

People Shaping Places: BLACKHORSE LANE

A report commissioned by Waltham Forest Council.

May 2016



Introduction

Waltham Forest Council commissioned Kaizen and Social Life to carry out four engagement pilot projects in the borough in order to develop a better understanding of how it can engage with residents across the borough in planning and designing new developments.

This summary sets out the activities carried out, key emerging themes and the implications for future community engagement in the Blackhorse Lane area.

The research strategy devised to structure this project was mixed in approach and included three different engagement methods: street interviews, a group discussion and walking ethnographies.

This research aimed to:

- Identify the major challenges currently facing residents and businesses.
- Understand how residents and businesses view the planned developments in the area and how to involve them in decisions about the changing character of the built environment.
- Help the Council, residents, developers and community organisations prepare for more comprehensive engagement in the future.

To receive a copy of the full report, please contact Waltham Forest Council at consultation@walthamforest.co.uk.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

This report was written by Social Life with contributions and research by Kaizen and Social Life.

Kaizen is an award-winning social business that specialises in designing and delivering projects in the community sector.

Social Life was established in 2012 by The Young Foundation. All its work is about the relationship between people and places.

For more information visit:
<http://wearekaizen.co.uk>
<http://www.social-life.co/>



Figure 1: Blackhorse Lane mural. Located opposite Blackhorse Road station



Figure 2: Research survey area

The Blackhorse Lane area

Blackhorse Lane - located in the western boundary of Waltham Forest - is one of the borough's key growth areas and was identified as a strategic development opportunity in the Mayor's London Plan and Upper Lee Valley Opportunity Area Planning Framework. The Blackhorse Lane Area Action Plan (AAP), adopted in January 2015, recognises the area as a major housing and job growth site for Greater London, with capacity to accommodate 2,500 new homes and 1,000 new jobs by 2026.

Blackhorse Lane's identity is largely linked to its industrial heritage. The area was an important manufacturing centre in the Upper Lea Valley and fuelled Walthamstow's past economic growth.

The urban character of the area has been gradually changing due to de-industrialisation. Developers are seeing the potential of these former industrial sites as ideal places to build new housing, given the area's close proximity to central London and good transport connections. Many of the former warehouses are being converted into new, mid-rise residential developments that are more modern in design, in comparison to the 2-storey terraced house more typical of the area.

The remains of the area's manufacturing base are also giving rise to the 'creative' industry, and "makers" and small-scale manufacturers are moving to the area to take advantage of the availability of relatively low cost workspaces.

The AAP acts as a framework to coordinate the area's transformation in a social, economically and environmentally sustainable manner. With some planning applications already submitted, Waltham Forest Council aims to ensure the existing community is involved and has the opportunity to influence the changing character of the area. The council also hopes to facilitate developer collaboration to build a comprehensive strategy that incorporates housing, business space, infrastructure (e.g. improved pedestrian/cycle routes), community facilities and services, and open spaces.



Figure 3: Development site in the Blackhorse Lane area (left). One of the construction sites in the Blackhorse Lane area



Figure 4: Blackhorse Workshop (right). Makerspace in Blackhorse Lane supporting the creative industries

Key findings



Figure 5: Gnome House community centre on Blackhorse Lane

Feelings about Blackhorse Lane today

1. **Many residents and businesses interviewed felt there is a need to build a sense of identity for the area.** Long-term residents said the loss of industry and local jobs has stifled the area. They report that this is affecting both their sense of community and the vitality of local businesses.
2. **Most residents interviewed were satisfied living in the area.** They spoke of the friendliness and diversity of people, good transport links and the location as key reasons for liking the area.
3. **There were concerns about the strength of the local economy.** Residents felt jobs were disappearing in the area, because of the decline in industry. It is felt that this is having adverse effects on other local businesses and contributing to decline.
4. **There were mixed views about the Mini Holland scheme.** Some residents interviewed were happy about the scheme bringing better cycling routes, while others were concerned about impact on traffic flow and congestion.
5. **There was a feeling that some parts of Blackhorse Lane were overlooked compared to other parts of the borough.** Some people said “the Village” had received more attention and investment.

