

Measuring the social impacts of regeneration in South Acton:

Results of the fourth social sustainability assessment

Research for Acton Gardens LLP

Summary report
April 2025



About the social sustainability assessment

This summary report describes the findings of research exploring how the Acton Gardens regeneration programme is affecting people living in South Acton in Ealing, West London. This is the fourth social sustainability assessment, building on previous assessments in 2015, 2018 and 2020.

The assessment took place between November 2023 and April 2024.

The project was commissioned by Acton Gardens LLP – a joint venture partnership between Countryside Properties and L&Q. The aim has been to explore the social impacts of regeneration as the development progresses, to capture change over time for people living in different circumstances and different parts of the estate, and to understand how local priorities and needs can influence future phases of planning, design and management.

The project uses a social sustainability framework and a set of indicators for measuring the social sustainability of new housing and mixed-use developments originally developed for The Berkeley Group, by Social Life and Professor Tim Dixon of the School of the Built Environment, University of Reading in 2012 and adapted for this project with the permission of The Berkeley Group.

Cover image: The People's Throne unveiling, 2023



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Research method

Between October and December 2023, 564 people living in South Acton and its surrounding areas took part in a household survey. They were asked about their feelings about their neighbourhood and community life, their opportunities to influence or be involved in decision making and their priorities for the regeneration programme. Eleven stakeholders were interviewed and a survey of the built environment explored how it was supporting wellbeing and community life.



Building up a picture of the regeneration over time

Social Life has carried out four social sustainability assessments in South Acton. The first two assessments in 2015 and 2018 used a very similar approach to the 2023 approach, although in 2020 the residents were given the option of completing the survey online. The third assessment took place during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the approach needed to adapt to a challenging context.



Acton Gardens Primary School mural

Key findings

- A strong majority of residents interviewed were positive about the regeneration plans and feel that they are improving the quality of life; this has increased since previous years. Knowledge about the regeneration is lower than in previous years.
- The gap between the experience of people living in new blocks and in the remaining older estate, identified in earlier assessments, continues to widen. People living in the new homes had fewer concerns about safety, they have higher wellbeing and are less likely to struggle financially. They feel better served by facilities and by the Community Centre and have a greater sense of influence over local decisions. However, people living in the older estate continue to report higher levels of neighbourliness and belonging.
- Although some key indicators of community strength are recovering since 2020, such as sense of influence, belonging and neighbourliness, these are not as strong as before the pandemic.
- The views of council tenants still living in the older blocks and social housing tenants rehoused in Acton Gardens (all former council tenants), have also diverged. Council tenants' views are more negative than those voiced by housing association tenants on several issues, including perceptions of the regeneration, safety, wellbeing and being able to have influence.



