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## Acton Gardens: the social impact of regeneration

### Summary Report

Measuring the social impacts of  
regeneration in South Acton:  
results of the second social  
sustainability assessment

June 2019









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LLP October 2018

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# Measuring the social impacts of regeneration in South Acton: results of the second social sustainability assessment

## Summary and recommendations

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### 01 Research for Acton Gardens LLP October 2018

This report describes the findings of a research project exploring how the Acton Gardens regeneration programme is affecting people living in South Acton in Ealing, West London.

The research was commissioned by Acton Gardens LLP – a joint venture partnership between Countryside Properties and L&Q – and took place between November 2017 and April 2018. It repeats initial benchmarking research carried out between January and May 2015 by Social Life.

The purpose of the research was to explore the social impacts of regeneration, to better understand local priorities and needs, and to influence the planning, design and management of future phases of development. The research findings are a snapshot of how residents are experiencing regeneration in the first years of the process, when the first phases of new housing have been developed in Acton Gardens and large areas of existing housing are still occupied. This research took place before the changes brought in by the 2018 Masterplan became known to residents and before significant

progress had been made on the delivery of the new Community Centre and Youth Centre.

The project uses a research framework and 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 Reading University in 2012<sup>1</sup>.

Acton Gardens has commissioned this research so they can take practical lessons from the findings to maximise the social impact of the regeneration programme. It also allows the experience of people living on the South Acton Estate and in redeveloped areas to be compared with those living in neighbouring areas. Through repeat surveys every two to three years, the development partners will be able to measure the social impact of regeneration and community development and assess the effect of community development and engagement methods being evolved during the programme.

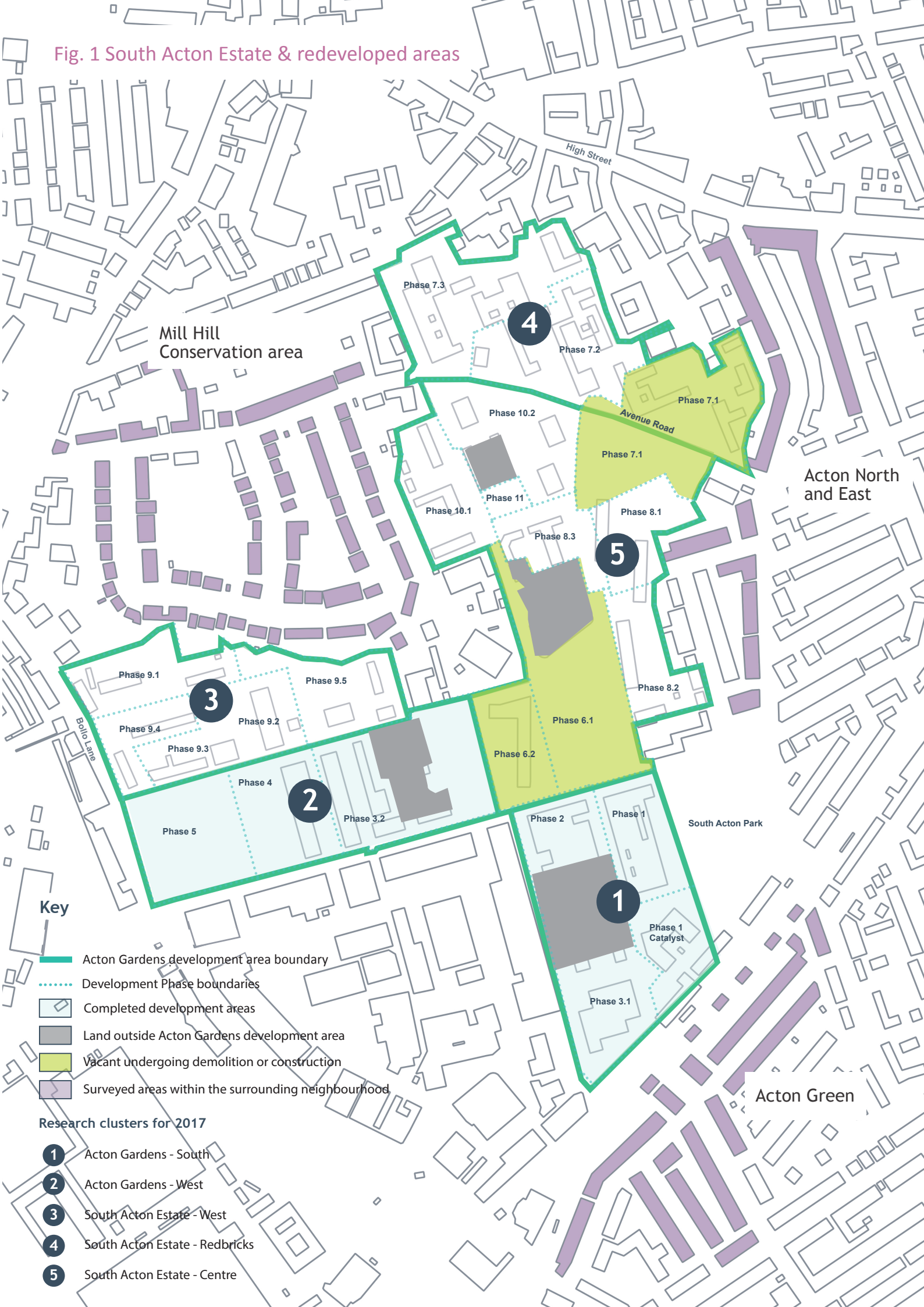
Reports of this work will be publicised to inform good practice in other estate regeneration projects.



