Tulse Hill Estate Listening Report

High Trees Community Action

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Introduction

We are community organisers from High Trees Community Development Trust's, Community Action team. We've been speaking to residents of Tulse Hill Estate on and off over the past few months about what life is like on the estate. We've spoken to 200 people so far about their experiences, concerns, and vision for the estate. We've found a lot of very friendly people who care about the area with very similar issues and a bright vision for the estate going forward. We're publishing the information we have collected through our listening campaign, in an anonymised format, in line with our core principle of working openly and with transparency.

Figure 1 - Photo of Estate Map

High Trees Community Development Trust

High Trees was born 25 years ago, through collective community action to save the old library based in Tulse Hill, turning it into a Community Development Trust. Today, High Trees provides a range of services to connect people and communities to strengthen skills and build stronger voices.

We do this though 4 areas of support which provide services in: Education & Training, Employment & Career Support, Children, Young People & Family Services and Community Action. We are the Community Action team.

Link: https://www.high-trees.org/

For more information about how we approach Community Organising please see the end of this report.

Listening Campaign: The First 200

We are putting together this report after our 200th listening on the estate to give a summary of what we've heard so far. We have now knocked on all 898 doors on the estate three times, at different times of the day (for those households who did not answer the first time).

Summary Findings

Disclaimer: This is a summary of the findings of these conversations, we recognise it is not the experience of every single resident and there may be different views held by many across the estate.

What people love about the estate…

The key topics people brought up when speaking about what they loved about the estate are listed below.

Figure 2 - Woodruff House

1. The biggest point for people, overwhelmingly so, was **their neighbours** both in terms of how often it was brought up and how strongly people felt about it.

   People spoke about changing demographics in the area e.g. more affluent people moving in, more private renters etc. but always spoke positively of most neighbours. Some knew others going back decades while others had formed more recent relationships with each other.

   With some people in particular, we found they looked out for neighbours, especially vulnerable ones, and were proud of the fact that 'we look out for each other'. We found examples of this ranging from house-sitting, helping with repairs to looking after pets.

2. The second most frequent point was the **proximity to Brixton** with its shops and amenities. This included things like access to transport for travel into Croydon or into the city centre.

3. Being close to **Brockwell Park** and having access to such a large greens space was brought up as well. This was both for people we spoke to themselves as well as, often, for their children to have a large area to play in.

4. Some people mentioned recent **improvement in the green spaces** around the estate which they appreciated.

Issues and concerns

Of the 200 listenings, the table below shows what was mentioned the most when discussing issues and concerns around the estate:

Issue Category/Theme	Count
Damp	90
Repairs	54
Safety	39
Plumbing	34
Young people	22
Anti-social behaviour	20
Drains	15
Bins	13
Parking	12
Noise	8
Fly-tipping	8

Table 1 – Most mentioned issues and concerns

To develop these points a bit further, we found it useful to group the issues into the following broad themes:

No.	Theme	Issues	Count
1	**Structural Issues**	Damp/Mould, Repairs, Plumbing, Drains	193
2	**Wellbeing & Safety**	Noise, Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour, Young People	89
3	**Environmental**	Fly-tipping, Bins, Parking	33
4	**Other**	Miscellaneous issues	-

It is important to note that these themes overlap a bit with each other, so they are not mutually exclusive and cover a wide variety of quality and intensity of the issue or concerns spoken about.

1. Structural Issues

Figure 3 – Leaking ceiling

The biggest issues by far were, firstly, damp/mould, and secondly, issues with plumbing and drainage.

Across both issues, there is a common understanding that:

- The problems are being dealt with superficially and root causes are not being addressed.
- The issue is being handled property by property rather than addressing the block as a single structure.
- Residents are being seen perpetrators rather than the victims of these conditions. They often feel accused of causing the problem themselves e.g. poor climate control of the property or misuse of the kitchen or toilet facilities.
- They feel they are being 'brushed off' by the council rather than being dealt with seriously. This applies across most issues in this report.

Damp & Mould

Across all households that spoke of this issue, without exception, the main repairs work carried out to deal with damp and mould, if any, was to paint over it. People largely said this was a temporary measure and the damp and mould emerged again within a short time. Some people had taken on the expense and effort themselves and regularly repainted parts of their property to avoid it from spreading.

