Sustainable Communities: Findings from the resident interviews

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Case Report 163

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

This report presents headline findings from interviews with 100 residents living in ten low-income neighbourhoods across England. This is the first in a series of reports summarising our current research into the areas. The research revisits the neighbourhoods included in CASE's *Areas Study*[1] carried out between 1998 and 2008. It explores how these communities have changed since 2008, assesses their social, economic, and environmental sustainability, and explores how residents feel about their neighbourhoods and how the areas could be improved.

Key Themes:

Community Strength and Stigma	Residents across the areas valued strong local ties and supportive networks. Areas with more active community centres reported stronger cohesion and a generally more positive outlook. However, many residents felt their neighbourhoods were unfairly stigmatised by the media, leading to negative reputations that do not reflect the lived reality.
Public services	All areas had seen a heavy reduction in funding for public services, with existing services increasingly stretched. The voluntary and third sector has gone someway to plug this gap, but to different levels across the areas.
Climate and Environment	While climate change was not a top priority for many residents, others expressed concern and took small-scale actions like recycling, gardening, or using public transport. Engagement was strongest in inner-city areas.
Safety, anti-social behaviour and crime	Crime and antisocial behaviour were widespread concerns, especially in inner-city areas. Many felt the police were absent or unresponsive, however there were a few examples of initiatives to tackle crime such as youth engagement programmes and anti-knife campaigns showed promise.
Opportunities for young people	Many areas lacked adequate provision for children and teenagers. Residents linked the absence of youth support to antisocial behaviour and low aspirations.
Housing	Housing quality was a major issue, with residents citing damp, mould, overcrowding, and slow repairs.

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[1] Lupton, R. (2003). Poverty Street: The Dynamics of Neighbourhood Decline and Renewal (CASE Studies on Poverty, Place & Policy). Policy Press

	New housing developments were often seen as unaffordable and geared toward outsiders, with little cohesion between new and more long-standing populations. Across the areas there was a strong call for more accessible and affordable homes.
Transport and Connectivity	Inner-city areas generally benefited from better transport links, while town and outer-city areas faced isolation due to limited services. Cost and safety concerns also deterred public transport use.
Employment	Job opportunities were often limited to low-wage, insecure work, and many felt local people lacked access to meaningful career pathways.

Section One: Introduction

Introduction

Since 2022, LSE Housing and Communities, based at LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) have been conducting research to understand how 10 low-income neighbourhoods in England have changed since 2008. The work aims to explore how disadvantaged neighbourhoods can become more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. The research revisits the neighbourhoods included in CASE's *Areas Study*[2] carried out between 1998 and 2008.

The neighbourhoods were initially selected in 1998 from the wards ranking in the highest 5% of deprivation measures in the 1991 Census and the Breadline Britain Index. Of those, 10 neighbourhoods were chosen to reflect the different regional conditions and a range of characteristics including urban, rural, coastal, as well as former industrial and manufacturing areas.

The areas vary in terms of ethnic diversity, housing tenure and location. We have classified the areas into:
- inner-city areas close to a city centre
- outer-city neighbourhoods on the outskirts of a city
- town areas with no obvious connection to a city.

Each neighbourhood has been given a pseudonym taken from the original study.

Neighbourhood	City/Area	Region	Category
The Valley	Sheffield	Yorkshire	Inner-city
Middle Row	Birmingham	West Midlands	Inner-city
Riverlands	Nottingham	East Midlands	Inner-city
East Docks	Newham	London	Inner-city
Kirkside East	Leeds	Yorkshire	Outer-city
Overtown	Knowsley	North West	Outer-city
Shipview	Newcastle	North East	Outer-city
Southside	Redcar	North East	Town
High Moor	Blackburn	North West	Town
Beachville	Margate	South East	Town

The research team interviewed 180 residents and key stakeholders[3] in the 10 neighbourhoods between 2022-25 and analysed the most up-to-date Census and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. Spanning over 25 years, this longitudinal research provides critical insights into how deprived neighbourhoods have fared under New Labour, under Conservative austerity since 2010, Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

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[2] Lupton, R. (2003). Poverty Street: The Dynamics of Neighbourhood Decline and Renewal (CASE Studies on Poverty, Place & Policy). Policy Press
[3] 'Stakeholders' in this context refers to individuals working in key support organisations, including frontline staff in statutory services, staff and volunteers in the voluntary sector, and members of community groups.

The research aims to explore three key questions:

- What makes a low-income community viable socially, economically, and environmentally?

- What undermines its sustainability?

- What actions can be taken to improve conditions and make low-income areas more sustainable?

This report is the first in a series of reports, and summarises the key findings from 100 interviews with residents from the ten areas, across a range of ages and backgrounds. We met residents in a range of neighbourhood settings, including community centres, food banks and pantries, youth groups, coffee mornings, and fun days.

We asked residents about their overall perceptions of the areas, the changes they have seen and how they see the future. We also covered topics around community cohesion, youth opportunities, local environment, climate change, housing, crime and local resources.

Section Two: Residents' Perceptions of the Areas

Residents' perceptions of the areas

As an introduction to the research, we began our interviews by asking residents to share their feelings about the areas; what they like and what they dislike. The most commonly cited aspects of their areas that people liked were: the community and access to local resources.

Across all areas, residents recognised a sense of community as a strength that greatly improved people's quality of life. This community effect was felt more strongly in outer-city areas. However, residents from Beachville (Margate), East Docks (Newham), and High Moor (Blackburn), three very different areas, had more mixed feelings and felt more disconnected from the community, often linked to demographic changes and decline in local services. Interestingly, East Docks (Newham) and Beachville (Margate) witnessed the biggest population shifts of the areas with an increase of working professionals in East Docks (Newham) and ex-Londoners known locally as DFLs[4], in Beachville (Margate).

> *"Everything, the community, everyone sticks together round here because we know each other"* Kirkisde East (Leeds)

> *"It's the people all come together, they've always come together. Whenever you need something, they're always there"* Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents in the inner-city areas of Middle Row (Birmingham) and The Valley (Sheffield), two of the most diverse areas, really valued the diversity of the population.

> *"I like the community, and I guess the history. The generations that have come from the different ethnic pots, how they got here and what they have established once they have got here"* The Valley (Sheffield)

In the town areas of Southside (Redcar) and High Moor (Blackburn), people valued living close to family and friends.

> *"Well, I have a lot of family in [Southside]. It is a fairly run down area, but I know quite a lot of people that work in the community centre, you can come in and meet quite a few people. There is some lovely people, there are the odd ones that cause bother, but there are a lot of lovely people. I feel quite comfortable walking around the area"* Southside (Redcar)

In inner-city areas, residents valued being close to the city centre and having easy access to shops and amenities. In East Docks (Newham), high quality public transport and recent investment have bought new build flats, hotels, shops and attracting new businesses, were also highlighted as strengths.