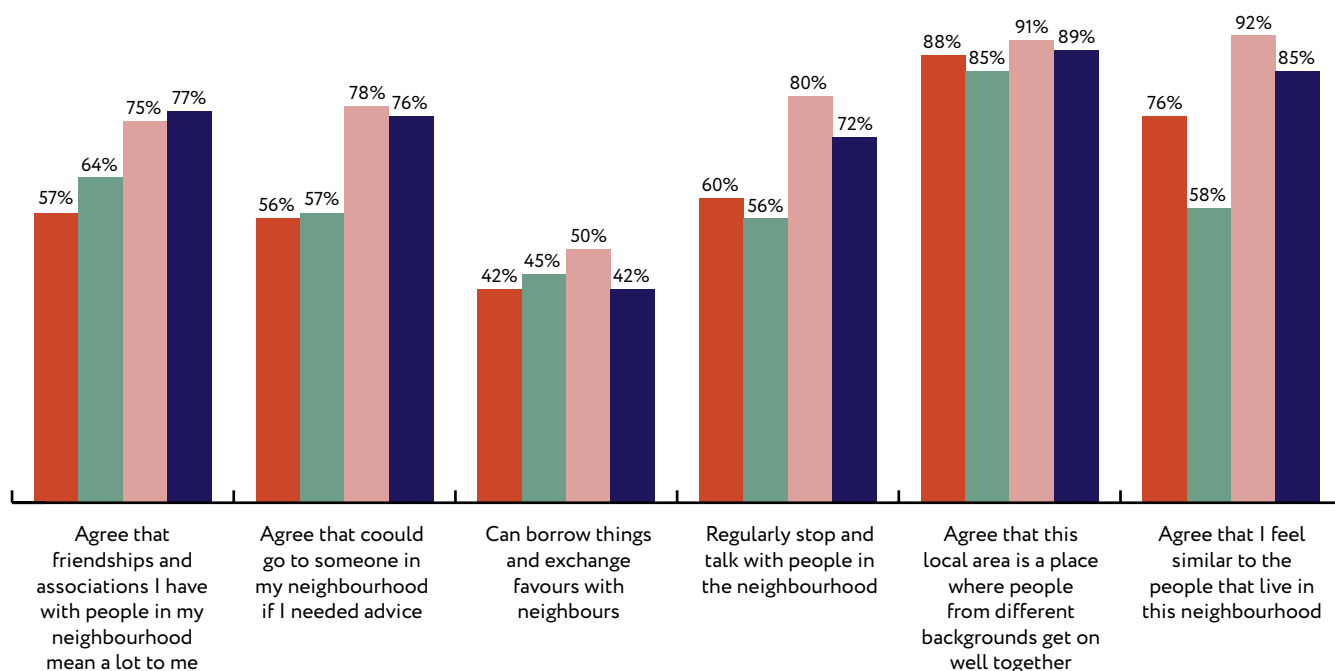
- Residents report feeling safer than in 2020, however safety is now residents' highest priority for regeneration. Almost all the regeneration priorities were less important for residents than in previous years, suggesting that as the estate is rebuilt, residents are paying less attention to the detail of the scheme.
- There are concerns about affordability of facilities, shops and businesses, rents and service charges. Wellbeing continues to be undermined by the after effects of the pandemic and the ongoing difficulties of the cost of living crisis. Although people reported fewer concerns about managing financially than in 2020, food bank use had increased across tenures. Residents in new and older homes attribute their worsening financial situation to increased costs of utilities, food and housing.
- Stakeholders describe positive relationships between neighbours, and a well-integrated community. There were some concerns that neighbourliness had been impacted by the disruption of regeneration, and about divides between "old" and "new" residents as well as concerns about repairs and communications.



Acton Gardens community event

Neighbourliness, indicators by year

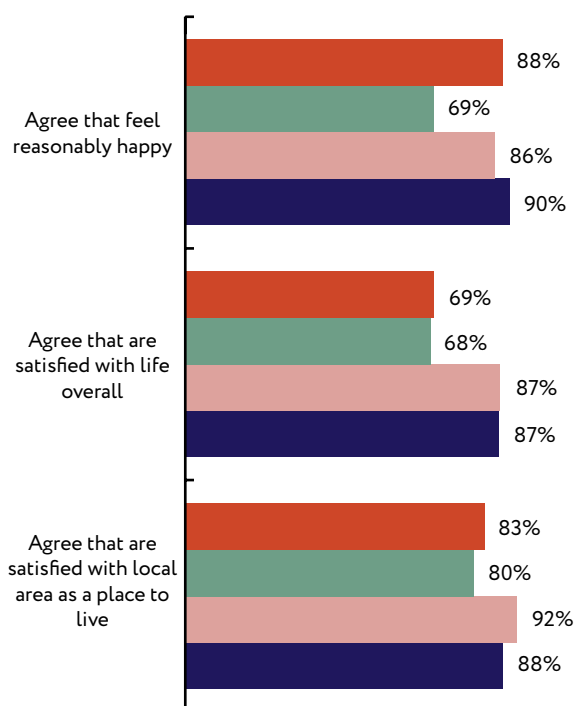
2023 2020 2018 2015



N= 395-401 (2023), N= 217-231 (2020), N= 347-352 (2018), N= 273-291 (2015)

