



The future of London's high streets

What do Londoners want?

July 2020



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Introduction



Background and objectives

- Outside of central London, over half of London's jobs are spread across 600 high streets. Two thirds of Londoners live within a five-minute walk of a high street. Existing research details the economic, spatial and structural changes affecting high streets and town centres, but does not address the question of what Londoners want and need from these spaces.
- The GLA's Opinion Research team set out to understand current public opinion towards high streets, including use and experiences of high streets, as well as longer-term aspirations and views on the future of high streets.
- This research explored not only high streets, but also town centres and associated spaces such as small shopping centres and parades. Throughout this report, "high streets" has been used as shorthand for these types of locations.
- **Please note:** soon after the research commenced, London was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology and research questions were adapted slightly to understand Londoners' views on the immediate impact of COVID-19 on London's high streets. However, the primary focus of the research was still to explore the bigger picture in terms of what Londoners want from London's high streets in the future.

Methodology

- **In-depth interviews*** – 20 respondents were selected across six case study sites (3-4 at each site). A mix of in-person and telephone interviews were conducted.
- **Mobile ethnography** – prior to the interviews, respondents used a mobile app to record and talk about different high streets they had visited.
- **Focus groups** – we conducted 3 online focus groups in April 2020. The focus groups explored attitudes and behaviour concerning high streets and tested 4 scenarios: *Future of shopping; Mixed use high streets; High tech high streets; and Community involvement.*
- **Survey of Londoners** – a survey of 1,068 Londoners through YouGov. The sample was weighted to be representative of the London adult (18+) population. The survey was conducted online, with fieldwork taking place between 8th – 11th June 2020.

* Due to the lockdown, interviews were mostly conducted via telephone and focus groups were adapted to run online.

Case study sites:

- South Norwood High Street (Croydon)
- Bromley Town Centre (Bromley)
- Walthamstow High Street (Waltham Forest)
- Nunhead/ Evelina Road (Southwark)
- Cockfosters Road Shopping Parades (Enfield)
- Holloway Road/ Nags Head Shopping Centre (Islington)



Key findings

- Londoners want variety on their local high streets, but the priority is to have essential shop and amenities followed by places to socialise and spend leisure time. They are willing to travel further, beyond their local high streets, for more serious shopping.
- There are some key barriers to spending time or accessing the high street which, if addressed, could likely increase use: safety, aesthetics, traffic, parking cost and availability, and opening times.
- In terms of attitudes towards high streets, more Londoners think that high streets in London have got worse rather than better in recent years – more-so among older, White and outer Londoners. The perceived decline of high streets is mostly linked to business turnover, social issues, and neglect.
- But there are positive changes to be noted as well, in most part due to investment on the high street.
- Outlook on the future of high streets is initially negative, mostly due to the continued rise of online shopping (and, more recently, coronavirus).
- But respondents recognise the importance of high streets, and the continued need for them in the future.
- Longer-term, they see potential for London's high streets to improve and adapt to the future through, for example, more mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, high-tech high streets and new shopping experiences.
- Local authorities are seen to be responsible for improving high streets and adapting them to the future.
- Londoners want them to fund improvements, support local businesses, make use of empty shops, better utilise their own buildings, and involve residents in shaping the future of their local high streets.



Experiences of London's high streets

High street use broadly falls into three main categories:

FREQUENT

QUICK VISITS

NEEDS TO BE LOCAL

Essential shopping and errands

- Grocery shops
- Banks, post office, pharmacies
- Health services e.g. dentist, GP

Leisure and socialising

- Places to eat and drink e.g. cafes, restaurants, pubs
- Green and open spaces
- Civic or community buildings
- Outdoor events e.g. markets, festivals

Serious shopping and entertainment

- Variety of shops – boutiques as well as national chains
- Shopping centres
- Department stores
- Entertainment venues e.g. cinemas, theatres

INFREQUENT

LONGER DAYS OUT

CAN BE FURTHER AFIELD

For these two, high streets need to be pleasant and aesthetic to encourage people to visit and stay longer

Respondents want variety in their area and are not limited to one high street – many use multiple for different reasons

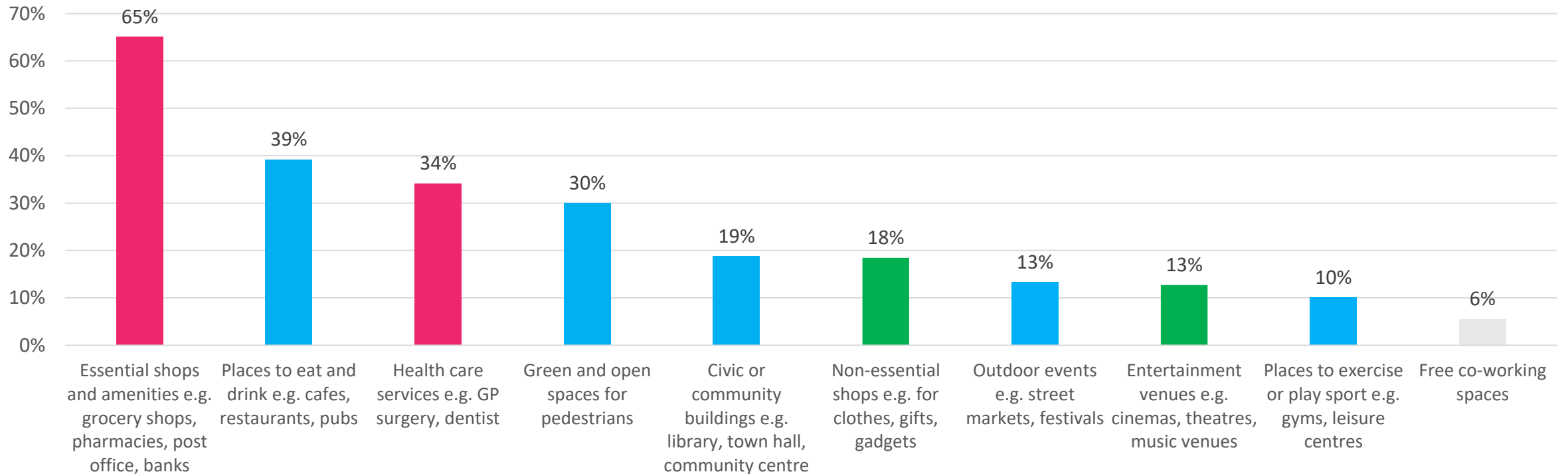
- Variety on the high street is key. Respondents **ideally want a local high street that caters to all their needs** and combines essential shopping and errands, leisure and socialising, and serious shopping and entertainment.
- However, they acknowledge that this is difficult to achieve in London and for some high streets is unrealistic. As such, many use multiple high streets for different uses, and are happy to do so – respondents highlighted this a key difference between London and elsewhere in the country. They don't expect to have everything on their closest high street, but need it in their wider local area within a short drive or trip on public transport.