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[4] "Down from London's" or "DFLs" describes the population who have moved from London to Margate often setting up their own businesses and doing up houses.

"It's centrally located, so the transport links put you smack in the centre of the city. The Jubilee line is good. It's a calm neighbourhood. There's diversity, lots of different nationalities here. And there's lots of services available" East Docks (Newham)

In Riverlands (Nottingham) residents highlighted the loss of local shops in the immediate neighbourhood even though the city centre is accessible from the area:

"Well, I think all them shops is really bad for the area, because we need shops, there was a fishmongers, there was a bank, there was a library. It was a very well known part. When I look at it, I think 'what a shame and what a waste'. There could be businesses that are thriving" Riverlands (Nottingham)

Community spaces and activities were identified by many residents as positive aspects of their local area. This was strongest in the areas with the most activities on offer with community centres as spaces accessible to local people. In all areas, it was clear that people value the opportunity to come together and meet other people from the area, this appears to be particularly strong in The Valley (Sheffield), Riverlands (Nottingham), Kirkside East (Leeds), and Overtown (Knowsley).

"It's a very lively area. You have so many people from different cultural background. They do so many social things like events and things for the kids" Riverlands (Nottingham)

"This [community centre] is the best thing round here for us, we have had it since we were kids. My oldest brother had this when he was a kid. It's never stopped. It just keeps us off the streets. You can be the happiest possible here. You can tell them all your secrets, and they will support you. We do different stuff, there is fruit for the kids when they are off school. Then there is activities for the kids from 12am to 4pm. Then for the youth, for us, she will do stuff like boxing. It's not just that we will go on residentials. It keeps us off the street, there is a lot going on" Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents also highlighted the things that they disliked. Dominant concerns were crime, antisocial behaviour (ASB), drug use, and the loss of public services.

"The crime…It's burglaries, joy riding, a lot of motorbikes up and down over the fields [and] drugs" Kirkside East (Leeds)

"I just think it's gone down a lot…it's a big drug place" Southside (Redcar)

In inner city areas specifically, there were also worries about the local environment such as litter, dangerous driving, lack of green spaces and a paucity of youth provision. Gentrification and community displacement were prominent worries in Beachville (Margate) and Newham, where tensions between new and long-standing populations were highlighted.

"Not enough for people and young children. You see the flats, where are they gonna play? There's not enough green space for them wherever you look. It's a concrete jungle and that's not good. Not good for kids" East Docks (Newham)

When asked about their perception of change over time, residents generally felt negatively with areas perceived to have deteriorated, due to service cuts, rising crime, and a reduced sense of community spirit.

"It's changed. Years ago, you had a big community, and you had a lot of good people in [Southside]. It has changed, for worse. People are just not like they were. I think a lot of it is more strangers coming into town, people go and don't come back. People say it was the best days of their lives being brought up in Southside, but we don't have the community like we did" Southside (Redcar)

Residents in Kirkside East (Leeds), East Docks (Newham), and Overtown (Knowsley), highlighted the building of new houses as a significant change but with mixed outcomes. There was often a sense of frustration that the new homes were not accessible to local people, but nevertheless, they had improved the appearance of the local area and bought in new opportunities and investment. In Beachville (Margate), some residents liked the emerging art scene and the vibrancy of the area, whereas others were concerned about gentrification and the loss of the "old Margate".

"It's bringing new commerce, they are more new and modern. It looks a bit shinier, so it's bringing Airbnb and hotels, which brings new economy to the borough, then the borough can do things for its residents. I think it's a good thing, they need to carry on" East Docks (Newham)

In some areas including Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley), and Kirkside East (Leeds) people were positive about the local community centres and community provision, explaining that the offer had improved. They felt this was an aspect of their community which had helped the area.

"I think [the area] has got better, the community centre has got better, at one point it was boarded up so it being open has made a difference" Kirkisde East (Leeds)

Residents across all the areas generally felt the reputation of their areas was negative and stigmatised.

"When I have spoken to people outside of [Middle Row], they think there are stabbings daily, you can't walk alone on the street, gangs everywhere. Don't get me wrong there is a reason behind these perceptions. But people have made it out that it's a daily occurrence to the average person on the street, not two youths who have got into a fight and its gang related" Middle Row (Birmingham)

This sense of stigma was particularly strong in Riverlands (Nottingham), High Moor (Blackburn), The Valley (Sheffield) and East Docks (Newham). Here residents felt their communities were unjustifiably seen as dangerous and undesirable, often amplified by media reporting.

> *"It feels like they are just pushing people into one area which doesn't always help, it just creates a bigger stigma. So, the area will always be known as that, then the good doesn't seep out how it should. So, you are always fighting for people to see the good in the community"* The Valley (Sheffield)

In High Moor (Blackburn), several residents admitted to pretending to live in a different neighbourhood to avoid the stigma attached to the area.

> *"Well [High Moor] always had a bad name. You don't say you live in [High Moor]. If anybody asked me where I live, I'd say between the two hospitals, because they sort of look down on people from the area"* High Moor (Blackburn)

We asked residents if they plan to stay in the areas long term. A number of residents in all of the areas said they had no intention to move.

> *"No, I wouldn't [move]. I've been here that long. My children were fetched up here. My husband died here. It's a lot of memories. And because I'm on the front, I think it's a nice place to be. I do like where I am"* Southside (Redcar)

> *"I wouldn't want to leave [The Valley] because of the community, everyone does help each other out, and your neighbours are fantastic if you have no language barriers"* The Valley (Sheffield)

In Overtown (Knowsley), Shipview (Newcastle), and Riverlands (Nottingham) people strongly expressed a strong desire to stay due to existing community and family ties. For those who did feel they might move from the area, in High Moor (Blackburn), The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham) people highlighted practical reasons such as needing a bigger house or better schools encouraging people to leave. In Beachville (Margate), residents explained their reasons for possibly leaving the area included career ambitions or dissatisfaction with recent changes.

> *"I would like to go somewhere with a more authentic roots, that's not just new, it feels fake here in a way, people have just moved here and painted it a different colour. Somewhere where not having loads of money means you are going to miss out"* Beachville (Margate)

> *"Eventually yes because of secondary schools and catchment area. I don't think there is many good secondary schools from what I have searched for"* Middle Row (Birmingham)

Section Three: Environment

Environment and Climate Change

The focus of the research is sustainability in its most general sense but we wanted to understand residents' perceptions about climate change and about environmental sustainability.

