

# Living at the Royal Arsenal



A social sustainability report  
commissioned by the Berkeley Group



---

# Foreword

The importance of place-making is now widely acknowledged by the house-building industry. It wasn't always this way. But the quality of housing design has improved significantly and people recognise you have to address social and economic issues, as well as the buildings and spaces, if you want to create fantastic places.

The idea of place-keeping, however, often remains an after-thought. We have focused much less on how these new communities are going to be managed and maintained and how residents should be involved if these places are going to thrive.

The last time Britain built more than 200,000 homes a year back in the Sixties and Seventies, these communities ultimately failed because of management and maintenance, as much as design.


So we need to start thinking about place-making and place-keeping as two elements of the same process.

You have to deliver on both to create a strong new community.

In practice, this means looking at estate management in an increasingly sophisticated way. It involves developers working in partnership with housing associations and local authorities to put in place the right funding and structures. It means finding new ways to bring people together and actively involving residents in decisions about how places are managed in the long-term.

What this research at the Royal Arsenal shows is that the same care, attention and investment now given to place-making needs to be brought to thinking about the idea of place-keeping.

Tony Pidgley, CBE  
Chairman, the Berkeley Group



‘We need to start thinking about place-making and place-keeping as two elements of the same process. You have to deliver on both to create a strong new community.’

---

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>07</b>
What do residents think about Royal Arsenal Riverside?	08
What did we learn from the research?	12
Social sustainability rating	13
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2. Research framework and methods</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 What is social sustainability?	17
2.2 Benchmarking the research findings	18
<b>3. Research findings</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Resident survey: who did we interview?	21
3.2 Social and cultural life	24
3.3 Voice and influence	31
3.4 Amenities and social infrastructure	33
3.5 Quality of life	38
3.6 Facilities residents would like to see	38
<b>4. Contextual interviews</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1 Neighbourliness and community spirit	43
4.2 Community cohesion	44
4.3 Prosperity of the area	44
4.4 Community voice and action	45
4.5 Built environment and design	46
4.6 Safety	46
4.7 Children	46
<b>5. Visitors to Royal Arsenal Riverside</b>	<b>49</b>
5.1 Visitor survey: who did we interview?	49
5.2 How often do they visit?	51
<b>6. Key insights and opportunities</b>	<b>55</b>
About this project	58





---

# Executive Summary

This report describes the findings of a research project exploring community strength and quality of life at Royal Arsenal Riverside in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, south London. Berkeley Homes, the developer of Royal Arsenal, commissioned this work to understand what life is like for new residents and to understand how to support the community as it develops.

Royal Arsenal is a large-scale, new suburban community. It is currently one of Europe's largest regeneration projects and has been planned to transform a derelict industrial munitions site into a new mixed-tenure, mixed-used community. Over 30 years 5000 homes, cafés, bars, shops, restaurants, health facilities, offices and a new park will be created at Royal Arsenal.

The research involved a household survey, a site survey, and a number of in-depth, one-to-one interviews. The household survey results were benchmarked against data from four national, government surveys to assess the experience of Royal Arsenal residents against that of people living in comparable places.

---

226 residents (11% of the current population) were interviewed in February 2014. A quota sampling method was used to reflect the overall proportion of private and affordable households at Royal Arsenal. 151 people lived in private housing (67%), 72 in affordable housing (32%), and three (1%) identified themselves as other.

A visitor survey was also commissioned as part of this project to understand more about how non-residents use Royal Arsenal and feel about the place and the facilities.

## What do residents think about Royal Arsenal?

---

‘Here I can have my London life, my city commute, but also village life.’

---

Residents at Royal Arsenal report high levels of happiness, belonging, and trust in their neighbours. They feel that where they live makes a positive contribution to their sense of identity and intend to live in the neighbourhood for a number of years.

- 93% of residents describe themselves as happy, which is higher than the average for London (87%) and the UK (88%).
- Overall 74% of residents feel that where they live is important to their sense of identity. This figure was much higher for residents living in affordable housing (90%).
- 66% of residents say they feel like they belong to the neighbourhood compared to 62% for London and 48% for comparable areas.

- 
- The majority of residents plan to live at Royal Arsenal for a number of years to come: 75% of people living in privately owned or rented properties and 71% of people living in affordable properties.

---

‘Residents feel that people from different backgrounds get along well but levels of neighbourliness are much lower than the benchmark.’

---

- 89% of people agree that people from different backgrounds get along but less than half the respondents felt they could ask someone from their neighbourhood for advice (45% private and 42% affordable, 44% overall).
- 49% of affordable and 39% of private residents said they spoke regularly to neighbours.

---

‘It’s safe compared to the rest of Woolwich and London.’

---

People feel safe at Royal Arsenal but less so in the surrounding neighbourhoods:

- 88% of residents feel safe at Royal Arsenal after dark but only 68% feel safe after dark in the surrounding neighbourhoods. This difference is less marked during the day: 98% of residents feel safe at Royal Arsenal during the day compared to 94% in the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Residents are willing to work with other people to improve the neighbourhood but only 40% feel they can influence local decision-making.

---

‘It has changed the reputation of the area. People come and say “I’ve never seen a building like this”.’

---

Overall, the majority of residents, visitors and people working in the area who took part in the research felt that Royal Arsenal has made a positive contribution to the wider area.

- Residents and visitors place a high value on the quality of the built and natural environment at Royal Arsenal. In particular, the riverside location and mix of heritage buildings and modern architecture create a unique setting.
- People recognise that the Royal Arsenal has helped to change the reputation of the area and has put Woolwich ‘on the map’.
- Improved transport links and the future Crossrail link are acknowledged to be a lasting legacy of the development.
- The built environment will continue to evolve but is already highly rated, with a wide range of community facilities including shops, a pub, restaurants, health centre, dentist and nursery.
- The site has become a destination for residents and the wider community.

---

‘The number of children is very low. Typically, it’s young urban professionals.’

---

Royal Arsenal has a young population and a large number of households in the private rented sector.

- Most residents are aged between 26 and 45. Fifty percent of people in private households and 40% in affordable households are aged between 26-35.
- 17% of respondents from private households were aged under 25.
- 66% of all private households are privately rented. This reflects the overall growth of the private rented sector, which overtook the social rented sector in 2012-2013 to become the second largest tenure group in England.<sup>1</sup>
- People living in private rented homes were as likely to feel happy and report that the local area was a place where people from different backgrounds get along, however, they were less likely than other tenure groups to stop and speak to neighbours or borrow things and exchange favours.

In-depth interviews revealed that some residents felt that people from different tenure types were disconnected and not sufficiently integrated creating an *us and them feel*. Others were concerned that Royal Arsenal is cut off from the rest of Woolwich. Not all interviewees shared this feeling; others thought that diversity of tenures and people from different backgrounds created a cosmopolitan community, where people were mutually respectful. Beresford Street (the dual carriage way) and the wall around the development create physical barriers between Royal Arsenal and Woolwich, and are seen to symbolise the social and economic gap between residents.

---

<sup>1</sup> Issue 10: English Housing Survey Bulletin, February 2014

## What did we learn from the research?

The experience of the Royal Arsenal residents highlights three key issues that a new approach to community management could address:

- First, expanding and re-designing estate management services to encompass community development functions. There is value in exploring a new hybrid 'Community Concierge' role that might integrate the skills of community development with the functions of estate management.
- Second, having different housing management arrangements for different tenures is both logical and problematic. It is impractical to suggest they could be streamlined into one system for everyone. But there is scope for closer integration. This would often support a stronger sense of inclusion and the kind of innovations seen at the Royal Arsenal where residents can opt-in to additional services are well worth developing.
- Third, experience at the Royal Arsenal suggests we need to think through how residents influence the management of public and open space in new communities. This has been a recurring theme of Berkeley's social sustainability assessments. It can be a cause of frustration. But done well, it brings people together and allows residents to take responsibility for the place where they live.

## Social sustainability rating

This wheel diagram indicates how Royal Arsenal performs against the 13 social sustainability criteria and provides an overall rating for the development. Seven of the 13 criteria receive a positive rating, mostly in the amenities and infrastructure dimension, which reflect the development's high quality built and natural environment. The other six criteria are rated as satisfactory.







---

# 1.0 Introduction

Royal Arsenal Riverside is a £1.5 billion mixed-use regeneration scheme in Woolwich, south east London. Once a 300-year old munitions site, it has now been decontaminated and re-developed into a vibrant neighbourhood where 2,000 households already live.

Twenty years ago, this site was derelict and isolated. Now it is fast becoming one of the best connected places to live in this part of London. Crossrail will soon take commuters to Bond Street in twenty minutes, adding to the transport options already provided by the Thames Clipper and Docklands Light Railway services.

The Royal Arsenal has undergone huge physical transformation. A disused brownfield site is today a beautiful, enjoyable location, home to restored and refurbished Georgian listed buildings. Bold contemporary apartment blocks sit alongside a café, gastro pub and restaurant. The

outside areas are landscaped with lawns and paving.

But the journey is only half way complete. When it is finished around 2030, this development will provide a total of 5,000 homes, alongside a hotel, shops and commercial work spaces.

## What has been delivered so far?

- 1,992 homes (1,364 private and 628 affordable – 46% of the first phases)
- 500,000 sq. ft. of retail, leisure, community, office and light industrial space
- 18 Grade II listed buildings restored
- 3,000 construction jobs created
- Over 1,000 permanent jobs created
- £15.5 million invested in the community through Section 106
- The below ground infrastructure for a Crossrail station

---

‘Twenty years ago, this site was derelict and isolated. Now it is fast becoming one of the best connected places to live in this part of London.’

---





## 2.0 Research framework and methods

### 2.1

#### What is social sustainability?

The Berkeley Group's innovative social sustainability framework has been designed to explore and measure people's quality of life and the strength of community on new housing developments. Social Life and Professor Tim Dixon from Reading University developed the framework for the Berkeley Group in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

The framework assesses a wide range of factors that are known to influence local quality of life and the strength of a community. It contains 13 different criteria that combine the results of 45 questions to measure three dimensions of social sustainability: social and cultural life, voice and influence, and amenities and social infrastructure.

