

## The Estate We're In

**When outside the bookies is the only place to hang out, is it any wonder dissatisfaction arises on a south London estate? Outreach programme, Project Subway, links up with the Stockwell Gardens Estate's youth forum to question this state of affairs.**

We are from Headliners and we live on the Stockwell Gardens Estate. We've been investigating housing and council estates in our local area. During this time three people our own age were shot dead in near-by estates. We've been finding out what are the main issues for the youth who live on this south London estate and asking questions of the general public, the local Labour councillor for housing in Lambeth, and Hyde's youth and regeneration officer for their views.



Charles Lacey, 55, head teacher, told us outside Stockwell station that he thinks the environment seriously affects the way people live. 'If people's environment is unpleasant, then I think it's very bad for morale and it doesn't encourage the right attitudes in people. If they have more say in their environment and more control over it, they take better care of it.'

What of our environment then? It is an ex-council estate, now managed by Hyde Southbank Homes, and was described in a recent South London Press headline as a 'crack den'.

This is not how we see it.

"It's a friendly community. You can always walk past someone and say hello," Sharifa says. "I think the housing's got better," says Alfred. "Now repairs are being carried out more efficiently, and the housing's getting better, but it's still not as good as it should be. They only focus on the actual housing and ignore everything else."

Natara says, "The housing's OK, but the best thing about living here is having your friends all around you."

## Youth club

So why is the estate getting such a bad press? One of our main issues is the lack of places to hang out safely – benches to sit down on outside, somewhere to socialise.

"We need to have a youth club, so there's somewhere that we can go instead of just hanging outside the bookies." Sharifa says. This is a view that all of us share. "They need to make a place for us to chill." Alfred says. "That's the most important thing, because if they don't, that's when people resort to doing crime. It's a proven fact that idle hands are the worst hands."

Sonia Gayle, Regeneration Co-Ordinator - Children & Young People Hyde Southbank Homes agrees that this is crucial for the youth on estates. "If there are problems, it's because the youth haven't got anything to do."

"They need more facilities and more activities. For the older kids, we need more challenging activities, like residentials – taking them out of their environment. For younger kids we need more soft activities like sports, swimming and bowling."

## Councillor

We asked John Kazantzis, Cabinet Member for Housing on Lambeth Council, if he thought about putting some of the money for housing towards youth?

He said: "It's a separate budget for youth provision, but there is some extra money in the general fund to put into it. Housing can spend some money on youth, and we do – we can build new play areas, we can build ball courts on estates as well, but it's a limited pot of money."



But why should this not be a priority?

Kazantzis says: "There is an awful lot that needs doing, I make no bones about that. But you've got to start somewhere. We propose to get in extra money to bring homes up to a decent standard, but also get the basics right in the day-to-day management of our estates."

He also admits that at the moment the housing in Lambeth does not equate to its value in money, and says "Historically there's been a lot of wastage in the department", referring to a former employee of the council who absconded with £3 million intended for home improvements two years ago.

With current insecurities over safety, it seems to us, though, that things have gone to an extreme. Fences, gates and cameras are going up everywhere, and we don't think that this is helping.

"They took the arches down and put up fences because they couldn't see what was going on under there," Jummy says of an area on the estate. "Under there was dark, but that was why I liked it. Everyone used to be there. A camera couldn't see through, but now you have to walk all the way around."

Alfred says: "Now you can't go certain places, there's so many boundaries - I feel like an animal. Where you could walk before, you can't walk now. Everything's closed off, so it's like they're caging us. People might think that's not affecting them, but subliminally, when the mind keeps on seeing gates and railings put up, then the mind is going to act like it's got to put its hands up and always have protection."

We put this point to John Kazantzis – that the youth are feeling trapped and caged.

"I understand that," Kazantzis says. "I hear it from the young more than the older generation, who do sometimes feel vulnerable on estates and are asking for more security, and more fences and gates, but obviously there's a balance to be struck. You don't want to cage people in, as you put it."

"We do need more youth provision, we need more activities in our open spaces – it's a case of making use of those spaces and making young people feel more able to use them – feel more free and less penned in on their estates. I think if we get that balance right everyone wins."

## Open spaces

This sounds great in theory, but where are the open spaces, and what about half the year when it's too dark to be out in the evening in open spaces? These are issues that need addressing seriously.

We also asked John Kazantzis about why it is so hard for young people to get social housing? Although he skipped the direct question, he went on to say, "It's hard for a lot of people to get housing in London, basically because there just isn't enough housing in London to go around.

"There are too many people chasing too few properties. The obvious answer to that is build more houses, but we want to ensure that what's new built is sensitive and takes into account the locals' needs. Ultimately we've got to provide more, either by building more houses or renovating - just getting more properties in circulation."

This is true, but it will take a long time for this to have an effect. It is difficult at the moment if you are housed into an area where you know no-one. We hope that what John Kazantzis says comes reality before it is too late for us.

These are our views, and here are our findings. We have asked a wide range of people of different ages and different backgrounds on housing and the local environment, and it seems that there is one thing that everyone agrees on: it matters, and making safe spaces for young people to hang out and socialise is a crucial part of that.

*A week after all interviews were completed, Hyde Southbank gave the go-ahead for a youth club to open on Stockwell Gardens Estate. The members of the Headliners' Project Subway team have campaigned through the estate's youth forum for over a year for this to happen.*

*Members of the story team: Alfred, Bukky, Calvin, Jummy, Natara, Shakira, Sharifa.*



## 9 comments

I used to live there

I always thought it was a great place to live. The flats were big and warm and the layout of the estate was generous, it never felt closed in. There was, in the 1970's, a youthclub in the hall in the middle of the estate. I was a table-tennis and pool sort of place but it only cost a penny a night, so can't complain! I think the estate has become much uglier since Hyde took over. They've knocked down a lot of the fabric of the place and made the bins a public spectacle, which would never be tolerated on a private estate. Great palce for playing 'run-outs' with all those balconies!

David from Brixton, 30 November 2007 14:30

Thank you

Thank you so much headliners for doing this long project with us and looking deeper into our views. its being very enjoyable and interesting on the way , im also happy with the out come thanks alot.shakira xxx Big ups to Ruth and neil dey deserve it.

shakira , 26 April 2007 16:19

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i grew up on the stockwell gdns est. from 1968 until about 1991,when i left and got married. but it was a great carefree place. sure,it had its problems. but nothing compared to now. id be interested to know if any of my old friends are still living there.

james mcclelland from salisbury,wilts, 30 December 1899 00:00

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