<sup>1</sup> The social sustainability framework that has been adapted for this project is set out in the report Creating Strong Communities (2012, The Berkeley Group) which can be downloaded at: <http://www.social-life.co/publication/creating-strong-communities/>



Fig. 1 South Acton Estate & redeveloped areas





## 02 About the regeneration programme

The South Acton Estate is the largest in Ealing with over 2,000 homes. It is made up of a series of housing developments stretching over 52 acres between South Acton overground station, Acton Town underground station and Acton town centre.

South Acton is one of the most deprived areas in Ealing and the estate sits within a much more affluent wider area. In 1999, Ealing Council began a major regeneration programme at South Acton following consultation with the community. The decision was taken to comprehensively regenerate the estate. Catalyst Housing Group initially developed 346 new homes, in 2010 Countryside Properties and L&Q were appointed to carry out the bulk of the regeneration programme.

By November 2017 the first four phases of the twenty-one phase programme had been completed. 763 new homes had been completed by Acton Gardens LLP and Catalyst Housing Association, replacing former council blocks. 1,092 households were in the older South Acton Estate. In all, over 3,400 new homes<sup>2</sup> are to be developed in a masterplan that reshapes the areas with over one mile of new roads, five parkland neighbourhoods, a new community hub including youth, community and retail facilities, and improved access to the surrounding area.

It is proposed that half of the new homes are either affordable rent, shared ownership or social rent with the remainder being either for outright sale or private rent. Acton Gardens LLP aims to rehouse all of the residents of the South Acton Estate that wish to remain living in the area in the new homes.

### Research method

207 people were interviewed on the South Acton Estate and 146 on Acton Gardens. 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. 221 interviews were conducted in the streets directly surrounding the South Acton Estate. The streets were all in a five-minute walking radius from the centre of the estate. Interviews took place during the day, in the evening and at the weekends.

11 contextual interviews with community representatives and local agencies were also carried out.

An independent site survey was carried out by Matter Architecture, assessing the quality of the built environment and the provision of community facilities.

### Key findings

The research has found that:

- The vast majority of residents interviewed feel that the regeneration is improving the quality of life for residents
- Neighbourliness and sense of belonging continue to be strong: Acton Gardens residents' scores for these indicators have risen significantly since 2015
- Residents of the new housing and the old estate report that their sense of being able to influence decisions is stronger than in comparable areas; this has risen since 2015
- The wellbeing score for the South Acton Estate (yet to be developed areas) has fallen over the two years
- There are some indications that residents living in the Redbricks area at the north of the estate have less positive perceptions than in other parts of the development
- Housing is a priority for residents across all tenures and residents of the existing estate and the new homes are happy with the housing mix
- In neighbouring areas – chosen for their proximity to the estate - there have been some falls in social sustainability scores, particularly feelings of safety.