The framework is grounded in academic research about social sustainability (as one of the three pillars of sustainable development) and how

quality of life and wellbeing are related to the built environment, for example:

- 'Physical factors' include decent and affordable housing, access to opportunities, high quality public services, good quality and sustainable public realm, good transport connections.
- 'Non-physical factors' encompass safety, local social networks, social inclusion and spatial integration, cultural heritage, a sense of belonging and identity, and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

The Berkeley Group framework pays particular attention to how residents describe their quality of life, feelings of safety, satisfaction with local amenities like shops and public transport, and their views on the strength of the community. The criteria in the social and cultural life and voice and influence dimensions are measured through an independent resident survey. The criteria in the amenities and social infrastructure dimension are measured through an independent site survey.

<sup>2</sup> Full details about the criteria and how the framework was developed and tested can be found in *Creating Strong Communities*

<sup>3</sup> N Dempsey, G Bramley, S Power and C Brown: 'The social dimension of sustainable development: defining urban social sustainability'. *Sustainable Development*, 2011, Vol. 19 (5), 289-300

## Benchmarking the research findings

An important part of Berkeley's social sustainability framework is the ability to 'benchmark' residents' experience against that of similar people living in similar places. This is done by comparing the results of the resident survey at Royal Arsenal to responses from national government surveys, which are matched to local areas using the Office of National Statistics Output Area Classification (OAC) methodology.

OAC provides a detailed, socio-demographic profile of small geographic areas, which means we can make a meaningful comparison between the responses that Berkeley residents report and the responses of OAC sub-groups for areas with similar socio-economic characteristics. We call this creating 'benchmarks for comparable places,' as shown opposite.

The results of the resident survey are subject to statistical testing. Only statistically significant results are reported in

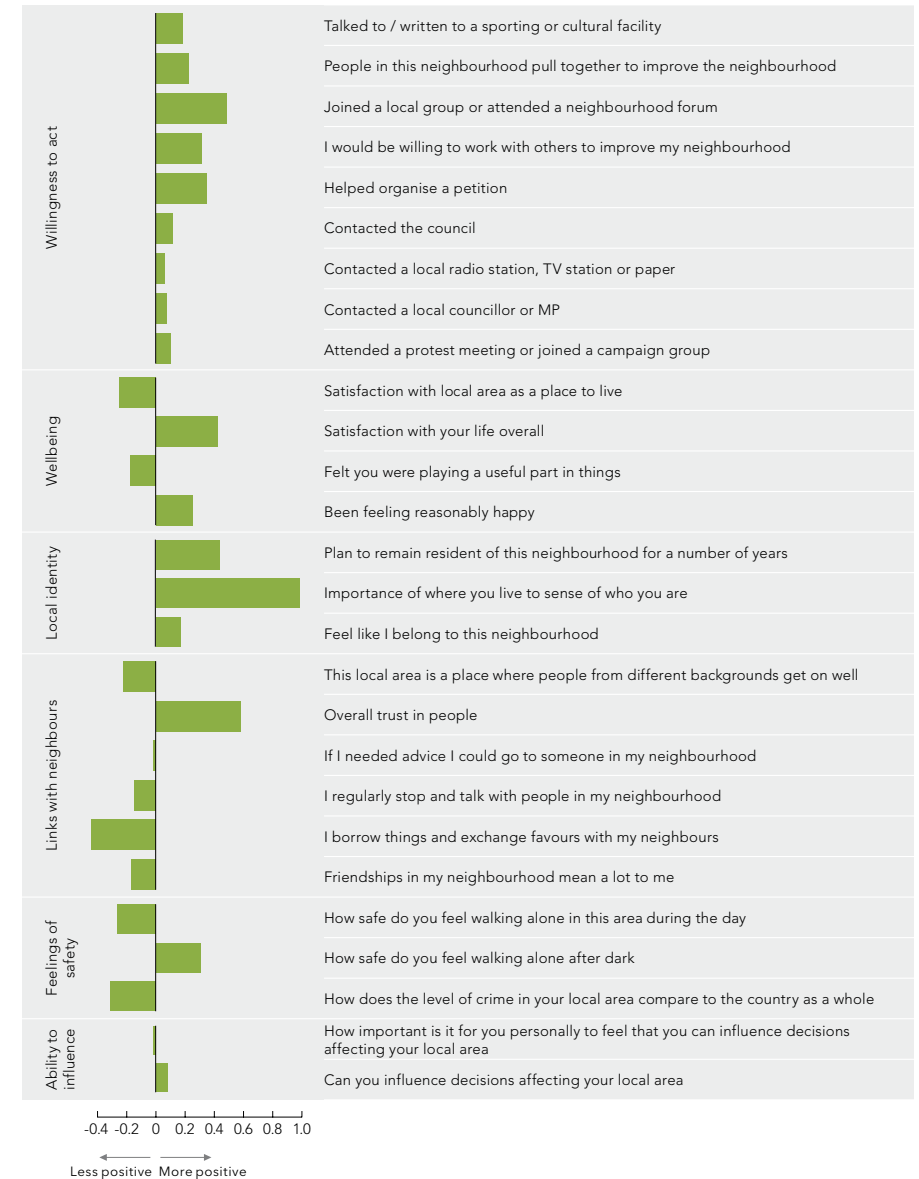
the social sustainability assessment. A RAG (red-amber-green) rating system is used to provide a simple graphic representation of the results of the resident and site surveys and to show the results for all the criteria. Green indicates a positive result, meaning resident survey responses are more positive than the comparable area benchmarks; amber is a satisfactory result in line with what would be expected for a comparable place; and red a negative response, lower than would be expected. The site survey data is assigned a RAG rating based on a scoring system established by CABE and the Home Builders' Federation for the Building for Life criteria.

**Berkeley Group social sustainability framework**



## Comparable area benchmarks for Royal Arsenal Riverside

This chart shows how the responses from the Royal Arsenal residents survey compare to responses you would expect areas with similar socio-economic characteristics







---

## 3.0 Research findings

**T**his section describes the findings of the resident survey, site survey and contextual interviews with local stakeholders.

---

### 3.1

#### Resident survey: who did we interview?

226 people took part in the resident survey.<sup>4</sup>

#### Household circumstances

- 151 people (67%) lived in private housing, 72 (32%) in affordable, and three (1%) identified themselves as other.
- 59 households (25%) had children under 18 living at home, of which, 40 (70%) had one child, 13 (22%) had

two children, and 10% had between three and five children.

- Royal Arsenal Riverside has a young population. 50% of residents living in private households were under 35 and 17% were under 25. 75% of residents in affordable households were under 45 and 40% under 35. Only 5% of people from private households were aged over 56.
- 18% had lived in their home for a year, 51% for two years, 23% for three years, 5% for four years, and 3% for five years or more.

---

‘When people who live within the borough come in, they are surprised to see such beautiful and historic buildings.’

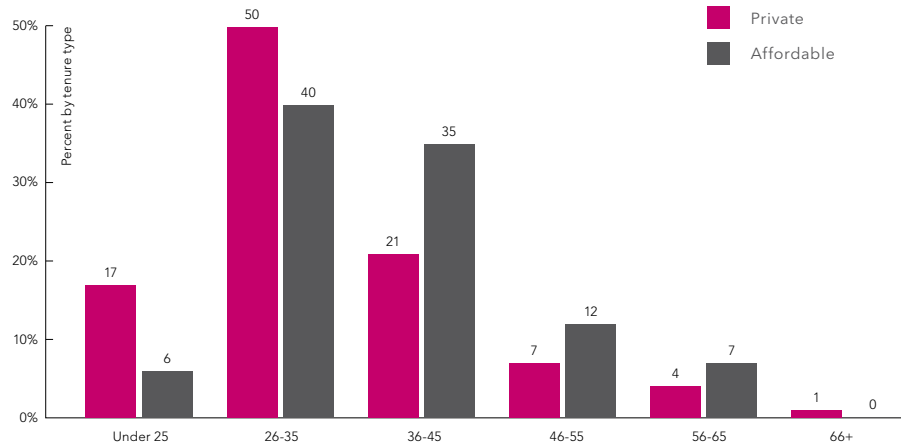
---

---

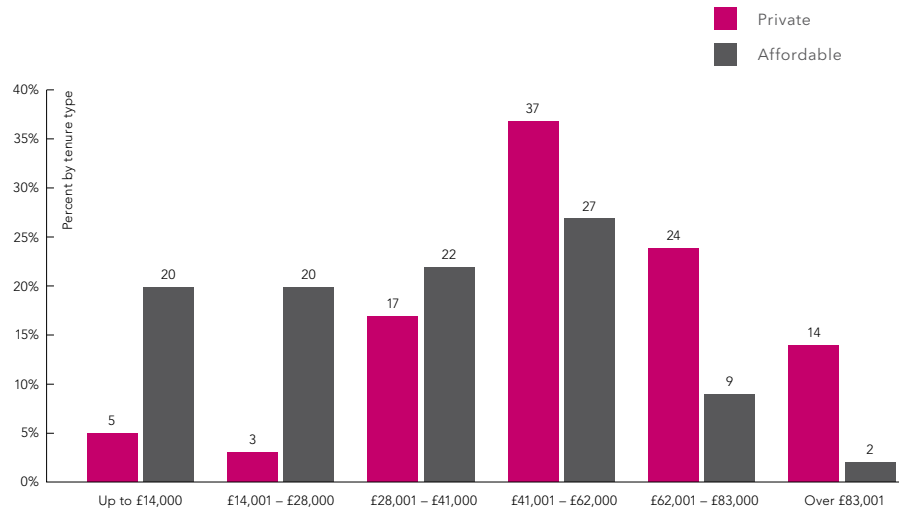
<sup>4</sup> Interviews were carried out during the day and the evening, during the week and at weekends, over a three-week period in February 2014. A quota sampling method was used to ensure that the balance between private and affordable households at Royal Arsenal Riverside was reflected in the data collection.