As with the general population, concerns about climate change varied significantly amongst residents living in the 10 areas. In inner-city East Docks (Newham) and Middle Row (Birmingham), there was generally a higher level of concern, with most residents saying they are concerned about climate change. In East Docks (Newham) air pollution was raised as a particular concern.

> *"Most people around here could have asthma, when they build the new tunnel most people will have asthma. Even now it's bad"* East Docks (Newham)

Residents living in all of the areas also said they are not worried about climate change. Others were focused on their local environment, without mention of the wider global issue.

> *"I personally worry about it because that's why I was so passionate about retrofit, but I don't think it's something the rest of [the area] worries about unfortunately. Especially the communities that have more short-term issues like food and housing, I do understand that. I think there are pockets of people that are starting to be more aware"* Middle Row (Birmingham)

The main action taken by residents to help protect the environment is recycling, which was mentioned in all the areas, even by people who said they had no concern about climate change. However, a resident in Riverlands (Nottingham) reported not having access to recycling facilities.

In East Docks (Newham), people reported a number of local actions such as active travel including cycling, using public transport, planting, and reducing single-use items.

> *"My commute is mostly walking. I try to minimise the plastic that I use, so when I go to the supermarket I try and use my shopping bag and also try to recycle"* East Docks (Newham)

Other measures taken include:

- Residents in Beachville (Margate) prioritised walking, diet changes to reduce waste, and donations to environmental causes.
- One person in Overtown (Knowsley) reported giving up their personal car and teaching their children about climate change.

- In The Valley (Sheffield), a resident said they grow their own food, and another said they try and do car sharing.
- In Riverlands (Nottingham), one resident reported growing food on their allotment, while another did litter picking.
- In Middle Row (Birmingham), residents reported the highest level of climate action. One person had been involved in a retrofit scheme, while another installed solar panels on their house.

Overall, people cared a great deal about their local environment and favoured small scale actions to improve it, but the more abstract ideas related to global environmental and climate change were less commonly addressed.

Section Four: Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

Resident perceptions about crime varied across areas. Those living in the inner-city neighbourhoods reported worsening crime rates, particularly incidences of knife crime, car theft, and drug use. In contrast, residents in Overtown (Knowsley) and High Moor (Blackburn) felt crime rates had dropped.

In Overtown (Knowsley) it was felt that the community centre had positively impacted issues related to local crime and antisocial behaviour by engaging young people in activities and keeping them off the streets.

> *"I think that has helped because those lads are in and out of here (the Community centre) all the time, and I think a few years ago they would have been smashing the place up"* Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents across the other areas had different views about levels and types of anti-social behaviour, for example:

- Some residents in Riverlands (Nottingham) felt things had improved following a crackdown on crime following a shooting in 2005.
- Residents in Kirkside East (Leeds) and Shipview (Newcastle) saw instances of unlicensed motorbikes, fly tipping, and stone-throwing growing worse.
- Residents in Overtown (Knowsley) were worried about teenagers "hanging out" in public areas.
- In Riverlands (Nottingham), one resident felt anti-social behaviour (ASB) had increased since the pubs closed because people have nowhere to go and now drink in the streets.

> *"They have closed all the pubs down, so they are sitting in the streets with cans. With the way the cost of living is going people are robbing people in the street, snatching phones to sell for drugs"* Riverlands (Nottingham)

> *"It's [crime and ASB] fuelled by alcohol, drugs... There's always the police around. Especially when the weather is really hot, tension is unreal in the area. People go wild. Go out, get hammered, get lashed on the front, thinking summertime, then there's always arguments"* Southside (Redcar)

There seemed to be limited awareness of crime-related interventions. Most residents could not name any local crime prevention initiatives. In Shipview (Newcastle) people were particularly concerned about a lack of youth provision and a visible reduction in neighbourhood policing.

Residents in a number of areas mentioned specific anti-knife crime initiatives:

- the "Put the Knife Down" campaign led by the community centre in Overtown (Knowsley);
- "knife amnesty bins" in Beachville (Margate);
- a meeting to discuss knife crime in The Valley (Sheffield).

Residents in Middle Row (Birmingham) spoke about local Mosques trying to engage young people to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Relations with the police tended to be mixed across all neighbourhoods. Residents in the inner-city areas of Newham, Birmingham and Leeds particularly (and also in Blackburn) reported low police visibility, a lack of trust, and a general feeling that the police did not respond to issues.

> "*There is a feeling that the police don't really care about the community in [Middle Row] I don't know if that's because of its reputation*" Middle Row (Birmingham)

> "*The police don't like the people here and the people here don't like the police*" High Moor (Blackburn)

> "*When you are walking in the street, doing your shopping, and suddenly the police officer is there grabbing someone. It's not very reassuring. It would be nice to see the police officers talking to someone, but then people can be aggressive because they don't like the police*" East Docks (Newham)

> "*I feel like people can't be bothered to ring the police, it's like we know they're not gonna do anything or turn up on time so why bother. And a lot of the time it's like the issues you see all the time, the motorbikes, the drug dealing you see on the electric scooters, it becomes like 'Oh that's just normal now', nothing seems to be done so people don't bother ringing. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy*" Kirkside East (Leeds)

There were some more positive examples. In Shipview (Newcastle), one resident highlighted a specific police officer they trusted while in Beachville (Margate), one resident felt the "friendly" community police officers had improved relations.

> "*Relations wasn't very good and then they bought in plastic police men, they were young people...I think they are called community officers. They had some females as well and they were friendly*" Beachville (Margate)

Section Five: Young People's Services

Young People's Services

The provision of services for children and teenagers was seen as a priority for many of the residents we spoke to, whether they themselves had children or not.

The opportunities for young people and the level of youth provision varies significantly across the areas with the outer-city areas standing out as having good levels of provision which had improved over the last five years. In both Overton (Knowsley) and Kirkside East (Leeds), residents reported that any services and activities for young people were led by local people wanting to make a difference in their area.

In Sheffield there was a good level of provision for young people, but residents were critical of the costs charged as it was felt that this limited who was able to attend. In this area there was, however, a local play and activity centre that parents and children are able to attend for free. In addition to providing a space for children to play safely, the centre also provides free meals in the school holidays and activity sessions such as growing plants. All the parents we spoke to in The Valley (Sheffield) highlighted how much they value being able to access the centre.