For one family, their child had to sleep in the corridor because his bedroom was so mouldy it triggered his asthma. The family has made the council aware of this repeatedly, but this had not led to a permanent solution.

Several families had accepted an additional ongoing expense of anti-damp paint to maintain a decent home and had given up on reporting it to the local authority as they felt there was no point in doing so. It was felt that the prescribed channels for complaints were not effective in solving problems.

Plumbing, Leaking & Drainage

In one instance, a resident had waste from their toilet, with solid material, flooding all over their flat. When the plumbing was done, they had to replace their own carpets.
They had countless examples of the wrong repair people being sent to their house. A different household spoke of cooking while holding an umbrella to prevent water dripping into the food or on them especially after a heavy rain.

We came across many other similar stories across the estate such not having running water for 3 months, not having hot water over winter, children's health being affected by the conditions and so on.

Figure 4 – A resident of Holt House showing pipe blockage photo on their iPad.

Repairs

This group of issues is connected to the issues of damp/mould and plumbing above but occurs across all repairs. Regardless of what the repair was that was required, the most frequent comments were (some are direct quotes and some are several similar comments combined):

- "You can't get through to someone at the council for complaints/repairs".
- "They say they'll send someone, but they take forever to do it "
- "They never send the right person".
- "They come to take photos but don't do anything".
- "I've been waiting X weeks/months for them to get back to me".
- "They say they've closed a job when they haven't".
- "They don't care about us".

The underlying feeling around repairs was one of not being listened to. The council repairs process was seen to be bureaucratic and deliberately difficult. There is felt to be a severe lack of communication across all stages – logging complaints, looking for updates, dates to expect contractors and more.

In one instance, as an example, a woman had been standing on her balcony for over an hour because her buzzer was broken and she didn't want to miss the contractor she was expecting because she knew if the buzzer didn't work, they wouldn't come up to her door.

In another case, the tiles on the roof of a block had been dislodged by a loose piece of concrete from the chimney. This caused heavy leaks into one man's bedroom whenever it rained. It took over 7 months to get any serious work done, with scaffolding standing idle for most of that time. "After seven months of this, I have no faith in the council doing anything about this," he told us, "I've tried everything I'm supposed to do, and where has that led me?" Eventually the degradation caused the ceiling to collapse onto the man's bed while he was in treatment for cancer (*Figure 6*).

Overall, the lack of communication and miscommunication between the local authority and residents became clear as we heard many examples of the following kind of statements:

- "They show up unannounced and then expect you to be home".
- "They give you a slot of X hours, so you take annual leave and stay home but they never show up".
- "They say they showed up when they never did".
- "They said they tried to get in touch but I was here all day and I heard nothing"

