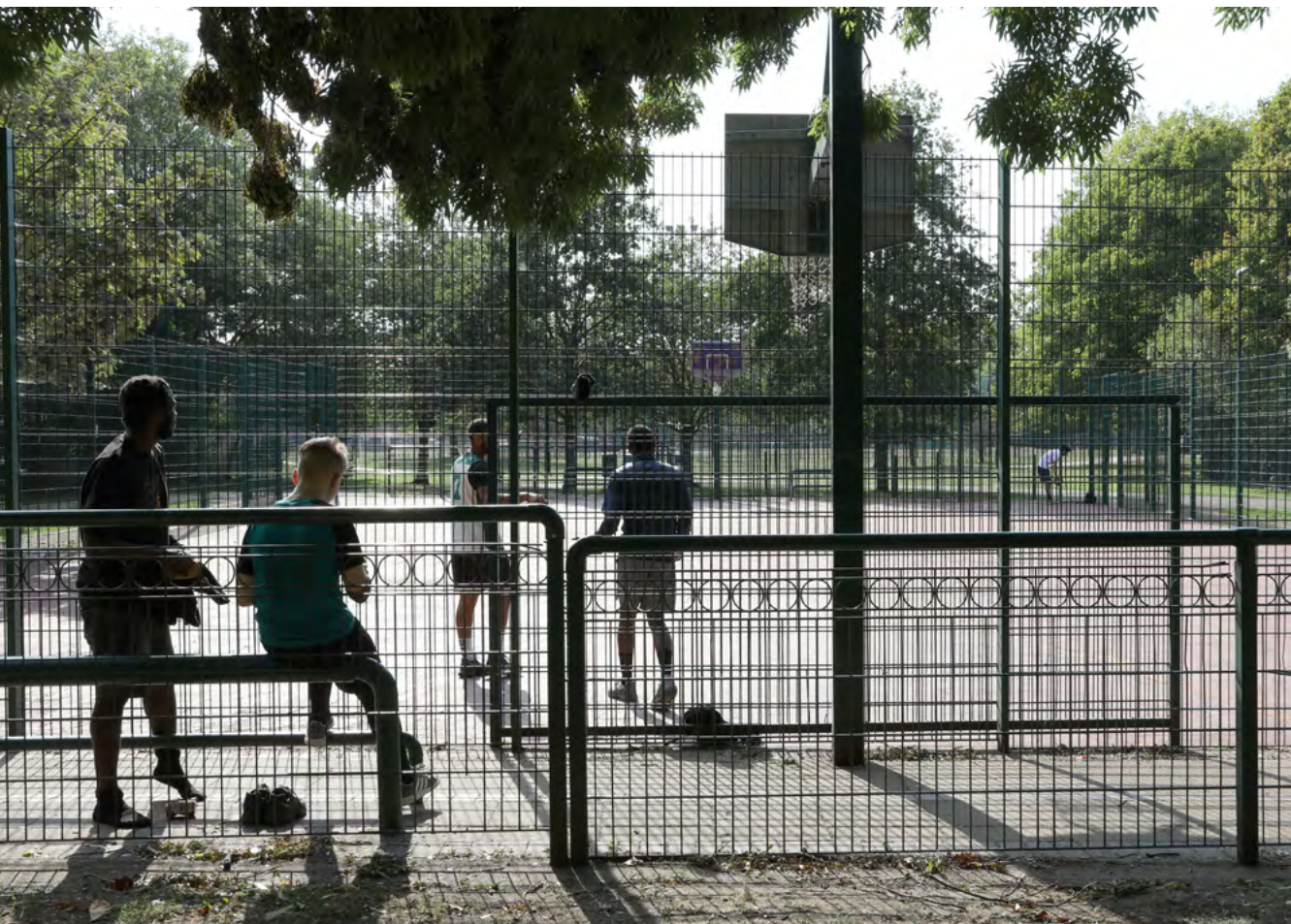
### 3

## Formal social infrastructure brings people from different backgrounds together

People are more likely to meet people from different backgrounds at formal social infrastructures such as health care centres, places of worship, sports facilities and playgrounds. There are opportunities to promote social integration through the design of new developments or when planning high street and town centre renewal. Informal social infrastructure is important in supporting and bringing together people from similar social backgrounds to form supportive relationships and build confidence.

- Bringing people together who live in an area is an important function of social infrastructure.
- The types of social infrastructure that were considered important for spending time with familiar people and with people from different backgrounds varied across the three studied neighbourhoods. Overall, residents are most likely to meet people from different backgrounds at formal social infrastructure.

- This reflects the characteristics of the areas: in Homerton, Victoria Park and local community centres were important; in Surbiton, places of worship, schools and sports facilities play a big role; and Catford has a rich variety of social infrastructure offering residents a range of meeting places and spaces.
- The research found high percentages of residents from all age groups visiting green spaces or other outdoor places and using GPs and health services. Use varies by age: more people aged 30–44 report that they have gone to sports and exercise facilities than other age groups, fewer 18–24-year-olds have been to GPs or health services. A mix of social infrastructure is required to facilitate intergenerational interaction. There is little difference in use of formal infrastructure between residents living in different tenures.
- The success of different types of places and spaces in supporting social mixing also relates to the characteristics of particular neighbourhoods and the qualities of the spaces





or facilities. For instance, some faith spaces draw highly diverse congregations, like the Catholic church St Dominic's in Homerton, which brings together members of the longstanding Irish community with people from more recently arrived African communities. Other faith spaces may be dominated by a single community.

- The degree of diversity in the local population also plays a part. Local social infrastructure will inevitably reflect local diversity and high street businesses are likely to be sites of social mixing. "Commonplace diversity"<sup>8</sup> has been identified as a characteristic of many London neighbourhoods.
- At a time when many Londoners are living in cramped and overcrowded housing conditions<sup>9</sup>, public spaces play an ever-more important role in maintaining relationships and supporting wellbeing.
- For the many Londoners who do not work because of caring responsibilities, ill-health, unemployment or retirement, as well as the growing numbers freelancing or working in the gig economy, civic spaces or other types of social infrastructure can be the place they go to for social contact during the day.
- Public space and social infrastructure are vital in giving Londoners opportunities to spend time with people who are different to them, enabling connections across difference.
- Spaces that bring together people with a common interest can also become a platform for building relationships across difference. Sports were considered an "equaliser" that helps alleviate a sense of difference and provide a focus for interaction. Faith can also provide a strong basis for shared interest and relationships.

8 Wessendorf, S., *Commonplace Diversity*

9 House of Commons Library (2020) *Overcrowded Housing (England) Briefing paper 1013*

# 4

## A range of local social infrastructure supports greater participation and civic engagement

Access to different types of social infrastructure allows more people to become involved and active in their community. 30 percent of people interviewed volunteer or help run local social infrastructure, with people aged over 65 most likely to be involved in their local spaces, places or facilities.

- Of those surveyed, a higher percentage of women and of Black residents reported that they volunteer or help run local social infrastructure.
- 76 percent of people surveyed participated in some form of local network, group or club, such as running clubs or residents' groups. Of those, 90 percent had got to know new people, with the majority getting to know people from different backgrounds.
- Social infrastructure can give opportunities for residents to actively contribute to their communities, from being part of

decision-making, to providing one off support or help to other people. Different types of amenity allow people to become involved and active in different ways.

- In Homerton people interviewed were more likely to be involved in a community group or residents association, in Surbiton the most popular type of group was organised around a hobby and in Catford people were involved equally in residents' associations and hobby-based groups.
- In practice, individuals will often be active at several levels and through several forums, or take part in different activities at different times. Roles that demand a greater commitment of time will also tend to engage fewer individuals.
- A small number of key community activists or volunteers often fill multiple roles and play a crucial role in animating local spaces. For instance, in Hackney, a local TRA chair (along with several other community members) has fought to bring the



community centre back under community management, created a community garden, and helped coordinate events and activities for a range of groups locally.

- Individuals with strong local networks are important in engaging others. More formal paid “community connectors” can also coordinate and motivate others to participate. However, the research also found examples where active residents act as gatekeepers, preventing other residents getting involved or using facilities.
- Volunteering can enable close relationships and bridge socio-economic divides. However, volunteering, particularly when it is formalised, is often taken up by those who are rich in time and resources. There is a consequent risk that volunteering can exacerbate inequalities by making people with less resources feel alienated.
- Participation, engagement and consultation processes are critical to designing good services and provision. These can all build belonging, neighbourliness and a sense of local ownership. Conflicts can arise between residents and agencies, or between different groups, when engagement is managed poorly.
- For many people, time and cost are the key barriers to use and participation. Affordability and perceptions of belonging can become closely entangled. When people feel and experience that new facilities, shops or cafés are unaffordable this can threaten their sense of belonging.

## 5

# Inclusive social infrastructure helps to tackle inequalities by providing Londoners with support, help and advice

Being able to access a welcoming and inclusive social infrastructure ecosystem provides Londoners with support, help and advice. This builds confidence and strengthens opportunities to participate in wider systems and structures, and to connect with others as equals.

- It is important that there is a mixture of inclusive spaces and places catering to a particular community in a local area. More inclusive spaces like libraries can ensure broad access and provide wider links to services, while more 'coded' spaces like cafés or barbers shops can generate the trusting relationships which underpin support networks.
- Essential services such as healthcare, education and childcare are vital to mitigating income and wealth disparities. Beyond the provision of core services, recent research has also shown in areas where there are no places to meet – such as community

centres, libraries or pubs – there are poorer social and economic outcomes, including higher rates of ill health and child poverty.<sup>10</sup>

- Formal social infrastructure such as faith spaces and GP surgeries can be an important source of help and advice. These physical spaces are vital for vulnerable groups to access information and services.
- Referrals and signposting between services and facilities work best where there are strong links within the local social infrastructure ecosystem. Local groups and services can find it difficult to identify which other supports and services exist in the local area.
- Demographic change and processes of regeneration can bring new local businesses to an area. These are often shops, bars and cafés that appeal to more affluent (and more newly



arrived) residents. This can generate perceptions of inequality, particularly among longer standing residents.

- Passers-by are quick to read the meaning of the look and feel of shops, cafés and social spaces and make assumptions about which group they are intended for, leading some to feel more welcome and others excluded.
- Targeting provision at particular groups can foster a sense of belonging and empower people to participate in wider systems and structures. It can enable groups to participate in decision making and governance and to challenge inequality. This is especially important for those who have less power as a result of being underserved and marginalised. There is a risk, however, that this can also entrench perceptions of difference.
- The different dimensions of social integration – relationships, participation and equality – often work together, with one aspect strengthening the other. An example of this is where a community centre gives advice to residents and also involves them in the management, thus increasing participation and enabling meaningful relationships to be built.
- However, these dimensions can also be in tension, with a focus on one dimension undermining another. For example, where the anonymity needed to provide sensitive services limits people's willingness to speak to each other.
- Overall, people interviewed were more likely to go to formal than informal social infrastructure for support and advice. Community centres were well used in Homerton, recognising the well-established facility on the Gascoyne Estate. Informal social infrastructure was less often used, more so in Homerton than Catford or Surbiton.
- More young people (under the age of 24) said that they would use informal social infrastructure if they needed help and advice than older adults.

- Across all studied neighbourhoods, GPs and faith spaces were particularly valued as sources of help and advice. These can provide the private and intimate settings where concerns can be shared.
- Across the three areas, libraries, often intended as neighbourhood information hubs, were also considered important, although less so than GPs and faith spaces. While these basic services are important in terms of equality, the research found that informal spaces also have potential as sources of support and advice.
- Research confirms that support services and provision targeted at different groups can support social integration, for example by building confidence, engaging with wider systems and structures, removing barriers and enabling communication across cultural barriers.<sup>11</sup>

11 Bagnall, A. M et al., Places, spaces, people and wellbeing



## 6

# In rapidly changing neighbourhoods, change is most often noticed through arrival of new informal social infrastructure, such as shops, cafés and pubs

78 percent of Catford residents surveyed reported that their local social infrastructure was affected by recent changes to the neighbourhood. Many residents reported feeling alienated and excluded from new social infrastructure.

- The turnover of local businesses which can come with the process of neighbourhood change, often described as 'gentrification', can impact residents' sense of belonging and contribute towards a sense of inequality.
- Residents in Homerton reported that the main way they perceive change in a neighbourhood is through the arrival of new shops, cafés, pubs and restaurants. These are often visibly intended for more affluent people moving into the area. Many residents reported feeling alienated and excluded from these.

**"I can't afford new cafés, it's a diverse area but segregated."**

(Homerton resident)

**"There are too few places to support people on lower incomes. Austerity is hurting people. Wasn't like this before. Can't afford to even buy food or pay bills."**

(Catford resident)

- When asked if local social infrastructure had been affected by recent changes, 78 percent of Catford residents interviewed reported that this was the case, compared to 65 percent in Homerton and 55 percent in Surbiton. Residents in Surbiton, a relatively affluent and stable area, were also less likely to feel that the area was missing facilities.
- The strength of local informal infrastructure – for example cafés, bars, pubs or restaurants – in straddling differences is often reported to be across ethnic rather than socio-economic lines,



although these are closely interrelated. Many independent businesses are strongly coded in their design and pricing to appeal to particular socio-economic groups.

- Cafés are often identified along class lines, with many new businesses believed to be unwelcoming to working class residents. The price of a cup of coffee was cited as a measure of who the establishment was for.

**“It’s a working men’s café with working class people so the posh people don’t come in here.”**

(Homerton resident)

**“Catford Mews feels like a place for my demographic. Seems to be a gathering place for my tribe: young and educated.”**

(Catford resident)

- Mediating the pace of change and ensuring a balance of businesses catering to different sections of the community can cushion the sense of loss that long-standing residents often report, helping to avoid feelings of marginalisation and maintaining access to products and services.
- This could be achieved in new developments by providing affordable retail and leisure spaces, or a mix of facilities. In rapidly changing neighbourhoods, inclusive social infrastructure can counterbalance commercial change, providing a sense of stability.
- Focusing on equalities highlights the importance of a healthy and well-connected local social infrastructure ecosystem – one that can connect individuals and families with the services they need and want, and bolster the everyday acts of support which many Londoners rely on.