In contrast, residents from other inner-city areas had more mixed views with concerns around the inconsistent levels of provision and services due to the short-term nature of the funding. A common issues reported by residents in Shipview (Newcastle), High Moor (Blackburn), Beachville (Margate), Southside (Redcar) and Riverlands (Nottingham) was the closure of most youth centres:

> "*There's nothing really for them to do and they just get into trouble. That causes them to rebel at school as well. Theres really nothing for kids nowadays. There used to be stuff for them to do*" Riverlands (Nottingham)

In terms of the availability of early years provision residents from The Valley (Sheffield) and Riverlands (Nottingham) were the most positive, with all feeling that there was a good level of high-quality and accessible provision. Residents across the areas spoke about the closure of Children's and Sure Start Centres:

- In East Docks (Newham) the cost of childcare including nurseries was raised as a particular challenge.
- In Beachville (Margate) and Southside (Redcar), people spoke about accessing nurseries through free government provision.
- In Overtown (Knowsley), one resident felt there was generally a good level of provision but there wasn't enough for young children with disabilities.

Residents from all of the inner-city areas and also in Beachville (Margate) were generally positive about the local schools and feel they have improved over time.

> "*I brought all my children up here, they [the schools] have definitely got better. The schools got new heads, and a new college was set up as part of one of the schools. Then there's an old school which they have redone, and you can stay from reception to college*" The Valley (Sheffield)

In East Docks (Newham) and Southside (Redcar) academisation was highlighted as having improved the local school. In Beachville (Margate), one primary school was highlighted as being particularly good and favoured amongst the "DFLs".

However, those residents in outer-city areas had more mixed views of the schools and many worried about bullying and poor communication between teachers and parents.

> *"They're okay. I think they've got worse only because they've been took over and the rules that apply in one area don't necessarily work. In [Kirkside East] there's a lot of children that are troubled children or have had abuse. There's a lot of children with a lot of different needs. And, that one rule doesn't suit everybody. So, a lot of them will get kicked out of school and not really given a chance"* Kirkside East (Leeds)

Residents from town areas reported that local schools had been shut down, and residents in High Moor (Blackburn) worried whether there would be enough school places to accommodate the families in the newly built houses.

We asked residents to reflect on their own views of the possible hopes and aspirations of young people in their local areas. This was widely seen as being dependent on individual upbringing and circumstances. In some inner-city areas, residents spoke of young people with aspirations of university, although residents reflected it was harder for young people whose families did not have a lot of money.

Residents in Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley) and The Valley (Sheffield) thought the lack of opportunities and jobs locally limit young people's aspirations. A resident in Overtown (Knowsley) also described a rise in zero-hours contracts as limiting young people's aspirations.

> *"There's no role models. There's not enough work, there's not enough youth clubs, there's not enough support, other than schools"* The Valley (Sheffield)

Views were most negative in the town areas of High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), where residents felt there was a culture of not working and children just "following their parents into drugs", although residents were keen to stress exceptions.

> *"There's no life. They're either gonna end up on drugs or in jail. We're tryna move off here now"* High Moor (Blackburn)

In Kirkside East (Leeds) and Middle Row (Birmingham), residents felt that the stigma attached to the area made people feel "if you are from here you won't amount to much". Many said that even if young people did end up going to university, they would not fit in, so they would rather not try.

> *"I don't think they do because they think to themselves, we're not able to get into Oxford or Cambridge or school of London. We won't fit in, or we*

haven't got that ability to do it. They might have, but they don't have the confidence" Middle Row (Birmingham)

Overall, views about young people's prospects in the areas were largely negative and feeling that there were limited opportunities.

"I don't know, I think it depends on the person. They will either go to college and make something of themselves or end up on the street corner smoking marijuana like the rest of them" Riverlands (Nottingham)

"I just think when you're in a rundown area and when you're walking the streets of that area daily, you're looking at adults thinking I'm gonna be like them. There's a lot of people round here on benefits for whatever reason and I think a lot of the children are comfortable with that. But it depends on you as a person" Kirkisde East (Leeds)

"Horrible. To me, I can't see a future for them. And if I can't see a future for them how the hell can they see a future for themselves, and I feel so sorry for them" Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents we spoke to had differing views about whether the areas were seen as 'good' places to grow up, highlighting several specific concerns such as the safety of children and the potential to become involved in criminality and ASB via gangs. There was consensus in all areas that there needed to be more activities for young people.

In Middle Row (Birmingham) a resident explained that although there are lots of activities available, they were worried about possible negative influences:

"The opportunities and facilities are there but whether you would want your children to use them because of some of the types of people that are also using them, maybe not?" Middle Row (Birmingham)

In Shipview (Newcastle) one resident felt the area was a hard place to grow up because it had been 'left-behind' by government, while in The Valley (Sheffield), residents felt the area received less funding for young people than other areas of the city. The lack of decent and quality jobs made things harder for young people growing up in many of the areas.

Section Six: Housing

Housing

In all the neighbourhoods, poor quality housing was common. This was more pronounced within social housing with damp and mould and poorly insulated homes being common issues.

Overcrowding was reported as an issue in Beachville (Margate) and Riverlands (Nottingham), and in Kirkside East (Leeds) there was a shortage of larger three and four bedroom homes.

In Beachville (Margate) and East Docks (Newham), private tenants were facing rapidly increasing rental costs while also experiencing homes in disrepair with limited response from landlords. One resident in Beachville (Margate) highlighted that despite these challenges they were feeling lucky to have a home in the current climate.

In most areas lack of maintenance and repair to homes was evident. One resident in Southside (Redcar) shared how they were struggling to look after their own home due to financial pressures and personal problems. In Middle Row (Birmingham), one resident has participated in a retrofit scheme, and in Kirkside East (Leeds) some of the residents were now living in energy efficient new build homes. Despite these issues, a majority of residents across all areas said they liked their homes, even if they felt improvements were needed.

The quality of social housing management was also viewed differently within and across the areas. In The Valley (Sheffield), Beachville (Margate), Southside (Redcar) and Overtown (Knowsley), residents were generally positive and felt repairs were dealt with promptly. In Overtown (Knowsley), a resident felt the service had actually improved since COVID.

In The Valley (Sheffield), residents are dealing with challenges related to damp and mould but do feel that the landlord is responsive:

> *"I think they [The Housing Association] are really good. Any problems I have had they have always come out. Even with my mould and damp in my bathroom. I can't say they solved the problem but they did stop it coming back as quickly, it did come back but it did help, so yeah I like them"* The Valley (Sheffield)

Residents in Kirkside East (Leeds), Middle Row (Birmingham), High Moor (Blackburn) and Riverlands (Nottingham) however were more negative about how social housing is managed.

> *"Its [Social housing management is] not very good. It got so bad a few years ago. My mum had to take them to court. Then they came and repair the toilet*

and everything. But now it's broken again. You have to report it three times for them to come. Then when they do, they don't give you a notice they are coming, so they put a slip through the door saying "you have missed your appointment"
Middle Row (Birmingham)

The biggest frustrations were landlords being too slow to deal with repairs and blaming tenants for issues with damp and mould.