Figure 5 – Broken door at Purser House

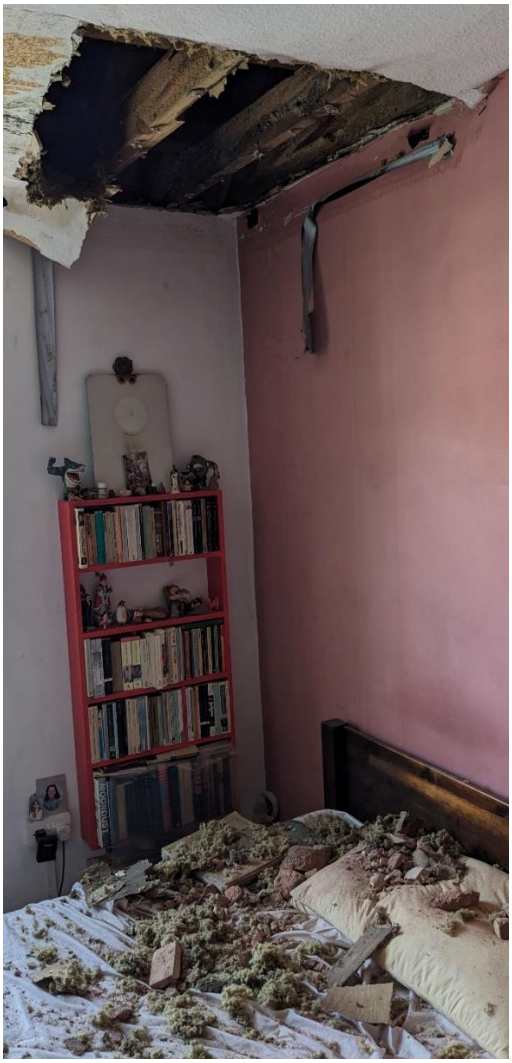

Figure 6 – Collapsed ceiling at Greenleaf Close

2. Wellbeing & Safety

The topics of safety, security, crime etc. came up frequently, if even just briefly mentioned. In one or two instances, people were not comfortable talking about it in detail while others were. For example, a few people had directly seen violent incidents take place outside or around their home. There was a sense it was not a safe place to be for a lot of people.

This overlapped and often connected with concerns for and about young people on the estate. A comment that came up frequently was about young people 'hanging out' in stairwells and balconies of blocks. This related to gangs and drug dealing which were also brought up in these conversations. Parents often spoke of this in relation to protecting their children from negative influences.

3. Environmental

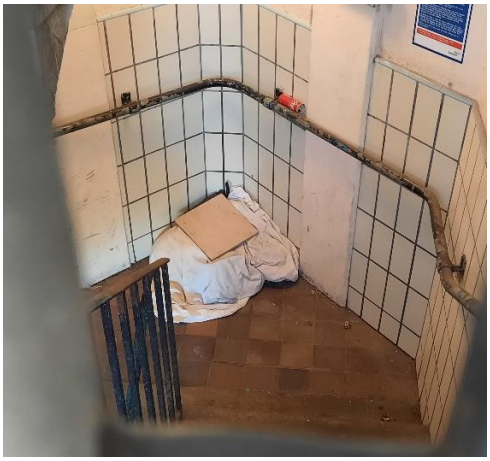

Figure 7 - Rubbish in stairwell

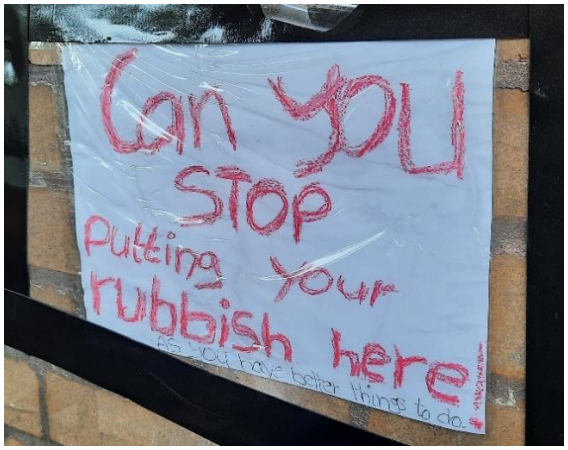

Figure 8 - Handmade rubbish sign

Something which came up frequently was the issue of fly-tipping and overflowing bins. Both things were often discussed together as part of the same issue. In one case, it was found the recycling bins were often locked and only a small slot was available to put recycling waste in the bin. Some mentioned that with overflowing bins, the wind carried the excess rubbish around to other parts of the estate. Sometimes other neighbours were mentioned as the cause of these issues while for others it was a perceived lack of regular collection.

Specific to the area around Washbrook, Irby and Holt House was the issue of parking during school hours where cars took up space not intended for parking or took up too many spaces primarily for residents' use. Some examples:

Figure 9 - Car parked by Irby and Holt House

Figure 10 - Car parked next to Holt House

An issue specific to the common area between Tulse, Woodruff and Tendring House was vehicles using it as a shortcut to cut through traffic and often doing so at high speed. There was a mixture of views on the introduction of the yellow lines to restrict parking in some parts – shown below. Some people liked seeing the parts of the estate being 'refreshed' while others thought it took away parking space that could previously have been used.