# 7

## **There is a lack of consistency in how social infrastructure is understood, assessed, planned and delivered across local authorities**

Local authorities do not have access to consistent data and guidance to inform decision making. This makes it difficult to ensure that local social infrastructure meets the needs of the community and can cause some local provision to be overlooked.

- There is little consensus, and sometimes limited understanding, of the ways that social infrastructure benefits communities through facilitating different aspects of social integration. Local authorities, designers and policymakers have different understandings of social integration, and often focus solely on social relationships.
- There are diverse approaches across local authorities to addressing social infrastructure in local policy, and differences in the type and amount of evidence gathered. While strategic policy in the London Plan provides overarching guidance, boroughs use different tools and methodologies to understand the local

context and inform decision making on social infrastructure to reflect local circumstances.

- 25 percent of local authorities surveyed responded that they do not have any overarching policy on social infrastructure, although aspects of this may be addressed under different policies.
- In some cases, engagement with local communities, providers and operators can be superficial or non-existent when plans are being developed. It is important that the design and delivery of social infrastructure is informed by a solid evidence base to genuinely meet local needs.
- A range of design approaches are supported by policy and practice, however the spatial and social implications of these are not always considered in detail, or even well understood.



- When considering social infrastructure within planning policy, even in places where there may be a well-developed evidence base, planners typically focus on formal and hard examples.
- Of the six local plans reviewed (at different stages of implementation including Early Engagement, Consultation and Adopted), only two explicitly addressed informal typologies of social infrastructure such as pubs and Idea Stores, and only one mentioned voluntary organisations and community groups.
- These more intangible and underrepresented typologies of social infrastructure are part of the wider ecosystem of local provision. If they are not recognised through planning policy their value within the local community risks being overlooked.
- Policy S1 of the London Plan<sup>12</sup> requires boroughs, in their development plans, to carry out a needs assessment of social infrastructure to meet the needs of London's diverse communities. However, less than 30 percent of the boroughs surveyed had carried out a needs assessment in the last three years.
- Some boroughs assessed faith spaces, libraries and community facilities, however informal infrastructure and soft social infrastructure are underrepresented within the evidence-gathering processes for planning – informal and soft social infrastructure were recognised in only half of the local authority evidence bases that were reviewed. This could lead to an incomplete understanding of the local offer and gaps in provision, despite boroughs' rigorous processes for developing Local Plans, Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDP) and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA).
- The local authority surveys highlighted inconsistency in the frequency and rigour of evidence collections across boroughs. Only 25 percent of respondents had carried out an audit of social infrastructure in the last three years. This further exacerbates

12 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan>

gaps in understanding about what social infrastructure exists in an area, its value to the community, and what may be needed in the future. Boroughs are likely to need greater support and guidance to carry out needs assessments to ensure policies meet the needs of local communities.

- Viewing social infrastructure as relational is a new concept to local authorities and planning policy teams, and there is a lack of appropriate tools and measures to support them to understand local social infrastructure ecosystems and their value. This creates challenges when planning for the future needs, as there is limited forecasting data available to support decision making.

# 8

## Community ownership increases social integration and boosts social capital

A sense of community ownership can boost social integration in a space or facility, and ensure long term sustainability through participation in governance, decision-making or consultative forums. However, when this sense of ownership is held by one group it can undermine inclusiveness. Community businesses and models such as community shares can help increase local ownership and promote inclusive governance.

- Support for community-led approaches to owning and managing social infrastructure has increased in recent years. Evidence shows that enabling residents to formally get involved in the design, development, governance, management and ownership of civic spaces can increase social capital and wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

13 RSA, (2015). Community Capital: The Value of Connected Communities



- The community and voluntary sector has often advocated for participation and involvement in management and design as ways of making social infrastructure more resilient to changes in the external funding environment.

**“A few years ago there were budget cuts to many community centres and children’s centres. Many closed down, others were taken over by locals and are now volunteer run. There’s a strong social conscience in the area which has helped some survive. Others have become privatised which makes them unaffordable to many locals.”**  
(Catford resident)

- Community involvement in governance is common in both the community sector and statutory services. Trustees of local groups and school governors, for example, have significant responsibilities. Inequalities in participation within these formal forums was reported by people interviewed.



- The skills and time required means participation can skew towards older or retired professionals, or those who are more comfortable dealing with formal processes. The result of these barriers is that opportunities are dominated by people with particular types of social networks, social capital and personal resources. This risks alienating other groups and diminishing the relevance of the services or activities.
- A sense of community ownership is important to ensure that places and spaces are well-used by local residents and that people feel that they can participate. However, community-run spaces can be disproportionately used by particular groups who dominate programming, activities and access. This tension between inclusivity and community empowerment needs to be carefully navigated, with guidance on governance and support from local authorities.
- Community participation in governance, decision-making or consultative forums can be a powerful way of increasing active citizenship, giving people control over facilities and services, and boosting social integration.
- However, it can be frustrated by inflexible institutional constraints, unclear parameters for decision making, and limits to delegated decision-making power. At worst, forums can degenerate into conflict, destroying good will and putting off participants. This can entrench or create divisions within communities, challenging social integration.
- Building more inclusive governance needs careful support and capacity-building. Some social infrastructure spaces have less formal governance mechanisms, such as a community steering group, which can be more accessible, but could also give people less power and control.
- Community Asset Transfers involve the transfer of ownership or management of a space on a permanent or temporary basis, generally from a council to a local group. This enables residents to take control of local spaces and tailor them to their needs,

giving communities a sense of agency and ownership that can spill over into other areas of their lives.

- Community Asset Transfers provide a model to safeguard a service or amenity that might otherwise be lost. Research shows that community centres are the most commonly transferred asset, followed by green spaces, sports and recreation facilities, and libraries.<sup>14</sup>
- In London, high land values and pressures to build affordable housing present barriers to asset transfer.<sup>15</sup> Asset transfers also risk reinforcing inequalities – communities with more resources are more able to take on spaces, and those with fewer resources may see closure.
- Local groups can struggle to manage and sustainably support assets in the longer term, however work on new models of community shares and crowdfunding is exploring approaches that can successfully deliver collective ownership alongside community wealth building.<sup>16</sup>

14 Power to Change (2016). A common interest: The role of asset transfer in developing the community business market.

15 Ibid.

16 Nesta (2019) Taking Ownership: Community empowerment through crowdfunding investment

# 9

## Successfully programmed and well-managed social infrastructure builds and develops relationships

How different uses and users come together to use the spaces of social infrastructure is as important as the spaces themselves. Programming, shared activities and interests and the actions of key individuals are vital to shifting relationships from co-presence to conversations and deeper relationships. For example, children and children's activities can both provide the common ground to bring adults from different backgrounds together.

- When thinking about how to plan social infrastructure, the way different uses and users come together should be just as important as the spaces themselves. The people and organisations that are the actors providing these connections should be valued alongside the buildings.
- Different types of social infrastructure provide opportunities for varied levels of interaction. Londoners' interactions range from 'co-presence' or surface interactions, where people spend time in the same place without deeply interacting such as two parents

in a school playground, to deeper conversations, through to meaningful relationships established over time.

- Public events are important for social mixing as they bring people from different backgrounds together to share a space and activities, however events alone are unlikely to enable lasting friendships and relationships.
- It is more difficult to support the establishment of relationships between people from different backgrounds through social infrastructure, without purposeful intervention, than relationships between people who see themselves as similar.
- Social class can be more of a barrier to relationships and use of space across groups than other types of difference. This reflects the findings of the Survey of Londoners that while 30 percent of Londoners surveyed reported “positive, frequent contact with people” from a different ethnicity to themselves, only five percent reported similar contact with people from a different social class.



- These different levels of interaction all have a role to play in social integration. Co-presence can change attitudes towards other people and perceptions of difference.
- Places that are inclusive and accessible, with few barriers to entry, such as parks, high streets, or shopping centres, tend to reflect the social diversity of an area and are used by people from different backgrounds. Frequent users may acknowledge each other with a smile or start spontaneous conversations. These opportunities for face to face contact can be particularly important for people who are more vulnerable, including older people.<sup>17</sup>

**“You see people and nobody disturbs you. Everyone is friendly and there is no aggression. I just sit down for an hour.”**

(Pocket Park user on Well Street)

- However, where there is little meaningful interaction, tensions can arise between different groups. When a particular group is thought to be “taking over” a public space, others can feel excluded.<sup>18</sup> In extreme cases spaces can become divisive rather than inclusive.<sup>19</sup> Contact between groups can help mitigate this. Interaction, alongside co-presence, is important to social integration.

**“The crowd that comes [to Ladywell Fields Park] hasn’t changed too much – it’s always been very diverse, but there are younger, more affluent families arriving. They don’t really interact with anyone they don’t know much besides smiles.”**

(Catford resident)

17 We Made That & LSE Cities, High streets for all.

18 Wessendorf, S. (2013) Commonplace diversity and the “ethos of mixing”: perceptions of difference in a London neighbourhood, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 20:4, 407-422

19 Holland, C., Clark, A., Katz, J. & Peace, S., (2007). *Social Interactions in Urban Public Spaces*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. York: The Policy Press.

- It is often the softer aspects of social infrastructure – the programming and activities as well as groups and individuals – which underpin their success in boosting social integration, by supporting relationships across difference.

**“The community hall – that’s how we get to know anyone, meet new people and things can develop from there, you see people make connections between different activities too, they might come for bingo then go to art club, word of mouth is much better than posters for finding out about things”**

(Gascoyne TRA member)

- There can be a symbiotic relationship between social networks, and activities and events. Networks are reinforced and extended by people coming together to take part in events or activities. The place that convenes the activities becomes more effective in building relationships through connections into informal networks. This interdependence is key to understanding how social infrastructure can best support improved social integration.

# 10

## **Social infrastructure supports the resilience of London's communities and responds rapidly to change**

Social infrastructure has a crucial role to play in times of crisis, nurturing local relationships and providing support to communities. Social infrastructure has been at the heart of London's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown just how much social infrastructure supports the resilience of local communities, businesses and neighbourhoods.

- The experience of crises can make clearer the effectiveness of community-led solutions to local challenges. More organic grassroots initiatives often find it easier to flex and react quickly than larger institutions, whereas local authorities' ability to adapt can be undermined by formal structures and overstretched services.
- The cumulative impact of austerity and neglect has hindered the ability of both community spaces and council-run spaces to respond to local challenges. Many communities are already



financially precarious, and the public health crisis has threatened business models, use and income streams.

- However, crises can catalyse new ways of working, bringing dormant or underused resources back into use, and galvanising new ways of pooling resources.
- Hyper-local networks rapidly became important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Groups of residents organised at the scale of the street, larger spaces hosted smaller organisations such as food banks, individual residents became couriers and befrienders, and micro-public spaces like doorsteps emerged as places for one-to-one support.
- Food is at the heart of many emergency support networks. The pandemic has generated a renewed appreciation of the social value of high street and local independent businesses.
- Online communication can provide key information and ensure that connections with local residents are maintained if facilities



are closed. However, dependence on digital resources can leave certain groups severely disadvantaged, including people who are not used to operating online and people with a lack of equipment or access to Wi-Fi and data.

- Pre-existing relationships are crucial in responding effectively to crises, building on trust that is already in place. At moments of crisis, many residents become involved in their local communities in new ways and form relationships across difference.
- National and international crises amplify existing inequalities and create new forms of social, spatial and economic exclusion. Crises see inequalities surge and spaces of exclusion increase. There are significant differences between the way that people from different social classes and ethnicities have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Crisis can provide an opportunity to devolve power to local networks and to think about how to support communities to design, manage and sustain community infrastructure themselves over the longer term.





# **INGREDIENTS FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

This section discusses the key elements that can maximise the social integration potential of different types of social infrastructure. It also details the approaches that organisations have taken to support social integration in their work.



## Understand local ecosystems

At a neighbourhood level, social infrastructure should be understood as a dynamic and complex ecosystem. Individual buildings and services do not exist on their own but are connective nodes within a wider network of relationships and supports.

The ecosystem is a mix of “hard infrastructure” – buildings and other spaces – and “soft infrastructure” – the groups, networks, online forums and individuals that bring the physical facilities to life.

Local social infrastructure ecosystems vary, with individual spaces or groups taking on different roles and hosting a unique set of relationships. In Homerton, for example, a local youth organisation performs a broad role beyond its official remit, acting as a key connector within the local ecosystem. Alongside its youth activities, it provides community meals and family support services. It is also linked to a number of other local social infrastructure operators, including schools and faith spaces.

A healthy ecosystem will share similar characteristics in different neighbourhoods – a diversity of different types of infrastructure, services and activities, working as part of a close-knit web of connections. These are important in catering to the complex and fluctuating needs of London’s neighbourhoods and communities.

The social, informal and relational aspects of neighbourhood social infrastructure ecosystems are harder to plan for and design, and are often left out when new spaces are created or existing spaces redeveloped. Building a detailed understanding of a local social infrastructure ecosystem is an important first step in strengthening provision and support for communities.

## Work with soft infrastructure

A relational understanding of social infrastructure puts an emphasis on the people, groups and networks that spaces and places depend on. Strengthening relationships between local groups can bring together people from different backgrounds, increase the range of people who take part in activities and activism, and link individuals to other channels of support. This also can expose what is missing

in an area, stop groups duplicating what others are doing, and help to build the resources needed to address gaps.

Informal networks play a key role in animating spaces, responding to local needs, and advocating for improved services or facilities. However, groups and networks, especially for more marginalised or seldom-heard groups, can operate “under the radar” and may only be visible to those directly involved. Where connections are weak and local networks are fragmented, activities and investment can become inefficient, missing important needs and failing to recognise local strengths and assets.

Building a strong network of soft infrastructure relies on coordination and communications. Forums for information-sharing can be formal or informal, from WhatsApp or Facebook groups bringing together groups of residents, to networks of local providers gathering to discuss specific issues. Community connectors, employed to forge links and work across different spaces and needs, can help build relationships and strengthen local networks.

**Local insight:** The Wick Award is a Big Local area which includes Hackney Wick and parts of Homerton. The organisation identifies gaps and opportunities locally. It provides a forum to link a range of groups and build local capacity and connections, as well as small scale funding to support activities. It has helped drive the redevelopment of a local community centre, and provides the animating force for a range of activities locally.