"They don't manage it, I manage it. Most of my repairs I do. If I got a leak, my sinks blocked or something, I unblock that. I even fix light switches. So mostly I don't ring them, I do my own repairs cause I know I've gotta wait for somebody to come and do it" Riverlands (Nottingham)

One resident in Kirkside East (Leeds) was even taking their council landlord to court over unresolved issues. In many areas there was a feeling that there should be more in person housing support and more local housing management.

We also spoke to residents about how the local housing offer had changed. In many of the areas, older homes had been demolished and replaced with new private developments. While this has improved the appearance of the areas more widely, residents explained that the new houses were unaffordable to local people, or were being occupied by people perceived to be newcomers or outsiders, and this had contributed to communities becoming more divided.

"I've found that there's more people that aren't from [Kirkside East] that have been placed here and a lot of people that needed a house in [Kirkside East] that are from here have been placed out. So that's a bit frustrating" Kirkside East (Leeds)

In some communities, residents raised concerns about existing local services not being able to serve the increasing population or that houses were all being given to "foreigners" or better of in-commers.

"There's enough people round here looking for houses, you know I'm not against it but people are going into a brand-new house when there's other people waiting to be housed. There's people on the streets and everything waiting to be housed and then they're bringing people in from a different country and rehousing them when they should look after their own first" Overtown (Knowsley)

This divide was particularly strong in East Docks (Newham), where social housing and community centres have been replaced with private rented flats, mainly housing

working professionals. Residents did like the fact that the new flats had brought investment to the area.

> *"The new flats have replaced all the old community spaces, we don't see the people that live in them, they are like robots"* East Docks (Newham)

> *"The new housing is good, because I hope lots of new things will come like new business open here, and there are new jobs and opportunities for my children"* East Docks (Newham)

In Southside (Redcar), demolition had the benefit of getting rid of lots of some of the less reputable and responsible "rogue landlords". In Beachville (Margate), residents were concerned about the loss of social homes and the rise of HMOs and Airbnb's which are pushing up rents. In Riverlands (Nottingham), The Valley (Sheffield), and High Moor (Blackburn) residents felt there were not enough homes for local people, especially larger family homes.

> *"We need affordable housing. We need houses in this country, all over the country, not just here, that are just literally a basic house, not got two bathrooms and a big posh thing, you need somewhere to live, somewhere to call home. Not something that's gonna cost you eight or nine hundred pound a month rent"* High Moor (Blackburn)

Section Seven: Location and Transport

Location and Transport

We asked residents to share how they moved around their local area to form a picture of local transport services. Walking is the most common mode of transport across almost all areas, with the exception of High Moor (Blackburn) and Overtown (Knowsley).

- High Moor (Blackburn) had the heaviest car reliance among the areas.
- Inner-city East Docks (Newham) was the area with the heaviest use of public transport, with nearly all participants stating regular use.

All other areas had a fairly even mix between public transport and car use. In Shipview (Newcastle) and High Moor (Blackburn), people reported regularly relying on taxis. Cycling proved a major form of transport in inner-city East Docks (Newham) and Middle Row (Birmingham) as well as Beachville (Margate).

The quality of public transport was viewed differently across the areas. People were most positive about the provision of public transport in the inner-city areas, although several people criticised rising costs as deterring people from using public transport.

Residents in High Moor (Blackburn) were the most negative about public transport explaining that the service is virtually non-existent, as the bus service has been heavily cut back over recent years. Similarly, in Southside (Redcar) the buses were not considered reliable as a form of transport:

> *"We've got no means of travel up here 'cos there's no buses. There're only three buses a day on here. We can't just hop on a bus and go to another place and do something there"* High Moor (Blackburn)

> *"Bus is hit and miss. I've got to get up earlier in the morning in case a bus gets cancelled or doesn't turn up"* Southside (Redcar)

Some residents generally felt that public transport was decent in their area, but this did not automatically mean they used it regularly themselves. For some people this was related to their own physical or mental health conditions which limited their ability to access public transport.

In Middle Row (Birmingham) there were concerns over safety and car use was seen as more convenient while in Kirkside East (Leeds) people avoided using buses, despite a good service, as they were not seen as being a pleasant way to travel. Cost was also mentioned in many areas as a disincentive to public transport use.

> *"To be honest with you, driving is more convenient and safer if you're taking your family. Going on the bus, going on the train, you never know what*

you're gonna get on there. Like I said, it's dangerous out there" Middle Row (Birmingham)

"I use it sometimes, the taxis are quite reliable, but they are expensive. The buses are okay, but they always smell, so I don't tend to go on them. They have that £2 thing so that's quite cheap at the moment, they are regular, but I try to avoid using them" East Kirkside (Leeds)

"Transport is very high price. When you go from one job to another job its nine or ten [pounds] gone" East Docks (Newham)

As all of the neighbourhoods are town, inner or outer city areas, we were keen to understand how connected residents felt they were to surrounding areas. Perhaps unsurprisingly given its location in London, the residents in East Docks (Newham) felt their area was well connected to surrounding ones.

"I think it feels connected because of transport. So people get out and go wherever they're going" East Docks (Newham)

This was contrasted most sharply with a sense of disconnection and feeling cut off in High Moor (Blackburn) and also in The Valley (Sheffield).

Views from the other areas were more mixed:

- In Riverlands (Nottingham), one resident explained that the negative reputation of the area made it feel cut off from surrounding areas.
- In Kirkside East (Leeds), someone felt that gang rivalries with other parts of the city cut the area off.
- In Beachville (Margate), there was a sense that connectivity was variable with some (newer) people feeling more "connected" via the high-speed train link to London than perhaps longer established Margate residents.

"I think the hipsters are very well connected because there are still connections to London, people work in Canterbury, or are connected all over the world working remotely. Other than that demographic, I would say ordinary people just live in [Beachville]. I remember my ex-mother in law she did go on holiday, or the odd trip to the theatre in London, but other than that her whole life was lived in [Beachville]" Beachville (Margate)

Section Eight: Employment and Support

Employment and Support

In all of the areas there was a sense that there was a shortage of good quality and accessible jobs locally. The jobs that are available are mainly low paid and insecure, minimum wage, zero hours jobs. Perhaps surprisingly, in the inner-city areas people still felt there were limited local opportunities, despite saying the areas felt well connected and had good transport links to the city centre. The exception to this was East Docks (Newham), where residents felt that the recent developments had brought new opportunities. For example, one resident previously managed a hotel in central London, and had managed to find an equivalent job much more locally.

