

We Walworth

A model for thriving neighbourhoods

[We Walworth](#) is a new project to engage everyone in Walworth to work together to make the neighbourhood a better place to live.

The context

The pandemic showed us that no single organisation, council or service can tackle the challenges our neighbourhood faces alone. It will take the whole neighbourhood bringing its collective tools, skills and ideas to really make a difference.

During lockdown we saw what was possible: a new way of working together that could transform our neighbourhood. A collective vision was forming of a future where no one worried about where the next meal is coming from, and where everyone was able to bring their contribution to support a stronger and more resilient neighbourhood.

We know that if we want to build a society where no one struggles for food and everyone can fulfil their potential, we're going to have to think bigger and differently about how to tackle our challenges together. We need to surface new leaders and ideas to tackle inequalities.

We think that by bringing together a team to work on local challenges, we can find new ways of solving problems together. So, we've built a new kind of project with a whole range of people who have something to contribute.

About the work

We Walworth is a new project to engage everyone in Walworth around local issues, and find out how we can work better together. It uses mass engagement to surface new leaders and their ideas through cross-sector teams, who take the ideas forward and build new visions for tackling issues together. It's a partnership of organisations, groups and individuals, led and coordinated by Pembroke House and Southwark Council.

By bringing people from both sides of the argument together, by working together as a group of residents, practitioners and professionals, including representatives of local and national government - we begin conversations to surface local issues that could unite the neighbourhood. In the first six months, as we developed our methodology, we used the principles of mass engagement to:

- Host **6 engagement events** with over **120 Walworth residents, government staff and local businesses** in attendance
- Have conversations about food and inequality with **700 local people**

- **Develop and present a new vision** for outdoor eating in Walworth, shaped entirely by this engagement, to residents at the local Ward Forum and council decision-makers
- **Surface our second challenge** around food economies and East Street Market

Challenge #1

The first challenge that surfaced from our mass engagement was the BBQs in Burgess Park. The BBQ area was popular before Covid, but is now fenced off after complaints about noise, pollution and safety concerns. Local people feared that the decision had already been made to keep the area closed for good. We brought people together around this issue to explore the tensions and complexities of the issue and unite around **a new vision** for outdoor eating in Walworth.

Challenge #2

Emerging now, our second challenge has surfaced real local passion and affection for East St Market. The market fulfils an important social function, and is part of the historic identity of the area. It provides a source of affordable food for some. However many people remember the market as previously much more vibrant, with a much wider offer. They sense that the market is in decline, with a diminishing and narrow offer that is not serving the community well, and is increasingly unviable for the traders too. We are currently bringing our second cohort together to take action to breathe new life in the market.

We're now looking ahead to the expansion of the pilot project in Walworth, which would lay the foundation for a wider model for this work that could be deployed in various neighbourhoods across London.

Our approach

There are three building blocks to the whole-neighbourhood approach we're taking in this work:

1. A coalition of willing partners, including local and central government, who can unlock capacity and resource to commit to the project, challenge existing institutional systems and embed the learning from the work within their teams
2. The use of mass engagement methods to talk to 80% of our neighbourhood about a given issue, which helps us see people and issues in a new light, surface new actors and build momentum and energy to achieve things that previously no one thought possible
3. A shared creative process that representatives from the neighbourhood, local organisations, the council and central government undertake to engage their neighbours, identify local priorities and develop new visions for addressing neighbourhood challenges

In order to surface pressing issues within the neighbourhood and then come together to address them, we've developed the model below.

MASS ENGAGEMENT (3 months)

The work starts by setting a goal to talk to 80% of the neighbourhood about a given issue. This goal isn't about achieving community consensus, it's not a priority setting exercise - elected representatives for the neighbourhood already hold the authority to make decisions and they are accountable at election. This goal serves to animate the whole community and the institutions which give that community structure. It's important that it's something that's difficult to achieve - a target which keeps breaking us out of our comfort zone.

We work towards reaching 80% of our neighbourhood through various methods:

Neighbourhood Welcome events (x2) that bring up to 50 residents, local government and central government staff together to:

- Share food
- Get trained on an engagement method (e.g. street canvassing)
- Practise what they've learned by going out into the community to have conversations with local members of the public about the topic at hand
- Come back together to reflect on what they heard

Activation Sessions (x2) that further engage Neighbourhood Welcome attendees who are interested in getting more involved. This is a smaller group session that includes training on another engagement method (e.g. phone banking) and the chance to practise this by following up with the members of the public who were engaged during the Neighbourhood Welcome.

One-to-ones with Activation Session attendees to gauge their interest in joining the next more intensive phase of the programme.

WORKING GROUP CHALLENGE (3 months)

The Working Group is made up of 3 residents, representatives from 3 local organisations, 3 Council staff and 3 central government staff who have engaged in one or more of the engagement events in the Mass Engagement phase. They work together as a team on an issue that has surfaced during the first phase through the below programme, in order to create a new vision to solve a problem facing the neighbourhood.

Week 1	<u>Engagement challenge 1</u> Mapping your community connections and reaching out to your networks
Week 2	<u>Engagement challenge 2</u> Meeting people working on the front line of the issue
Week 3	<u>Creation session A</u> Surfacing challenges, ideas, opportunities & resources
Week 4	<u>Engagement challenge 3</u> Engaging your sceptics in the neighbourhood
Week 5	<u>Creation session B</u>

	Developing visions and practising pitches
Week 6	<u>Engagement challenge 4</u> Pitching new visions to local groups and institutions
Week 7	<u>Creation session C</u> Finalising presentation of the visions and practising pitches
Week 8	<u>Engagement challenge 5:</u> Facilitating a local Ward Forum and presenting to decision-makers

IMPLEMENTATION & STEWARDSHIP (6 months)

The final phase is all about testing out different elements of the vision through implementation in the neighbourhood, in collaboration with local decision-makers. A smaller, offshoot working group (of 1-2 residents, representatives from local organisations, Council staff and central government staff) meets every other week for six months to help the council understand how the vision could be implemented and provide consistent feedback on their delivery plan.

This phase solidifies the social capital that has been generated through the project to date and provides a chance for the cohort to build relationships with the next Working Group. It also provides space for local government and central government representatives to build out more effective ways of working together in local contexts.

The details of this phase are variable and are worked out by each team depending on their vision.

Project outcomes

In the short-term:

- Equitable cross-sector teams are built and work successfully together
- Two local challenge ideas are surfaced and developed with their own set of outcomes
- A replicable model that can be used for local decision-making on any issue in any area is created and refined
- Council and central government staff spend more time in the local neighbourhoods they serve
- New neighbourhood capacity is created through new skills, connections, relationships and partnerships
- Increased social capital for participating residents and public sector staff
- Learning from the project is shared by participating public sector staff within their teams

Over time:

- Local people and organisations gain a greater sense of agency and ability to affect change in their local area
- The public sector gains new skills to better connect with - and therefore serve - communities

- Learning from the project is embedded within organisational structures, bringing about wider cultural change within participating institutions