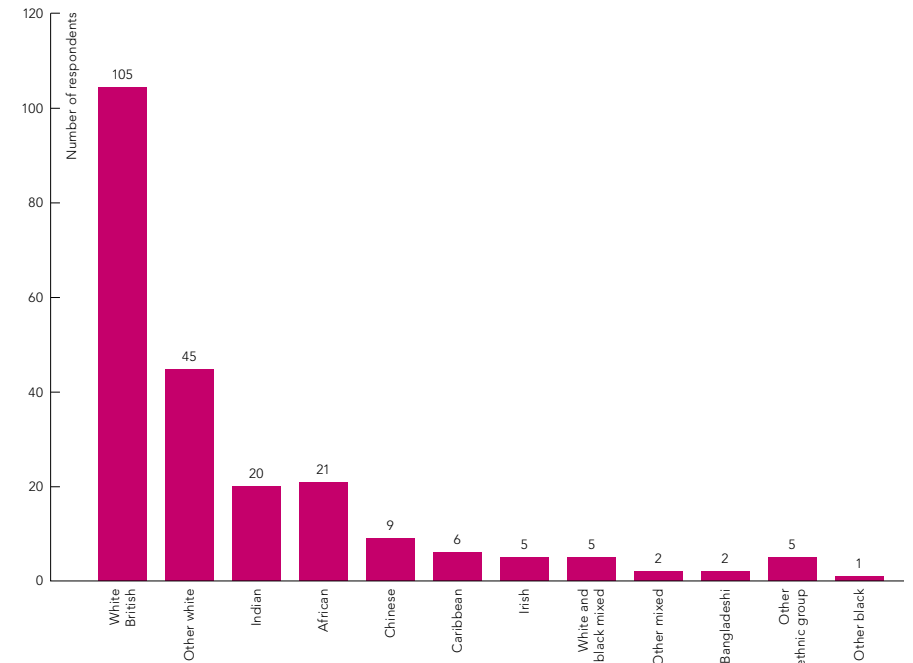
## Age of respondents



## Average annual household income



## Ethnicity



## Work and household income

76% of people from private households and 72% of people from affordable tenures were in full or part-time paid work. 8% of respondents were unemployed (in line with the borough average for Greenwich). 7% of private residents and 1% of affordable residents were students. Average household incomes ranged from £14,000 to over £83,000 per year.

## Ethnicity

The majority of people living at Royal Arsenal described themselves as being of White British or Other White backgrounds (66%). 9% were Indian and 9% were African. The other ethnic groups were Chinese (4%), Caribbean (3%), White Irish (2%) and a small number of people who were Bangladeshi or from mixed African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds.

## Social and cultural life

This section describes how residents answered questions measuring the social and cultural life dimension of the framework.

### Local identity

- Do you plan to remain a resident of this neighbourhood for a number of years?
- Do you feel like you belong to this neighbourhood?
- How important is where you live to your sense of who you are?

Much research about communities explores how the identity and character of a neighbourhood creates an identifiable sense of place and how this influences people's feelings of belonging to an area. Physical and social factors both contribute to a positive local identity, for example, distinctive architecture or natural landscapes, community history, and local social events like street parties.

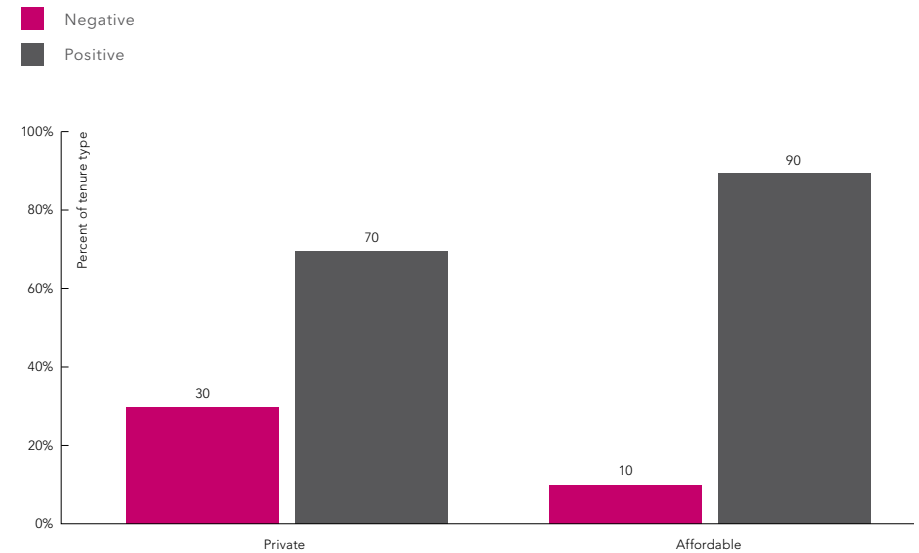
This criterion investigates how residents at Royal Arsenal feel about the identity of the area and how these feelings influence their own sense of self and belonging. For all three questions in this criterion, residents report positive responses that are above

the comparable area benchmarks, in particular, residents described very high levels of feeling that where they live contributes positively to their sense of who they are. Residents and visitors place a high value on Royal Arsenal's unique architectural and natural landscapes. It is likely this distinctiveness contributes significantly to these positive responses.

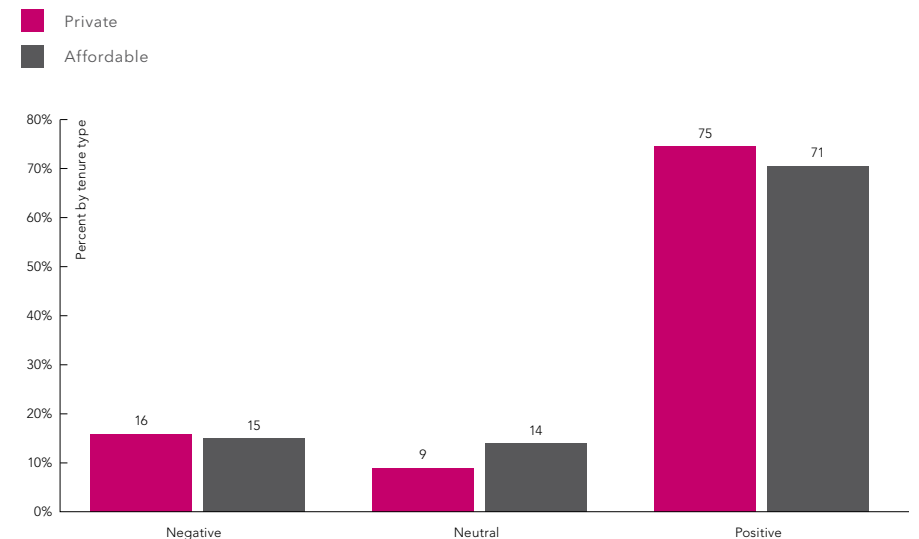
Overall, 75% of residents in private households and 71% in affordable households plan to remain resident. A more detailed breakdown of responses by tenure type shows an interesting picture:

- 90% of owner occupiers and 67% of tenants in private rented accommodation plan to stay in the neighbourhood. This seems like a particularly positive response from people living in private rented accommodation, which is often assumed to be a more transient tenure type.
- 85% of residents who are living in properties rented from a housing association plan to remain resident, yet only 47% of people who have shared ownership tenures planned to remain. The number of shared ownership properties at Royal Arsenal is relatively low (30 units), however, it could be assumed that households with shared equity would be more likely to want to stay in the neighbourhood.
- The number of residents reporting they plan to remain resident in the neighbourhood is above the comparable area benchmark.

### How important is where you live to your sense of who you are?



### Plan to remain a resident for a number of years



Feelings of belonging are higher than the benchmark for comparable areas. Private residents reported stronger feelings of belonging than residents in affordable households (69% compared to 60%).

## Links with neighbours

- If I needed advice I could go to someone in my neighbourhood
- I borrow things and exchange favours with my neighbours
- I regularly stop and talk with people in my neighbourhood
- Friendships in my neighbourhood mean a lot to me
- Most people can be trusted or you cannot be too careful with people
- People from different backgrounds get on well

Social ties at neighbourhood level are acknowledged to make a positive contribution to individual wellbeing and community resilience. Work by

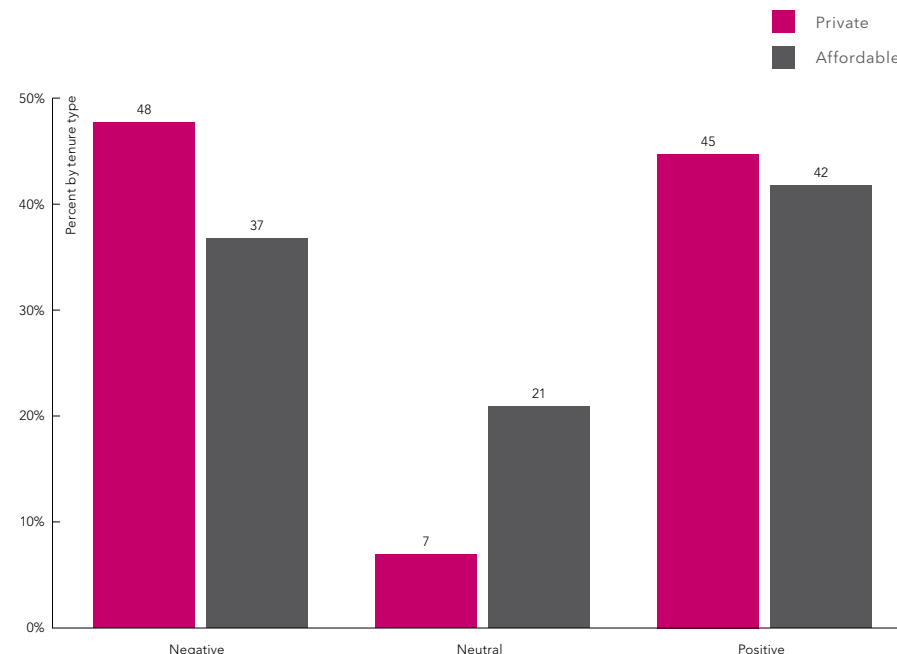
CABE has demonstrated that well-designed and high quality public spaces, street layouts that connect and integrate different neighbourhoods, and shared facilities like shops and parks, can encourage informal daily interaction between people of different backgrounds. This kind of daily social interaction between people living and working in a neighbourhood has been demonstrated to build trust and over time, to encourage the type of weak social ties that are often described as 'latent neighbourliness' or 'collective efficacy'.

30% of residents at Royal Arsenal say they trust other people who live locally, which is a very positive response (the second highest) against the comparable area benchmark. Almost 90% of residents (90% private and 87% affordable households) agree that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get along, although these responses are lower than the comparable area benchmark.