“I do like to be able to use my high street to relax, to have some food, to have a drink, to have a coffee, but also be able to go to the Post Office, be able to do my banking, be able to do my house shopping. So I think it needs to have a bit of a mixture of both.” Cockfosters respondent

“The thing I like most about our area is that we're never too far away from a high street...Our closest high street is Norwood high street, but apart from that we've got Penge high street, we've got Beckenham high street, we've got Croydon town centre, we've got Addiscombe high street, we've got Thornton Heath high street, and if we wanted a change of scenery, Bromley high street, or Bromley town centre isn't really that far away.” South Norwood respondent

In terms of what is most important on their local high street, Londoners prioritise essential shops and amenities

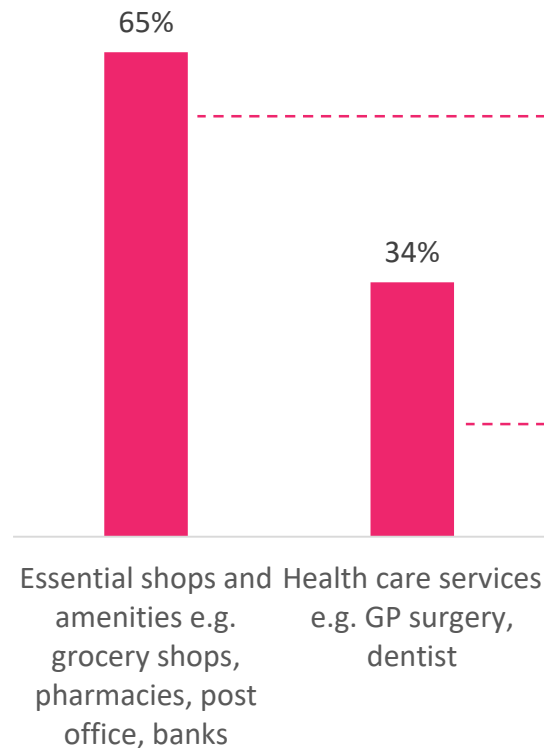
Most important things to have on the high street*



Essential shopping and errands; Leisure and socialising; Serious shopping and entertainment

*Thinking beyond the coronavirus pandemic, which two or three of the following do you think are most important to have on your local high street?

Essential shops and healthcare services are particularly important for women and outer Londoners



Essential shops:

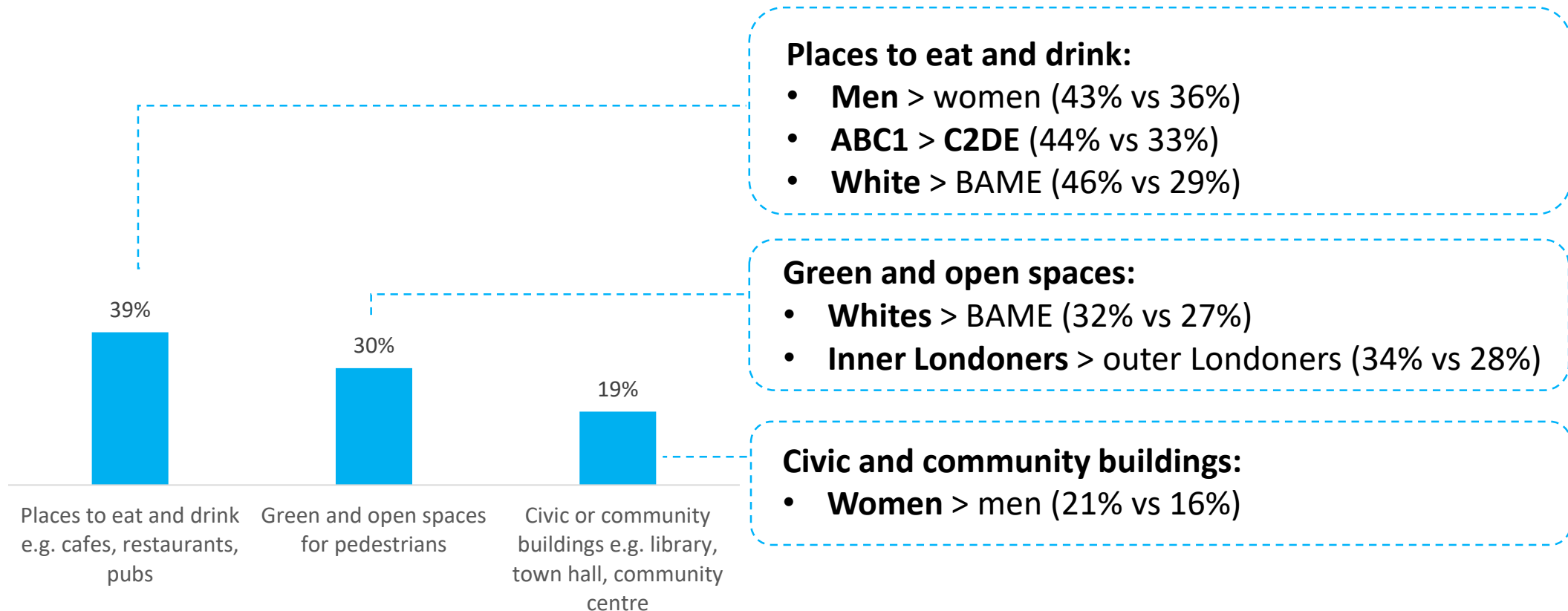
- **Women** > Men (71% vs 59%)
- **Outer Londoners** > Inner Londoners (67% vs 62%)
- **White** > BAME (70% vs 59%)

Health care services:

- **Women** > Men (40% vs 28%)
- **Outer Londoners** > Inner Londoners (39% vs 26%)
- **ABC1** > C2DE (39% vs 31%)
- **Over 50s** > under 50s (33% vs 18%)