Challenges facing residents

6. **Flytipping, rubbish and general uncleanliness of public areas were noted as a nuisance for residents and businesses.** Most people interviewed noted the dumping practices in the area and how streets were full of rubbish like mattresses, fridges, and other large items.
7. **There are great transport links but frustrations with parking.** While it was felt the area is very well connected, there is a widespread frustration with parking and traffic management, as well as a need for safer pedestrian crossings. There was a desire to see more buses serving the area.
8. **There are not enough social facilities.** There was a general feeling from interviewees that the area lacks activities and facilities to support community life and for people to meet their neighbours. Residents interviewed feel there are not many places to socialise - few cafes, playgrounds, restaurants, and cultural amenities.
9. **There is a lack of local services.** Residents interviewed felt that GPs, healthcare facilities, youth facilities and childcare facilities were lacking. There was also concern about how existing amenities would cope with increasing numbers of residents expected to move into the area.

“Someone I know moved his business from this area because of parking problems.”

-Blackhorse Lane resident

“We are building houses for people to come and live here but where are they all going to work?”

-Blackhorse Lane business owner and resident

“We need more pubs in the area, anything, just something.”

-Blackhorse Lane resident

Community and safety

10. The majority of new and long-term residents interviewed feel a strong sense of belonging to the area, though views were mixed about the sense of community. Most people noted “friendliness” and “diversity” of residents as key community strengths.
11. Generally people feel safe in the area but noted occasional anti-social behaviour. Many residents interviewed voiced concern over people loitering on street corners and near the train station.
12. People described Blackhorse Lane as a “nice area”, “friendly” and “quiet” and some commented, “the best is the transport.” Others felt the area was “up and coming”, “better now” and “not a bad area”. However, some responses were more negative with descriptions such as “not much of a community”, “bit of an eyesore”, “boring”, “run down”, and “rubbish!”

Attitudes towards change

13. Lack of affordable housing and rising housing costs are a concern for many of the residents interviewed. While there was more uncertainty than opposition as a whole towards the new developments, affordability in the area was a key concern, both in terms of new homes, and existing properties.
14. Most residents interviewed did not know anything about the planned new developments in the area. They were uncertain about their implications and many respondents voiced fears about the impact on housing affordability, local services and gentrification. They wanted to be better informed about plans.
15. There is a desire for more involvement. Most residents interviewed reported that they had not been consulted before and many wanted more meaningful involvement in council plans. There was a desire for more printed materials. It was suggested that construction hoardings in the area could be used to display more information about the planned developments.
16. Some residents interviewed spoke of the need to encourage developers to bring community facilities and meeting spaces to the area, within the new development sites. They identified the site nearest the station as a potential location for some of the facilities they feel are currently lacking in the area.



Figure 6: Businesses along Blackhorse Lane

Walking interviews

“They say these are the people who make and do things but they should also be the people who make the decisions and put forward the ideas... and ideas should be listened to.”

-George, walking interview participant, in reference to the mural across from Blackhorse Road station

Walking interviews are a simple method used to capture rich information about how people feel about places and how they are used at different times of day and night. It is a method that allows participants to set the agenda, to show and talk about the issues they think are important rather than responding to a pre-set agenda.

Walking around an area stimulates people to think about their everyday experience - like taking the bus to work or walking children to school - and talk about things they might not think are important to mention in a more formal interview setting.

Social Life carried out nine walking interviews with residents living in and around Blackhorse Lane and used a free mobile application called Ramblr to map the walking routes. Ramblr automatically maps walking routes using GPS and can capture photographs and audio recordings of sound or interviews, which are geo-tagged on a map.

The map below illustrates the walking routes of all participants. The summaries of the walks with Maria and Martin reveal a glimpse into the lives of residents living in the Blackhorse Lane area.

The names of all interviewees have been changed to protect their identities, though the stories and quotes are original.