574 people interviewed in a face-to-face household survey of South Acton Estate, Acton Gardens and the streets surrounding the estate (544 were interviewed in 2015).



<sup>2</sup>The proposed new masterplan increases the number of homes to 3,400



### 03 Who is living in South Acton?

The residents' survey gives us a snapshot of the area and who is living there today. The population is changing as new residents move into the area, and longer standing residents of the South Acton Estate either move to new homes in Acton Gardens, or leave the immediate area.

The profile of the residents interviewed living on the South Acton Estate remained broadly similar in 2017, compared to 2015.

There were however more changes in the profile of Acton Gardens residents: comparing the 2015 and 2017 surveys, a higher proportion of people were in work, there were more 35-44 year olds, more residents with no children and a higher proportion of residents defined their ethnicity as white. This demographic change is likely to reflect changes in the proportions of different tenures in the new homes.

#### Views of the regeneration

The vast majority of interviewees - 98% of Acton Gardens residents interviewed and 91% on the South Acton Estate - think that the regeneration is successful in improving the quality of life of residents.

When asked in more detail about their views of the regeneration plans, a strong majority of Acton Gardens residents reported feeling positive about the regeneration, more than in 2015. Acton Gardens residents were asked their views of the regeneration programme

before and after moving, and for some perceptions were less positive after they moved.

On the South Acton Estate there are more reservations about the regeneration plans. Fewer people are positive about the regeneration plans than in 2015. However, in both the new and existing areas of housing, only a small minority voiced outright negative views overall about the regeneration plans.

Housing was identified as the aspect of the regeneration that is most important to residents. Residents reported their satisfaction with the housing mix at Acton Gardens. As in 2015, concerns were reported around the level of service charges and higher council tax for the new properties.



Fig. 2 What aspects of the regeneration are most important to you? (by cluster area)

	Acton Gardens South	Acton Gardens West	South Acton Estate - West	South Acton Estate - Redbricks	South Acton Estate - Centre
(Number of respondents)	103	43	42	64	101
Housing mix	62%	12%	48%	31%	17%
Availability of new housing for South Acton residents	40%	16%	21%	28%	79%
Improving housing quality	66%	30%	69%	72%	29%
Improving quality of open spaces	44%	81%	43%	33%	29%
Improving street layouts and lighting	38%	35%	36%	36%	23%
Improving community safety	52%	60%	50%	44%	26%
New community facilities	50%	63%	31%	34%	25%
New health facilities	55%	40%	31%	27%	22%
New facilities for young people	44%	30%	14%	16%	23%
Affordability of housing	51%	35%	36%	58%	24%
Disruption from building work	6%	9%	10%	6%	10%



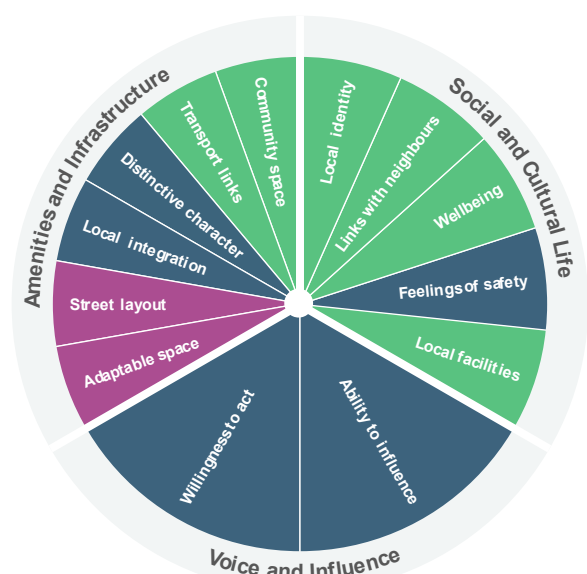
## 04 The social sustainability assessment

The research uses a social sustainability assessment to measure a wide range of factors that are proven to influence local quality of life and the strength of a community now and in the future. These are categorised into three different dimensions: Social and Cultural Life, Voice & Influence, and Amenities & Social Infrastructure.