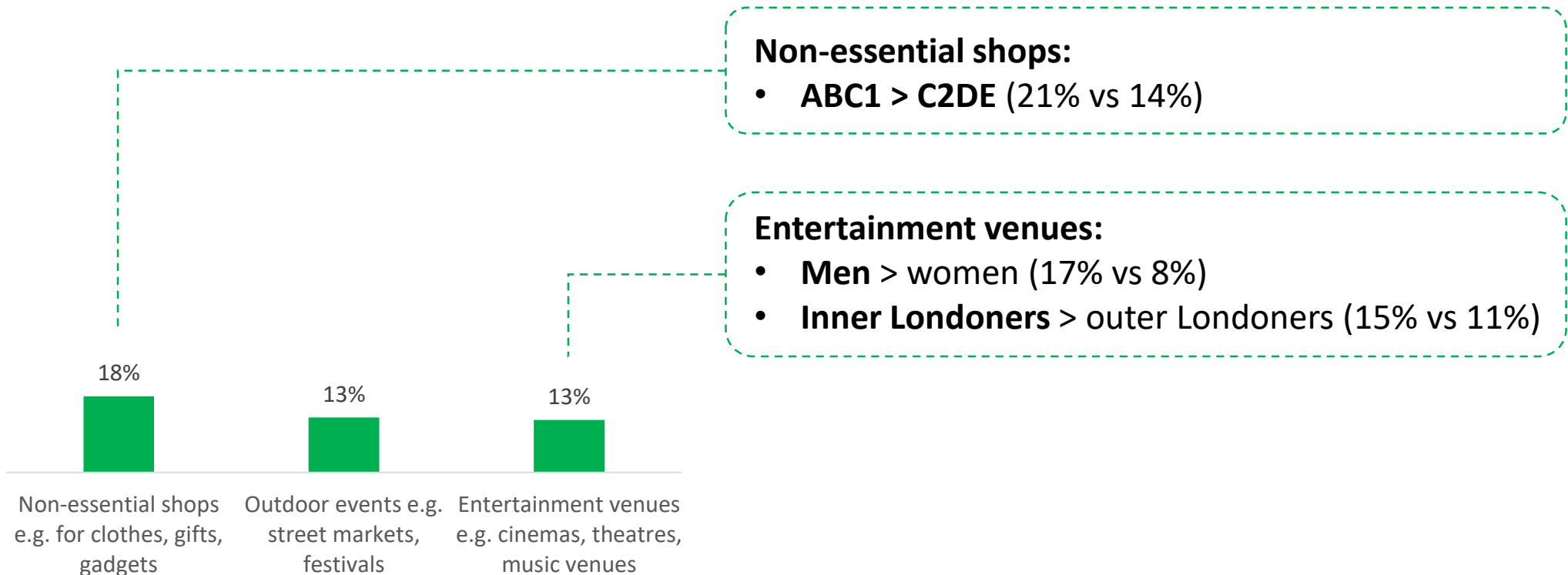
**Thinking beyond the coronavirus pandemic, which two or three of the following do you think are most important to have on your local high street?*

Places to eat and drink are most important amongst men, White and higher social grade Londoners



**Thinking beyond the coronavirus pandemic, which two or three of the following do you think are most important to have on your local high street?*

Non-essential shops, such as clothes shops, are more important amongst higher social grade Londoners



**Thinking beyond the coronavirus pandemic, which two or three of the following do you think are most important to have on your local high street?*

1. Essential shopping and errands

- Respondents tend to regularly access a collection of high streets, with one or two being their main go-to places for local amenities. They want the closest high streets to where they live, or work, to have essential shops and amenities for regular use. These include:
 - **Services and amenities** – e.g. bank, post office, pharmacy, library, GP surgery. Older people frequently mentioned needing to use banks and post offices regularly. Many aired frustrations about the absence of these, thus chose to travel to high streets further away for banking, rather than go online.
 - **Essential shops** – e.g. supermarket, newsagent, hardware store. Having shops close by to pick up staple items and necessities is key. If the local high street does not meet these needs, respondents will travel to larger supermarkets or other high streets.
- Factors like free parking, frequent buses, proximity to home or work, and shop opening times are more important than how it looks or the atmosphere on the high street – **convenience is the priority** here. It is about being able to quickly run errands, less-so enjoying a day out on the high street.

“When I go out to run errands, it’s really handy to be able to do a group of things in one day. So I’ll tend to go to the area that has the most things that I need – so if I need to go to the Post Office, the supermarket, and other things, you want to go to that one place. Holloway Road can be good for that.” Holloway Road respondent

2. Leisure and socialising

- As shown previously, spending leisure time eating and drinking or in the public realm are valued by Londoners. These are seen as important places to socialise and can help instil a sense of community for the local area.
 - **Eating and drinking** – these are a big draw to high streets and are important places to meet people and spend time with friends and family. Respondents want a good variety locally.
 - **Public realm** – open, inviting areas and green spaces are deemed extremely important to the majority. Many welcome pedestrianized zones, or widening pavements to accommodate outdoor seating.
 - **Independent shops** – encourage browsing and make the area more attractive. Respondents want to support local businesses, but these must reflect the needs of the local community (for example the prices, range, and opening hours). If they do not, Londoners will go elsewhere such as a larger town centres or shopping centre.
 - **Street markets & community events** – valued by those who have these on their local high streets. Whilst not everyone buys from markets, they like the vibrancy they create on the high street.

“I think the most essential thing would be the restaurants and also the pub. I think those places there are bringing the community element to it, because those are the sorts of places that keep people in there... being able to have a night out or evening out on your local high street is very important.” Cockfosters respondent

3. Serious shopping and entertainment

- Respondents are **willing to travel a little further** when it comes to buying more expensive items, clothes and non-essential items. Serious shoppers will travel into central London, e.g. to Oxford Street or Covent Garden, and are drawn by the variety of boutique shops as well as the national chains, the department stores such as John Lewis, or the flagship stores such as the Apple store. Others travel to large shopping centres such as Westfield or Brent Cross.
- For some, their local town centres meet all these needs: outer London towns like Bromley and Croydon were felt to offer serious shoppers the variety and choice they require. But, some criticised Croydon for its aesthetics, highlighting that the experience and feel of the place is important for this type of shopping. **Hygiene factors such as feeling safe, having a pleasant atmosphere and low traffic are key to encouraging people to stay.**
- Entertainment and cultural venues, for example cinemas, theatres, and music venues, also add to high streets locally – but, as with shops, respondents are happy to travel slightly further for these.