Different kinds of actors will have different roles to play. Grassroots charities, with their community reach and local understanding, are important in delivering services, either directly or in partnership. In some areas, local authorities are not best positioned to deliver community-building activities, however they can use their convening power to bring groups together, encourage information-sharing and collaboration, and support capacity-building. In other areas, local authority officers become important sources of local information and support.



Informal local networks can reach sections of the community that may be harder for mainstream services to contact, however they may be poorly equipped to take on service delivery. At times, groups may perform unexpected functions within a local ecosystem and take on a different role than their official remit would suggest.

Recognising all these complexities and being alert to the potential of networks and groups in an area can strengthen the wider ecosystem of services, groups and activities, and enable agencies to leverage opportunities from planning and development.

### **Be attentive to programming**

Programming and activities underpin the way that social infrastructure supports the three dimensions of social integration, providing the basis for interaction, the opportunities to participate, and the support required to mitigate inequalities. Where there is weak programming, often due to a lack of revenue funding, spaces can become underused or dominated by a single group. For example, Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and sports “cages” on estates are an important resource for all young people, yet they can easily become spaces where older teenagers congregate, stopping younger teenagers and children from using them. Older teenagers can find that there are few spaces specifically designated for their use and are often criticised for using spaces like skateparks and MUGAs at the expense of younger teenagers.

**“There needs to be a want and a need to interact”**

(Homerton workshop participant)

Programming should represent the diversity within the local area and careful programming can provide points of engagement for different groups. Scheduling activities at the same time or following on from one another is one strategy for ensuring greater engagement and interaction. One-off events can bridge community divides, though they are more limited in their ability to build lasting relationships. The experience of Pembroke House in Southwark, developing the Walworth Living Room, shows how social infrastructure uses can be developed in collaboration with residents, by giving them the opportunity to shape the space and the activities that take place in it.

**“It’s the overlap between activities and their connections that we are most interested in”**

(Pembroke House)

Purpose-oriented activities, such as bingo or making food together, can create the openings needed to provoke conversation and interaction. Planning a mix of structured and free time can help people engage and go on to develop friendships and support networks. Consistency over time can be crucial to the success of relationship-building activities. This can be at odds with the short-term funding available to many community groups to deliver activities.

**“What doesn’t work are pop-up things, you’ve just got people aware and then it’s finished”**

(Wick Awards Manager)

To be effective, programming should flow from the interests of the community. For example, bingo has proved to be the most successful activity at the Gascoyne 2 Community Hall in Homerton. Going to this sort of regular event can build the confidence and relationships which encourages people to get involved in other activities that they may not have initially considered joining, such as cooking classes, and get to know other people.

### **Understand the role of individuals**

The social integration potential of many spaces depends on the efforts and initiative of key individuals. New relationships and encounters are often brokered by staff members and volunteers taking the time to make introductions or speak to users. Similarly, a sense of welcome often depends on the behaviour and attitudes of the people running a space.

**“Social integration is not about spaces. It is a peopled process.”** (Homerton workshop participant)

These skills and responsibilities can be incorporated into the roles and recruitment of staff. They can also be facilitated by the design of a space. For instance, placing a manager’s desk at reception

can help build relationships and understanding between staff and users; when services are behind a counter this can reduce familiarity between users and people delivering support.

Stability in staffing and consistency among volunteers also supports social integration. Long term staff members or volunteers who are skilled at developing relationships with a range of people are better able to build trusting relationships. Connections between groups often rely on the relationships between individuals and detailed local knowledge built over time.

Dedicated community activists and volunteers are vital to the good functioning and strength of social infrastructure ecosystems at a neighbourhood level. Their energy, time and dedication drive many of the activities and events which take place locally, their community networks help build connections and reach residents who may be less likely to participate, and through their activism they often effectively advocate for greater community ownership or for spaces to be improved, protected or developed.

**Local insight:** Gascoyne 2 TRA Chair. Sharon has lived in Homerton all her life. As well as chairing the estate's tenants and residents association, she hosts and helps cook a weekly community meal at the community hall, runs the over 50s bingo, and organises an annual holiday trip for over 50s, including coordinating a savings circle which allows people to put money aside for the trip. She is someone people turn to for advice and has brought many people to the centre to take part and help out in community activities.

**"Sharon has given her life to the community for 20 years. For free. She is important."**  
(TRA member)

### Value the informal

Many spaces without a formalised social purpose, such as local cafés, pubs, or shops, perform a range of social functions, from supporting community activities such as school fêtes, providing

material support to people in need, or acting as a focal point for relationships and social connections. Independent high street businesses can provide a central point of identity for local communities, as well as employment opportunities. They sometimes also provide advice for people to navigate legal and welfare systems, as well acting as a meeting point for different groups.

**Local insight:** The Lamb is a family-run pub in Surbiton, with a strong focus on supporting the local community by providing “a living room for the neighbourhood”. Like a traditional public house, the two pub managers live above the pub with their family and are active in engaging customers, getting to know their circumstances and needs, and signposting them to relevant opportunities in the area – working closely with local community organisation, the Community Brain and other community networks.

The social value of businesses can be very difficult to make visible and quantify. When they are under threat, they find it difficult to evidence impact, and there are few protections apart from the Assets of Community Value designation, which can have limited use in areas of high land value, such as London – although the wealth in some London communities gives residents more scope for crowdfunding and other collective financing than in other areas.<sup>20</sup>

Informality in the provision of social infrastructure is not only a quality of commercial spaces. For example, some faith spaces take on informal characteristics, occupying under-used and low rent commercial spaces on a temporary or short-term basis while residents of council estates have turned patches of land into community gardens without explicit permission from the landlord. Informality can also characterise the feel of spaces and the way services are delivered, helping people feel at ease. For example, a newly redeveloped hall in Homerton was felt to be clinical and lacked the intimacy and character of the previously more ramshackle space which was built and adorned by the community.

20 Power to Change. A common interest: The role of asset transfer in developing the community business market. November 2016.

## Understand barriers to use

Barriers to accessing spaces or services will differ between groups and individuals. For many, time constraints are the key obstacle to using or engaging with a space or activity. Formal social infrastructure such as libraries and community spaces are often open only during the day, limiting accessibility for people who work at conventional times. Formal participation opportunities, from volunteering to consultation forums, may also require too much time commitment, or clash with childcare responsibilities or shift working patterns.

Cost is a key barrier as well and where services are charged this is likely to exclude people who are struggling financially. Price and affordability are also closely entangled in perceptions of belonging – when people feel priced out, they often report concerns that the neighbourhood is no longer “for them”.

**“It's become more expensive, less community, there are more cafés but they're trendy hipster cafés”**

(Homerton resident)

When people consider going into a place – whether for a cup of tea, to get advice or to borrow a book – their perception of who that place is intended for is important in whether they go in, and how comfortable they feel once inside. This is associated with a range of signals and cues, such as who else is there and how it is decorated. People may fear rejection, prejudice or racism in places where they do not see people who look familiar, or where the look and feel of the place suggests that other cultures are more valued.

People who are newly arrived in an area may not yet feel comfortable in local places, or may lack knowledge of spaces and services available. Visibility can be critical to ensuring access and the design of signage is important. Making use of informal networks and influential individuals for communications, as well as local businesses, ESOL classes, or faith organisations, can help overcome these barriers.

Engaging with people when they come into a place can also be vital for reaching those who are most marginalised, or who may find a place unwelcoming, and for making sure that social infrastructure is well used and boosts social integration.

**Local insight:** Pembroke House has moved its emphasis over the last few years from direct service provision to a community organising model, working in partnership with other community organisations and agencies to support people living in their community outside of their building as well as through activities and events.

**“I would go to local pubs but don’t have the money to, also the library, but can’t afford bus fares.”**

(Catford resident)

A majority of those interviewed in Catford, Homerton and Surbiton could not identify particular facilities that they felt unable to use, however around 20 percent of respondents stated that they would like to start using facilities and groups like book clubs, libraries and children's centres.

Mobility and health are also barriers. This is not always linked to distance but also to public transport routes or the availability of parking – programming, especially for older people and others reliant on public transport, needs to carefully consider these issues.

### **Mix uses carefully**

Creating spaces with varied uses increases the number of roles they can play, needs they can meet, and range of users. This adds to their resilience and helps create a more vibrant atmosphere.

**“Social infrastructure should be a place where there is always something happening that draws people in.”**

(Homerton workshop participant)

The community hub model has grown in popularity in recent years, with many libraries and community centres transitioning towards

co-location models and multi-use spaces. New social infrastructure provision is often designed with a mix of commercial functions, such as workspace, alongside community uses.

**Local insight:** Catford Mews is a community space opened in 2019 by Really Local Group as a meanwhile use agreed with Lewisham Council. The multi-functional space includes a three-screen cinema, live music venue, a bar, café, stalls for local food vendors, and rooms for community hire. From the early planning stages, Really Local Group aimed to create an inclusive space that nurtures local talent and entrepreneurs, offers programming which reflects local interests, and becomes a catalyst for Catford's cultural regeneration.

**"The idea was to bring the heart back into the high street. We don't think the high street is dead. It's just that people are approaching it the wrong way. We think that if you engage with the community and understand what people want, and offer a space which is tailored and flexible to meet changing needs, then it can work."**

(stakeholder, Catford)

Co-location aims to build a network of support within a single space, providing greater ease of access and visibility of services to users. Co-location can bring benefits as part of a wider ecosystem, but it is not a solution for all problems and has risks. Co-location does not guarantee engagement. Some uses are less suitable for co-location – youth services, for instance, often work better in more separate spaces with fewer constraints. Tensions can arise when separate functions within a space are not respected.

The rationale behind co-location often includes financial efficiency, and a need to generate revenue through rent, space hire or commercial functions. These imperatives require a delicate balance with other functions. So, while the redevelopment of community centres or halls may result in improved spaces, the increased running costs may also mean that more income is needed. Some social enterprises are successfully finding ways to run community

centres with income generated from cafés, workspace, room hire, and a mixture of paid and free activities, keeping their social function at the core of their activities. Openly addressing these constraints at the outset of any redevelopment process can help mitigate future tensions.

### **Balance inclusivity and exclusivity**

The relationship between supports and services for more vulnerable or excluded groups, and services that bring people from different backgrounds together, is complex. Single group targeting can help build confidence and trust, provide a safe forum for people to interact, and help forge vital social support networks. For example, in Catford's Corbett Community Library, ESOL classes and a dementia support group are both successful at building connections within these specific groups, creating "bonding" social capital.<sup>21</sup>

Under some circumstances, however, targeted provision can be unpopular, and can entrench difference and reduce the accessibility of services. For instance, universal children's services may be a better way of supporting families than targeting only households eligible for particular welfare support, which can exclude many struggling families.

The wish to be inclusive can result in agencies providing bland venues and programming which can unintentionally appeal to fewer people. This can also be reflected in insipid designs, with little character or intimacy. It is important that agencies are aware of these potential pitfalls when they try to bring different groups together or provide equitable access.

21 Robert D. Puttnam (2010) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster







# **AREAS OF ACTION**

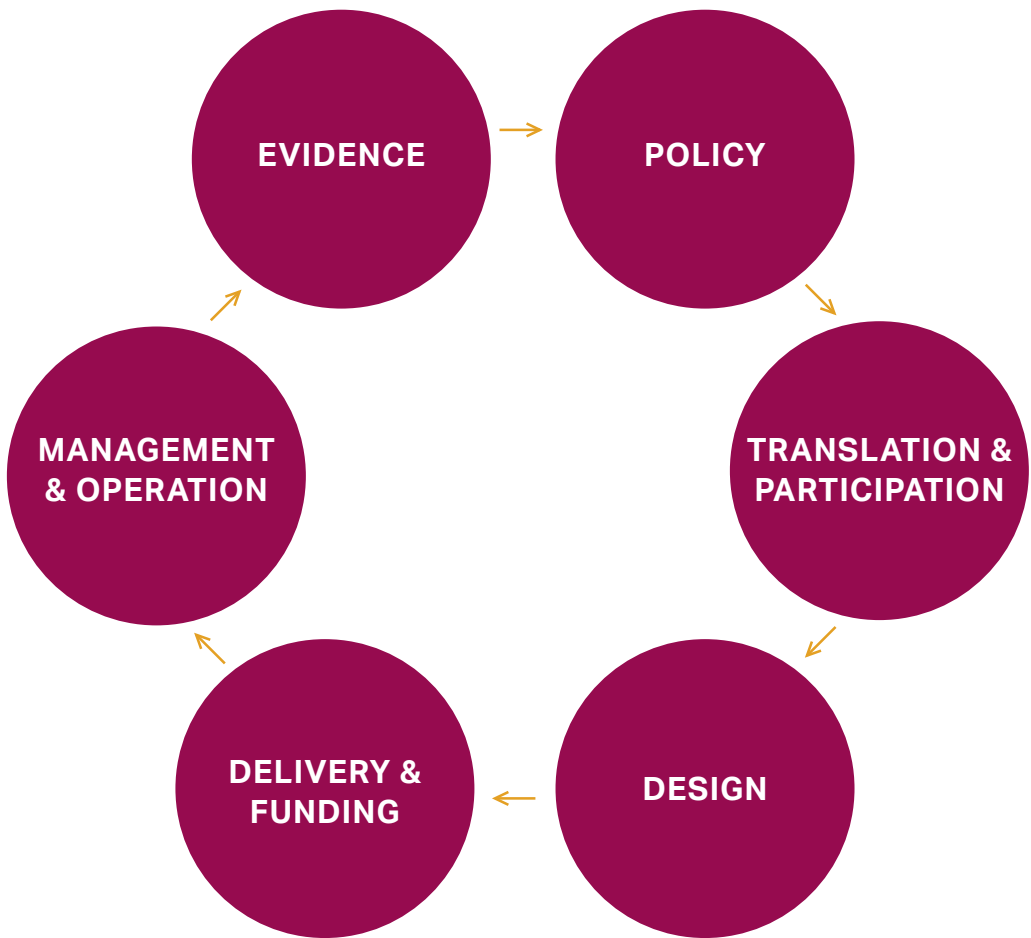
## AREAS OF ACTION

This section sets out how the Mayor of London, London boroughs, other policymakers and those involved in the design and delivery of social infrastructure can support the realisation of its social integration potential. It draws on the findings of all the inquiry's research strands, together with input from stakeholders.