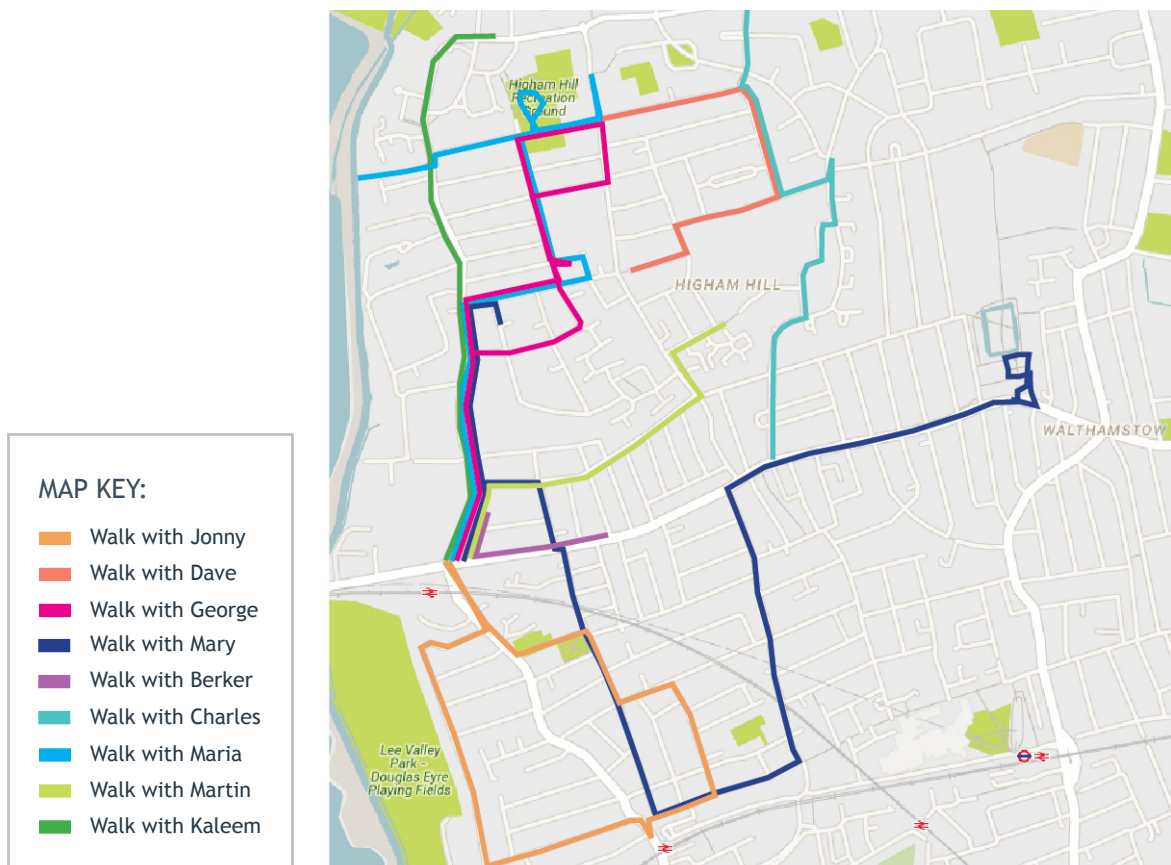
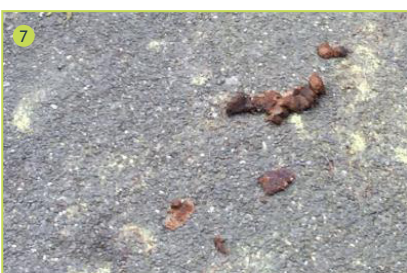


Figure 7: Routes of all walking interview participants



Walk with Maria

"I'm always stressing about community stuff because that's what is lacking here...along Blackhorse Lane there is nothing unfortunately."

Maria has lived just off Blackhorse Lane for 7 years. She and her family moved to the Blackhorse Lane area because they could afford to buy a family home and the transport connections are good. Maria is in her early 30s and both she and her husband work and study relatively close to home. They have two young children.

Maria shows us the routes she regularly walks along Blackhorse Lane from her home to her son's school and daughter's nursery, to the local park where they go to play, to the reservoir where they like to walk and cycle when the weather is good, and to the bus stop where she travels to and from work.