“If I want to do some serious shopping then I’ll normally go a bit further afield and go to Oxford Street. That’s normally if I want to go and spend a whole afternoon there.”
Walthamstow respondent

“I would definitely say my top high street is Oxford Street...I really like it because you get a lot of the flagship stores...it’s very pedestrian friendly.”
Holloway Road respondent

There are some key barriers to spending time or indeed accessing the high street:

- **Feeling unsafe** – driven by perception of crime in area; appearance and cleanliness of street; direct negative interaction with locals; presence of groups of youths; police visibility (or lack of). Some older female respondents said they avoided high streets at the end of the school day, when groups of youths are present on streets.
- **Run down areas** – unattractive shop fronts; empty shop units; specific shops – betting, charity and chicken shops; and littered streets all make the high street less appealing to spend time on.
- **Level of traffic / busy roads** – the noise and hecticness from traffic are the main issues here, which can make it unpleasant to spend time on the high street. A few mentioned air quality (mostly parents of young children).
- **Parking cost and availability** – particularly important for those who live in outer London and rely more on cars. If there are limited parking options (too little or too expensive) they will go elsewhere (e.g. shopping centre).
- **Shop opening times** – for Londoners working during the day, shops are often closed when they return to their home area, causing them to shop online or elsewhere.

Key barriers to **spending time** on the high street – these are particularly important for **leisure and socialising** and **serious shopping and entertainment**

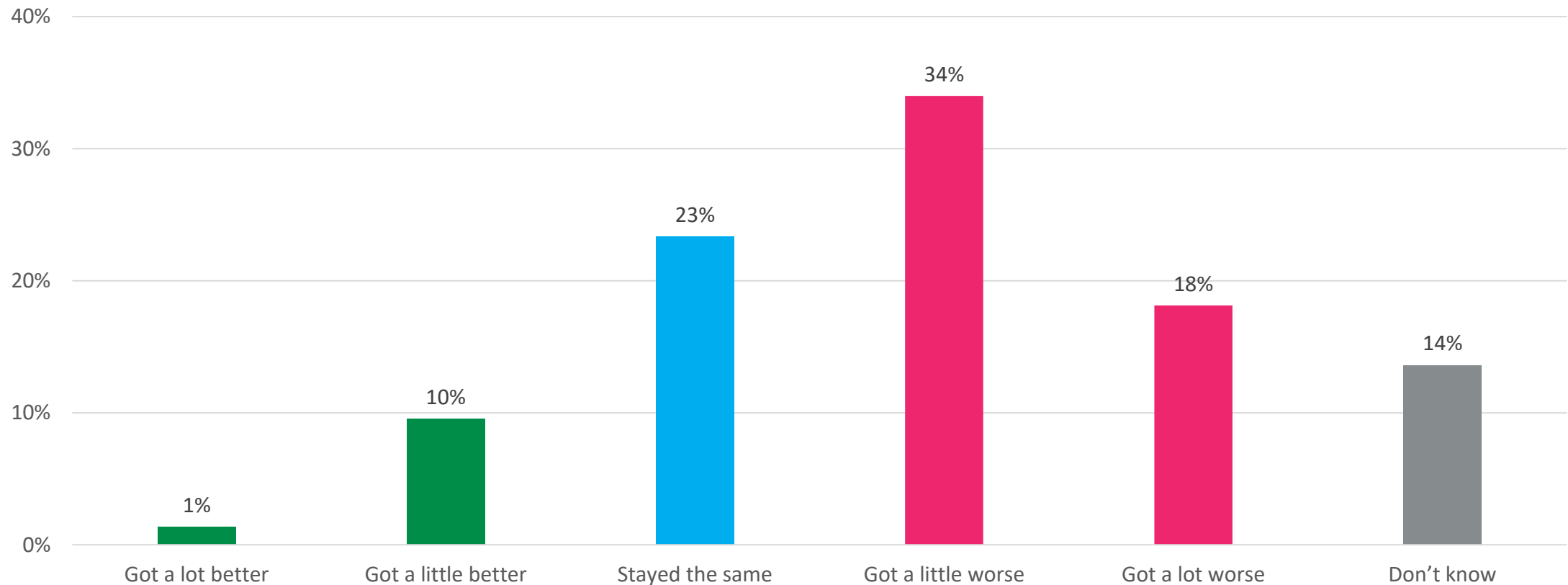
Key barriers to **accessing** high streets – these are particularly important for **essential shopping and errands**



Attitudes towards London's high streets

Roughly half of Londoners think that high streets in London have got worse in recent years

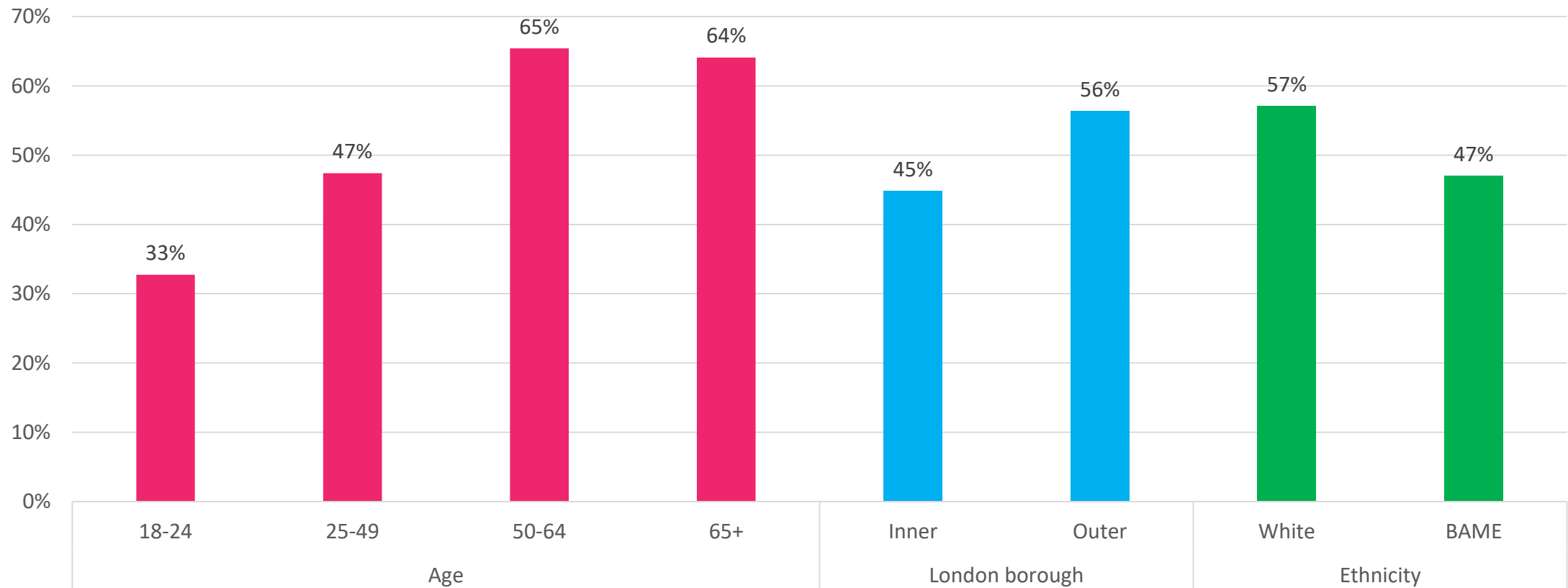
Perceived changes to high streets in London over the last five years*