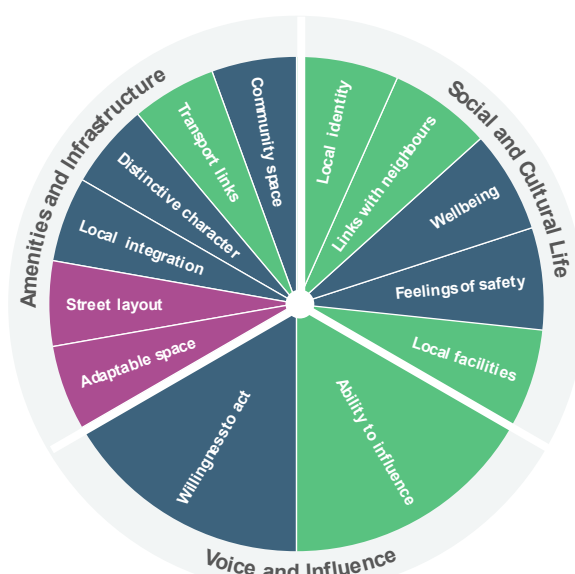
The social sustainability assessment for Acton Gardens in 2017 was more positive

than the same assessment carried out in 2015. However the 2017 assessment of the South Acton Estate found more weaknesses than in 2015.

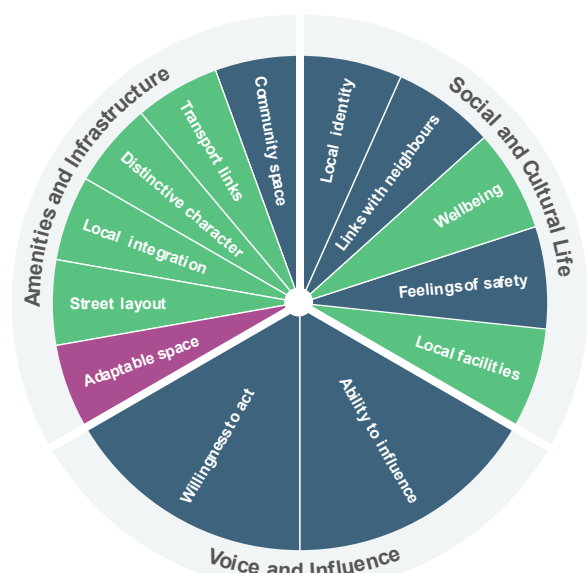
The surrounding areas also showed more vulnerabilities in key indicators than in 2015, showing that some of the issues identified in the South Acton Estate assessment are common to the wider area. There are no reasons to associate these changes in residents' perceptions in neighbouring areas with the regeneration project.



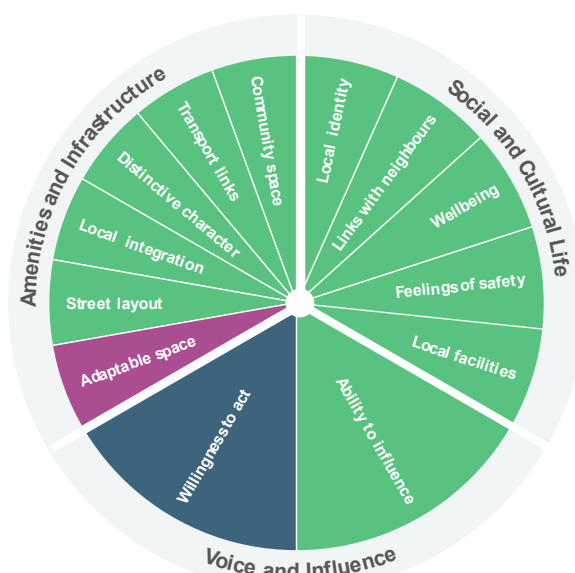
South Acton Estate - 2015



South Acton Estate - 2017



Acton Gardens - 2015



Acton Gardens - 2017

### Scoring explained

Significantly better than comparable areas

Performs as expected (equal to comparable areas)