This design inquiry is intended as a first step and a catalyst for a long-term process of making London more socially integrated, by realising the potential of social infrastructure.

The following six areas of action have been identified through the research:

1. **Evidence:** understanding existing social infrastructure and social integration needs
2. **Policy:** creating frameworks for the protection, support and delivery of effective social infrastructure
3. **Translation and participation:** putting policy into practice through effective engagement
4. **Design:** creating and improving the spatial design of social infrastructure
5. **Delivery and funding:** supporting the creation and maintenance of social infrastructure
6. **Operation and management:** ensuring social infrastructure supports social integration



# KEY ACTIONS

## 1. Evidence

**Build an evidence base that enables a better understanding of how formal and informal social infrastructure contributes to social integration**

- Develop social integration metrics from the Social Integration Measurement Toolkit<sup>22</sup> to capture barriers to equality, relationships and participation in London neighbourhoods.
- Work across local authorities, civil society, individuals, anchor institutions and other stakeholders to gain a more accurate picture of the needs of different parts of a community.
- Understand locally specific ecosystems to enable decision making that supports community resilience.

## 2. Policy

**Acknowledge locally specific social infrastructure needs within local planning and town centre strategies**

- Use the evidence base (see section 1) on social infrastructure and social integration to inform local planning decisions.
- Include social integration action plans in town centre recovery strategies.
- Link social integration outcomes to investment in social infrastructure.

## 3. Translation and participation

**Engage local organisations and community groups in the co-design and governance of new facilities, especially within areas of significant change**

- Capture local knowledge and build on existing connections to deliver sustainable interventions, sensitive to the local context.
- Involve local users, managers and occupiers of social infrastructure in co-designing project briefs and setting social integration objectives.

<sup>22</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/social-integration-measurement-toolkit>

- Provide support to civil society and community groups to define shared interests and aspirations in an area.

#### **4. Design**

**Establish a high design quality benchmark for social infrastructure, including the upgrade of existing spaces as well as new facilities**

- Invest in capital projects to test new design strategies for social integration and deliver high quality social spaces that demonstrate best practice.
- Use design briefs to harness the potential of ancillary spaces, as well as primary functions, to support social integration.
- Be intentional about designing and programming social infrastructure to maximise its impact for an intended end user.

#### **5. Delivery and funding**

**Coordinate new investment to secure, develop and enable social infrastructure alongside a representative mix of local contributors**

- Collaborate with the private sector to pioneer new approaches to social infrastructure that integrate new investment within existing communities.
- Recognise that neighbourhoods are more likely to be successful if development is tied to an existing social infrastructure ecosystem.
- Proactively use public assets to secure social value and social integration.

#### **6. Operation and management**

**Create new opportunities for communities to contribute to local governance and civic innovation**

- Embed opportunities for participatory process or community-led activity within projects.
- Develop lease models to enable inclusive management and use of spaces, inviting different parts of a community to use and activate social infrastructure.
- Build the capacity of civil society and community businesses to deliver sustainable social value and innovation.

# 1 EVIDENCE

## **Understanding existing social infrastructure and social integration needs**

The Mayor's work on social integration has a particular emphasis on evidence, responding to the lack of data supporting decision-making about social integration.

This study reveals many gaps and inconsistencies in the evidence about both social integration and social infrastructure. While the benefits of formal social infrastructure, in all its forms, is well understood, its relationship to informal social infrastructure and its role in social integration is less understood and documented. Assessments of existing social infrastructure are often limited to floorspace, footfall and revenue.

Better and more consistent evidence-gathering methodologies will ensure social infrastructure is better planned, protected and delivered to support social integration.

## **Auditing existing social infrastructure**

Auditing existing social infrastructure enriches our understanding of what exists. Good information can enable operators and networks to work together better; to identify gaps, and to see how proposed new provision fits into the wider ecosystem and how to maximise its benefits. It also means that if social infrastructure comes under threat it will be easier to plan to keep it or to better manage its loss. Audits should therefore build on existing mechanisms of evidence gathering such as for Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDP) and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA).

Evidence gathering should cover publicly and privately-owned assets and will need input from a range of actors including boroughs, other statutory services, civil society organisations and members of the local community contributing their understanding and local expertise. A proactive process of engagement is more likely to identify soft infrastructure and networks and to highlight variations between neighbourhoods.



Along with physical mapping of social infrastructure, it can be helpful to record the relationships between services, facilities, groups and networks where resource and timing allows for it. Mapping the social infrastructure ecosystem of a neighbourhood will identify the key connectors and enablers. This will be particularly important in areas going through change, either because of regeneration or because of changes in demographics driven by market forces.

Any social integration assessments carried out by individual spaces or services themselves should also be included when mapping and assessing social infrastructure within IDPs and JSNAs. Auditing and mapping provision is a resource intensive process. Local authorities are encouraged to carefully consider joint working across teams and departments to coordinate these exercises so that the range of interested departments and services that support social infrastructure delivery benefit from the information.

### **Understanding social integration in an area**

Assessments of local social infrastructure will reveal gaps and deficits in types of provision to meet need. It is important to understand how both formal and informal social infrastructure supports social integration, and to identify gaps. These could include a lack of places for particular groups to meet and spend time together (relationships), limited opportunities to get involved (participation), and barriers to access social infrastructure (equality).

Exploring social integration opens up opportunities for dialogue with local communities about their area and the role of social infrastructure. The Mayor of London's Social Integration Measurement Toolkit sets out a comprehensive list of questions that can be used as prompts to structure research. Information could be gathered from street interviews with local residents or through discussions with stakeholders and service users.

While the Mayor of London can provide overarching guidance and collate local information to enrich the London-wide evidence base, local assessments depend on the involvement of local stakeholders and residents, with boroughs having responsibility to carry out this process.

## **Valuing the contribution of individual pieces of social infrastructure for social integration**

Social integration should be considered a key success measure for all social infrastructure, alongside intensity of use, footfall and revenue generation. Successful cases of social infrastructure are often undocumented and their contribution to social integration goes unrecognised – until they come under threat.

Boroughs, social infrastructure providers, occupiers and members of the local community should be able to measure social integration benefits of particular spaces and places and ensure that these are part of the discussion about future provision and meeting local needs.

Ideally, these assessments should be part of the evidence-gathering process for Infrastructure Delivery Plans, inviting social infrastructure providers and operators to contribute to assessments with their detailed spatial and social knowledge. This would require a simple and accessible methodology that allows providers and operators to carry out assessments themselves, as part of a process of unlocking new avenues for funding and support. These assessments could also be carried out by agencies and designers commissioned by local authorities, to bring social integration into design decisions – for both spatial and service design.

# TACTICS

## Gathering Evidence

1. **Street interviews:** These are an effective way of engaging with residents who might not participate in other research or engagement, such as online surveys or focus groups. They may use a range of open-ended and closed questions to help tease out the qualitative dimensions of local spaces, as well as providing insight into wider social integration issues in an area.
2. **Stakeholder interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with local groups and agencies can identify sensitive social integration challenges and the needs and barriers facing particular groups, including those that are more vulnerable or harder to reach. Engaging with stakeholders from across the community is important in building a clear picture of the social infrastructure ecosystem in an area.
3. **Using data:** These findings can be related to London-wide data from the Survey of Londoners and a range of supporting sources highlighted in the GLA's Social Integration Database, as well as publicly accessible borough-level or local data on health and wellbeing. (Note: some NHS and other local evidence may be confidential and therefore difficult to reference in policy)

## Assessing social infrastructure

The process of assessing the social infrastructure provision and needs in an area should consider how spaces and services facilitate relationships, participation, and equality:

- What facilities and services (both formal and informal) are enabling meaningful interactions between people from a different background?
- What facilities and services (both formal and informal) are encouraging people to become more involved in their local community?
- What facilities and services (both formal and informal) are tackling the impact of inequality in an area?

- Where are the gaps in supporting relationships, participation and equality?
- What might future needs be in the light of what is known about future development and change?

Questions asked at borough or neighbourhood level can be adapted to identify the contribution of specific social infrastructure to social integration:

- Who uses the space or service (by age, gender, ethnicity, household type, employment status) and does this reflect local demographics?
- Is there a group or demographic that is particularly dependent on the space or service?
- Which groups seem more comfortable using the space?
- What services or activities are provided?
- Which services, programmes or activities are better used and by which groups?
- Have some users become more active or involved in the area, or in activities as a result of using the space or service?
- What services would they like to provide and are currently unable to?
- Which groups are not being accessed and what are the key barriers?
- Do people come here for help or advice? How can the service or space support them?
- Do they collaborate with any other organisations?

Assessments may highlight use by different groups, the quality of interactions supported by the space, how interactions are facilitated or enabled, how users or residents are engaged as active participants, and how support services are delivered and signposted.

Spatial assessments can also be used to highlight the way design enables or constrains social integration:

- Is the space or service visible to passers-by or people unfamiliar with the area?
- Is it easy for people of all abilities and backgrounds to get there?
- Is the space or service accessible and easy to use?
- What are the key spaces and functions within the building?
- What are the key thresholds between public and private spaces?
- How do these different spaces and functions interact?
- How does that change over the day?
- Do people interact? Where and how?
- Is there a set activity or function? How do people engage with it?

## 2 POLICY

### **Creating frameworks for the protection, support and delivery of effective social infrastructure**

As established in the previous chapter, there is little consistency among boroughs on definitions, scope or responsibility for social infrastructure across departments and sectors. It generally sits across several different policy areas, including health, education, housing, regeneration and land use planning, sometimes falling between different departments.

The Mayor of London's definition of social infrastructure and social integration gives the starting point for a combined and expanded definition to support agencies and individuals to increase social integration through providing, designing and operating social infrastructure. This description aims to inform cross-sector and multidisciplinary discussions and decision-making through setting out a shared language:

**"Social infrastructure covers a range of services and facilities that meet local and strategic needs and contribute towards a good quality of life, facilitating new and supporting existing relationships, encouraging participation and civic action, overcoming barriers and mitigating inequalities, and together contributing to resilient communities. Alongside more formal provision of services, there are informal networks and community support that play an important role in the lives of Londoners"**

All of us: The Mayor's strategy for social integration (2018)

This socially-led definition is supported by an understanding of social infrastructure as an ecosystem consisting of formal, informal, hard and soft infrastructure. The Mayor has also set out a range of strategic guidance, aligned with this definition which will inform local priorities and could facilitate discussions about local planning and policy through the lens of social integration.

For example:

- Support development and infrastructure that will create an environment where Londoners find it easy to have positive and regular contact with those around them
- Help create the right conditions for people from different backgrounds to come together
- Improve volunteering and social action opportunities to increase participation, particularly among groups of Londoners who are currently less likely to be engaged
- Equip more Londoners to participate in democratic processes such as voting, public debates and citizen-led action
- Deliver growth through a citizen-led approach
- Reduce inequalities which could undermine social integration, working alongside partners
- Address specific barriers to social integration

Translating this into actions and deliverables at a borough and neighbourhood level will demand linking social integration outcomes to local social integration commitments in order to support investments in social infrastructure. These will need to be developed in partnership between local authorities, social infrastructure providers and operators.

### 3

## TRANSLATION AND PARTICIPATION

### **Putting policy into practice through effective engagement**

There can often be a disconnect between policy and practice, particularly how policy translates into informing project briefs and strategies that lead to the design and delivery of improvements and new provision. It can therefore be useful to set out shared social integration commitments at a borough or neighbourhood level which can then translate to project briefs. Similarly, Strategic Planning Guidance should clearly communicate the particular social integration requirements expected from planning applications.

The process of identifying shared commitments can be challenging as community and user engagement in identifying local needs and delivering social infrastructure is often limited to a minimal and standardised consultation process. This is a lost opportunity to capture local knowledge and build on existing connections to deliver sustainable interventions, sensitive to the local context.

Local users, managers and occupiers should be fully involved in co-designing project briefs and setting social integration objectives. Participation should be a continuous process – from contributing to evidence and shaping local policy, to translating policies to projects and briefs, through to the design, delivery and eventual management of a facility or service. It is important for local authorities to facilitate meaningful partnerships with civil society and community groups. This is particularly important in areas going through long-term change, where limited evidence of results from ongoing involvement can deter local participation.

Engagement of any kind may reveal tensions and competition between groups in the community. In some areas, an organisation takes on the role of mediating between community interests and aspirations and agencies. This can be taken by an independent organisation, such as the Community Brain in Surbiton or an individual, such as a Town Centre Manager. Whichever model is chosen, familiarity is needed with residents, local provision and businesses, and understanding of the processes within the borough.



## 4 DESIGN

### **Creating and improving the spatial design of social infrastructure**

The design of social infrastructure, both spaces and services, can facilitate and celebrate different forms of social integration. This is particularly relevant to the spatial design of physical infrastructure, which is the focus of this section.

The capacity of the design of spaces to support and enable interactions and influence human behaviour has been well researched in the public realm, workspace and residential sectors. However, this insight is less frequently applied to social infrastructure. Social infrastructure includes a diversity of scales and functions, ranging from a small corner pub to a large health centre, which makes it challenging to apply consistent design principles across typologies.

The common factor across these different typologies is that social integration is often secondary to the main functions of the space, and it can be taken forward in secondary spaces as well as the primary programmed spaces. For example, circulation spaces and foyers can play a crucial role in enabling casual interactions, providing opportunities for engagement and inviting people in – supporting relationships, participation and equality.

The research highlighted recurring spatial design aspirations that are common across social infrastructure typologies. The list below sets out a summary of key considerations from the research to facilitate discussions between local authorities, designers, operators and users when designing for social infrastructure spaces.

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

**Location:** The need for increased footfall and accessibility to wider audiences should be carefully balanced against the needs that are currently met within smaller catchments and particular communities.

**Co-location:** There must be clarity about the key aspiration for co-location functions and services from the outset, supported by a plan for how operators or providers will share the spaces and services.

**Flexibility:** Spaces should have the capacity to adapt to changing needs and functions for different demographics, enabling different groups to have a sense of ownership over the space. This can be facilitated through the design of spaces and the management of its programme of uses.