* Thinking about London's high streets, over the last five years, do you think they have improved, got worse or stayed the same?

Older, White and outer Londoners are more likely to think high streets in London have got worse in recent years

Perceived changes to high streets in London over the last five years: *total got worse*



* Thinking about London's high streets, over the last five years, do you think they have improved, got worse or stayed the same?

The perceived decline of high streets is mostly linked to business turnover, social issues, and neglect...

- **The types of shops and businesses** – respondents highlighted the closure of local institutions and small businesses, as well as branches of national chains. This has resulted in a decline in what high streets have to offer but also high streets losing their character and sense of community. Additionally, the opening up and proliferation of certain shops and businesses on the high street can also contribute to an area feeling rundown – notably betting shops.
- **Changing populations** – some attributed the decline of high streets to gentrification and changing local populations, resulting in shops and services that don't always meet the local population. This is seen to contribute to business turnover and a loss of community feel.
- **Crime and homelessness** – some reported a rise in both homelessness and crime on their high streets, creating a feeling of unease.
- **Neglect to the high street** – linked to the above, with the presence of boarded up or empty shops on the high streets. But some also reported general 'deterioration' of buildings, roads and shop fronts.

“There are so many bookmakers in Peckham, and that’s part of the problem that I have with that area, which is what would get me away from there... things like that tend to scream out that this is... I don’t want to say poverty, again, but it’s... not alright. That’s the only way to describe it, it’s not alright, seeing so many in one area, it’s like heavy oversaturation as well.” Bromley respondent

...but there are positive changes to be noted as well, in most part due to investment on the high street

- Not all high streets have declined. Respondents highlighted some positive changes to their local high streets, notably **new or improved pedestrian areas and greenery or refurbishment of shop fronts** and buildings such as those in Walthamstow. Such small interventions have had a big impact on the experience on the high street.
- But respondents also noted much more noticeable changes and improvements to high streets as a result of large-scale investment and regeneration. Examples include Bromley which has experienced a high rate of change with new supermarkets, a new cinema and housing developments. Holloway Road respondents also highlighted the successful case of nearby Upper Street (Islington), which is now seen as a future model for Holloway Road.
- Although large-scale improvement may have only been seen on a small number of high streets, it has shown what can be achieved and **the potential for high streets to change for the better**.
- London's high streets are also seen to be more resilient than elsewhere in the UK, where high streets are seen to be undergoing greater decline.

“The general area of Angel and Upper Street has been renovated. There’s lots of money going into that side of Highbury and Islington. They’ve opened up a massive new complex with shops, restaurants, a cinema. You could say you’re going out for an evening in Upper Street, but you wouldn’t say the same for Holloway Road.” Holloway Road respondent

Outlook on the future of high streets is initially negative, due to the continued rise of online shopping and coronavirus...

- Respondents initially offered a negative outlook on the future of high streets. Central to this are **fears about the future of retail on the high street**. Some see empty shop units and high turnover of businesses as a sign of the uncertainty that high streets currently face.
- The growth in online shopping is seen as the primary threat for high streets and some respondents believe online shopping will inevitably contribute to the end of retail on the high street, especially for high street shops without an online presence. Among those respondents we talked to who shop online, the convenience and lower prices online are key draws that high streets have to compete against.
- There are now fears for the **long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic**. The pandemic has highlighted the fragility of high streets and respondents worry that many independent businesses will not survive.

“I think the high streets at this point are dying out as it is anyway because of online shopping. The specifics of what you can buy online, the speed. Going to the shops can be a bit of a rigmarole and you might not even find what you need. The look of it is I don’t think it will recover the way they want it to. I think it will die to be honest.”
Holloway Road

...but respondents see the importance of high streets currently, and the continued need for them in the future

- Whilst high streets are seen to be under threat, respondents see them as important places for communities – the essential shops and amenities they offer but also the places to socialise and **the sense of community they create**. They want this to remain in the future.
- They also see a continued need for high streets, as **there are many high street uses that cannot be replaced online**. As shown previously, Londoners by far prioritise essential shops and amenities on their local high streets which are seen as being more resilient to the online threat. There are errands and services that cannot be done online, or which people may prefer to do in person. After that, Londoners want places to eat and drink which – even more so, there will always be a place for these on the high street.
- Conversely, non-essential shops (e.g. clothes shops), which are most affected by online shopping, were only ranked 6th most important to have on the high street. And even with those shops, **many people still want to be able to shop in-store and to browse the shops**.