Roughly half of the people interviewed said that local friendships and associations were important to them. Yet in spite of high levels of trust residents at Royal Arsenal describe a mixed picture of day-to-

'Almost 90% of residents agree that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get along.'

## Local support networks to call on



day interaction with their neighbours. Responses to the four questions about neighbourliness were all below the comparable area benchmark.

- 45% of private and 42% of affordable households report they could seek advice from someone in the neighbourhood if they needed help
- 39% of private and 49% of affordable households report they regularly talk to their neighbours
- Only 18% of private and affordable households borrow things or exchange favours with neighbours

- People living in shared ownership and private rented tenures reported lower levels of interaction with their neighbours across all the questions about neighbourliness. They were least likely to say they could go to someone in the neighbourhood if they needed advice (31% shared ownership and 40% private rented compared to 54% of owner occupiers) or to regularly stop and speak with their neighbours (37% shared ownership and 33% private rented compared to 51% of owner occupiers).



## Wellbeing

- Have you recently felt that you were playing a useful part in things?
- Have you been feeling reasonably happy?
- How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with life overall?
- Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?

80% private and 75% affordable households report they felt they were playing a useful part in things and 91% of private and 89% of affordable households say they have been feeling reasonably happy.

Residents report high levels of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live (84% private and 80% affordable households) and with their current situation (86% private and 78% affordable households).

A closer look at different tenure groups shows that people living in private rented homes report the highest levels of happiness; 95% say they have been feeling reasonably happy and 88% said they felt happy yesterday. The results for the first question – ‘have you been feeling reasonably happy?’ – are only marginally higher than

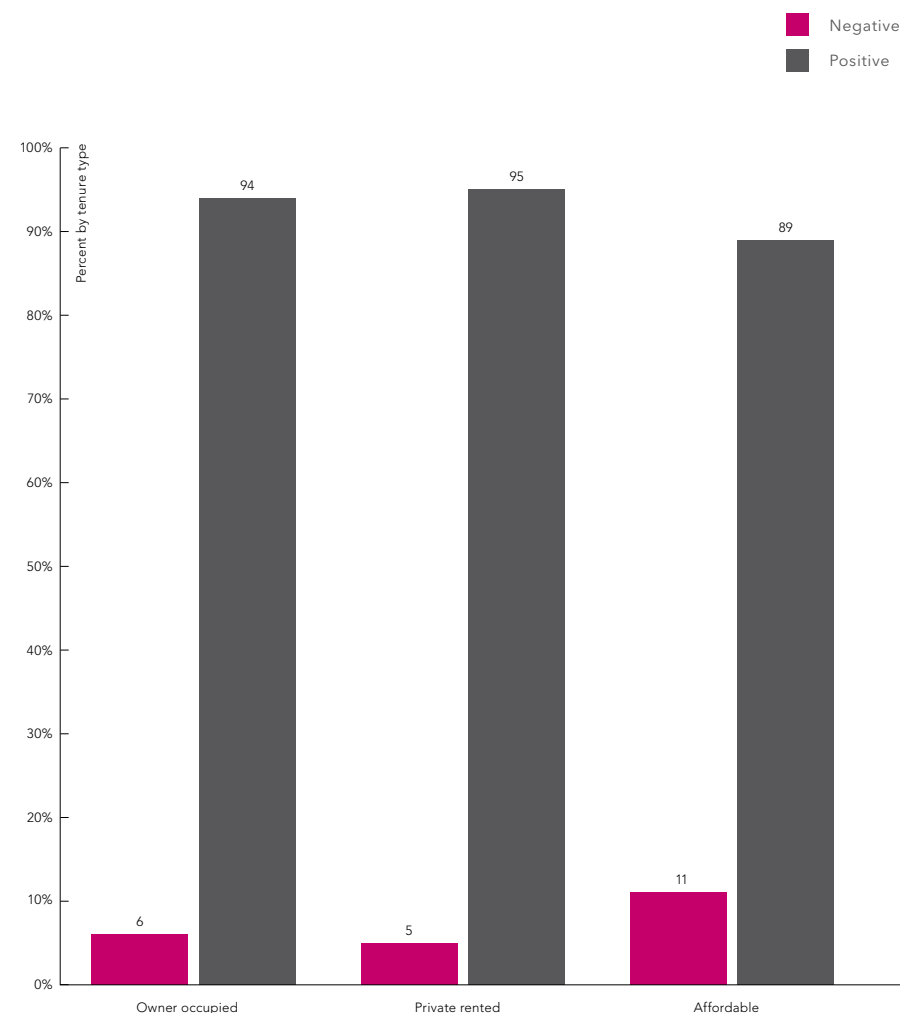
those for owner occupiers and shared ownership households (94%) but significantly higher than people living in social rented homes (86%).

If the four questions in the criterion are taken individually, residents report very high levels of satisfaction with life overall and high levels of feeling reasonably happy against the benchmark for comparable places. However, levels of satisfaction with the area as a place to live and responses to the question ‘have you recently felt you were playing a useful part in things?’ are below the benchmark for comparable places.

ONS is putting considerable focus on the measurement of the nation’s wellbeing following a policy direction set out by the Prime Minister after the 2010 election. ONS uses four questions to explore different aspects of wellbeing: ‘overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?’, ‘overall, to what extent do you think the things you do in your life are worthwhile?’, ‘overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?’, and ‘overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?’.<sup>5</sup>

This framework includes one of these questions in the social sustainability assessment: ‘overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?’ and three questions from other national surveys. These questions were selected when the framework was developed because Berkeley Group and the research

## Have you been feeling reasonably happy?



team felt it was inappropriate to ask residents very personal questions. However, an additional question ‘how happy were you yesterday?’ was also

included in the Royal Arsenal resident survey, although the results have not been included in the benchmarking or overall social sustainability assessment.

<sup>5</sup> ONS (2011) *Initial investigation into subjective wellbeing from the Opinions Survey*. London: Office for National Statistics.

## Feelings of safety

- How safe do you feel walking alone in this area during the day?
- How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?
- Compared to the country as a whole do you think the level of crime in your local area is...

Residents were asked how safe they feel walking alone in the area during the day and during the night in the local area (defined as being 15-20 minutes walk from home) and also in Royal Arsenal development.

The majority of residents feel very or fairly safe at Royal Arsenal during the day (98%) and at night (88%). However, feelings of safety in the local area at night are much lower with 68% of people saying they feel fairly or very safe in the neighbourhoods surrounding Royal Arsenal.

Feelings of safety in the local area are higher than the comparable area benchmark but responses to the other two questions are lower than the comparable area benchmark. 30% of people feel that levels of crime in the neighbourhood are higher than average. 17% feel they are lower than average and 36% feel they are about the same.

## Local facilities

Are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the quality of facilities for:

- Children and young people (0-4 years)?
- Children and young people (5-11 years)?
- Children and young people (12-15 years)?
- Children and young people (16-18 years)?
- Quality of health facilities?
- Quality of sport and leisure facilities?
- Quality of facilities where you socialise with friends and family?

This criterion includes seven questions about residents' satisfaction with the availability and quality of community facilities in the development, with a particular focus on provision for young children of different ages and spaces for people to socialise.

These questions are intended to give residents a voice in assessing the availability and quality of community facilities as a counterpoint to the independent site surveyor's assessment. These questions are assessed as part of the overall social sustainability rating but are not benchmarked against national datasets.

Royal Arsenal residents rated the quality of sports and social facilities, and play facilities for children aged 5-11 as satisfactory. Residents were very positive about the provision of local health facilities but were unsatisfied with the play facilities for children under the age of four.

The lack of facilities and spaces for children and young people emerged in the in-depth contextual interviews and was identified again when residents were asked what kind of facilities they would like to see at Royal Arsenal in the future. Provision of facilities for young children was fourth on the list of priorities for both private and affordable residents.

Getting the right balance of play spaces for children and young people is often a challenge in new housing developments, in particular, designing play spaces that are not rigidly managed so are able to provide a degree of flexibility in how young people use them and are able to adapt as children get older.

The contextual interviews identified that parking for the doctor's surgery and pharmacy is felt to be very inadequate. The practice has four parking bays for staff but there are 15 clinical rooms with potentially 15 clinicians, 15 staff and 15 patients at any one time.

### 3.3

## Voice and influence

This section describes how residents responded to questions about the

two criteria that measure voice and influence.

## Willingness to act

- I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood
- To what extent do you agree or disagree that people in this neighbourhood pull together to improve this neighbourhood?
- In the last 12 months, have you taken any of the following actions to try to get something done about the quality of your local environment?
  - Contacted a local radio or TV station or newspaper
  - Talked to or written to a sporting or cultural facility
  - Contacted the council
  - Contacted a local councillor or MP
  - Joined a local group or attended a neighbourhood forum
  - Attended a protest group or joined a campaign group
  - Helped organise a petition

Royal Arsenal residents report positive responses to all nine of the questions in this criterion compared to the benchmarks.

Three questions generated responses that were significantly higher than the others:

- First, 27 of the 226 people surveyed (11%) said they had joined a local group or attended a neighbourhood forum in the previous 12 months. Although this is a relatively small number of people, it is significantly higher than the comparable area benchmark.
- Second, 16 people (7%) reported they had helped organise a petition. Again, this is a small number of people but it is significantly higher than the comparable area benchmark.
- Third, people reporting they would be willing to work with other people to improve the neighbourhood (69% agree or strongly agree).

The relatively high levels of community action are likely to be linked, in part, to opposition to future phases of development at Royal Arsenal. A number of residents have recently come together to raise concerns about how site expansion will impact on current residents. In addition, in-depth interviews carried out alongside the resident survey identified a

---

‘69% agree or strongly agree that they would be willing to work with other people to improve the neighbourhood.’

---

number of community-led initiatives running alongside formal residents’ associations, to bring people together and share information including a community website, a book club and a supper club.

### Ability to influence

- In the last 12 months, has any organisation asked you what you think about:
  - Sporting facilities
  - Cultural facilities
  - Environmental facilities
- Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?
- How important is it for you personally to feel that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?

In spite of the high levels of activity reported by residents against the ‘willingness to act’ questions, they reported low rates of being consulted about the environment and local sporting and cultural facilities.

95% of residents said they had not been asked what they thought about local sporting, cultural or environmental facilities in the previous 12 months.