Wellbeing, indicators by year

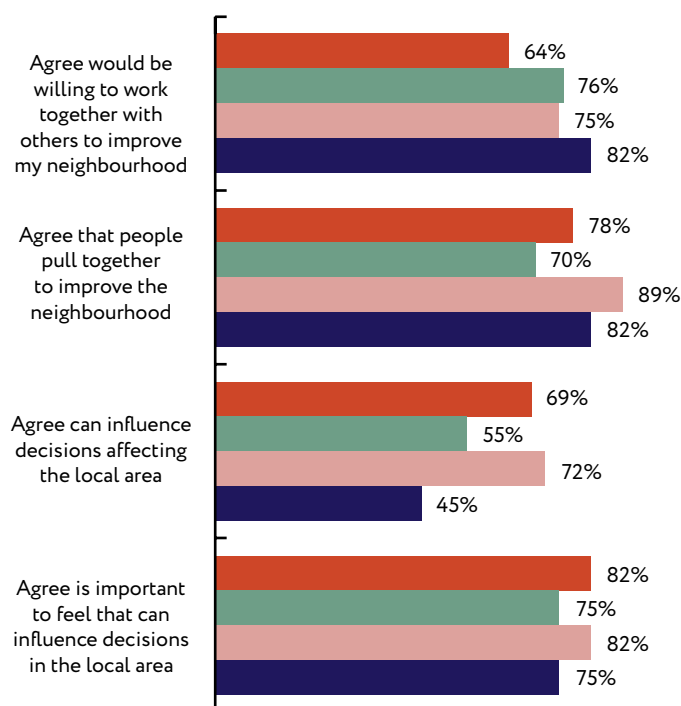
2023 2020 2018 2015



N= 392-401 (2023), N= 225-232 (2020),
N= 351-352 (2018), N= 282- 293 (2015)