**Futureproofing:** Spatial configurations that can be adapted in response to local needs and demands will provide more resilient infrastructure to support communities through change. Existing social provision should be valued for its distinct spatial qualities, using innovative approaches to make the best of constrained spaces and to accommodate activities that can be difficult to replicate in new provision. New spaces should plan for a fast-changing context where local demands may vary greatly in the long-term.

**Accessibility:** A range of accessible and affordable social infrastructure is needed in a neighbourhood. The needs of groups that may be excluded by spatial, social, or financial constraints must be considered sensitively. These barriers to access should be included in assessments of local needs and provision, as part of a design response.

**Inclusivity:** The audience that spaces and services are catering to must be considered as well as whether needs are being met across different groups. It is not necessary for all spaces to deliver all functions to all people, however within a local ecosystem of social infrastructure, the needs of all parts of the local community should be met.

**Safety:** Some groups within the local community need safe spaces outside the home and it is important that this is available in the local ecosystem. Vulnerable groups may need particular spaces to feel safe. This could include certain aesthetics or visual barriers between public and private spaces.

## 5 DELIVERY AND FUNDING

### **Supporting the creation and maintenance of social infrastructure**

The policy framework for viability and planning obligations are set out in the new London Plan, in 'Chapter 11: Funding of the London Plan' and through 'Policy DF1; Delivery of the Plan and Planning Obligations'. This framework estimates the investment in infrastructure needed to deliver the plan. It highlights that a lot of this investment will need to be provided by the public sector and outlines the gap between committed and required public sector funding, summarising potential options for meeting this funding gap. This chapter recognises the need to enable and fund key social infrastructure services including schools and health facilities, and the challenges that these services face.

New social infrastructure is often delivered by local authorities in partnership with external bodies, mostly with health providers, educational bodies, parks and leisure operators and civil society. Partnerships with the private sector, with foundations or other grant funders or provision by the borough alone are less common. The funding streams available to different types of social infrastructure are different, and statutory provision often has better access to resources and support. Less formal social infrastructure is supported through a very wide range of sources including crowd funding, subscription models, donations and cross-subsidy from business activities.

Pressures on revenue funding can prevent social infrastructure providers and operators from planning strategically. The problems of accessing funding for small third-sector organisations are well recognised, including prescriptive grant regimes, short-term programme funding, competition between community organisations for scarce resources and the difficulties generating enough revenue from community-owned assets.

Some models of funding recognise social value. Some of these are well established, while others are emerging models:

- **Community Asset Transfer:** the transfer of management or ownership of public land or buildings from the owner, usually a local authority, to a community organisation. Often this is for “less than best consideration” – less than the market value. This discount is based on a presumption of long-term local social, economic or environmental benefit.
- **Community Shares:** issued by co-operative societies, community benefit societies and charitable community benefit societies, enabling a broad-based community ownership of local assets.
- **Rent-subsidy model or social value leases:** assets are let at conditionally subsidised rents, with criteria for rent reduction including local benefits such as local employment support.
- **Crowdsourcing:** an increasingly popular model for funding small-scale infrastructure through platforms such as Spacehive. Crowdsourcing has varying levels of success which depend partly on the money available within of the local community. When done well, it can draw in additional resources – skills, time and expertise – and bolster capital resources with revenue match funding. Crowdsourcing can promote engagement and incubate new, collaborative governance – Crowdfund London<sup>23</sup> is an example of this.
- **Redevelopment cross-subsidy:** social infrastructure sites owned by local groups may be able to redevelop their sites to generate long-term revenue streams from residential or commercial rents.

23 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/funding-opportunities/make-london>

## 6 OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT

### **Ensuring existing social infrastructure supports social integration**

Social integration in practice is often a careful balance between people sharing spaces and people making contact with each other. While spaces can facilitate interactions and reduce barriers to access through careful design, the process of developing meaningful relationships and encouraging people to get involved in their local community often requires a human catalyst.

The management and operation of social infrastructure is crucial to promoting social integration . Individuals are often the key enablers of interactions between groups, yet they often have little support or training. There is a clear role for operators and managers in the process of designing spaces, and in decisions about the look and feel of different provision. The role of the space and the role of the facilitator are both important, and there can be trade-offs between the inclusivity of spaces and the intensity of interactions .

Partnerships that bring together a range of interests and expertise can support social infrastructure ecosystems locally. These can be supported through co-ownership models, as well as co-management. They can be useful for maintaining an oversight, particularly in areas that are going through regeneration.

## TACTICS

As with design, it is difficult to standardise tactics for operators and providers to boost social integration in spaces and places. However, lessons have emerged from this work:

- Engage local communities to develop programmes of services and activities, with particular care in reaching those communities that are less likely to use facilities.
- Allow casual overlaps between activities (both spatial and in timing), encouraging informal interactions between people from different backgrounds.
- Engage with council services and other statutory provision to create complementary uses and activities that allow different levels of participation.
- Programme informal events to activate spaces for alternative uses, engaging a wider audience and encouraging casual interactions.
- Allow overlaps in activity and enable loose, unstructured time between activities to encourage casual interaction.
- Support networks and partnerships between formal infrastructure providers to enable them to share facilities and to collaborate in the services they provide.
- Protect facilities that provide safe spaces for particular communities.
- Sign up to social integration commitments and ensure that they are put into practice in how facilities are managed and in delivery of key services.
- Establish a governance structure or partnership for co-located services in the same building to align and coordinate service delivery and programming.
- Incorporate skills and approaches that support social integration into the recruitment and roles of all staff members.





**MAKING THE  
MOST OF SOCIAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

# Community Action and Engagement

A thought starter by Daisy Froud

Social infrastructure, in a diverse and rapidly growing and changing city like London, is political infrastructure. Social infrastructure provides the spaces, systems and networks that support the activities and conversations of the 'polis' – that Ancient Greek term for the collective "body of citizens". In an ideal and equal world, the polis makes the city, in both senses: the city IS its people, and is produced democratically BY its people.

Healthy social infrastructure is vital to democratic activity. It helps ensure that citizens can be part of decision-making about the changing city, and ideally to directly shape decisions. But in today's London, decision-making about change often happens in a context that is far from ideal and equal. Many of the communities most affected by redevelopment not only lack what we might conventionally think of as social infrastructure: space in which to assemble, and services that meet everyday needs. They also feel excluded from the power structures that determine change. These factors are inter-related and serve to compound inequality.

What London's communities usually do not lack however is the most important type of social infrastructure: relationships.

As this report makes clear: social infrastructure is by its very nature 'relational'; it only really comes into existence when activated or occupied. A new community hub is just some space with a lid on it and a jolly-coloured floor without the meetings that take place there, the cups of tea that are stirred in the kitchen and passed through the hatch, the information that is pinned to the noticeboard or Facebook page, and the connections and actions that are sparked by all of these, and that flow out and activate the wider world.

In focusing on what kind of social infrastructure London requires, we should therefore ask: what will best enable and maintain the relationships that we need, both within communities, and between communities? And how can we support those relationships, and the energy and potential they contain, to really make change?

**"A new community hub is just some space with a lid on it and a jolly-coloured floor without the meetings that take place there"**

In engagement about regeneration, people inevitably lament the lack of tangible Stuff: space, money, staff. It's important, of course, that those with influence continue to procure – and fight for – these. But they miss a trick, and treat fellow citizens simply as recipients, if they focus only on wish lists of 'needs' (xm2 of community floorspace provided, x support workers funded), and neglect to think about how these measurable 'good things' sit within the city's wider ecosystem – the infrastructure of communal life.

Standard consultation – survey or "Have Your Say!" culture – all too often leads to predictable wish list outcomes. In contrast, deliberative engagement conversations – workshops, assemblies, review panels – tend to generate more interesting social infrastructure scenarios. Participants often imagine, for example, community spaces where different uses combine in hybrid ways, where people from different backgrounds encounter each other's knowledge and ideas, where entrepreneurial projects are hatched, and skills are shared. They also often imagine these spaces hosting similar deliberative conversations: about the future of neighbourhoods, about shared values, about "who decides", and about how the city is produced through true diversity of thought and action. Space, funding and core services are vital to enabling those conversations and encounters, but they are also of little value without them.

So, when it comes to its planning and provision, and the targeted deployment of the limited resources that city and local government have, I would like to see a focus on social infrastructure that does the following four things – a kind of 'circular ecology' of social infrastructure if you like:

- **Meets practical needs through space and facilities.** That's a given. But this includes the need to assemble 'politically' and debate possible futures, ensuring the constructive check to the power of the state that healthy society thrives on.
- **Pro-actively supports relationships and conversations in those spaces:** both those that maintain stability within groups ('bonding social capital'), and those that enable reciprocity between groups ('bridging social capital').

- **Has the capacity then to be re-imagined in response to those relationships and conversations**, and to the new demands, desires, knowledge and ideas that emerge from them e.g., for transformation of existing spaces or services, or of blueprints for future ones.
- **And, vitally, can – as a result of those previous points – become a site of the wider production of the city**, enabling more distributed, imaginative and active decision-making about what our city is, how it works, and in whose interests it does so.

Hannah Arendt describes the 'polis' as 'the space of appearance'. It is where we make ourselves visible to each other: where we negotiate, and work out how to shape society together. It is the space where democracy happens.

Society and its infrastructure, like democracy, take work, and are never definitively fixed. Understanding social infrastructure in this way, and looking for ways to sustain its emergence, may be more challenging than providing 'x' number of public spaces. But the challenge is worth it, if those of us who currently hold any form of power truly want to work towards a more equal city. One where we and our fellow citizens have real choices about who we are, what we do, and how we live, together and as individuals.

# **A Social Infrastructure of Beauty, Vitality and Meaning**

A thought starter by Adam Khan

A hundred years ago the pioneering social housing reformers Basil Jellicoe and Irene Barclay proclaimed, 'Housing is not Enough'. Faced with the direst slums of St Pancras, their intimate knowledge of the neighbourhood told them that places to come together were the foundation of a sustainable, resilient community.

London has a fantastic successful history of diversity, community entrepreneurship and social mobility – yet the recent past has seen a slew of sterile dormitory developments. Gated or socially segregated, these short-sighted approaches run counter to that decent London tradition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many of the glaring inequalities and inadequacies of our housing and public space, and so as we plan for recovery, as we face up to our own housing crisis and start to build again, we are fortunate to have an emerging consensus on the need for Good Growth, founded on the social

infrastructure that will allow new homes to become vibrant, resilient neighbourhoods. That infrastructure was already under strain, with capacity tested by increasing densities, the loss of many informal spaces such as the room over the pub, austerity enforced cuts, and the current model of large-scale development which introduces rapid shocks to these fragile ecosystems. And all this against a backdrop of continuing high property values and gentrification, of increasing wealth polarisation in the pandemic, and a poverty and mental health crisis, makes social integration more urgent than ever.

And so, we need to understand how social infrastructure works as an engine of social integration, how to do this at scale, and where best to apply leverage. As designers, we come to know our communities and projects well and to understand the fine grain of specific requirements. But translating that to wider policy and distilling best practice is not straightforward; the subject is complex, involving multiple voices, agencies, and skillsets. How can one generalise in such a tangled web? How can we map the terrain and establish some shared methods and ways of understanding?

**“The potential renaissance of social infrastructure requires designers with a powerful set of skills”**

What emerges is the complete interdependence and synergy of the soft and hard networks. But whilst digital connectivity becomes ever cheaper and ubiquitous, physical places to gather are becoming rare assets, particularly for those with least means. The fabric of community life and organisation relies on the ready availability of spaces which are affordable and flexible, able to host a multitude of functions.

But these shared spaces must also lift the spirits. To become adopted and gather meaning and significance they must be highly attractive to use and, yes, poetic. They are entrusted with some of the really significant moments of life – the weddings, parties and funerals – and, to truly support social integration, they must be places where those with choice also choose to go. The emotional capacity of these places can therefore bring viability and long-term sustainability, founded on a strong desire to use and adapt the space.

In recent years there has been an understandable tendency towards rationalising community spaces into centralised hubs, with stakeholders accessing them on a timetable basis. Whilst these may appear efficient from the providers perspective, they can also result in bland spaces with little feeling of place or belonging. Whilst technically multi-functional, they can miss out on the appropriation and customisation that comes from the strong sense of ownership and empowerment found in dedicated or community-made facilities. Paradoxically, it can be this very specificity which makes the spaces then attractive to other very different groups, and hence securely viable.

We know that physical place plays such an important part in social identity, agency and belonging. Just as our planning departments rebrand to placemaking, we need to see that social infrastructure is highly dependent on sense of place, and some of the most powerful and effective facilities are found amongst a dispersed network of micro-spaces. These small, informal facilities are key to growing communities from the ground up.



We are at a critical moment with so much infrastructure lost or under threat, and yet the large scale of development underway brings fresh opportunities. There is a burgeoning appetite amongst communities to design, shape and manage an ambitious range of facilities, and many local authorities are moving towards enabling these in partnership with communities. The potential renaissance of social infrastructure requires designers with a powerful set of skills – to understand how to work with communities, how to enable communities to design, to understand how spaces can be robust, practical, and flexible, and above all to create shared spaces full of beauty, vitality and meaning.

# Planning for Social Integration

A thought starter by Hilary Satchwell

Despite their best efforts to engage with the planning system, there is often a disconnect between what communities would like to see delivered and what they see happening. When faced with a proposal for new development, particularly one containing new homes, I hear people ask, “where are the extra school places going to go?”, or, “how will the doctors surgeries cope?”. What they are asking is where is the social infrastructure to cope with growth.

A lack of clarity for many communities about how the planning process works, especially where the perceived need for the social infrastructure is concerned, leads some to wonder if planning is even trying to deliver what communities need to support socially integrated and well-planned places.

However, that is exactly what the planning system and most planners are trying to do. The challenge is a remit that is more limited than many imagine and the competing objectives at play as we “plan” and make policy or spatial decisions about land, what is needed, and where things should go. From then on though, planning’s ability to deliver on the needs and requirements of a place is entirely contingent on funding and delivery decisions made by those outside of the plan making and regulatory process itself.

This complex pattern of delivery and opportunity is why we need strong planning policy and guidance, underpinned by a good understanding of the evidence, including across borough boundaries and on a pan London level. This is why we need to have a clear view of what social infrastructure we need, and why we need it. We must consider very carefully how we can use the planning process to best effect in “enabling” the delivery of the valuable impacts and specific outcomes that communities need to thrive.