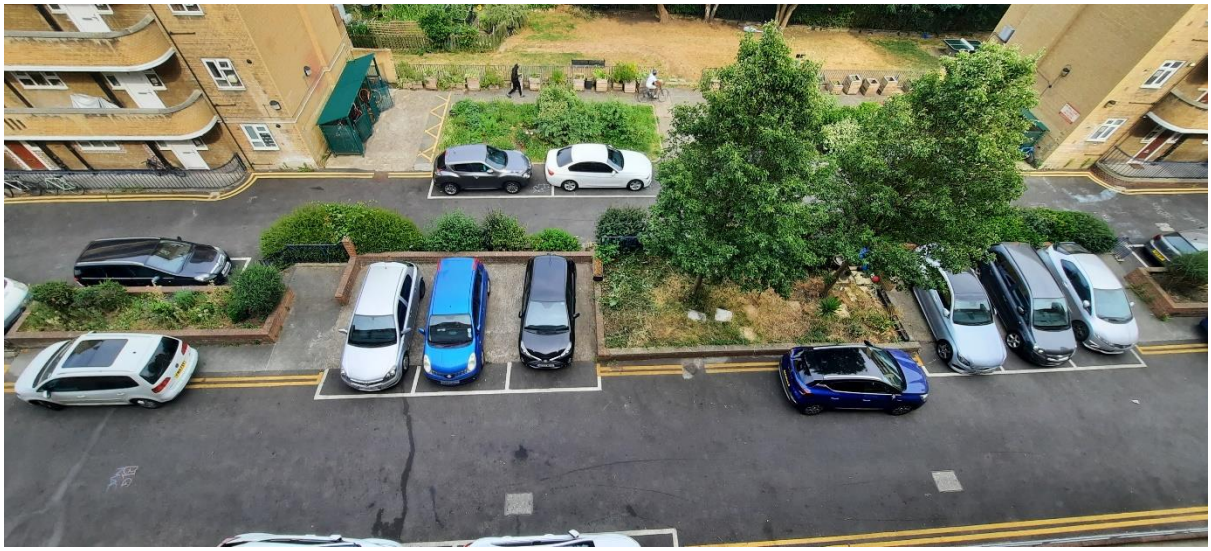

Figure 11 - Parking lines outside Tulse House

Pests

Issues with rats were particularly mentioned around the south end of Woodruff house though to be connected with the overflowing bins shown below.

Figure 12 - Bins at south end of Woodruff House

4. Other

Around Tulse, Woodruff and Tendring House, there were some feeling of being separate to the "main part of the estate" on the other sides of the road and a difference of treatment by the local authority although this was not a commonly held view.

At Eccleston House, there was a hesitancy to discuss issues openly in part due to the structure of the building itself where there is no common area, and four doors open up in front of each other in a very small space on every floor.

The greenspace in front of the bungalows of 50-67 Tulse Hill was thought to be maintained by the council but not the greenery directly in front of the houses. Most households here knew each other very well.

Accessibility & Availability

Figure 13 - View from top of Holt House

Among the barriers to accessibility and availability were disabilities affecting mobility, other physical disabilities and concerns with going to a meeting after dark on the estate. Many people had childcare responsibilities as well. Apart from this, we met people for whom English was an additional language.

We always aim to have one-to-one meetings with people so if there is a barrier you face in getting involved, please get in touch and let's chat.

Figure 14 - Birch House

Our Approach & Next Steps

Community Organising

Community organising is the work of bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice. We typically practice Community Organising using the following framework:

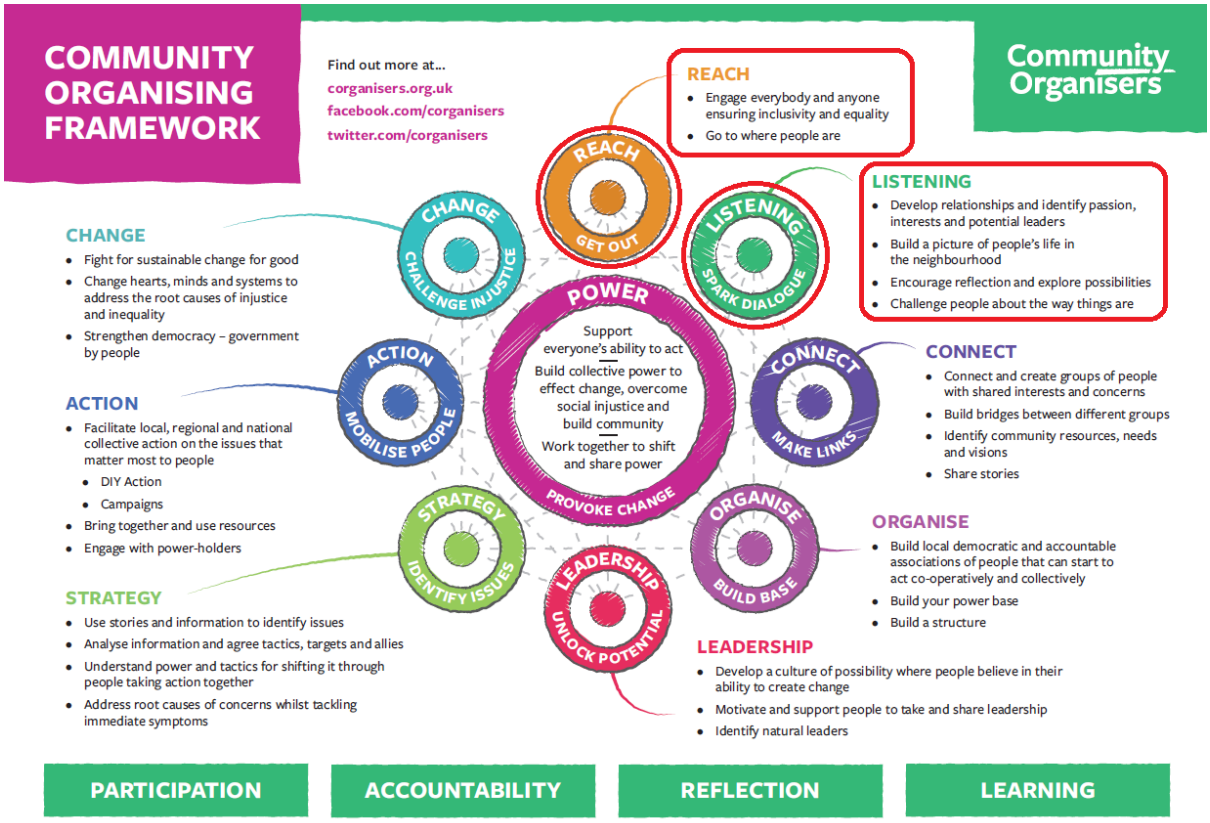

Figure 15- Community Organising Framework

This report focuses on our initial work under the **'Reach'** and '**Listen**' parts of the framework. The principle 'Go to where people are' means we knock on people's doors to have conversations (or 'listenings' as we call it because the main point of each conversation is to listen to residents!) and invite them to join with their neighbours in taking collective action on issues that matter to them. We call this a 'listening campaign'.

Questions

Our conversations are quite wide ranging in terms of the content depending on what comes up for people as most urgent and relevant for their lives, but we roughly cover the following:

- Basic information e.g., how long they've lived on the estate.
- What do you love about the area?
- Do you have any issues or concerns?
- What do you think can be done about them?
- Do you have a say in how the area is run?
    - If yes: how so?

- If no: do you want a say?
- Availability to meet other neighbours to work together to take action on issues.

This is not a comprehensive list of questions, nor does it mean these same questions are asked in every conversation or in the same way, it is not a survey but a relational conversation.

Calling Cards

Where we don't speak to someone, we leave a calling card in their letterbox like the one shown below:

Figure 16 – High Trees Community Organiser Calling Card

Community Organising FAQs

Please read our 'High Trees Community Organising FAQs' for more details on what community organising is and how we work at High Trees. This is an important document and will help to answer a lot of questions you may have.

Door Knocking

We will continue with our door knocking until we cover the whole estate, door by door, multiples times until we have groups of people with common concerns involved to take collective action.

Take action!

Join the Community Organising work happening across Tulse Hill Estate and take action on issues affecting the estate. We will have meetings to help residents connect and build their power with each other. Let's connect and create strategy to take effective action to create lasting change. We are stronger together. Get in touch to find out more.

Figure 17 - View from Tendring House

Accessibility

If you or someone you know need this document in large print for visual impairment, please let us know at action@high-trees.org

Contact Us

If something isn't clear to you at all or you're interested in taking action for change in your community, please get in touch with us, we'd love to meet you.

High Trees Community Action team

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