Responses to the question ‘how important is it for you personally to feel that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?’ were marginally below

the comparable area benchmark and responses to the question ‘can you influence decisions affecting your local area?’ were marginally above the comparable area benchmark.

---

### 3.4

## Amenities and social infrastructure

This section of the report describes the results of the independent site survey, which is based on an independent site survey adapted from CABE’s Building for Life assessment.

### Community space

Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés? (What kind? Are the facilities appropriate for the whole community?)

Have the community facilities been appropriately provided?

Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?

This indicator includes three questions about the appropriate and timely provision of community facilities in the development. It captures information about the type, adequacy, and

timing of provision of facilities, with a particular focus on provision for young children of different ages, and spaces for people to socialise.

The site survey identified that access to retail facilities and other local services is excellent. Royal Arsenal has a Tesco Express, a gym, office space, estate management offices, a nursery, a pub/restaurant, two cafés, shops, health facilities, the Firepower Royal Artillery Museum and Local Heritage Centre. Residents can also access a full range of national and local independent retailers in Woolwich town centre and both a covered and open market in Plumstead Road and Beresford Square. There are no on-site schools but there is a range of primary schools and secondary schools of various denominations close by.

Open and green spaces are currently well provided and generally well managed. There is Royal Arsenal Gardens, a riverfront public park planned as a ‘Playable Route’. It includes a skateboard park, multi-purpose, grassed and hard landscape areas for a range of activities, although the January 2013 Masterplan proposes to re-provision this as a linear park.

The site survey describes the reconfigured park as particularly important, both to residents and the wider area, as new phases of high-density development evolve at Royal Arsenal it will provide an active, well-lit space.

The only equipped, public play area completed to date is at Wellington Park in the centre of the completed development.



## Transport links

Does the development have easy access to public transport?

The development is close to Network Rail's mainline stations of Woolwich and Plumstead and Woolwich DLR Station in the town centre. In addition, a new Crossrail station is currently under construction on the site, which Berkeley Homes has been instrumental in securing.

Beresford Road (A206) is part of the South Circular and gives access to the national road network and to the north bank of the Thames via the Woolwich ferry. A number of buses and the Thames Clipper serve the site. Consequently, the site has a high Public Transport Accessibility Rating of 6a.

## Distinctive character

Does the scheme feel like a place with distinctive character?

The development incorporates 18 Grade I and II listed buildings, dating from 1545 to 1829, which have been converted to a range of uses. The listed buildings and the orthogonal pattern of streets and spaces give the Royal Arsenal development an extremely distinctive, formal character. The historic buildings are of exceptional quality with an abundance of detail and these have been

combined with a range of new additions that are architecturally restrained. However, the site survey identifies that the proposed new development on The Waterfront, to the west of the site, lacks the same contextual constraints and creating a distinctive environment will be more difficult.

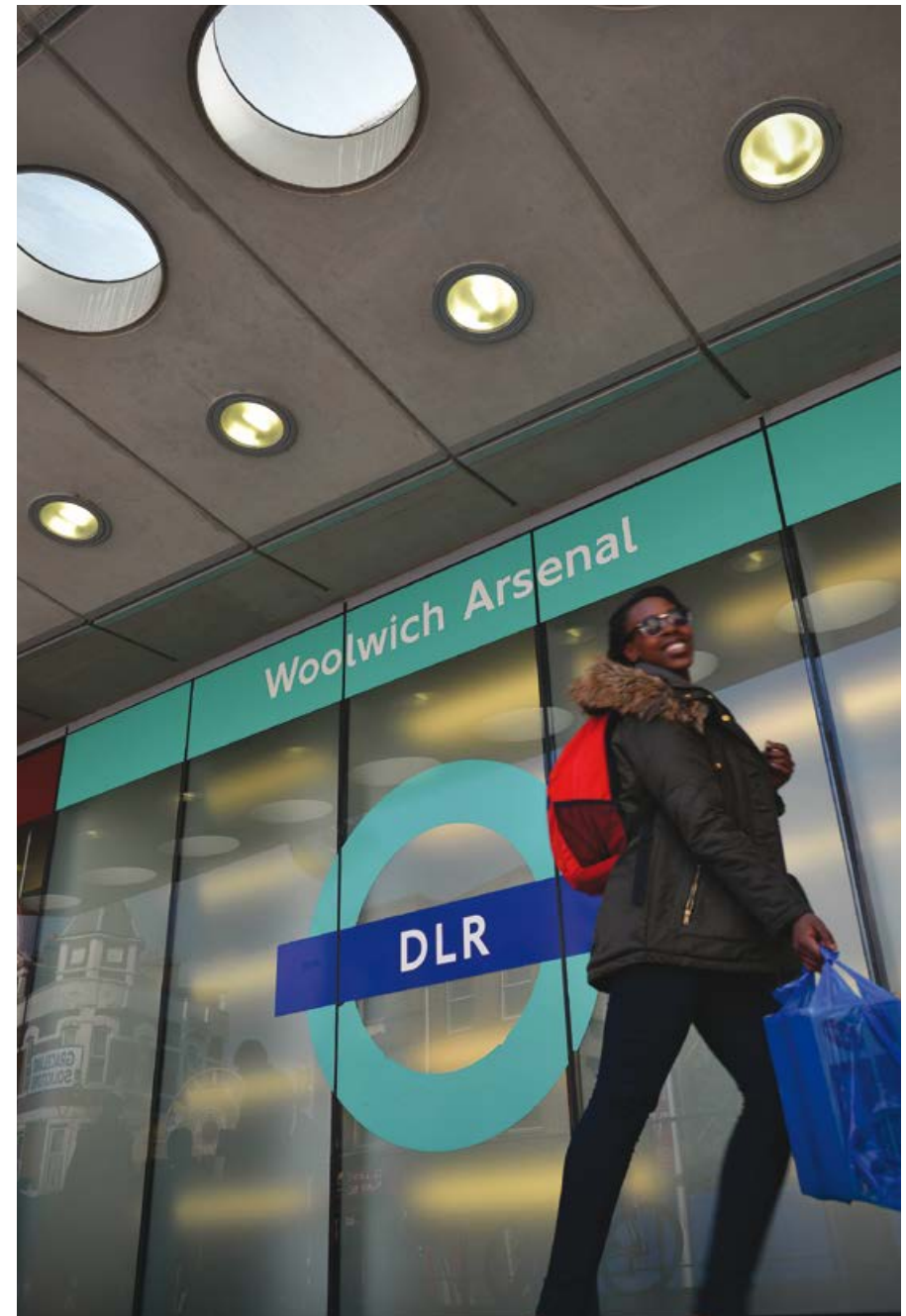
## Local integration

Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?

Does the design of the site encourage people from different backgrounds and social groups to interact on a day-to-day basis (eg public spaces that are open to all, amenities situated for everyone to use, amenities accessible to all without entrance barriers?)

Does the design of the site enable people from different backgrounds and social groups to share community, shopping, social and leisure facilities like parks and restaurants?

A range of property types is provided including: studio, one, two and three bedroom flats, penthouse town and mews houses. They have been developed by Berkeley Homes to a mix agreed with its Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and Greenwich Borough Council.



The development to date includes 46% affordable housing. When the final scheme is delivered, it will make up 25%. The site survey identifies the reduced level of affordable housing is likely to be due to the very high costs of site abnormalities including contributions to Crossrail, the need to retain and restore so many listed buildings and general economic conditions. The percentage of affordable housing increases in The Waterfront to 35%.

## Street layout

Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?

Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?

Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?

Does the design of the local environment adequately support the needs of people with limited physical mobility?

Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?

The site survey describes Royal Arsenal as legible with distinctive, memorable buildings, spaces and artefacts at every turn.

The Royal Woolwich Arsenal was designed as a separate, secure enclave

behind a high perimeter wall that is in part listed and a largely immovable barrier to integration. The site is further isolated from the town centre to the south by Beresford Street/Plumstead Road, a busy dual carriageway with few obvious opportunities for enhanced links. The Crossrail Station will make the Royal Arsenal site a major destination and clearly major improvements to pedestrian crossing facilities will be needed.

A new site access is proposed from the existing Beresford Street and Macbean Street junction that will allow improved pedestrian access to Church Street in the town centre, providing access to The Waterfront scheme.

To the east, the long Woolwich Arsenal boundary is defined by a high (approx 2.5 metre) brick wall of relatively recent construction and integration with the adjacent, residential development areas is poor. The development of the suburban IO Centre business park adjacent to the eastern boundary exacerbates the situation, making integration more difficult still due to the dramatic change of land-use and development typology and issues of safety and security.

Streets and public spaces, existing and proposed, are well overlooked from adjacent buildings and generally feel safe and are accessible to the disabled, frail and infirm. All buildings are designed to meet Lifetime Home Standards and 10% are adaptable to Greenwich's Wheelchair Site Plan.

## Adaptable space

Do external spaces and layout allow for adaption, conversion or extension?

The adaptable space criterion assesses the flexibility of external spaces in two ways: in the short-term to be re-programmed for a variety of uses, such as community events or interim use projects, and in the long-term to be adapted as resident populations change in age or composition.

Academic and applied research about social sustainability has repeatedly identified the importance of adaptability and flexibility to the long-term success of communities. In practical terms, the idea of adaptability can be interpreted as:

- Public spaces that can be adapted for different uses as the community changes, for example, play spaces that can evolve if the average age of children in a community changes;

---

‘Academic research has repeatedly identified the importance of adaptability and flexibility to the long-term success of communities.’

---

- Flexible land use planning that leaves space for residents to influence the design and use of public spaces in a development;
- Scope and flexibility within governance and decision-making structures for residents to shape decisions that affect the area.

Adaptability and flexibility also play another role in large-scale new communities, which is to create opportunities to bring people together to shape their own space and services. Intermediate or ‘meanwhile use’ of land and buildings can provide space for community activities and for people to get to know each other.

Royal Arsenal performs weakly on the adaptable space indicator. The site survey identifies that other than in the IO Business Park, the density of the development is such that it would be difficult to extend properties.

The resident survey and contextual interviews suggest that people would appreciate a more relaxed approach to how open spaces are used and managed at Royal Arsenal. In addition, feedback about how children use streets as informal play spaces because the playground is not appropriately located, and the tensions this creates with child-free households, suggests there is value in working with residents to explore alternatives.

The research did not identify any proposals for temporary or interim uses of Royal Arsenal's open spaces.