“We must balance the very important need for more homes with the equally important need for places for all residents to meet, interact and grow together”

We must also reflect on how far a system that is largely about the physical definition of land and buildings for specific uses can or should try to measure, manage or control the less tangible elements of our places that support integration and community. At the moment, the normally very “single land use” specific delivery or expansion of schools, health provision and community facilities are all planned for in policy in one way or another, but are subject to considerable challenges around funding, timing, spatial requirements, and operation. Planners are often in no better position than anyone else to “make things happen”, or assess impacts in relation to existing provision and in line with the current speed of demographic and urban change. Alongside all of this we must balance the very important need for more homes with the equally important need for places for all residents to meet, interact and grow together. Only by thinking about these both of these things together can we create Good Growth.

To really make a difference, and reduce the numbers of mono-cultural planning applications and places, we need to encourage landowners, developers and other organisations to want to deliver good social infrastructure in partnership with councils, communities and user groups, because they know it will lead to a better scheme and a better place. We need to see more developers with the confidence to properly research what is going on in and around the sites they are looking at, to talk to the community about flexible spaces and opportunities before they submit applications, and then to put the time and effort into developing models that are inclusive and financially sustainable.

With a willing applicant, an engaged community, and a clear evidence base to inform what is needed, planning will be (and should be) well placed to provide a framework of encouragement and support. Alongside better communication and transparency, communities would be able to feel more positive and encouraged about the change that is going on around them and the framework for them to help shape it – with social integration in mind.

What is clear is that we need to imagine a (new?) planning system that puts people at its heart. This needs to be based on good quality research about what makes places socially integrated – such as this study – and that then values, records and supports the broadest range of social infrastructure uses and activities, from policy making to delivery. This isn't something that planners can achieve alone and will take partnership working with the broadest range of groups, organisations and communities and a shared sense of place and people-based purpose to really deliver the Good Growth that London needs.



**DESIGN  
CONSIDERATIONS  
FOR SOCIAL  
INTEGRATION**

## DESIGNING FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Many emerging trends in social infrastructure identify ways in which social and spatial outcomes are delivered through design interventions, some of which, such as co-location, are already strongly supported in strategic policy. Others have been identified through this research, including the “social front door”. These have been explored in further detail below to establish a set of design tactics and prompts which can help facilitate social integration in practice.

These tactics do not provide a comprehensive list of actions, instead they aim to summarise some early findings regarding designing for social integration and to begin a collaborative discussion about how social integration can be facilitated through spatial design – encouraging architects, designers and other stakeholders to contribute to the knowledge base and to help shape robust and adaptable design guidance.

### Co-location

Co-location of council services in new civic hubs is a common model across London. Co-location can occur spatially or through programming within buildings, as well as at the neighbourhood level where public assets may be more distributed. Both can facilitate social interactions by bringing together diverse uses that enable people to cross paths. It is important to be clear about the driver for co-location – whether it is a response to spatial constraints, an opportunity for programme synergies, a way to reach new audiences, or to achieve cost efficiencies. Each of these preferred outcomes may require different forms of co-location.

Conversations with local authorities, as well as a review of case-studies that have implemented co-location, provide us with some key lessons.

### Co-locating functions

- Demonstrate how uses can complement each other through shared resource, services, or networks – these can build on both direct and indirect relationships.



- Direct relationships between uses would generally target similar audiences, corresponding to the 'one-stop shop' approach, such as bringing together council services or children's facilities.
- Indirect relationships can be supported by bringing together unlikely activities in the same space, which can facilitate social integration between people who may not have otherwise met.
- This can be particularly useful when bringing together formal and informal uses, that build on the catchment of one function to access a wider audience.
- Engage potential occupiers early, establishing what resources can be shared and where programmes can be aligned.
- Where functional relationships are strong, co-located uses can adapt to a range of spatial configurations. However, if functional relationships between uses are indirect or weak, there will be an impetus for creating strong spatial connections and overlaps.
- Clarify management responsibilities for shared spaces, identifying opportunities for third-party and community involvement at an early stage.

### **In a neighbourhood**

- Cluster civic uses around areas that are visited by a cross-section of local communities, such as in town centres, around parks and open spaces.
- Ensure that these are connected by a good quality, walkable public realm, ideally with complementary and inter-dependent social infrastructure located no more than 400m away from each other.
- A pedestrian-priority neighbourhood is more likely to enable chance interactions than one where there is heavy traffic.
- Strengthen the role of high streets within communities by taking a unified approach to formal and informal social infrastructure.
- Social infrastructure spaces should not be seen solely as service delivery, but should be considered as a part of the social life of the neighbourhood.

### **Within a building**

- Carefully programme co-located uses to ensure that they are complementary in function, demonstrating the social integration benefits of direct or indirect functional relationships.

- Establish shared and public-facing spaces at an early stage, ensuring that all co-located functions have access and the ability to shape the space.
- Explore opportunities to engage external agencies or groups for temporary use of shared spaces.
- Carefully design entrances and circulation spaces to accommodate secondary activities that people can either actively, or passively, participate in.
- Where possible, create visual connections between different uses that are visible from publicly accessible spaces.
- Ensure that all interventions within shared spaces are equally accessible to the users of co-located functions.

### **The Social Front Door**

The “Social Front Door” has emerged as an important concept through discussion with operators and providers, referring to entrance spaces that give social infrastructure a distinct presence on the street, with a porous interface with the public realm.

Although the social front door is primarily a transitional space, it can include reception desks, information points, cafés and other informal uses that encourage people to linger and engage with internal uses, without having to commit to a specific activity. The porosity of this entrance, and the activity immediately inside is important in connecting to the wider community.

Social infrastructure entrances and foyer spaces should aim to:

- Ensure visibility from the street, providing lines of sight to welcoming internal spaces.
- Convey key information about services, support and activities in the building easily.
- Explore the potential to accommodate informal uses in entrance space which attract may attract a wider audience that the primary function alone, increasing footfall and chance interactions between groups. This could also provide a passive security presence.



It is important to consider where the security line (threshold between public and private spaces) is in relationship to entrance spaces and how visible it is from outside. An open and accessible foyer without a visible security line may attract many people and have a greater presence on the street. However, this can be difficult to achieve if there is a need for security and safeguarding, often disproportionately impacting ethnic minority groups. Interventions that avoid a physical security line tend to require more management input from staff and operators. This should be considered in the early design stages.

- The security line should be as far removed from the main entrance as possible in order to accommodate public activity that is visible from the street.
- Avoiding physical barriers can create an inviting environment but can also pose operational and management challenges.
- A physical barrier often needs least staff time, but can deter social interactions and informal activities.
- Security guards can often be more of a deterrent than a physical barrier.
- A receptionist behind a desk is often used. This can provide an information point and provide passive security, but it can also formalise entrance spaces and create a physical barrier to going inside.
- Walking receptionists are common in commercial buildings and are increasingly present in civic buildings.
- Indirect or passive security can be maintained by co-locating informal uses such as cafés in reception spaces. Staff will need to be trained to handle sensitive situations, and operators and providers will need to support this commitment.

## **Engagement and participatory design**

The need for meaningful participation is necessary across all stages of the design, delivery and running of social infrastructure. The design of social infrastructure can benefit greatly from the involvement of operators, community groups, residents and workers. Input from these stakeholders should be actively sought throughout the design process, exploring opportunities for meaningful consultations to inform briefs, co-designing spaces and designing for co-ownership and co-management where needed.

In order to make best use of local participation, these processes should:

- Ensure that participatory processes are inclusive and that under-represented groups are reached.
- Establish a clear project brief with local stakeholders, including:
  - Evidence of the types of spaces that may be needed to support social integration locally.
  - Identifying groups that are under-represented or not catered for within the local ecosystem.
  - Management and ownership, identifying community involvement and responsibilities.
- Engage the community to establish the aesthetics and character of the building or space as well as the functions:
  - Understand that the design and aesthetics of a space can create invisible barriers, sometimes spaces that are strongly coded appeal to some groups but not others.
  - Don't strive for a "neutral" aesthetic, as this can dilute the sense of ownership that communities feel over a space.
  - Ensure that the design of social infrastructure is carefully costed, and that this builds upon an in-depth understanding of financial constraints and expectations of local organisations, occupiers, and providers.



**PRECEDENT  
LIBRARY**



Woolworths still watching Coles

Woolworths is still watching Coles as the supermarket giant looks to expand its footprint in the south-east. The company is reportedly in talks with several potential partners to acquire more land in the region. This move is seen as a strategic response to Coles' aggressive expansion in the same area.

Sarkozy pushed to resolve Suez, GdP

Brokerages blooming in India's hothouse

India's financial markets are experiencing a boom, with several new brokerages opening their doors. This growth is attributed to the country's strong economic performance and increasing investor confidence. Analysts predict continued growth in the sector over the next few years.



Media snaps up Fotolog in online expansion

The media industry is expanding its online presence, with several major players acquiring new digital assets. This includes the acquisition of Fotolog, a popular online photo-sharing platform. The move is part of a broader strategy to dominate the digital media landscape.



## BARKING LEARNING CENTRE

<b>Location</b>	Barking Town Centre, North East London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Public private institutional partnership
<b>Primary function</b>	Co-location of educational, public, and civic services

A library hosting a group of services that support local people, which has continually adapted and flexed its model and space to maximise its accessibility and impact.

- Barking Learning Centre demonstrates how large public institutions can be adaptable in their use of space and ways of working to maximise the number of activities and services, and to prioritise accessibility.
- It shows how flexible co-location of council services alongside education and voluntary sector services supports a wide range of users, enabling knowledge exchange between organisations and ensures financial viability.
- Co-location can increase accessibility to services for vulnerable individuals, as agencies can easily make cross-referrals. This is supported by the sense of anonymity provided by the design and layout.
- The model has enabled targeted, responsive and experimental services to be developed.

Originally a traditional municipal library, the learning centre was redeveloped in 2007 to provide a wider range of education services and facilities, in partnership with Barking and Dagenham College and the University of East London.

The centre is home to three types of service provision: council services, education services and an evolving range of advice and socially focused services. The council services are consolidated under a programme called 'Community Solutions' and include career

support and financial and housing security. University advice drop-in sessions are provided by the University of East London and Barking and Dagenham College provide extensive classes including ESOL, maths and English. The Children and Adult Libraries are actively used, and provide free computers, scanners and printers.

The evolving range of advice and socially-focused services respond to particular needs. There is an eclectic range of provision including a Citizens Advice Bureau, a health spa for vulnerable young women, a café run by people with disabilities, regular coffee meetups and reading groups for children, prayer rooms, food clubs, an MP's office, a nursery and conference rooms. Some generate income for the centre through the rent they pay. The large number of partners can make cooperation and working to shared objectives complex, limiting capacity for community participation and leadership.

**"The beauty of this building is the diversity."**

Zoinul Abidin, Head of Universal Services.

In 2018 there were over 600,000 visitors, and a queue can often be seen at the door before the centre opens at 9am. The wide range of services available ensure that people from a range of backgrounds use the provision throughout the day.

Many of the services are confidential or sensitive, and consequently visitors may be unwilling to speak to other people using the library or services. The size of the space creates anonymity, particularly in the library, so vulnerable groups can be comfortable without the pressure of engagement.

One challenge of the open-door policy is that vulnerable people often come in to rest and use the wash facilities, and staff do not have the capacity to care for them. The centre is currently working with homeless charity The Source to develop dedicated rest facilities.

Approximately 50 percent of funds for the Barking Learning Centre come from Barking and Dagenham Council, 25 percent from Barking and Dagenham College and the University of East London, with the remainder from service provision and space rental income.

With 5,800m<sup>2</sup> of floor space, coordinating the efficient use of the centre is a major challenge. The space has had to be continually reconfigured to respond to emerging needs. This has created a culture of flexibility – many of the room partitions are mobile, the back entrance has been closed to reduce security costs, and the staff have been trained in “flow working” rather than working behind a fixed reception desk.

**“We’re always reconfiguring the space... We make simple changes in order to make the space work better.”**

Zoinul Abidin, Head of Universal Services.

This enables new services and programmes to be accommodated when they are needed. It also means that the space feels informal, sometimes slightly disordered. This atmosphere attracts users who may be deterred by a more institutional atmosphere. The open-door policy is core to the success of the Learning Centre, despite its management challenges.



## BROCKWELL PARK SURGERY

<b>Location</b>	Herne Hill, South London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	GP Practice
<b>Primary function</b>	Healthcare provision

A GP practice that funds its own community garden open to both patients and the public, but particularly intended for people with mental health or social difficulties.

- Brockwell Park Surgery demonstrates how attaching informal social space to a mainstream service provider can enhance patient care at a time when budgets are under pressure.
- There is a symbiotic relationship between the healthcare services and the informal social activity of the garden, enabling doctors and staff to maintain relationships and a continuing role in the wellbeing of their patients beyond their 10-minute appointment slots. It also gives patients a way to develop social relationships and improve their wellbeing through gardening and volunteering.
- The building and garden create a familiar and equalising space, encouraging the participation of more vulnerable user groups, and helping to tackle social isolation.

Brockwell Park Surgery has existed for at least five generations of doctors. It is based in a terraced house originally built as a residential home, with the ground floor acting as the surgery for the family doctor who lived upstairs. The back garden began to be used by the practice as a 'pet-project' for nurses around 10 years ago. Since then, the project has expanded.

The building's domestic typology and residential location makes it visually unremarkable from the street. It caters to a wide demographic of 9,500 registered patients (the UK average number

of patients per practice is around 2,100). This includes social housing tenants as well as more affluent, middle-class demographic.

Formal gardening sessions are hosted twice a week through the Garden Project, which focuses activities around the care and maintenance of the garden. Long-term involvement is encouraged, and volunteers often take and share ownership of vegetable plots, following their growth through the year. At harvest time there is a public-facing event – the sale – which invites patients and visitors to buy the produce of the garden. Other events include summer and Christmas parties open to all.

During the rest of the week and when the weather allows, the garden is used by patients waiting for appointments, using its space for sitting, reading, or for children to play. Staff also use the garden for lunches and occasionally for patient consultations. One of the doctors is an avid beekeeper and has introduced a hive, which has attracted a lot of attention and involvement, particularly from children.