In Southside (Redcar) however residents felt that available opportunities had declined with the closure of the steel works. It is hoped that the opening of the Teesworks site might change this, but residents had mixed views on whether this would materialise and if any benefits would be felt by local people:

> *"I am hoping Teesworks will help, I am keeping my fingers crossed. If it doesn't it will be bad. It will never be the same as what British Steel was, people had jobs for life there"* Southside (Redcar)

Where jobs are available, residents generally felt that local people do not have the skills or experience needed, or that jobs were more accessible to others. For this reason, one resident in Riverlands (Nottingham) argued local jobs too often went to "outsiders" and a resident in Middle Row (Birmingham) felt that everyone was struggling, even those with advanced qualifications.

> *"Well in an area like [Riverlands] jobs are given to outsiders, which is wrong. There isn't that many jobs and then when there is they go to outsiders"* Riverlands (Nottingham)

> *"At the moment it's like work for 6 months or do volunteer work and get the experience. Then if you're lucky you get a job, but you don't know how long you will keep that job. People have degrees but they don't have jobs"* Middle Row (Birmingham)

In addition to the shortage of jobs, some residents in the outer-city and town areas felt there might be a localised culture of not working, which also links in with the low aspirations of younger people growing up there. One resident from High Moor (Blackburn) explained:

> *"No. I don't know anybody that works round here. There's no jobs. Factory work, that's all you can get round here but that's all the way up in [nearby town] there's nothing actually around here"* High Moor (Blackburn)

"Because when you're on Universal Credit, I was getting a lot more…I was a lot better off. Yeah, so I know where they're coming from, like the young ones, they would be a lot better off. But I think it's just the attitude. I think it's really, I think it's just attitude of people at the moment. I think they just don't want to work" Shipview (Newcastle)

Residents shared their views on local support services to help people access employment and training. It was clear that wider public service cuts since 2010 had impacted these areas, for example, in The Valley (Sheffield) the New Deal[3] programme had previously offered lots of support. In all the areas, excluding High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), the Job Centre was cited as a main provider, however views were mixed on the effectiveness of support provided: in East Docks (Newham) one resident felt they supported you in getting a job but not in progressing your career, and in Overtown (Knowsley) a resident felt the Job Centre only helped you claim benefits not get a job.

"They (The Job Centre) just help people that don't have jobs they don't help you if you're already working to get a better job or if your self-employed" East Docks (Newham)

"There's just obviously the job centre but they don't really help you. They're only just interested in getting you in over your benefit claims and things over actively helping you" Overtown (Knowsley)

In Riverlands (Nottingham) and Kirkside East (Leeds) the library acted as a centre to run training and support from. There were some positive examples of support:

- In East Docks (Newham) a resident told us London Boroughs work together to offer opportunities.
- In Riverlands (Nottingham) and Overtown (Knowsley) the local community centre offers a range of different services.
- In Shipview (Newcastle) the local housing association offers apprenticeships.

"Yeah there's loads, we have had people from the council come here (community centre) and they are literally like our best friends. One day they had like the council, police, fire everyone… She sent us on a course for jobs. So they do try and help us. They sent us on Prince's Trust" Overtown (Knowsley)

There appeared to be the least support in High Moor (Blackburn) were residents told us there was nothing available.

"Not up here there's nothing like that. Nothing around here at all" High Moor (Blackburn)

Section Nine: The Community

The Community

We asked residents to reflect on the "sense of community" and how it might have changed over time. There were, as is to be expected, a variety of views across and within the areas:

- In East Docks (Newham), the **loss of community social spaces** was perceived as weakening the sense of community, but over time relations between different ethnic groups had improved and strengthened community ties.
- **Division and tension** between different racial groups was described as a challenge in inner-city Middle Row (Birmingham) and The Valley (Sheffield).
- The loss of shared social spaces and activities for people to come together weakened the sense of community in High Moor (Blackburn) and Shipview (Newcastle).
- In Southside (Redcar), residents felt the **closing of the steel works**, had "*destroyed the community*".
- On the other hand, residents in Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley), and Kirkside East (Leeds) felt the "sense of community" was strengthened by the **expansion of community centres** over recent years.

> "*I can't say it's losing its community spirit, but before everyone's neighbour was a like a family, and now you don't know who is living next door to you. There are a lot of language barriers as well. We have had a lot of people come from Ukraine and they don't speak a word of English unfortunately*"
> The Valley (Sheffield)

Across all inner and outer-city areas, most residents felt "part of the community", even in the areas where most residents felt the sense of community was declining.

> "*Yes, because I have lived here for so long, been involved in things like this, my kids all went to local schools. I have been involved with community care stuff for decades now. I think if you live anywhere for 30 year you feel part of it, deep roots I suppose*" Middle Row (Birmingham)

In The Valley (Sheffield) and Kirkside East (Leeds), children's spaces and activities were important in providing a sense of belonging. People across the areas also spoke about people looking out for each other.

> "*I do (feel part of the community). I'm just a people person. I just do. The kids know a lot of people, they do a lot of things and you just get to know other people*" Kirkside East (Leeds)

"Yes (feel part of the community) because whenever there is anything on I am always ready to help. We are going to organise some buy and sell stalls here (Children's activity centre). The leaders will always ask me and my friend if we would like to help. If there's anything in the community I am always going or helping" The Valley (Sheffield)

Feelings about being "part of the community" were more mixed amongst residents from the town areas who also felt they had lost community connections due to the loss of social spaces and community activities. Access to community spaces were seen as crucial in helping strengthen community ties and building strong social and community relationships. The Town areas of High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), and inner-city East Docks (Newham) and The Valley (Sheffield) had experienced a notable decline in community centres.

"The only thing I would say is, we need to have a community centre. Then you would be able to address certain things with the whole community. So, there is a big litter picking group, there is the volunteers that look after plants. But it's little pockets. If there was one central place, you could see what was going on and do different things. I just don't know why we don't have one" The Valley (Sheffield)

In The Valley (Sheffield), a resident highlighted that the services are available are often targeted at certain groups and are no longer accessible to the wider community.

"The community centres seem to be more targeted like for domestic abuse or men's mental health. So, it doesn't make you feel like you want to be a part of it" The Valley (Sheffield)

In Middle Row (Birmingham) and Southside (Redcar), people described the problem of services being reliant on volunteers.

"The community centres lack on volunteers, or even the mosque or gudwara down the road cos they have lack of volunteers they don't open" Middle Row (Birmingham)

In High Moor (Blackburn) the local community centre had been sold on to a private company and now had a reduced community offering. In East Docks (Newham), people understood community spaces to include cafes. However, the area experienced the loss of these affordable cafes that doubled as community spaces, replaced with more expensive coffee shops.

"Some people feel like the improvement is pushing us out. I remember this café we used to go to right up the road, it was like a little homely place, then when the other shops came in, she couldn't pay her overheads or her workers and had to close. So that is still missing, even though it's improving you still want that" East Docks (Newham)

In contrast residents from Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley) and Kirkside East (Leeds) felt community spaces had improved a lot, linking their success to certain individuals taking over the management of local community centres.