## Quality of life

Residents were asked what aspects of living in Royal Arsenal contributed most to their quality of life. Residents identified a wide range of factors and these have been analysed by tenure to determine whether there are significant differences of opinion between how residents in private and affordable households value the development.

Transport links was the most highly rated factor for private households who value the connections to central London, the city and Canary Wharf, and the job opportunities and access to shopping, leisure and cultural facilities elsewhere.

Royal Arsenal's surroundings are the most highly rated factor for affordable households, who identified the river, open and green spaces (rated second for private residents) followed by transport links.

Safety and security were rated third for private and affordable households, followed by the peace and quiet

and then quality of the housing and built environment as fourth and fifth factors for private households and quality of housing and cleanliness of the development for residents in affordable households.

## Facilities residents would like to see

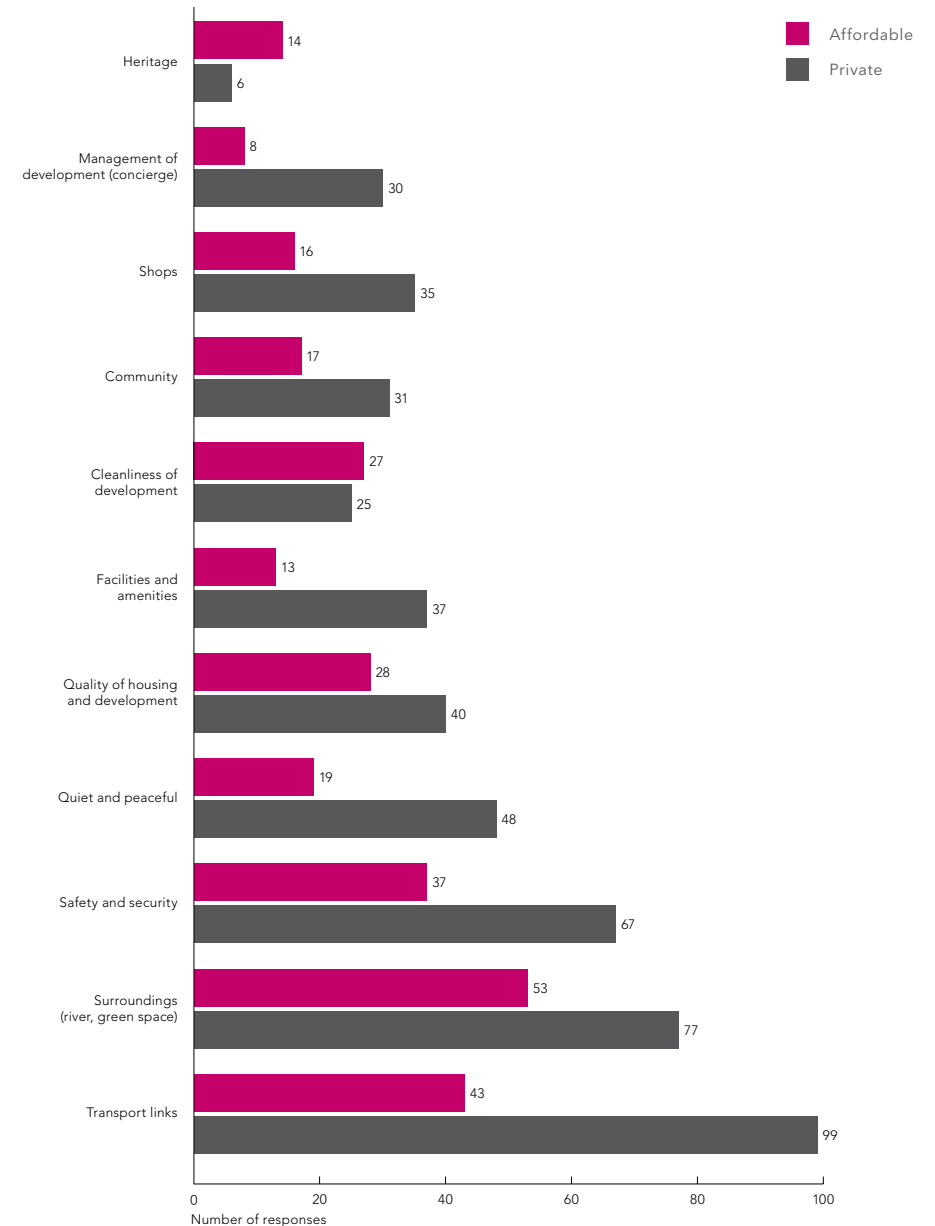
Residents were asked to identify the facilities they would like to see developed at Royal Arsenal.

Overall, a better and more upmarket choice of bars, cafés and restaurants and better sports facilities were the top priorities for respondents from all tenures.

High street shops were the third priority for people living in privately owned or rented households.

Facilities for young children and community facilities were the third and fourth priorities for people living in affordable households.

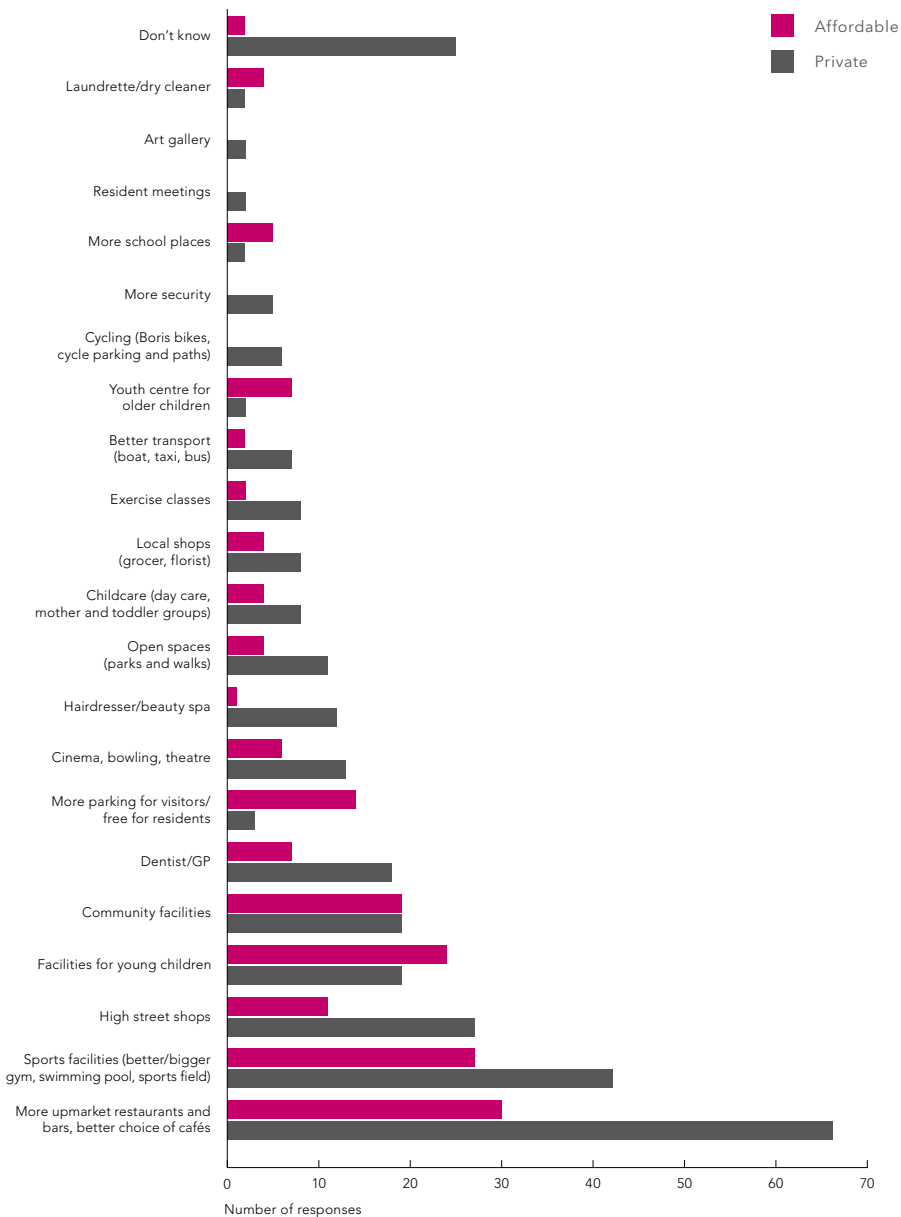
## Factors contributing to quality of life



‘Crossrail means everything, it guarantees Woolwich’s future – access to Canary Wharf, the City, the West End and Heathrow.’



# Facilities residents would like to see







---

## 4.0 Contextual interviews

**T**his section of the report describes the main themes emerging from the contextual interviews.

Eight in-depth, one-to-one interviews were carried out with people working and living at Royal Arsenal Riverside,<sup>6</sup> including housing associations, local businesses, local councillors, the management company, one of the residents' associations, and a community organisation. The purpose of the interviews was to capture a range of perspectives that would be valuable in interpreting the results of the resident survey.

---

'People recognised that local businesses and facilities play an important role in enabling residents, and people from the wider area, to come together.'

---

---

### 4.1

#### Neighbourliness and community spirit

The interviews revealed a variety of perspectives about Royal Arsenal's sense of community. Some people felt it was a friendly neighbourhood and 'a tight community' and gave examples of neighbours helping each other out when there were problems with their houses, such as someone being locked out.

For people who described a strong sense of community spirit at Royal Arsenal this feeling was attributed to a sense of pride and solidarity, which they felt creates a foundation for a more profound sense of community cohesion. For example, some people thought that sharing a contained space, separate from the rest of Woolwich, created a positive sense of belonging. Others that the site's distinctive character and the fact it is well kept and managed, fosters a sense of pride that residents want to maintain.

---

<sup>6</sup> The interviews were semi-structured, up to an hour long, and took place in February and March 2014.

Other interviewees felt that there were cliques within the community and 'subsets of different communities'. Some interviewees linked this feeling to the huge diversity of tenures and people from different backgrounds living at Royal Arsenal and described that people from different tenure types were disconnected and not sufficiently integrated creating an 'us and them feel'. Not all interviewees shared this feeling; others thought that diversity of tenures and people from different backgrounds created a cosmopolitan community, where people were mutually respectful.