Voice and influence, indicators by year

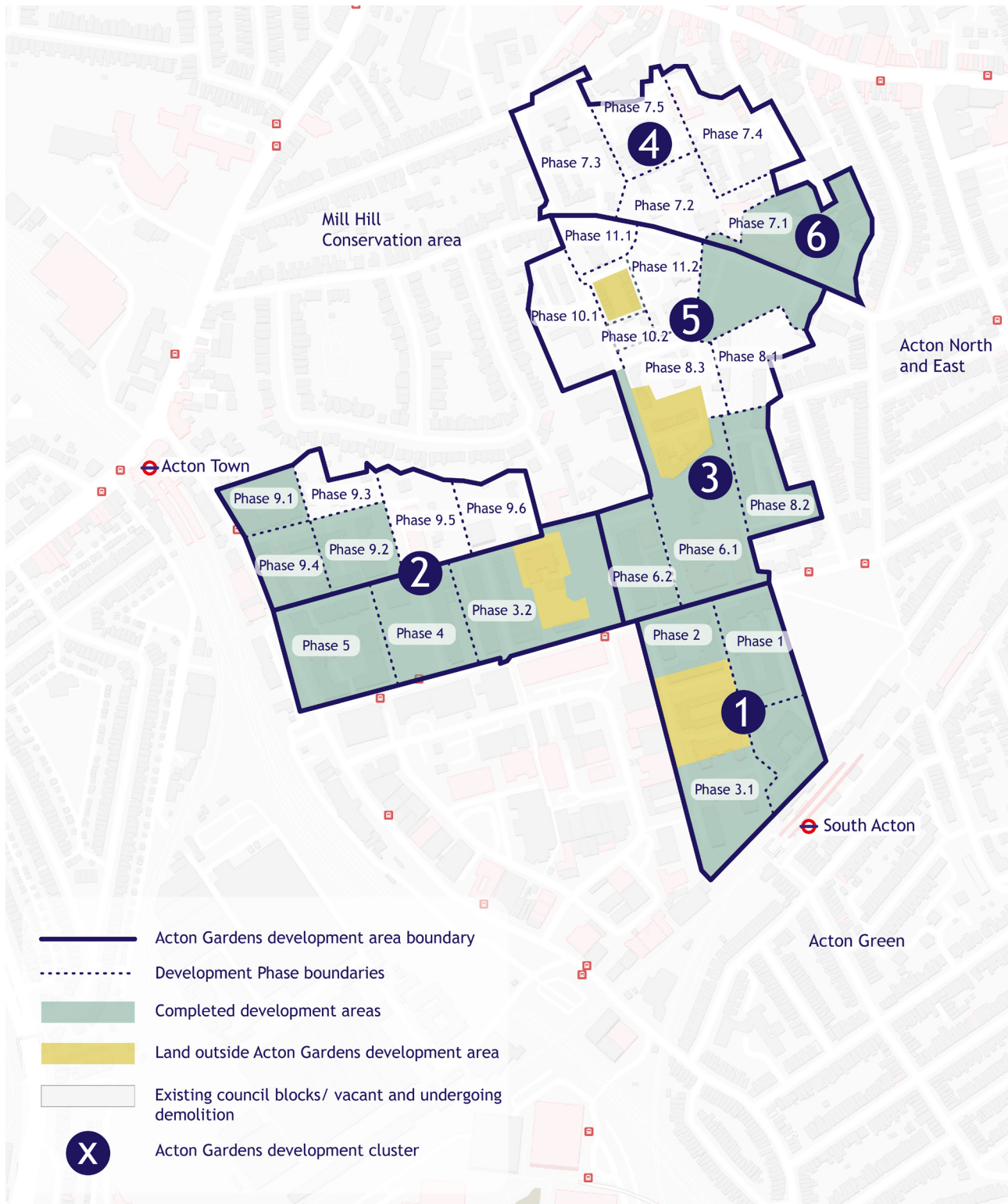
2023 2020 2018 2015



N= 372-397 (2023), N= 189-225 (2020),
N= 325-349 (2018), N= 198-288 (2015)



Cluster areas used to structure the survey, 2023



Who is living in the regeneration area?

The residents survey gives us a snapshot of the estate and its residents. The increase in home ownership and the resulting decline in the proportion of people in social housing have altered the demographics of the estate.

The proportion of white British residents has gradually increased over the four rounds of research, and the proportion of Black African residents has decreased. Compared to 2020 and 2018, in 2023 a smaller proportion of residents were on very low incomes under £14,000 a year, however, the proportion of residents on high incomes - over £69,000 - remains broadly the same as in 2020. These trends are reflected in ONS (Office for National Statistics) 2021 Census data.¹

Tenure change from 2015 to 2020 in Acton Gardens

- In 2015 there were 310 new homes on the new development at Acton Gardens (including Catalyst Housing homes); by 2018 this had increased to 2,186 new homes.
- In 2015 there were 68 social rented homes in the new development at Acton Gardens, and 639 by 2023.
- In 2015 there were 19 shared ownership homes on Acton Gardens, in 2023, 250.
- In 2015 80 homes on the new development on Acton Gardens had been built for private ownership, in 2023 there were 1,074.

The social sustainability assessment

The project uses a framework for measuring the social sustainability of new housing and mixed-use developments which was first developed for the Berkeley Group in 2012. The social sustainability framework has three dimensions: Social and Cultural Life, Voice and Influence, and Amenities and Social Infrastructure.