Significantly worse than comparable areas

Fig. 3 Social sustainability scores 2015 and 2017, Acton Gardens and South Acton Estate

## Social and Cultural Life

The residents survey shows that:

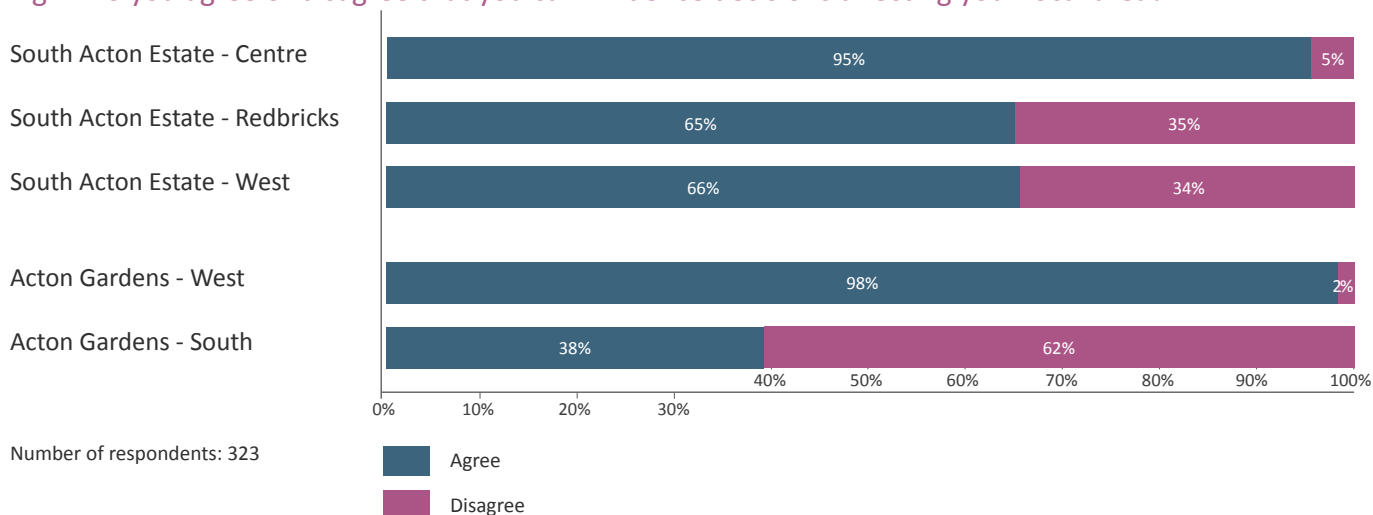
- Levels of belonging and a sense of local identity have remained very high, despite all the changes in the area. They have risen significantly in Acton Gardens South
- Residents have strong relationships with their neighbours. Levels of belonging and neighbourliness are highest among social housing tenants
- Tolerance of people from different backgrounds is high and people strongly identify themselves with the area Differences are respected but different groups are not necessarily mixing
- People moving into the area are mainly from a different socio-economic background. Existing residents will need to adapt to this new diversity, in the same way as they successfully adapted to people from different ethnic backgrounds moving into the area in the past
- Negative perceptions surrounding the area are changing as South Acton Estate becomes Acton Gardens
- People overwhelmingly feel safe, however crime seems to have consolidated in the parts of the estate that are not due for development for many years
- In general, residents are highly satisfied with facilities in the area
- There are concerns about the lack of meeting places in the area and the loss of community spaces in recent years. Acton Gardens residents report that a new community centre is a priority, alongside more local shops
- Scores from the three neighbouring areas show some deterioration overall in Social and Cultural Life, with feelings of safety falling across all three areas. Wellbeing has fallen in Acton Green from above, to below, comparable areas.