Residents shared how they felt their communities had changed over recent years. In many areas there had been an increase in diversity among the resident population. For some residents this was a positive change but for other residents (more commonly in the outer-city and town areas) there were frustrations related to perceived inequalities in access to resources and services such as housing.

"Yeah, they get on. Like the people who own the shop they speak their own language in the shop and no one is having a go at them. Everyone gets on with them, they know everyone. We are all in the same situation, we are all on a housing estate. They have problems just like me, you can't hate anyone" Overtown (Knowsley)

"It's impacted the food banks so we get a lot more people who are ethnic coming to the food banks. It's hard cos you don't wanna sound like you're being racist, but you find that the houses, it seems that, you know people who have been wanting and been on a waiting list but then the houses get given to other people" Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents in inner-city The Valley (Sheffield) and Riverlands (Nottingham) described how there can sometimes be tensions between different ethnic groups in the local area but that the diversity of the areas was one of its strengths.

"I have noticed with the youth it does get a bit tricky, especially when there's a language barrier, kids can get nasty. I have seen and witnessed a lot of ethnicity gangs and wars" The Valley (Sheffield)

In inner-city The Valley (Sheffield) and East Docks (Newham), and town area Beachville (Margate), a growing population has increased pressures on the housing market leading to increased overcrowding, homelessness, and local people being priced out of the area. East Docks (Newham) and Beachville (Margate) had both seen a growth in wealthier residents - working professionals in East Docks (Newham), and families moving from

London in Beachville (Margate) with the development of divisions between new and more established populations.

> *"I think it's become a bit of a forgotten space and a strip between places. So, like the regeneration that took place on the other side of the [East Docks], and just up until, like the coop, cooperative and the gym area, this bit, this side of [East Docks] there's like a divide with south [East Docks]. It's quite stark and you can see it"* East Docks (Newham)

Residents in Riverlands (Nottingham) reported a growing student population following the demolition of old houses and being replaced with student accommodation and in Middle Row (Birmingham) there had been an increase in professionals moving in.

Section Ten: How Residents See the Future of Their Neighbourhoods

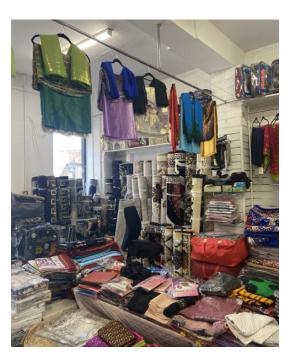## How residents see the future of their neighbourhoods

Finally, we asked residents to share how they saw the future of the area, and what they would like to see change.

The Valley (Sheffield)

Residents were generally positive about the future of the areas reflecting on a growing community spirit, supporting each other more, and actions to improve the area such as litter picking. However, residents also expressed concern the growing population, with one resident saying local government should distribute new arrivals more evenly across the city instead of "dumping them" in one area. Aspirations for the area include increasing funding to provide youth opportunities and maintaining the area's diversity and community spirit.

"I would like it to be a bit better than it is now, continue with the community spirit and helping people. We love the multi-culture in [The Valley]. I want it to continue with the equality and the diversity. As long as we have equality and diversity still in [The Valley], we will be fine" The Valley (Sheffield)

"It would be good if they offered more after school clubs, when I was growing up there was a lot of that but its been taken away. This place is amazing for the holidays. But yeah there has been a lot of funding cuts" The Valley (Sheffield)

East Docks (Newham)

Residents spoke about the increased investment in the area in new buildings, and the influx of working professionals. However, views of the impact of this change were mixed. While some thought about this as change improving employment and opportunities for local people, others expressed concern about gentrification, with older flats and schools being demolished and house prices rising, pushing out long-time residents and increasing homelessness.

Residents would like to see more green spaces, community activities, especially for young people, and a local economy that reflects the needs of the existing population, such as restaurants and markets serving a range of different affordable food.

"*Even in the block I'm in, because it's on a prime site more or less now, in a few years, that will be gone. And again, it will be high rise. There's a school there. It's been there since the war. And I can see that all going. Because the whole big area that will be high rise. And that's not a way to run places, just putting high rise*" East Docks (Newham)

"*More services for the local people. So, as the development is happening, we don't lose sight of the fact that services need to remain for people, we also need green spaces, because when places are built up you do lose natural spaces*" East Docks (Newham)

Middle Row (Birmingham)

In Middle Row (Birmingham), views were quite mixed. Several residents were quite pessimistic about the future of the area and expressed concerns that it would become more rundown as those who are more successful tend to move on from the area. Others were worried about potential gentrification and displacement due to the new HS2 connection to London.

In contrast, some residents were more hopeful, highlighting that nearby neighbourhoods in Birmingham had improved, and that change was possible. There were calls for the community to have more youth services, green spaces and affordable housing alongside increased ground-level policing, making it a safer place for children to play in the streets.

"I think it could change with HS2 if that all happens. I fear if the area starts getting gentrified by people who want to get to London quickly. I don't want it just to become a commuter town which I think it could" Middle Row (Birmingham)

"I would like it to be more friendly, and for families to get to know each other so children can play in the street. It would be nice to have a street party and for everyone to join in" Middle Row (Birmingham)

Riverlands (Nottingham)

There was a sense that residents we interviewed in Riverlands (Nottingham) were quite negative about the area's future feeling that it was overlooked by the local authority and lacked in care from public services. One resident felt there was a "lost generation" in Riverlands and the area would struggle to improve. Residents hoped the council would invest more into the area, bringing empty shops back into use, and providing more activities for children.

"*The future will be to see them shops open and more things for the young ones. To be able to sit out there and see the market out there bustling and everyone bustling around. That would be the best. But I know that will never happen in my time*" Riverlands (Nottingham)

"*Well I would like to see a supermarket that's the biggest number one priority. I want this bit back to its former glory, there used to be so many shops. It was a big area to come to shopping*" Riverlands (Nottingham)

Overtown (Knowsley)

Residents were unsure about whether it was possible for the area to improve because of the current cost of living crisis and how much people are struggling. The community centre was seen as a crucial support hub and a factor in helping the area improve and one resident highlighted that people were starting to feel more of a sense of pride in the area. Residents wanted to see

more youth provision, stronger community bonds, and the replacement of old housing with more modern, liveable homes.