“They’re almost like the heartbeat, really, of the area. I think they bring people together, they’re a meeting point, they’re a landmark. It would be almost like... It would be similar to what we’re going to be facing soon, it would almost be like a lockdown type of thing, there would be no high street. What would people do? Where would they go? Where would they hang about? Where would they sit for an hour?” Bromley respondent



The future of London's high streets

Longer-term, respondents see potential for London's high streets to improve and adapt to the future

- The research identified some quick-fixes or key hygiene factors (see p.25) that, if addressed, can improve the appeal and increase use of high streets. Longer-term, respondents see greater potential for London's high streets to change, especially when thinking about the types of things that high streets of the future could offer.
- The following slides summarise respondents' views and ideas for how high streets can be improved:
 1. Mixed-use high streets
 2. Enhancing the shopping experience
 3. Pedestrian-friendly high streets
 4. High-tech high streets

1. Mixed-use high streets – blending shopping and leisure

- Currently and foremost, respondents want mixed-use high streets. They want to be able to **shop, socialise and spend leisure time in one place**. They want to be able to spend a whole day or evening on the same high street. Although some parts of London offer this holistic experience, such as central London or town centres, many high streets do not.
- Some respondents highlighted the appeal of shopping centres (e.g. Westfields) and large department stores as examples of this. They are liked for the variety of things to do and the spaces to meet in close proximity, but also the general ease and convenience (e.g. toilets, seating, safety).
- Places like BoxPark in Shoreditch, Peckham Levels and Pop Brixton were also mentioned as being appealing but smaller mixed-use spaces and models to be replicated elsewhere, though these will not appeal to all types of Londoners.

“You shouldn’t just go to a high street because you want to buy clothes or buy groceries. You should also want to spend time on the high street doing social activities, not just going shopping, buying clothes.”
Bromley respondent

“I think there is a shift in younger generations towards experiences over buying items and high streets would be well placed to adapt to that.” Focus group respondent

2. Enhancing the shopping experience

- Although retail on the high street is seen to be under threat from online shopping, respondents highlighted the importance of the in-store experience and see potential for shops to adapt and entice people to the high street:
 - **In-store activities** – for example, ball pits for children to play in; live entertainment for adults. This is about turning shops into places to socialise and have fun, not just to browse and buy items.
 - **High-tech shops** – for example digital mirrors that allow you to virtually try on clothes. Technology like this would be useful when shopping as well as being fun, offering additional reasons to shop in-store.
 - **Concept stores or showrooms** – some like the idea of these and cited the popularity of Apple stores. Even if they cannot walk out with an item, it is still helpful to view and feel products in person.
- Though the above are seen to be more suited to central London or large shopping centres. Respondents would not expect these on a smaller typical high street.

“It needs to become more of an experience. It's because the pleasures of shopping have become meagre, that shops have become vulnerable to takeover by the internet.” Focus group respondent

“The future lies in offering things that the internet can't.” Focus group respondent

3. Pedestrian-friendly high streets

- The appearance of high streets is important for attracting people to use and enjoy high streets. This includes the buildings and shop fronts, but also the pedestrian areas – the pavements and open spaces. Many respondents highlighted **the benefits of pedestrian high streets**, either those currently found in London or elsewhere in the UK and abroad. Many welcomed more pedestrianised high streets where possible, to create more pleasant places to be and improve the experience in general – creating more space to walk, more greenery, more seating and reducing noise and air pollution from vehicles.
- Importantly, creating more pedestrian-friendly high streets is seen as an effective way to not only **make high streets more pleasant but also attract people to them** through offering more leisure options on the high street – providing space for restaurants and shops to spill out onto the high street, space for people to meet and be together, and space for outdoor events such as sports screenings, outdoor cinemas, concerts, and festivals.
- Even temporarily pedestrianising high streets, for example in the evenings or on the weekends only, would be a positive step for some – acknowledging the practical and logistical difficulties of doing this 24/7.

“If you got rid of that parking and were able to get the tables out... you could have your dessert shops and your restaurants having an outside area, and your cafés being able to expand where everybody is out during the summer time. I think that would bring more of the Mediterranean continental feel, and I quite like that. I think that’s something that I would definitely enjoy.” Cockfosters respondent

4. High-tech high streets

Londoners see the value in having more technology elsewhere on the high street. For the most part, however, this would make high streets more practical – it would not increase their use of high streets, and is not a priority.

- **Click & Collect** – many use these already, and some even find them more convenient than home delivery. But some would prefer stores or lockers where they can collect orders from multiple sellers, not just one.
- **Information points or interactive maps** – similar to those found in shopping centres, to help explore what there is on the high street. They could also promote local businesses, especially those off the main street.
- **Mobile charging points** – can be very convenient and helpful when needed.
- **CCTV** – this is seen as important to discourage crime and increase sense of safety on the high streets, though facial recognition is seen as a step too far.
- **Adaptive street lighting** – practical and may save money for council. But need reassurance that this would not replace lighting as some worried about dark unlit streets at night.
- **Smart sensors** (e.g. air quality, traffic, footfall) – practical and may lead to wider benefits, but not for individuals.
- **Free Wi-Fi** – useful in shopping centres or department stores, where there is poor signal, but not needed as much on the open high street.



Responsibility for London's high streets

Local authorities are seen as being responsible for improving high streets and adapting them to the future

- Respondents see local authorities as being primarily responsible for improving high streets and adapting them to the future, with some seeing a minor role for the Mayor as well. This is especially true when it comes to the public realm and infrastructure on the high street as well as key hygiene factors mentioned throughout this report. In some cases large and long-term investment from local authorities is seen to be needed.
- But there is also more immediate investment or actions that local authorities can make. The following slides summarise respondents' views and ideas for the role of local authorities:
 1. Supporting local small businesses
 2. Making use of empty shop units
 3. Better utilising existing civic buildings on the high street
 4. Involving residents in the shaping the future of high streets

1. Support small local businesses

- When it comes to the types of businesses on the high street, respondents acknowledge this is largely out of the hands of local authorities. But they still see a role for local authorities to support small businesses, mostly through:
 - **Reducing rents** – high rents were flagged by many respondents as one of the key challenges for small businesses on the high street. There is an assumption by some that local authorities own the high street and have control over rents.
 - **Reducing business rates** – this was spontaneously raised by many respondents as a way to help small businesses financially. Most were unaware that this is set by government, not local authorities.
 - **Other financial incentives** – support from local authorities to encourage more small and independent businesses to start up on the high street or avoid closure, e.g. through loans or grants.
 - **Marketing initiatives** – to promote the variety of small businesses and encourage people to shop small and locally.