Social and Cultural Life

- The assessment shows that social and cultural life indicators on the new development has strengthened since 2020. Feelings of safety and perceptions of local facilities show the biggest increases.
- On the older estate scores for local facilities have improved, however wellbeing continues to be significantly worse than in comparable areas and safety is still as expected.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/search?topics=9731,6646,3845,9497,4262,4128,7755,4994,6885,9724,7367&filter=datasets>

Voice and Influence

- Residents' sense of influence remained strong in 2023, as in previous years. In the new and older areas, willingness to act strengthened, from expected to stronger than expected.

Amenities and Social Infrastructure

- The Amenities and Social Infrastructure scores for Acton Gardens are higher than for the South Acton Estate, as in 2020, reflecting improvements to housing design and the public realm.
- Acton Gardens is only given a negative assessment for one indicator, adaptable space.
- The scores for the South Acton Estate have fallen reflecting the experience of demolition and rebuilding, and the number of blocks standing empty at the time the assessment was carried out. Scores are weaker than would be expected for all indicators except transport links which scores positively, and distinctive character which scores as expected.



A resident's new home



Acton Gardens community BBQ

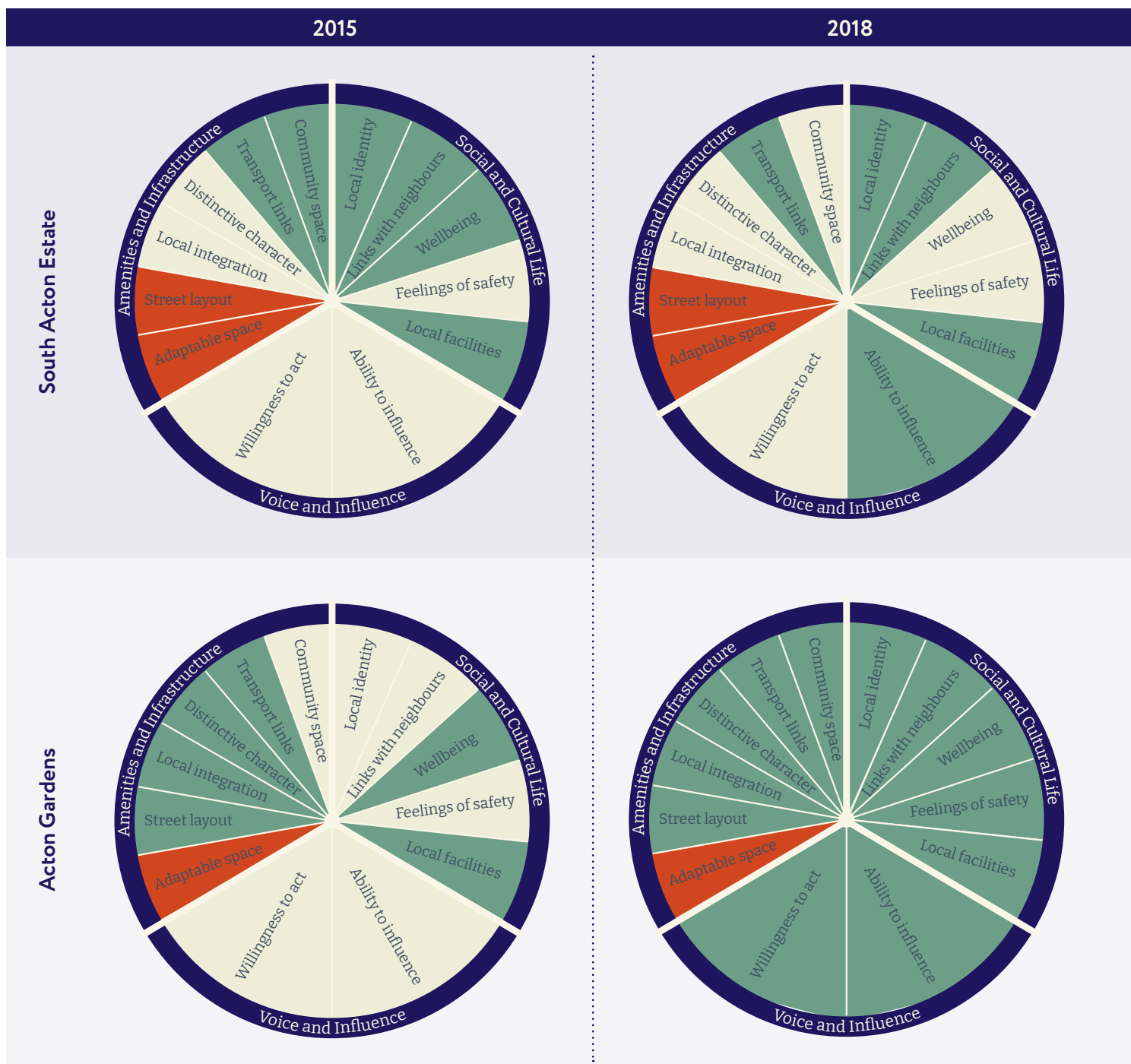
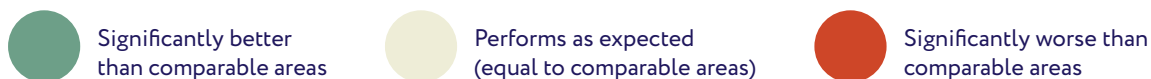
Comparison with neighbouring areas