People recognized that local businesses and facilities play an important role in enabling residents, and people from the wider area, to come together. One person described how The Dial Arch pub 'works like a village pub... you can walk in and just join a group of people.' Another person described how the Cornerstone Café is an important 'social hub' and informal community meeting space for a book club, supper club, and the badminton club meet-up. Interviewees appreciated the holiday time children's activities organised by Southern Housing and the summer fun day organised with sponsorship from Berkeley Homes and Rendall & Rittner.

Overall, interviewees felt that support for the community could be better but at the moment 'it was heading in the right direction', although interviewees were keen to stress that, as the development grows, the fragile new community will need to be nurtured.

---

#### 4.2

### Community cohesion

A number of interviewees identified that the sense of disconnection was reinforced by the way the development is managed, which make it difficult to bring different resident groups together into a cohesive community, in particular, enabling residents to come together and develop a shared voice about local issues.

Some people found the different management structures and variations in service charges linked to different tenure types confusing and identified this as a source of tension for some residents, who were unclear about what to expect in return. For example, although the gym is now accessible to all residents, the concierge service is limited to some tenure types. People felt this kind of distinction is unhelpful and reinforces feelings of difference and sometimes exclusion. Some people suggested that having a Community Liaison Officer who could help to organise local events would improve community strength.

---

#### 4.3

### Prosperity of the area

Generally, Royal Arsenal is seen to have boosted the reputation of Woolwich and made a positive contribution to the area. Interviewees described the DLR and forthcoming Crossrail connection as the lasting legacy of the



development, which would not have been possible without Berkeley.

Interviewees described Woolwich as changing fast from a working class area of London to a much more mixed area as a result of the influx of professionals who work in the city now choosing to buy homes in the area. Some people said that locals welcomed the change but others were concerned that 'the money made in the Arsenal stays there' and doesn't feed into the wider area because Royal Arsenal residents don't shop in Woolwich. Conversely, some people said that people living around Royal Arsenal don't use the shops, bars, cafés and parks in the development.

Beresford Street (the dual carriage way) and the wall around the development are physical barriers between Royal Arsenal and Woolwich and are seen to symbolize the social and economic gap between residents.

---

#### 4.4

### Community voice and action

People recognized the residents' forum does a good job and works hard. However, some interviewees felt that the forum is limited in what it can do and is trying to build a community against the odds. Others felt that it is hard for some people to have a voice in the forum and Berkeley should provide more practical support for residents and groups in the community to come together.

Interviewees described a number of initiatives to provide local information and support residents: people use Facebook and Twitter to organise community activities, there is a residents' website providing updates about the local surgery and pharmacy opening times, and local businesses organise events for the community.



Some people are concerned about how the scale of future development will impact on the existing community. Interviewees described how some residents are hostile because they feel they were not properly informed about the next phases of development and at the same time, there are feelings of irritation that some facilities, like a local cinema, were promised but are yet to materialise.

---

#### 4.5

### Built environment and design

People are attracted to Royal Arsenal because of its unique heritage. Interviewees described the buildings as 'beautiful', 'unusual' and 'a sensitive mix of old and new' and recognised the development's proximity to the Thames and the riverside walks make it a distinctive place to be. Although some people felt the built environment is stark and regimental as this quote indicates: 'Everything is square... long roads, square buildings. It has no soft part to it'.

Interviewees said that most residents feel proud of and respect the built environment, evidenced by people picking up litter and keeping their surrounding environment clean. However, people also described the estate management regime as excessively strict.

---

#### 4.6

### Safety

Interviewees said that Royal Arsenal feels much safer than the rest of Woolwich and London, creating 'a sense of relief as people come through the gate' from the outside area.

There have been very few incidents of opportunistic crime such as bicycle theft, and anti-social behaviour is not seen as a cause for concern. Interviewees said people are reassured by the two security officers patrolling the site and the CCTV cameras. The local Safer Neighbourhood Team holds resident surgeries regularly, however, interviewees said that not many people turn up.

---

#### 4.7

### Children

Royal Arsenal was not felt by three interviewees to be very family friendly and the number of children living in the development was generally thought to be low. Interviewees described 'typical residents' as young urban professionals, nearly all couples, or people with different lifestyles with high disposable incomes who 'don't want children's facilities to be near where they live'.

Interviewees felt the strict rules imposed by the management company created tensions for families. For example, the park was described as a 'space to be admired and walked on'.



It was also felt the park and children's play area is too far from people's homes, which means children tend

to play outside their houses, where they can be made to feel like a nuisance.





## 5.0 Visitors to Royal Arsenal Riverside

A significant number of non-residents visit Royal Arsenal Riverside for work and leisure. A visitor survey was commissioned as part of this project to understand more about who is visiting Royal Arsenal and what they feel about the community, in particular, the facilities and open spaces.

### 5.1

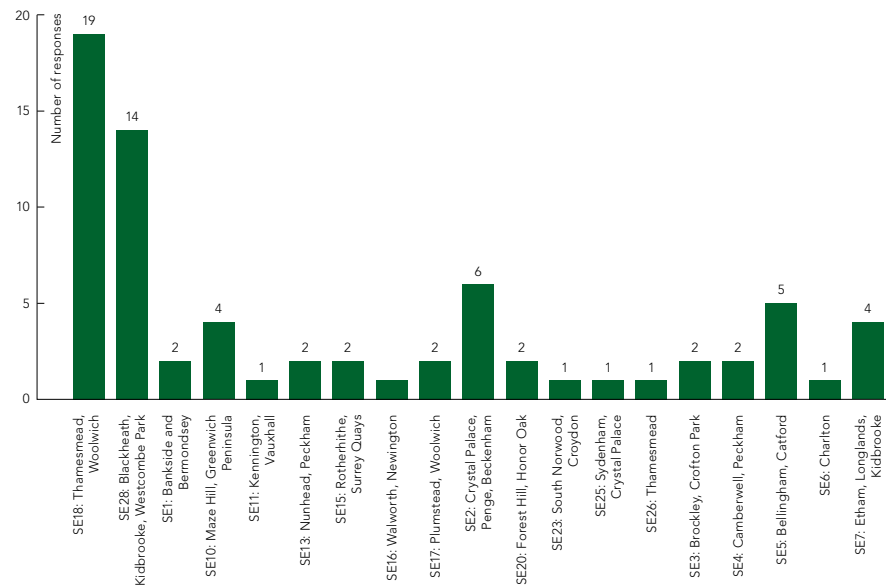
#### Visitor survey: who did we interview?

138 people were interviewed as part of the visitor survey.<sup>7</sup>

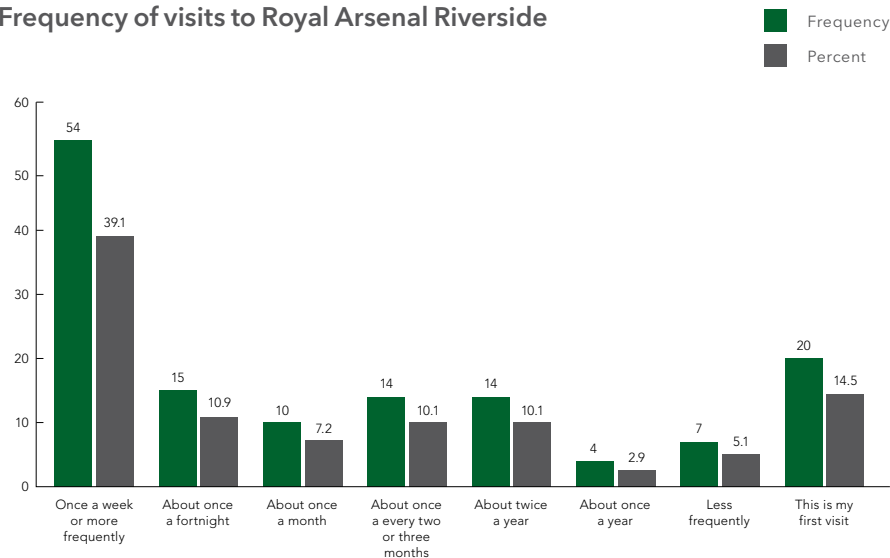
- 42% of people were visiting for leisure, 28% for work, 22% visiting family and friends, and 8% were passing through on the way to somewhere else.
- 66% were alone, 30% were in a party of two adults and 15% were visiting with children.
- 64% of people described themselves as White British, 17% 'other white background', 6% African.
- 76% of visitors were in full or part-time paid work, 20% were self employed, 14% retired, 10% unemployed and 7% were students.
- The majority of people were visiting from other parts of London with the greatest number (77 or 58%) coming from other areas of south east London. 14% came from other areas of central London, 17% from outer London, and 14% from London including visitors from other areas of the country and internationally.
- 24% of the visitors surveyed came from the neighbourhoods in SE18 postcodes, which cover roughly a two-mile radius around Royal Arsenal.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews were undertaken on the Royal Arsenal Riverside site on all days from the 5th to the 11th February 2014. Interviews were undertaken during the day and in the evening and at the weekends in order to capture a range of visit types. Participants were screened to make sure only non-residents were interviewed. Interviewers rotated between three sampling points; the car park, the gate and the boat pier.

## Visitors from south east London postcodes



## Frequency of visits to Royal Arsenal Riverside



- 27% had travelled to Royal Arsenal by car, 24% by bus, 22% walked, 14% by DLR, 8% by train, 1.5% by riverboat. Trips by underground, motorbike or coach each accounted for less than 1% of the total.

Feedback about the local facilities was positive. 49% of people described themselves as very satisfied and 41% satisfied with the available facilities. 36% of people thought some facilities were lacking and said they would like to see more parking (13 people), more restaurants (10 people) and public toilets (10 people).

### 5.2

## How often do they visit?

The frequency of visits to Royal Arsenal varied from 39% of people who said they visit weekly, 11% who visited fortnightly, 7% monthly and 15% who were making their first visit to the development.

The majority of the people who were interviewed were not intending to visit a specific destination. Only 26% were visiting to go to the Cornerstone café, 21% for the Dial Arch pub, 9% for the Greenwich Heritage Centre, 18% for the Firepower Museum, 24% for Woolwich High Street.



People were asked about their general impressions of Royal Arsenal. 152 respondents gave positive answers, which included the attractiveness of the area, the peace, quiet and relaxing space, and the sympathetic and innovative combination of old and new architecture.