A social prescriber employed by Age UK has recently started at the practice to work with frequently visiting patients, particularly people with social difficulties and poor mental health. The aim is to get more people from the local area involved in the Garden Project, as well as signposting them to other activities in the area.

Importantly, although the Garden Project is accessible and inclusive to all, it is not widely promoted outside of the practice, maintaining a certain level of exclusivity in its user groups. This is important as the garden is used by many vulnerable people who find comfort in the relatively stable group of people who use the space. This balance between inclusivity and exclusivity is a challenge to maintain, however it is crucial in enabling supportive relationships.

## PEMBROKE HOUSE

<b>Location</b>	Walworth, Southwark, South London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Charity and former Settlement House
<b>Primary function</b>	Provision of space and services for local community, community organising

A community centre that has outsourced service provision and activities in order to focus on building relationships in the community.

- Pembroke House is a strong example of successful relationship-building within a local community, showing how a 130-year history as a Settlement House can be leveraged and provide a strong basis to creatively promote social integration.
- Pembroke House draws on an ethos of community organising, working with many different groups, both newly formed and longstanding.
- Outsourcing of activities to different agencies has freed up staff to focus on work that they describe as “around the edges”, making connections between their programmes, between users, and with other organisations. This has also created capacity for experiments.
- The Walworth Living Room, close to the main building, is their latest space and project. This offers a different sort of flexible provision and is designed so the community can decide how the space is used.

Over 30 projects are currently delivered and supported at Pembroke House in collaboration with 15 organisations. These range from craft groups, classes for young musicians, ESOL classes and language exchange clubs, educational programmes for school children, and health and wellbeing drop-ins.



ALL  
TOGETHER  
NOW...



The strength of Pembroke House is the interconnection between the activities. For example, on Thursdays, people arrive early for the Community Lunch Club and sit at the side of the hall watching the end of the morning dance class.

**“It’s the overlap between activities and their connections that we are most interested in.”**

Mike Wilson, Executive Director

The recently launched Walworth Living Room has been left intentionally undefined to reduce the distinction between service users and providers. The aim is for the space to become self-sustaining. A programme called the ‘Clubulator’ allows users to organise what activities take place. So far, an open workspace, a weekly potluck buffet and a chess and coding club have been set up.

Pembroke House brings together functions that are each aimed at different communities. People from different backgrounds tend to come on different days of the week, and sometimes getting those groups to mix can be difficult.

**“The aim is to create a place for ‘people like me’, and then twist it so they can meet people that are not like them”.**

Quote source

The lunch club has become important as many staff members and volunteers join the lunch and casually chat or recommend activities and programmes. There were 107 volunteers in 2017, alongside six residents who each contributed 15 hours a week in exchange for subsidised rent.

Pembroke House secures a wide mixture of funding sources, with the bulk coming from Trusts, Institutions and donations, supported by income from renting space and accommodation.



## REACH ACADEMY FELTHAM

<b>Location</b>	Feltham, Hounslow, West London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Academy School and Children's Hub
<b>Primary function</b>	Statutory education and community facing cradle-to-career support hub

An Academy school that puts an emphasis on relationships and equality, which has expanded its approach into the wider community and set up a hub for families.

- Reach Academy Feltham was set up as an “all-through” school for children aged two to 18. It puts a strong emphasis on pastoral care and community support to enhance social mobility alongside learning and curriculum development.
- The Reach Children's Hub was set up in 2017, five years after the school opened. It is a separate organisation nested within the school, able to access wider funding and support than the school can. It aims to provide “cradle-to-career” support for families, from the antenatal stage to adulthood.
- The work of the Community Hub, the structure of the curriculum, and the overall school ethos all support the wish to build relationships and promote equality.

Reach Academy Feltham was founded by three teachers who felt there was a need to develop a new type of school that could meet the needs of students from deprived backgrounds. Reach Academy Feltham focuses on building relationships between staff, the student body, and the wider community. The through-school model means many children who join the nursery aged two stay until they are 18. This enables the staff to build a deep understanding of that child's needs.

**“We orient our teachers to building relationships as a focus”**

Ed Vainker – Co founder Reach Academy Feltham and CEO of the Reach Foundation

The Reach Children's Hub is run by the Reach Foundation, a registered charity, under the umbrella of the Reach Academy Trust. The Hub works with the school to run programmes for the wider community. These were developed following consultations with over 30 local organisations, who identified the need for antenatal and early-years support, careers guidance, adult education and mental health support.

Although only operating for two years, the Hub has developed a cradle-to-career service framework. This includes antenatal advice and training for first time parents, hosting youth sessions for children and parents in the community farm on the site, and providing careers advice and development for 16-21 year olds. The school describes their strategy to connect people as "flipping the logic". Rather than trying to convince people to use their services, they instead ask "what's missing?", and then adapt the services so users come of their own accord. Since opening, 36 mothers have attended training courses, 148 children attended holiday activities, 56 families took a parenting course, and over 1,000 young people took part in a careers activity.

## THE LIONS SOCIETY

<b>Location</b>	Croydon, South London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Volunteer-led mentorship
<b>Primary function</b>	Youth network through barbershops

A network of barbers in Croydon providing mentoring and support to help young people move away from involvement in knife crime.

- The Lions Society shows the potential of a volunteer-led organisation to use informal social infrastructure – in this case barbershops – to engage with young people who may be unwilling to engage with formal youth services.
- The model demonstrates how long-term relationships between customers and barbers can become the basis for youth intervention, education and signposting. This builds on relationships that sometimes stretch back to early childhood.

The Lions Society successfully uses existing social networks and informal infrastructure – local barbershops – to deliver counselling and support services. As well as their jobs as barbers, the volunteers act as mentors and counsellors for young people in Croydon. They use their status as role models, and their ability to connect with young people, to contact people involved in gang violence who are unlikely to trust more formal services or to move outside of their small local areas. This leverages the longstanding and close relationships that barbers can build with their clients, sometimes since childhood.

They run an annual Community Peace Cup bringing people together through football tournaments, live music, bouncy castles, food and drink stalls and a range of sporting activities.

Although they are involved in a range of activities, their approach is always tailored for the individuals and groups that they are working with.







## FRIENDLY FAMILIES COMMUNITY NURSERY

<b>Location</b>	Deptford
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Charity
<b>Primary function</b>	Parent-led nursery and early years

The Friendly Families Community Nursery encourages parents to volunteer their time in exchange for lower childcare costs, promoting social relationships and participation in the local community.

- Friendly Families Community Nursery has been inspired by, and has consciously learnt from, similar models in the UK and internationally. It enables low-income parents to reduce childcare costs by allowing them to contribute their time to running the nursery.
- The focus on co-design of the space, co-creation of the nursery programme, and wider community engagement has helped support community relationships. Schools are well-recognised as facilitators of community relationships, and this example shows how this can also happen through early-years provision.
- The nursery space was created by parents and children through a co-design process that involved experimenting with materials and shapes to make sensory furniture.

Friendly Families Community Nursery was established by a group of local parents who have set the vision and initial business plan for the nursery with the support of two charities (the New Economics Foundation and Coram Family and Childcare), a partnership with Peabody, and with co-designers and makers Co-DB.

The project identified early-years child costs as being an unsustainable burden for many parents. One aim of the nursery is to showcase a model that can work in different contexts throughout

the UK, and to produce a financial modelling tool to support this. It was concluded that settings like this can “turn us from passive recipients of services into active participants”, encouraging integration through shared objectives and greater relationships between teachers and the lived experiences of families.

The land the nursery occupies was donated by Peabody, responding to their tenants’ need for affordable childcare. The nursery gives 15 percent fee subsidy in return for one day volunteering a week, from 9am–3pm. The non-discounted rate for families who cannot volunteer or otherwise participate still falls below the area average cost for early-years childcare.

Before the nursery opened there were a series of open sessions for prospective parents and community members to discuss their needs and what they would want to see happen in the nursery, and to begin to establish good relationships. A co-design participatory workshop for parents and children by the architectural practice Co-DB resulted in tailor-made furniture and outdoor equipment.

This project was supported by the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund and London Family Fund, which specifically aimed to facilitate relationships between parents in London, as well as Peabody and Trust for London.

## THE SELBY CENTRE

<b>Location</b>	Tottenham, London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Charity
<b>Primary function</b>	Community centre and community sector support

The Selby Centre is a community-led organisation which brings together many diverse organisations and small businesses on the site of a former school, providing training and support to grassroots organisations across Tottenham. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Selby Centre opened its doors as the Selby Food Hub, an independent project run by volunteers that provided food and support to vulnerable local people.

- The Selby Centre is a strong example of how a community organisation can be shaped by a rich local history, and a background of complex relationships between communities, institutions, and the police, and continue to adapt over time to serve a changing community.
- It demonstrates the value of informal community “ownership”. 39 local community organisations are hosted on site, supporting 130 grassroots initiatives through dense networks of relationships across the wider area.
- The Selby Centre has embedded community organising into the core of its approach, training residents to be community organisers, strengthening relationships with the local community, and supporting residents’ capacities to drive change.

The Selby Centre was established by Haringey Council in 1986, following a local campaign for an affordable community centre which could house different services and communities with significant needs, and that local people could call “home”. It is now run by The Selby Trust.



The Centre, located in an area of high deprivation, brings together a rich mix of individuals and community organisations and provides an enormous diversity of services. These include food banks, housing associations, counselling services, women's associations, care agencies targeted at underrepresented communities, learning centres and childcare services.

Community organising, relationships and the building of social action is a key component of the Centre's activities – 120 community organisers were trained between 2017–20. These were local people from within the Selby Centre and beyond, in local neighbourhoods, and from other organisations, who were trained in how to join together to build relationships with their communities, and to promote equality and participation.

Effective community organising depends on the relationships the centre has with the wider area. The Trust makes significant efforts to employ locally, with a focus on diversity to reflect the users of the Centre. Currently, 60 percent of the staff live in Haringey, and 95 percent within a five-mile radius of the Centre. Over 20 languages are spoken within the staff team, and 13 ethnicities are represented. The Selby Centre will soon be relocated to a new building on the same site as part of a wider redevelopment, risking uprooting the large number of organisations currently supported but providing a new purpose-built facility.

**LONDON  
TIGERS**  
London Tigers  
Sports Complex



**125 3 12 123**  
RUNS WKTS OVERS TARGET  
GRAY-NICOLLS

## LONDON TIGERS SPORTS COMPLEX

<b>Location</b>	Tottenham, London
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Charity
<b>Primary function</b>	Community centre and community sector support

The London Tigers Sports Complex is a sports centre and a community hub with a wide offer for the residents of Ealing, created through an asset transfer from the local authority.

- London Tigers Sports Centre is an example of a Community Asset Transfer that has brought together local charity London Tigers, Ealing council and a range of stakeholders and community organisations through the Spikes Bridge Partnership, to create a successful community sport facility.
- Long-term investment and support from the local authority allows the organisations to plan and invest in the facilities with confidence.
- The rent-subsidy model used, where rent is reduced if identified community benefit criteria are met, is being examined as a model to apply to other social infrastructure in the borough.

The centre brings together people from different backgrounds through a shared interest in sport, with a focus on intergenerational involvement.

The local authority ran a competitive tender process and London Tigers and Southall Community Alliance were chosen to run the sports complex in Spikes Bridge Park. The community asset process transferred the public land to the local organisation at less than market value.

Community ownership was welcomed by local residents and facilitated by the different community organisations that came

together in the Spikes Bridge Partnership. Hounslow Council provided strategic support.

The local authority offered a 25-year lease of the centre and made a commitment to low rent levels, with the council paying for grounds maintenance (a cost of approximately £10,000 a year) and utility bills. Hounslow Council have established a rent subsidy based on key community benefit criteria. Meeting all the criteria leads to an 80 percent reduction in market rent.



## ST JOSEPH'S HOME, SINGAPORE

<b>Location</b>	Jurong West, Singapore
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Faith-based organisation
<b>Primary function</b>	Care centre for older people and childcare centre

St Joseph's home brings together a care home for older people and a childcare centre, to reduce childcare costs and isolation among older people.

- St Joseph's Home shows how services for different generations can co-exist if managed and designed carefully. It brings together care services for older people in the fast-changing Jurong West area of Singapore, and a more recently established new childcare centre for children aged six months to two years.
- As well as the co-location of the two uses, contact between different ages is encouraged and supported through programming and sharing common spaces. A school and a home for boys involved in crime is also involved in the model.
- This is becoming a model for the delivery of shared amenity in public housing developments in the city.

The centre was set up by the Singapore-based Catholic Welfare Services in 1978, but is open to people from all faiths. In 1985 it expanded to include a hospice, and in 2017 launched the childcare facility as they moved into a new and bigger building.

The centre maintains areas of privacy and quiet for the two distinct age groups that use the building, however the central courtyard space includes a playground. This is the main social space for interaction between generations.

Students at the primary school opposite the centre visit regularly, and some are mentored by the older residents. The Boy's Home across the road, for young men who have been involved in crime,



runs a coffee cart in the central courtyard of the home. The shared care for older people and childcare services provides an important resource in a fast-changing neighbourhood. As well as reducing isolation for the older people it hopes to cultivate respect and mutual understanding between the very old and the very young, and lessen the children's fears of ageing.



## BROWNSVILLE COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTRE, NEW YORK

<b>Location</b>	Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Public private partnership
<b>Primary function</b>	Legal, educational, and community service centre

The Brownsville Community Justice Centre aims to prevent crime by investing in local youth and improving the physical landscape of central Brooklyn.

- The Brownsville Community Justice Centre shows how the twin aims of reducing crime and the incarceration of young people, and strengthening community trust in justice can be combined. It does this by building positive support networks for youth and offering alternative sentences to prison, providing its own in-house judges.
- The community service sentence asks offenders to work on public-space improvements and festivals. This has been shown to reduce stigma and promote new relationships.
- There is evidence that the programme has been successful in stimulating the local economy and improving the quality of the built environment, however there is less robust evidence about changing perceptions of law enforcement.

The Brownsville Community Justice Centre is one of 29 programmes run by the Centre for Court Innovation, which tests new approaches to criminal justice. The project was set up in 2010 in Brownsville, as the neighbourhood had one of the highest violent crime rates in New York City, alongside low levels of trust in law enforcement.