## Voice and Influence

The residents survey found that:

- Overall, residents say they are willing to work to improve their neighbourhood, however this is lower among people living in the Redbricks area and in the west of the South Acton Estate. The number of people who report they actually have taken action to get something done locally is relatively low
- Reflecting the strong levels of neighbourliness, the vast majority feel that people in this neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood
- In Acton Gardens West people feel they have a say and that this is important, whereas Acton Gardens South residents felt this to be less important
- On the South Acton Estate, the vast majority feel it is important to have influence over the area, but again in the Redbricks and West areas of the estate, fewer residents feel that they actually do
- In the neighbouring areas these indicators fluctuated a little between 2015 and 2017, but with no clear trend. In one of the three neighbouring areas willingness to act scores fell from above average to expected levels. However in another of the areas ability to influence rose from expected levels to above expected.

Fig. 4 Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?





## Amenities and Social Infrastructure

The site survey and interviews with stakeholders revealed that:

- On the South Acton Estate since 2015, overall the quality of the built environment on the existing estate has slightly decreased. This reflects the impact of the ongoing substantial physical regeneration programme
- In Acton Gardens the quality of the built environment has stayed the same
- Changes in scores reflect the disruption and dislocation of redevelopment and reflect the particular stage of development in late 2017. For Acton Gardens the score for integration with the wider neighbourhood fell
- Providing the right community hub for the estate is important for stakeholders, to encourage different groups to mix and to accommodate local organisations that currently provide support to particular groups
- The Amenities and Social Infrastructure of neighbouring areas were not assessed.



Fig. 5 Site assessment

	South Acton Estate		Acton Gardens	
Indicator sub-group	Score 2015	Score 2017	Score 2015	Score 2017
Provision of community space	2.5/3	2/3	2/3	2.5/3
Transport links	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1
Place with distinctive character	0.5/1	0.5/1	1/1	1/1
Integration with wider neighbourhood	2.5/4	2.5/4	4/4	3.5/4
Accessible street layout and design	2.5/5	2/5	5/5	5/5
Physical space of development that is adaptable in the future	0/2	0/2	0/2	0/2
TOTAL	9/16	8/16	13/16	13/16

■ Better than expected  
■ Worse than expected  
■ As expected



## 05 Recommendations for Acton Gardens LLP

- It is important to continue to support facilities, organisations and events, both formal and informal, that bring together new and longer-standing residents. The design of new public spaces, shops and social facilities and other community facilities have a key role here, alongside existing assets that are already embedded in the neighbourhood
- It continues to be important that services for the community are provided sensitively, in a way that respects the specific needs of the user, and to communicate with residents about facilities that are already planned and the engagement that has taken place
- The capacity of South Acton's residents to adapt to and embrace high levels of ethnic diversity points to resilience and adaptability. Differences in income and social class will be most easily accommodated if residents from different backgrounds are supported to develop neighbourly relationships and come to rely on one another for support. It is important to recognise the value of recent work in this area and support this into the future
- All residents will need social facilities and other initiatives that boost wellbeing. However it is important to give priority to residents living in older homes on the estate to maintain their quality of life throughout the regeneration
- Attention needs to be paid to crime and safety throughout the redevelopment area, particularly in the north of the estate where there is a complex arrangement of buildings
- More understanding is needed about the reasons for the fall in satisfaction with the regeneration programme among Acton Gardens residents after moving into their new homes, and responses should be developed to tackle this
- Now that the project is a quarter complete Acton Gardens LLP can explore ways to make residents in the surrounding neighborhoods feel more invested in the outcome of the regeneration programme
- Access to public transport was highlighted as a key strength of the neighbourhood - this should be maintained when densities increase.

It is important to continue to support facilities, organisations and events, both formal and informal, that bring together new and longer-standing residents.

Differences in income and social class will be most easily accommodated if residents from different backgrounds are supported.





## RESEARCH TEAM

The report was written by Lucia Caistor-Arendar and Nicola Bacon, with additional research and analysis by Christina Bayram, Claire Gordon and Alix Naylor. Professor Tim Dixon acted as academic reviewer.

Social Life was established in 2012 by the Young Foundation. All its work is about the relationship between people and places, for more information visit [www.social-life.com](http://www.social-life.com)

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