"*More places for people to come together. More courses, more youth clubs, more variety*" Overtown (Knowsley)

"*I am trying not to be negative. I am nervous for the future. I just hope it doesn't keep declining and more stuff is put back in and becomes available. Even the local shopping centre isn't what it used to be. I would just like a bit more community and a sense of togetherness*" Overtown (Knowsley)

Shipview (Newcastle)

Residents were mostly pessimistic about the future of the area. Residents expressed fears that without serious investment from the council, the area's reputation would worsen, and support services would continue to decline. However, one resident felt the local neighbourhood centre was beginning to improve things locally.

Key hopes for the future included removing antisocial behaviour and drug issues, better mental health support, and more community support initiatives such as a food pantry. Similarly to other areas, better child and youth provision was a key priority, with the hope this would improve the aspirations of young people.

"It would be great if the kids were told you can go to university too. You can be whatever you want to be. You have that promise and that capacity and use your imagination to be whoever you want to be, so we need more stuff for young'uns" Shipview (Newcastle)
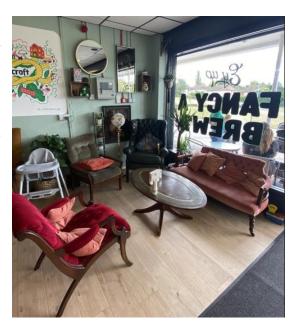

"The parks, things for young people, for Children and Families. There's a lot of children in this area who have additional educational needs so there could be some kind of room for special educational needs and SEN" Shipview (Newcastle)

Kirkside East (Leeds)

Residents were generally positive about the future of the area believing in the potential for improvements in housing and services for families and children. In the future, residents wanted to see more new houses that will give local children something to aspire to if they work hard. One resident also hoped the community could be more accepting of people from all backgrounds.

"*I think its gonna get better, I can see they're building the new houses, the community are coming together a lot more, I think it will change for the better*" Kirkside East (Leeds)

"*I can see it getting better than what it is. I would like it all to be new houses and new streets, for the kids mainly so they can see what they can have. If you work hard in school you can buy one of these houses*" Kirkside East (Leeds)

High Moor (Blackburn)

In High Moor (Blackburn), all the residents interviewed spoke about the impact of the new houses. Some residents were positive about the impact they would have and were positive about the impact of a changing population. However, others were concerned about local infrastructure being able to keep up with growing demand. There were also concerns about population turnover because of the high rents of the new properties. Residents wanted a cleaner environment, better transport, restored community spaces, and more youth support.

> *"If we have the community centre back under community control, that's a must. Have some council services running from there because there's nothing at all"* High Moor (Blackburn)

> *"Just a nice, clean area to live. Well-kept streets. Well-kept gardens. Hedges cut"* High Moor (Blackburn)

Beachville (Margate)

In Beachville (Margate), views were mixed. Residents noted that the area is becoming more accepting and culturally vibrant, with more spaces opening and artists moving in. However, there was widespread concern about the area becoming too much like London, with perceptions of people moving from London pushing up house prices. Hopes for the future included better public services, cleaner streets, more trees, better connection between the young and old population, accessible housing, and jobs for local people.

"*Places where people can live together and live together with their different needs. Children playing, older people rather than them being cut off in their care homes*" Beachville (Margate)

"*Good schools and good services. Cleaner. A good cross sector of shops, independent business. I feel hopefully this will become an area where you don't have to go to the other areas of Margate*" Beachville (Margate)

Southside (Redcar)

Finally, in Southside (Redcar) residents were quite negative about the future of the area. Most residents believed the area was declining and had been declining since the 1980s with good housing being demolished, unaffordable new build properties in their place, and a lack of youth services. On the other hand, some residents were hopeful that supportive local councillors and the economic potential of the UK's largest freeport, Teesworks, could improve life for local people by increasing local job and training opportunities. Residents wanted to see more community pride, green spaces, and local businesses, as well as more youth and community support.

"I would like people to have pride in their area like they used to. They didn't have nice cars or houses, but they wanted their kids to do well" Southside (Redcar)

"Spaces for everyone and the younger generation can come together, like bingo nights or curry nights" Southside (Redcar)

Section Eleven: Conclusions

Conclusions

This report captures some of the experiences and views of 100 residents living in ten low-income neighbourhoods in England. Each area is unique and every individual we spoke to has their own experiences which shape their views. Nevertheless, there were a number of key themes across all the areas. We have summarised these as:

- a sense of pride and belonging in the community
- concerns about ASB and crime
- access to and quality of housing in the local area
- a lack of provision for young people.

Residents consistently highlighted the value of strong community ties and the importance of local spaces where people can meet, access support, and build relationships. Where community centres and groups were active, people felt more hopeful. In contrast, areas that had lost these spaces left residents feeling their communities were fragmented and isolated.

Across the area's residents felt the perception of their area was generally negative, often perpetuated by the local press. In most cases, people felt these perceptions were unfair and that the positive aspects of the area were overshadowed and ignored.

Housing was a concern among all residents. Many residents live in homes with damp and mould, experience overcrowded conditions and a poor quality of repair. The service received by social housing residents varied from area to area. New housing developments were often seen as unaffordable and not aimed at local people, deepening a sense of exclusion and, in some cases, fuelling community tensions. Residents want to see more genuinely affordable, good-quality homes that are accessible to long-standing members of the community.

Provision for children and young people was highlighted across all areas. In places where youth services were running, often thanks to the dedication of a specific person or group of people, they were seen as lifelines and a major strength of the community. But in many areas, residents told us there was "nothing for the kids to do", linking this to wider problems related to antisocial behaviour and low aspirations. People want to see more safe, welcoming spaces where young people can grow, learn, and feel part of the community.

The environment and sustainability more generally were not perceived as a top priority for residents, perhaps due to wider financial pressures and other challenges in people's lives. Nevertheless, some residents shared their concerns relating to climate change, predominantly in the inner-city areas. Many residents named things they were doing to help protect the environment including recycling, growing food, and reducing waste, and some residents had taken part in bigger projects like retrofitting homes or using solar energy.

Crime and ASB were raised as a concern across all the areas, with inner city areas generally having perceived worse crime levels. Community centres were seen as having the ability to reduce ASB and crime by keeping teenagers off the street. Relationships with the police were mixed, while some residents felt they could rely on them, others felt they were un responsive, and there was a lack of trust.

Across the areas, public services were felt to be overstretched having been heavily cut back over recent years. There were concerns about the visibility and responsiveness of the police, and the impact of cuts on mental health, youth support, and community spaces.

Despite these multiple challenges most residents had a strong sense of pride in their areas, with the majority of residents we spoke to wanting to stay there long term. All the residents had clear ideas of how to shape and improve their areas, making them better places to live.

This report is the first in a series of reports about the areas, a second report will summarise the reflections of community stakeholders, and we will also produce a detailed report into each of the individual areas. We hope collectively the research will give us deep insight into how these neighbourhoods work, what their strengths are and the challenges they experience.