She likes living in the area and appreciates the open skies and natural areas around the reservoir, which she describes as "special for London."

As we walk around the neighbourhood, Maria points out the roads and places she uses regularly. She generally feels safe walking around the neighbourhood but describes many of the streets as dirty because of litter and flytipping.

She shows us to an alleyway near Higham Hill Recreation Ground that is used everyday by school children walking home that has lots of dog mess.

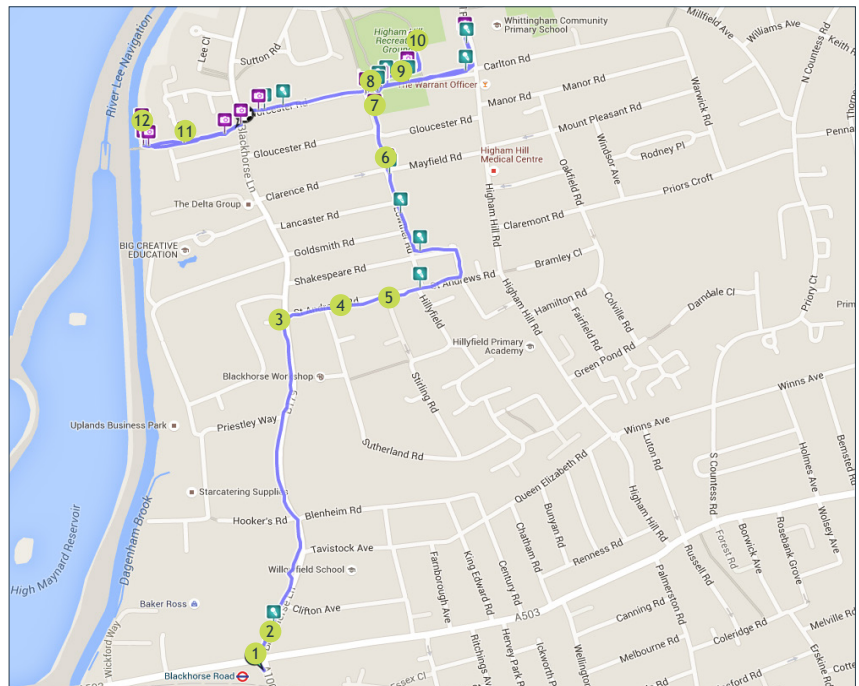


Figure 8: Images 1-12 from the walk with Maria (left)
Figure 9: Ramblr* map showing walking route with Maria (right)

*Social Life used the app Ramblr to record observations and the walking route on a map. The photo icons shows where images were taken and the microphone icons show the sound recording bytes.



The nearby playground has empty drink cans and bottles and broken furniture that Maria would like to see tidied up so it is a safe area for children to play.

Maria feels the area does not have a strong sense of community or many places for people to meet socially.

“People are always rushing...no one says hello,” she says.



She would like the area to have more local places like cafes or community spaces where people can stop and chat. Maria says there is not much for families to do locally. She usually visits her family in Colindale or takes her children to Walthamstow Central.

She would like to meet other people locally, especially people with young children, but says it is difficult to find local groups or associations. She wishes the closed down pub opposite the station would open up with some sort of community facility, like a community centre, childcare area or shop.



On our walk, we pass Gnome House and stop to look at some of the activities. Maria has not been to Gnome House before but may explore it in the future. Maria has seen people playing bowls at the Higham Hill Bowls Club but has not been able to get in touch with anyone to find out how to join.



Maria takes the bus to work from Blackhorse Lane. She often works early shifts and describes how the buses are *“really really busy...at 6 am people are already waiting...it’s jam packed.”*

She does not know much about the new developments that are planned for Blackhorse Lane but thinks the local transport system might not be able to cope without improvements. She is concerned about how the developments will impact services and facilities in the area.

We finish our walk at Lockwood Reservoir, which Maria describes as her favourite place in the neighbourhood but the gates are locked and she is not sure when it will be open again.