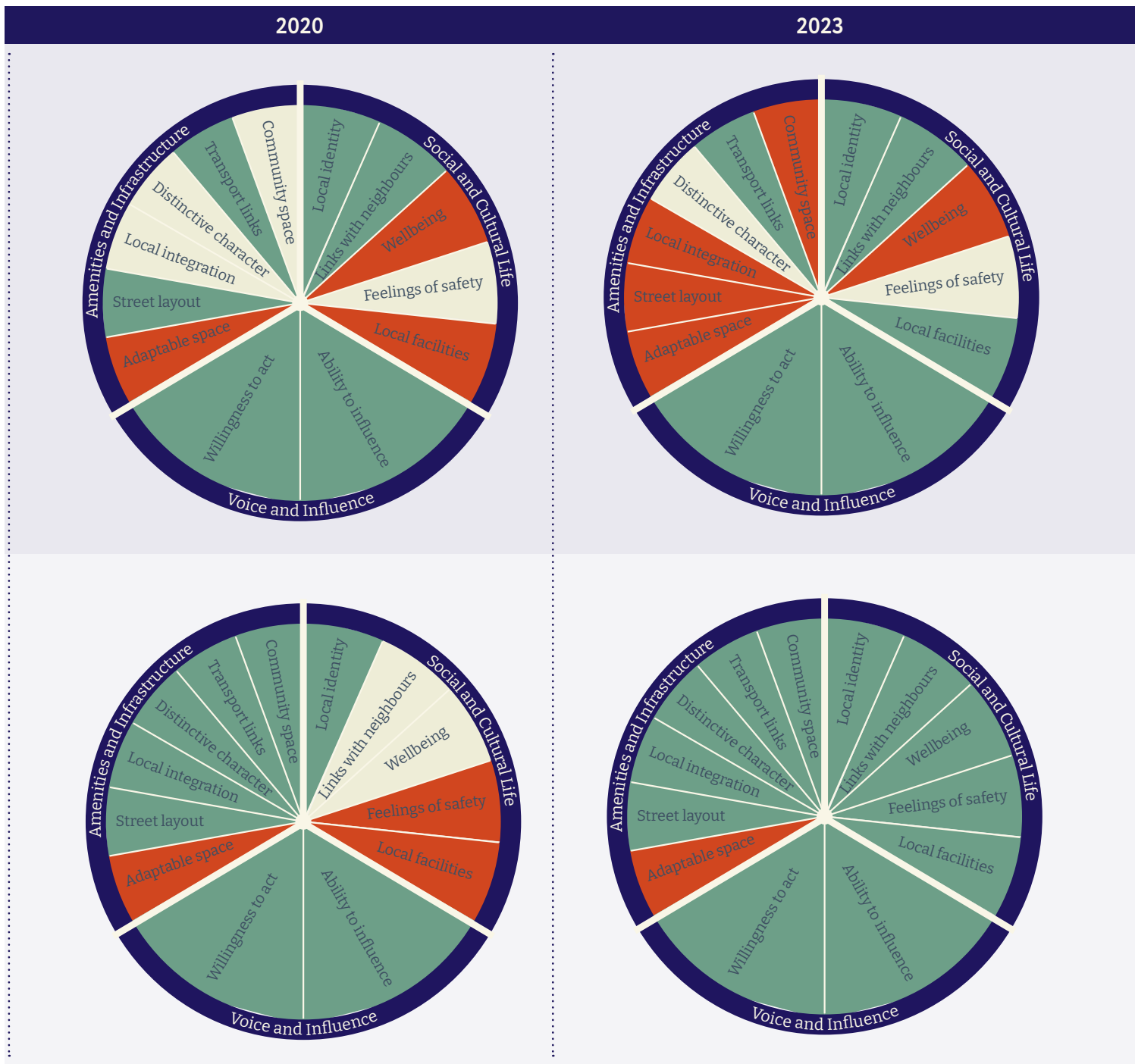
- Overall, residents living in the new homes have more similar feelings and perceptions to people living in neighbouring areas around South Acton than to residents of the old estate. This includes their level of knowledge about the regeneration, satisfaction with the local area, their plans to remain resident, feelings safety and life satisfaction.
- On key neighbourliness indicators, including belonging, local friendships and perceptions that people from different backgrounds get on, the old estate scored higher than both the new development and most of the neighbouring areas.
- Residents' perceptions of being able to influence local decisions are stronger among people living in both old and new homes on South Acton than people living in neighbouring areas.