The centre includes a youth hub which provides a safe space for young people, connecting them to community activities in the area. This includes a learning lab and computer suite, and different

education programmes providing high school, university and professional training support. A focus is training young people to recognise opportunities in their neighbourhood to stimulate the local economy and increase participation.

The key innovation is the outward-facing community response team, which carries out public space works in the local area. Young people can be required to take part in this as part of a community service sentence. This programme develops relationships between offenders and members of the local community, going beyond litter-picking, and instead aiming to co-create and revitalise public spaces. This includes planting trees, building street furniture, and painting murals to encourage young people's sense of community ownership and to increase safety and visibility.

In 2019, 500 young people passed through the centre, and over 100 local businesses got involved in the public space project.

## KOFOEDS SKOLE, COPENHAGEN

<b>Location</b>	Copenhagen
<b>Type of organisation</b>	Charity
<b>Primary function</b>	Support for vulnerable and marginalised people

Kofoeds Skole is a charity that supports socially isolated people who have been marginalised for a variety of reasons, by providing them with skills and experiences that help with their reintegration into wider society.

- Kofoeds Skole shows how an organisation can support vulnerable people through counselling, housing support, education and employment initiatives, and help them to reintegrate into society by selling their products, running a café and facilitating relationships.
- The design demonstrates how visible and public facing services, rather than enclosed facilities, can successfully reduce stigma and promote wider participation.

Kofoeds Skole shows how social isolation can be tackled by supporting socio-economic integration with the wider society. A recent renovation of the site had improved social integration by the new physical design, creating an incremental threshold between public interaction and private rehabilitation. Designing a staged threshold between public and private space allows vulnerable individuals to re-engage with society at their own speed.

Kofoed's Skole was founded at a time of economic depression by the pastor Hans Christian Kofoed, who believed marginalised people were best reintegrated into society through being active and participating citizens.





The school provides a wide range of courses including stand-alone classes like languages, music or beekeeping, as well as longer, more comprehensive programmes which have a socio-economic component. This includes activities and skills courses such as upcycling bikes, woodwork and craft, and producing food such as honey and apple juice, which is made collaboratively between students and neighbours. All these products are sold in the public-facing shops on the ground floor of the school, which act as a testing ground for students to learn and to feel more secure about being part of wider society.

The school also offers counselling services and a walk-in consultancy, and supports homeless people who are moving into accommodation with a start-up package of furniture and clothing. Over 500 people use the school for different activities every day. Most are marginalised and in need of support. However, a few courses such as beekeeping are open to the wider public and are free to attend.

The renovation used the new principle of “city-school-base”, to create a staged threshold from public to private spaces; the city is wider society, the “base” is a private safe place where students can retreat if they need a break or support, and the school is the transition between. Creating more visibility and connections between the wider neighbourhood and the centre by making the ground floor public required careful consideration of the students’ wellbeing.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Civil society:** Where people take action to improve their communities when government or the private sector do not. This includes both formal bodies like voluntary and community organisations, and informal groups, like people who unite for a common purpose. It also includes individuals who act to improve their community for all.

**Co-creation:** Engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders in the entire process of planning, design and implementation, giving decision making power (within set parameters) to all stakeholders, including those with no formal power. Stakeholders may include residents, businesses, civil society agencies, local authorities and the public sector, and local community groups.

**Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP):** This identifies a borough's infrastructure requirements including social, physical and green infrastructure, setting out what is needed, where it is needed, and when it is needed, to support identified growth. It also provides an update on the delivery of the required infrastructure to date.

**Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA):** The process by which local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups assess the current and future health, care and wellbeing needs of the local community to inform local decision making.

**Public realm:** The spaces between and within buildings that are publicly accessible. It is functional, symbolic and social. All public realm should be inclusive and accessible for all.

**Social capital:** Social capital is about the way that social networks and social relationships bond people together. It is defined by the OECD as "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups".

**Social infrastructure:** The places, spaces, facilities and networks that support local communities. Social infrastructure includes a variety of different forms of provision from formal places and spaces

like libraries, places of workshop and parks, and informal facilities such as cafés and pubs.

**Social infrastructure ecosystem:** This describes the complex relationships between different types of social infrastructure in an area, capturing the way that relationships and networks support buildings, spaces and services; how buildings, spaces and services support relationships and networks; and how individual elements within this support and reinforce each other.

**Social integration:** Social integration is about all of us and how we all live together. It is the extent to which people positively interact and connect meaningfully 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.

**Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):** Supplementary Planning Guidance provides additional detail and advice on policies set out in planning policy, including the London Plan.

**Local Plan:** A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

**The London Plan:** The London Plan is the statutory Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London prepared by the Mayor of London in accordance with the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (as amended) and associated regulations. As the overall strategic plan for London, it sets out an integrated economic, environmental, transport and social framework for the development of London over the next 20-25 years.

**Third place:** A place outside of home or work where people come together to socialise.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND THANKS

### **Consultant Team**

Nicola Bacon, Social Life  
Lucia Caistor, Social Life  
Christina Bayram, Social Life  
Claire Gordon, Social Life  
Jonah Rudlin, Social Life  
Darryl Chen, Hawkins\Brown  
Ketki Mudholkar, Hawkins\Brown  
Michael Riebel, Hawkins\Brown

### **Social Infrastructure Sounding Board**

Adam Khan, Mayor's Design Advocate  
Daisy Froud, Mayor's Design Advocate  
Hilary Satchwell, Mayor's Design Advocate  
Arvinda Gohil, Central YMCA  
Bharat Mehta, Trust for London  
Christine Goodall, HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network  
Eloise Shepherd, London Councils  
Harri Weeks, LGBT Consortium  
Jim Minton, Toynbee Hall

### **GLA Client Team**

Anna Turner, GLA Planning  
Carmel Keren, GLA Planning  
Ellie Howard, GLA Regeneration  
James Parkinson, GLA Regeneration  
Joanna Kozak, GLA Regeneration  
Shona Scales, GLA Regeneration  
Melissa Meyer, GLA Regeneration and Social Integration  
Shanthi Gunesequera, GLA Social Integration  
Katherine Radlett, GLA Social Integration  
Janaki Mahadevan, GLA Social Integration

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The team would also like to thank all the people interviewed for the report, and the organisations that made time to let us carry out observations and to speak to people using their spaces.

## **ABOUT GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN**

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 development and growth should benefit everyone who lives here. As such, it should be sensitive to the local context, environmentally sustainable, and physically accessible. The programme calls on all involved in London's booming architectural, design and built environment professions to help realise the Mayor's vision. Good Growth by Design uses the skills of both the Mayor's Design Advocates and the wider sector. This includes teams here at City Hall, the London boroughs and other public bodies.

The programme has six pillars:

### **SETTING STANDARDS**

Using design inquiries to investigate key issues for architecture, urban design and place-shaping, in order to set clear policies and standards.

### **APPLYING STANDARDS**

Ensuring effective design review and scrutiny across London, including establishing a London Review Panel.

### **BUILDING CAPACITY**

Enhancing the GLA Group's and boroughs' ability to shape new development to deliver good growth.

### **SUPPORTING DIVERSITY**

Working towards a more representative sector and striving for best practice while designing for diversity.

### **COMMISSIONING QUALITY**

Ensuring excellence in how the Mayor and other public sector clients appoint and manage architects and other built environment professionals.

### **CHAMPIONING GOOD GROWTH**

Advocating for best practice to support success across the sector.

## **The Mayor's Design Advocates**

The Mayor's Design Advocates are 50 built environment professionals. They were chosen for their skills and experience to help the Mayor support London's growth through the Good Growth by Design programme. They are independent and impartial, and provide support, advice, critique and expertise on London's built environment. The group includes practitioners, academics, policymakers and experts in community-led schemes. Fifty per cent of the advocates are women, and one in four are from a BAME background.

## **Social Infrastructure and Social Integration**

The Mayor's Design Advocates and City Hall's Regeneration, Planning and Social Integration Teams have been developing research building on the recognition that London's built environment plays an important role in enabling social integration, as set out in the Mayor's Strategy for Social Integration. The strategy sets out the importance of designing social infrastructure to meet the needs of communities and to support Londoners in building relationships with one another. This research sits alongside the Mayor's Social Integration Design Lab and Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network, programmes which work with local authorities to deliver a more socially integrated city through local regeneration projects.





# CHANGES TO THE CURRENT PLANNING SYSTEM AND THIS REPORT

This report was prepared prior to the consultation and part implementation of various proposed Government changes to the planning system, and therefore it does not take into consideration these changes.

## **What planning regulations have changed?**

On the 1st of September 2020 the Government brought into force changes to the Use Class order in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) England Regulations 2020. The Use Class order groups uses of land and buildings into classes. Movement from one primary use to another within the same use class is not defined as development and does not require planning permission.<sup>24</sup> Planning permission is normally required when a change of use of land or buildings constitutes a material change.<sup>25</sup>

Summaries of these amendments continue overleaf:

24 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required> – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph: 012  
Reference ID: 13-012-20140306

25 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required> – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph: 011  
Reference ID: 13-011-20140306

<b>Use classes effectively revoked</b>	<b>New Use Class E</b>	<b>New Use Class F1</b>	<b>New Use Class F2</b>	<b>Additional uses added to sui generis<sup>26</sup> use class</b>
A1 Shops	Shops	Education	Shops selling essential goods including food <sup>28</sup>	Pubs, wine bars and drinking establishments
A2 Professional and financial services	Restaurants and cafes	Art galleries	A hall or meeting place for the principle use of the local community	Hot food takeaways
A3 Restaurants and cafes	Financial and professional services	Museums	Outdoor sports or recreation	Venues for live music performance
A4 Drinking establishments	Indoor sports, recreation or fitness	Public libraries	Indoor swimming pool or skating rink	Cinemas
A5 Pubs	Health services	Public hall or exhibition hall		Concert halls, bingo halls and dance halls
B1 (offices, research and development, light industrial)	Nurseries and day centres	Places of worship or religious instruction		
D1 Non-residential institutions (health centres, nurseries, schools, galleries, museums, libraries, places of worship, law courts, training centres)	Offices	Law courts		
D2 Assembly and leisure (Cinemas, music halls, dance halls, swimming baths, gyms)	Research and development			
	Light industrial <sup>27</sup>			

26 Note: Existing sui generis uses include theatres, arcades, laundrettes, petrol stations, taxi businesses, scrapyards, hostels, night clubs, casinos, betting offices and pay day loan shops.

27 being a use, which can be carried out in any residential area without detriment to the amenity of that area by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit.

28 Note: These must be smaller than 280sqm and with no other such facility in a 1000 metre radius of the shop's location.

On the 31st of August the Government also brought in changes to enable the upward extension of existing dwellings and buildings in commercial use<sup>29</sup> and the demolition of commercial and residential buildings for construction of new dwellings in their place<sup>30</sup>.

In addition, on 3 December 2020 the Government published a consultation to allow the conversion from Class E to C3 (dwellings)<sup>31</sup> without the need for planning permission, but the streamlined process called prior approval. The consultation proposes the right would come into force on 1 August 2021.

### **What do the changes mean for social infrastructure and community uses?**

There are no longer protections in place for key social infrastructure facilities and uses such as sports centers, most shops, post offices, health facilities or nurseries. Small convenience stores are only protected if there is not another similar store within a kilometer. Under the previous Use Class order these uses were largely grouped with more compatible social infrastructure uses including libraries, museums, places of worship and swimming baths, and gymnasiums.

Prior to these changes being brought into force, the Mayor and London Council's requested health centres, nurseries and day centres be removed from Use Class E and included in Use Class F1 alongside other community facilities.

The full impacts of these changes on the future of social infrastructure and community uses that serve the needs of London's communities cannot yet be fully understood. Exposing these services to competition with more commercially successful uses such as office spaces in London's property market does raise risks around the long-term viability of these uses and their protection.

29 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No.2) Order 2020

30 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Order 2020

31 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure>

Under the current planning system boroughs across London can place planning conditions or legal agreements on decisions for uses where social infrastructure facilities are secured to ensure their protection and longevity. Some existing social infrastructure uses throughout London will currently be protected by conditions or S106 agreements. How conditions are used and what impact this has on the protection of these uses against these changes will need to be monitored going forward.

### **Changes to the planning system currently under consultation:**

The Government has published “Planning for the Future”<sup>32</sup>, a white paper setting out comprehensive changes to the planning system in England. These changes were being consulted on until the 29th of October 2020. In summary, this paper sets out a new style of local plans that would comprise an interactive web-based map of the authorities area that would identify land under the following three categories:

- Growth areas suitable for substantial development
- Renewal areas suitable for development; and
- Areas that are Protected

Land within these different categories would be granted certain types of planning permissions depending on their category. The paper proposes a myriad of other changes including a new process for the development of Local Plan’s, a new standard method for setting housing requirements, new national development management standards and changes to the way infrastructure is funded. Removal of existing section 106 legal agreements and changes to the infrastructure levy would have a significant impact on delivery of social infrastructure.

32 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future> – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Published 6 August 2020

Local Plans will also contain locally-produced design codes that are binding for decisions. These can be done by the LPA, neighbourhood planning groups or applicants (but only have weight if prepared with effective input from the local community). The paper lacks detail on what these changes mean for London and how they can be delivered given London's unique context and the Mayoral planning powers. At this stage it is unclear which, if any, of these proposals would be taken forward and in what timescales. Furthermore it is not possible at this stage to understand what impact these changes will have on the identification, delivery and protection of social infrastructure uses and networks across London given the lack of detail in the proposals.

### **Looking forward**

In light of these changes to the planning system, this report and its recommendations are important to help local authorities, social infrastructure providers, planners and architects further understand the importance of social infrastructure for social integration. The increased importance of design codes in decision making had already been provided for in the current planning system and is specifically supported in the new London Plan. However, their effectiveness will require local input from communities, and if there is genuine scope and time for this they will provide a greater opportunity for design principals set out in this report to be used to help encourage more social integration in spaces. The report makes a clear case for the role social infrastructure plays in bringing people and communities together and provides useful resources, ideas and tools to help understand, design, promote and protect social infrastructure across London.