“This is my favourite spot...I love the ducks, marshes, birds. I hope they will not put new houses there! And Lloyd Park...they have a nice coffee shop, there are lots of parents there and you can sit down and have a chat.”

-Maria, walking interview participant



Walk with Martin

“I would like to be a neighbourhood warden...I have lots of free time. Would that be possible at my age?!”

Martin has lived near Blackhorse Lane for 11 years. He and his wife bought their home when they moved to the area from Woodford Green. Martin is retired and has two grownup children.

We trace his daily route from Blackhorse Road Station, along the streets that he walks everyday when he accompanies his wife for her morning commute. She works in the West End and takes the tube from the station. He walks his wife to the station and back because she finds it intimidating when people are hanging around on the street corners.

Martin does not know much about the changes planned for Blackhorse Lane but he worked in construction before retiring and says he would love to work on the site. As we walk around he points out the things that frustrate him about the neighbourhood: flytipping, dog mess, speeding and inconsiderate parking are the things that bother him most because they could be enforced by the council, but are not. This makes him feel as if no one cares about the area.

He says he would like to be a warden who fines people who do not look after the streets and describes how he carries bags for picking up dog mess and offers them to owners who do not clean after their animals. *“They say thank you, I’ll get a bag at home and walk away,”* he says.

Martin has an allotment where he grows vegetables. He describes the allotment community as friendly but says they do not talk about changes in the area and seem not to know much about what is planned.

“The idea of affordable housing is an absolute joke...with rent, maintenance charges and rates etc, it’s £1,500 a month... only lawyers and bankers in the city can afford that...

...I can’t complain I own my house...I’m old, I’m pensioned and sitting fairly pretty...but that’s not affordable housing for people who live and work ‘round here. ”

-Dave,
walking interview
participant

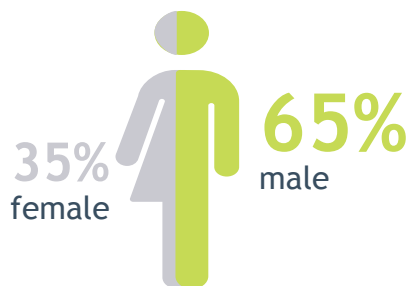


Figure 10: Flytipping. Image captured during walking interviews in the Blackhorse Lane area

OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

71

GENDER



ETHNICITY

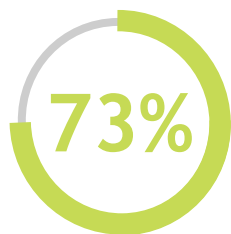
44%	White British
19%	Asian or Asian British
15%	Black or Black British
9%	Other White
6%	Mixed
5%	Prefer not to say
3%	Other

AGE

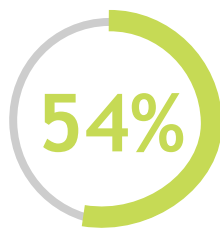


SURVEY RESULTS

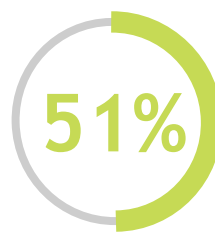
Said views have never been consulted



Are satisfied living in the area



Feel there is a strong sense of community



Have a strong connection to the area



CONNECTION TO AREA

27%	21+ years
29%	11-20 years
15%	7-10 years
9%	4-6 years
14%	1-3 years
6%	<1 year

PREFERRED METHOD TO RECEIVE INFORMATION

49%	Email updates
36%	Newsletters
29%	Waltham Forest News

KNOWLEDGE OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

37%	Nothing at all
17%	Not very much
31%	A little
12%	Quite a bit
3%	A lot

THINGS WORKING WELL FOR AREA



Friendliness
61%



Transport Links
49%



Diversity
39%



Location
39%



Feels safe
34%

30%	Shops	16%	Health provision
28%	Schools	16%	Facilities for children
21%	Access to nature	13%	Leisure facilities
20%	Cafes/restaurants/pubs	11%	Health services
18%	Parks/open spaces	11%	Cultural facilities

* Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100%. Some sections like 'things working well for area' and 'preferred method to receive information' allowed residents to select more than one answer. Not all residents responded to each question.