“We had a fantastic bakery which had to close down because they couldn’t afford the rent increase. So if there are any incentives that can be given to smaller and more independent places.” Nunhead respondent

“Offer grants to people that want to open a business – I don’t know if they do already. Give them like a starter grant for six months. Maybe give them their rent half price for the first six months so they can get started” South Norwood respondent

2. Make use of empty shop units on the high street

- Many respondents commented on shops being vacant for long periods. In addition to making high streets look run-down and in decline, empty shop units are seen as a waste of prime high street real estate. Respondents were keen for empty units to be utilised wherever possible, offering suggestions for short-term use. They see this as being a role for the council. These include:
 - **Pop-up spaces** – for retailers or businesses as well as cultural activities (e.g. gallery space) or community events.
 - **Workspaces** – providing affordable or free places for local residents to work, whether local freelancers and start-ups or office workers working remotely.
 - **Shelters for the homeless** – a few respondents felt shops that were vacant for long periods could be used for more pressing social issues, such as shelters for homeless people.

“I think three or four shops have closed down. So you have those shops which are basically standing empty, some of them, looking sad. If that space could be turned, with a bit of financial backing... you could set up workstations that people could use until maybe the space has been let out or has a more permanent solution.” Nunhead respondent

3. Better utilise existing civic buildings on the high street

- Respondents were open to greater civic infrastructure on their high street, such as town halls, community centres, libraries and leisure centres. Many believe the high street should offer opportunities to bring the community together, and these are seen as places that can do this and are currently used by the whole community.
- However, they need to be attractive and appealing for people to visit and use them. For example, whereas libraries and leisure centres are popular among some respondents, they complained about neglected or outdated buildings, limited opening hours, or them being situated off the high street and not as accessible.
- Similar to empty shops, Londoners see **potential for public buildings to be utilised more and become more appealing destinations on the high street**. This could involve providing more public service hubs, but also other uses such as free workspace and space for pop-ups and cultural events.

“More community centres. I know they’ve kind of shut them down recently, but I think that’s something that needs to come back in a more modern way, where older people can come and talk, and younger people – like anyone, of any age, can come and just talk to people, play games, interact with each other.” Holloway road respondent

4. Involve residents in shaping the future of high streets

- The focus groups sought respondents' thoughts on a few community-led initiatives ideas for developing high streets that benefit local communities. Overall there was strong support for these. Respondents liked the idea of **communities having more control over their local high street**. They also liked the idea of councils curating high streets for the benefit of residents.
- But whether respondents would personally get involved is another question. Being involved requires a certain level of time and commitment, which would put off many people. These would not support the 'average' resident to shape their high street.
- Most would instead prefer to **have a say on the future of their high street through more passive input** for example suggesting and voting on ideas. This could inform other initiatives, for example the outcomes in a social value lease, but offers a more accessible way for residents to shape their high streets. They had few ideas for how this could work beyond traditional consultation and engagement.

Social value lease – reduced rent to tenants who deliver on social value outcomes or meet local need.

Community asset transfer – transfer of the management and/ or ownership of a building or land from a local authority to a community organisation for less than market value.



















Crowdfunding – supporting grassroots projects.

“Some surveys or gatherings to get the opinion of the residents would be quite good...like you’re doing here, and being able to get everybody on the same page and understand, what are the frustrating points? What needs to be improved? What would attract people?” Cockfosters respondent



Case study sites

High street health check* – at a glance

	South Norwood	Bromley	Nunhead	Walthamstow	Cockfosters	Holloway Road
Essential shopping and errands						
Leisure and socialising						
Serious shopping and entertainment						

*Ratings are indicative and based on respondent views and sentiment

Nunhead

Nunhead is located 2 miles south of Old Kent road. It is surrounded by residential areas leading to Peckham, East Dulwich and Brockley. Funding from Southwark council and the GLA is being used to improve the area, through renovating shop fronts, creating a new Nunhead Green, plus pop-up shops and a festival programme. Next to the green is a community centre and the area has its own community website.

Despite its regeneration, the Londoners we spoke to tended not to visit Nunhead frequently, despite living within a 20 minute walk. Whilst the street has a few independent shops, respondents criticised them for not having the variety required, with inconsistent opening times. It is also felt the shops can be quite niche and do not encourage regular visiting. Nunhead is not on a main bus route. Thus, respondents choose not to go out of their way to visit, unless it is to go to the reputable garden centre, which is near the station and not on the high street.

The Londoners we spoke to choose to go to other areas. Whilst Peckham high street is less aesthetically pleasing, the range of shops attract more people during the day. It also has a bustling night scene. Lordship Lane in East Dulwich is popular for the greater range of eateries, bars and shops and a weekly Saturday market. The larger stores and supermarkets on Old Kent road offer a greater range at affordable prices, compared with the smaller shops in Nunhead.

Nunhead's community centre and library were not well known to the Londoners we spoke to, despite these being appealing services to use. Nunhead is an attractive place and has a lot to offer its local residents. But for respondents on the edge of Nunhead, (and this can be as little as a 15 minute walk away) it is relatively small and tucked away for it to be a destination journey itself.

“The closest high street to me is Nunhead. But there isn't quite as much as the other ones. It has less shops and less cafés. So if I go there and the little place is full, then you're basically stuck, there's not much else.”



South Norwood

South Norwood is located 3 miles north east of Croydon town centre, with Norwood Junction railway station at the heart of the High Street. The Old Clock Tower with surrounding outdoor fruit markets bring character to the area, and the essential shops are relied upon.

According to the residents we spoke to, the area has seen a gradual decline over the last few years. The closing of the bank and large post office has been felt by residents. This, and the limited choice in shops and cafes means residents often go to other high streets – Croydon town centre, Thornton Heath and Addlestone are popular alternatives. There is also limited free parking in the area which prevents people from going to the high street.

Currently, residents are not encouraged to stay for long on the high street: the shops appear neglected; pavements are narrow, and the traffic-heavy road is noisy. In addition, crime levels are perceived to be high. Respondents reported feeling unsafe, some having been victims of crime themselves. The relatively new school has brought an added pressure to the high street and pavements can feel crowded. Whilst the area benefits from South Norwood park, it is felt there could be more greenery on the high street itself.

South Norwood has received funding from Croydon council and the GLA. Amongst respondents there was vague awareness of the regeneration programme. Respondents' suggestions for improvements echo the works in the pipeline. To alleviate the congestion on the street they suggest increasing pavement widths or pedestrianising the road. Highlighting school zones would also allow other residents space on the road. Many of our respondents highlighted that regeneration work is evidently required.