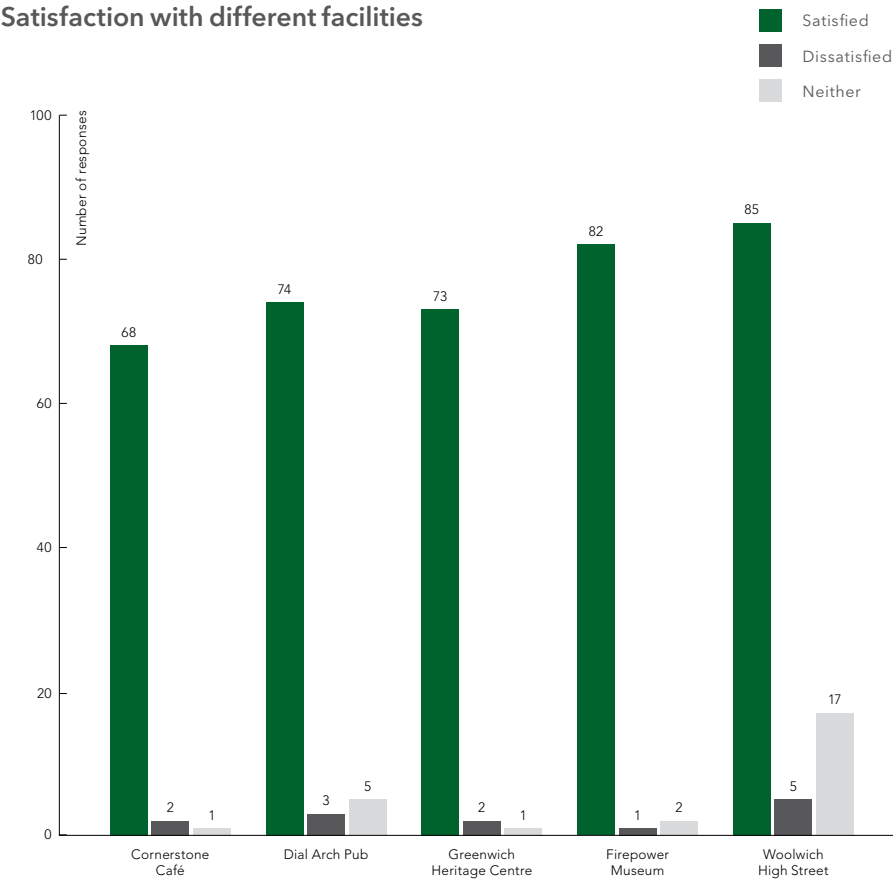
Some visitors also reported that Royal Arsenal was good for the wider area, creating new housing and potential

jobs, with onsite access to Crossrail creating closer links with the city, the West End and Heathrow.

23 people gave negative answers citing concerns about Royal Arsenal being exclusive and insular and becoming overcrowded as future phases of development continued.

Right: A volunteer at Firepower, The Royal Artillery Museum

Satisfaction with different facilities







---

## 6.0 Key insights and opportunities for innovation

This work identifies a set of practical issues and lessons for Royal Arsenal Riverside, which reflect the complexity and challenges of creating genuinely mixed and sustainable communities. They are questions about the inclusion and involvement of residents from different backgrounds and tenure types, and how these opportunities (or obstacles) influence neighbourliness, community cohesion, and participation in the social and civic life of the community.

Some of the issues identified in this research are about the built environment, such as the management of public spaces or Royal Arsenal's separation from Woolwich town centre. Primarily, however, the key findings are about the way people living, working and visiting Royal Arsenal interact and feel about each other. Inclusion is a recurring theme in this research. While the survey findings show that

overall residents feel happy, safe and like they belong to the community, the in-depth interviews find potential fault lines between people from different backgrounds and tenure types and in Royal Arsenal's relationship to the wider area. Residents say they value the emerging community spirit but also recognise it is fragile and will need to be nurtured if the neighbourhood is to become a strong and cohesive community.

Royal Arsenal's diversity of social, income and ethnic groups and mixture of tenure types can be seen as typical of the current generation of large-scale new communities and regeneration schemes in London. The successes and tensions this research reveals are not unique to Royal Arsenal but are reflected in the experience of new communities and estate regeneration initiatives all over London and around the UK, which makes it all the more important the views expressed in this research are given attention.



Crucially, this work shows that the services and support available to residents shape feelings of inclusion and are as important as the quality of the built environment. It is in approaches to stewardship of the community, or 'place-keeping', where there is real scope for innovation.

The key insight from this work is that a new 'place-keeping' model is needed to respond to the challenges this research identifies and to provide the support needed by large-scale new communities and estate regeneration programmes. The sector needs to seek out innovative, pragmatic and economically

sustainable approaches that can incorporate elements of community development and support into the traditional role of housing and estate management.

The experience of the Royal Arsenal residents highlights three key issues that a new approach to community management could address.

- First, expanding and re-designing estate management services to encompass community development functions would provide a sustainable and cost-effective way to give residents on-going, practical support. Feedback from Royal Arsenal,

and other social sustainability assessments at Woodberry Down and Kidbrooke Village, suggests that light-touch support to organise community events, co-ordinate between different resident associations, share local news and provide informal engagement would be sufficient. There is value in exploring a new hybrid 'community concierge' role that is partly about community development and partly about estate management. Arguably, this type of hybrid role would offer opportunities to develop a different and more responsive type of relationship with residents.

- Second, there are valuable lessons about partnership working that could be applied to the design of a new place-keeping model. Residents at Royal Arsenal, and other Berkeley Group developments, identify the tensions that arise from different housing management arrangements for different tenure types. It is impractical to suggest that these could be streamlined into one system for all tenure types. However, there is scope for innovation in key service areas or functions where collaboration is possible and will help to support feelings of inclusion. For example, establishing a single residents association that is open to everyone regardless of tenure, or, as has happened at Royal Arsenal, allowing residents to 'opt-in' to added value services such as gyms where these services are not included in their service charge.

- Third, experience at Royal Arsenal suggests there is value in exploring how residents could influence the management of public and open spaces in new communities. Feedback from this social sustainability assessment, and others at Beaufort Park, The Hamptons and Knowle Village, all identified tensions around the management of public spaces. These frustrations could be used as the starting point for a productive conversation with residents about how people want to use open and public spaces and the scope for jointly designing temporary or interim uses that can also service to bring residents together.

This work demonstrates that it is possible to measure how residents experience life in a new neighbourhood, to understand how new communities start to form, and to use these insights to identify how housing providers and public agencies can intervene to support new places to flourish. We believe this kind of understanding matters to the housebuilding industry and planning authorities. Tools like this social sustainability assessment framework are a step towards this goal, enabling us to generate valuable and measurable insights about how the built environment, public services, and local community facilities and resources can work together to help new neighbourhoods become flourishing places.



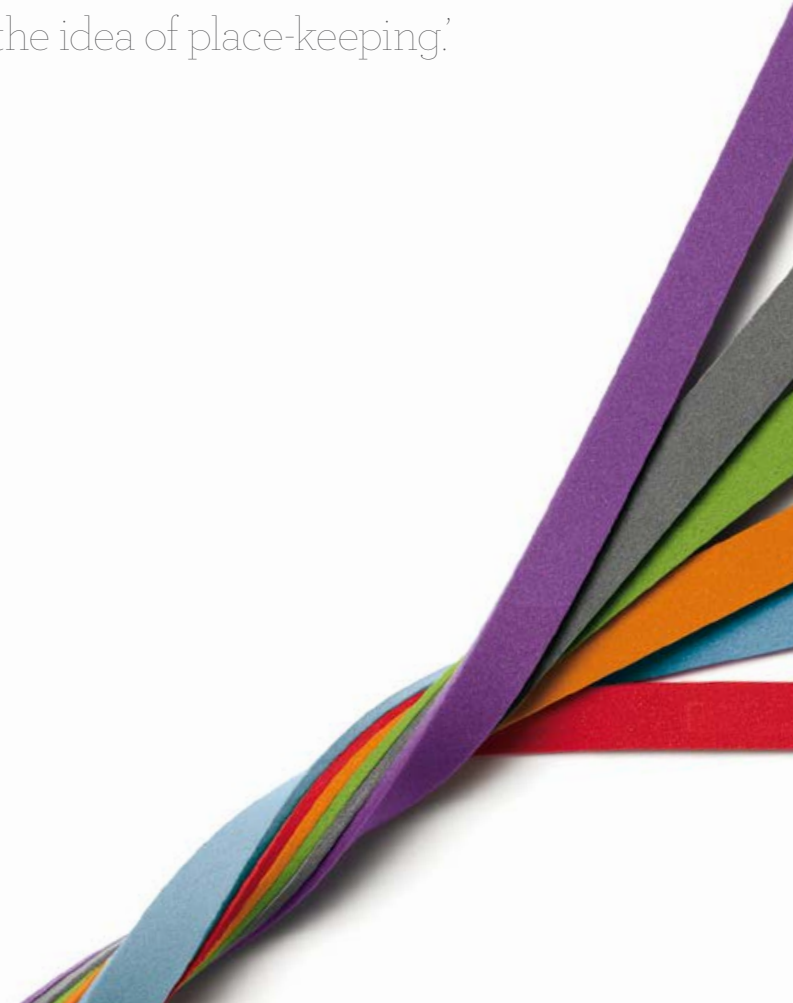
‘This research shows that the same care, attention and investment given to place-making needs to be brought to thinking about the idea of place-keeping.’

---

This project was carried out by Social Life, a social enterprise specialising in work on innovation in place-making. Our expertise is in the social dimensions of place-making and sustainability, in understanding how to accelerate local social innovation, and in knowing how to translate these insights into practice and policy. Our mission is to connect place-making with people’s everyday experience and the way that communities work. Social Life works with property developers, housing associations, architects, communities and governments in the UK and internationally.

Social Life carried out the analysis and interpretation of this research project. Face Facts undertook the resident survey. Gerard Brady of Matrix Partnerships carried out the site survey. Alix Godfrey of Sigma Phi carried out the statistical analysis.

---



Berkeley Homes  
East Thames Limited  
85 Tudway Road  
London SE3 9YG

[www.berkeleygroup.co.uk](http://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk)



**Berkeley**  
Designed for life