Social sustainability RAG wheels for 2015, 2018, 2020 and 2023

Scoring explained:





Recommendations for Acton Gardens LLP

A short set of recommendations for Acton Gardens LLP and its partners have been developed drawing on the findings of the research. These focus on areas where there is most potential for agencies involved in the regeneration to take action to improve residents quality of life and everyday experiences.

1. Increase quality of life and perception of safety for the remaining residents living in the old estate through meanwhile investments and small-scale place-making initiatives in the open spaces. This could include improvements to lighting, public art, programming, providing planters and temporary moveable gardens.
2. Continue to support residents who are struggling financially, by funding the foodbank and other supports. Additional low-cost supports could be explored such as baby banks, a food coop, or a sharing library. Financial and employment advice is needed by residents who are on low incomes and those who are looking for work, or better quality work.
3. Provide open space for young people to feel they have a place to hangout that is theirs. Consider setting up a co-design process involving both young men and women to participate in shaping the space.
4. It is important to maintain the strong current sense of belonging and neighbourliness. Initiatives like events bringing residents together in a celebration, marking religious and cultural festivals, and providing space that groups of residents can maintain can all build a sense of belonging that brings together people from different backgrounds.
5. As in 2020, there continues to be a need to develop a long-term strategy for the provision of social infrastructure that meets the needs of the entire community, balancing activities to reflect demand and cater to local needs as these change over time.
6. Continue to progress regeneration plans at pace, to provide the remaining council residents with new homes to bridge the gap between the experiences of residents living in the older estate and the new development.



Avenue Road play area, 2023



The research team

The report was written by Mena Ali and Nicola Bacon, with research and analysis by Mena Ali, Simeon Shtebunaev and Alix Naylor.

The online and door to door surveys were carried out by Face Facts, using questions developed by Social Life.

About Social Life

Social Life is a social enterprise, created by The Young Foundation in 2012 to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about people's relationship with the built environment - housing, public spaces, parks and local high streets - and how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric and wellbeing of local areas. For more information visit www.social-life.co