“The shops look neglected. They don’t look interesting. Again, there’s no cafés, so that kind of gives you a clue – people feel safe to relax if there’s a café. There’s always a lot of traffic going up and down, and quite fast sometimes. I desperately miss the banks. Barclays pulled out down there, NatWest pulled out down there.”



Bromley

Bromley Town Centre was historically a market town in the county of Kent. It now has a large retail area, consisting of a shopping mall and a pedestrianised high street. It is well-connected with its train station located in the town and direct trains into London Victoria.

Bromley residents value their local town centre and visit it frequently. Whilst respondents occasionally visit surrounding high streets - like Chislehurst, Beckenham, Penge, Sidcup, Catford - they predominantly choose Bromley. Bromley is said to 'have everything' with its' variety of essential shops and larger high street stores, and also attracts respondents from other boroughs. The town benefits from a variety of eating and drinking options, and a wealth of entertainment facilities with a leisure centre, cinema and theatre. There are open pedestrianised spaces, offering appropriate areas for events and performances.

Car parking is mostly pay and display. Whilst respondents shared some complaints about this, some recognised it has reduced car pollution in the area. And it didn't put them off visiting. Bromley is felt to be a safe area. Respondents claimed young people are prevented from gathering in large groups, and the presence of the police station is noticed.

Bromley has received funding from the council and the GLA to improve the town centre, though there is still a sense it could be modernised in places. Respondents suggested improving shop fronts, modernising the market, and bringing new restaurants and bars to open the Bromley night scene. There were some suggestions for more independent shops and restaurants to introduce more character to the town. More greenery and improving the current park would also be welcome. It is felt the library could be advertised to make it better known. Previous community events have been enjoyed and more are encouraged.

"It's got a bit of everything really. You can go and have a pint, you can do a bit of shopping, you can then go and have something to eat. You can get a train up to London. The possibilities are endless, really."



Holloway Road

Holloway Road is a 3km long road in Islington that carries the A1 and runs from Archway to Highbury Corner. It is one of the main shopping streets, containing major chain stores as well as numerous smaller shops, the Nag's Head Shopping Centre, and Selbys department stores. It also contains institutions like the Odeon cinema, Coronet pub, and London Metropolitan University. This research focussed mostly on the central stretch around Nag's Head.

Holloway Road is seen by respondents as a very practical high street, with good transport connections and a variety of shops and services for errands, including the large Morrisons in Nag's Head Shopping Centre. The major chain stores and Selbys also make it a decent shopping destination.

However, although respondents view it as practical, it is by no means a scenic or pleasant high street to be on. A key feature of the high street is that it is a dual carriageway and carries the A1 – the noise and hecticness of the traffic deters respondents from strolling along the high street. It also forms a physical barrier between both sides of the road which has resulted in a noticeable difference in the types of shops on each side, with more of the chain shops and higher-footfall on one side. Respondents also cited crime and anti-social behaviour in the area, and a general unease when on the high street.

Respondents frequently compared Holloway Road with Upper Street, which starts by Highbury Corner (at the South end of Holloway Road), with its pleasant atmosphere, greater selection of restaurants, bars and cafes, and more up-market vibe. Having gone through its own regeneration over the years, Upper Street is what our respondents wanted (and to an extent expected) Holloway Road to become.

“It’s the bottom end of the A1, so it’s really, really noisy and trafficky, all the time... it doesn’t feel very personal...the bus links are very good, to get into town, and to get into Upper Street in Islington, which is a lot nicer. Plenty of places to get coffee, which is nice, but as I say, the actual aesthetic of the place isn’t great”



Cockfosters

Cockfosters is a suburban and residential area at the end of the Piccadilly line, next to Trent Park, on the western edge of the London Borough of Enfield.

This research focussed on the collection of small shopping parades along Cockfoster Road, near the Underground station – Station Parade, Heddon Court Parade, and Cockfosters Parade. The three parades are largely similar in that they are set back from Cockfosters Road, have on-road parking, and consist of mostly independent businesses.

The parades have a village feel to them and consist of mostly small units and independent businesses. Combined they provide essential shops and services, including two supermarkets (a Sainsburys Local and Co-op Food), pharmacies, bakeries, a hardware store, a bank and a GP surgery. The variety, however, is limited and respondents often drive to nearby town centres included Enfield Town, New Barnet and Southgate to access their larger supermarkets and a greater variety of shops. The parade shops themselves are mostly to pick up essential items. It can also be difficult at times finding somewhere to park on the parades, which is another reasons for venturing further afield to the nearby town centres and shopping centres with free or more available parking.

The nearby town centres are also the places to go for entertainment (such as cinemas) or public services such as libraries. Though what the parades excel at, and which are a local draw, are their variety of independent cafes and restaurants. These are frequented often by respondents and help instil a sense of community in the area, particularly for the large Turkish and Greek communities.

“This is more a high street for socialising, it is not really for shopping as much. They have got a pharmacy, things like that...but I would go further out for shopping. It is mainly just like meeting friends or if I want to go out with the family for a meal.”



Walthamstow

Walthamstow is Waltham Forest's major town centre, with transport links to central London via Walthamstow Central. It is a major retail destination in the borough and is home to The Mall Walthamstow as well as the 1km street market along Walthamstow High street, one of the longest street markets in Europe.

The local residents we spoke to highlighted the variety of shops and amenities in the town centre. It is a high street where they can get everything they need, whether from the shopping centre, market, or the large number of independent shops and businesses. And then Stratford is nearby, if they need it.

The pedestrianised high street offers a pleasant shopping experience, as well as space for the market which adds a multicultural vibe to the area. Though respondents commented that the high street and town centre could be more attractive in parts, and highlighted the lack of greenery along the high street and litter from the market.

Respondents also pointed out the different experiences and appearance between the top (by Walthamstow Central) and bottom (by St. James Street) parts of the high street, with the former being more developed and the latter having more of an up-and-coming Shoreditch appeal especially with the opening of pop-ups by St James Street. The area around St James Street has received regeneration funding from Waltham Forest Council, which has given the area an uplift though renovating buildings, removing unnecessary signage, and installing new shopfronts, and architectural lighting to landmark buildings.

“I think I’d describe it as a very multicultural, interesting, unique high street – the market is always there, we’ve got so many different independent shops amongst the larger supermarkets. I think there’s very little you can’t get on Walthamstow high street. Some of the shops are probably a little bit run down, a little bit tacky, but some of that is part of the charm of the high street.”



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