CREATE streets

Create Streets
Briefing paper

November 2020

Terraced Friendship

How terraced streets brought us together: The Create Streets *Living with Lockdown survey*.

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Executive summary

As the nation faces a second lockdown, Create Streets looks back to the events earlier this year to understand what consequences the lockdown had on our relationships with those around us and whether the make-up of our built environments played any role.

Between 23rd of May and 25th June 2020 Create Streets undertook an indicative survey via social media of 438 people into the relationship between where they live and how connected they felt to their neighbours, both before and after lockdown. It was not a controlled survey by age, geography or socio-economic status so can only be indicative. Nevertheless, the breakdown of home types and locations is a reasonable match for the British population with only a modest skew. It represents social tenants less well than private tenants or owner occupiers. We therefore believe that, while not definitive, our findings are helpful particularly as some of them corroborate other findings in different countries and decades. We found that:

We came together during lockdown. Our study found that people know more of their neighbours than before lockdown, with 37 per cent of people now knowing six or more of their neighbours, compared to just 29 per cent before.

Access to greenery is strongly associated with greater neighbourliness. Our research found that both that access to front gardens and access to private gardens were associated with many more neighbourly interactions compared to environments with no outdoor space. Of the respondents with no form of outdoor space, 59 per cent did not have any social interactions with neighbours, during and after lockdown compared to 33 per cent from the rest of the sample.

45 %

of those living in apartment blocks did not interact with their neighbours in any way.

Good fences make good neighbours – terraced houses were the best COVID-beaters. Respondents living in terraced houses spoke to more neighbours than in those living in other types of house or in flats. 40 per cent interacted with neighbours more than four times a week as opposed to 33 per cent of those living in semi-detached homes or 23 per cent in detached homes. Those living in purpose-built flats were the least likely to speak to their neighbours. 45 per cent of those living in apartment blocks did not interact with their neighbours in any way (over double the rate for terraced homes).

Cars appear to stifle neighbourliness. Those who used cars as their main form of transport were less likely to interact with their neighbours in any form (31 per cent), during and after the lockdown, compared to those who walked (25 per cent) or cycled (13 per cent). Cars are also associated with reduced social cohesion at street level. Fourteen percent fewer of those with properties facing busy streets were likely to interact with their neighbours regularly than those who lived on quieter streets.

Denser environments do not always guarantee tighter communities. Rural areas had greater levels of social interaction during lockdown compared to suburban and urban areas. Despite proximity, 32 per cent of respondents from urbans areas stated they had no interactions with neighbours during and after lockdown. This was double the rate (16 per cent) of those who had no neighbourly interactions in rural areas.

This report summarises these results. In the context of a period of flux in the spheres of planning, house-building and highways design, it also makes a few suggestions as to how we might 'build back better' and retain some of the silver linings from the health and economic challenges of 2020 as part of a better, more purposeful, prosperous and better connected future.

Our key recommendations are to maximise public health, mental wellbeing, support for new development and neighbourly connectedness, highways policy and design codes should:

Create gardens. Local plans and local design codes should require front, back and communal gardens wherever possible (these can be modest in size). These are associated with speaking to your neighbours more which in turns is associated with personal well-being.

Create terraced streets. Local plans and local design codes should, wherever possible, support terraced homes. In our COVID survey, these are associated with speaking to your neighbours more than purpose-built flats or semi-detached or detached homes whilst also being more space efficient.

Create quiet streets. Local plans, master-plans and local design codes should create streets which design out fast speeds. These are associated with cleaner air and knowing more of your neighbours.

Support walking and cycling. Local plans, master-plans and local design codes should create streets on which it is easy, pleasant and safe to walk or cycle. Making it easy to get about by walking or cycling is associated with more neighbourly interactions.

1. We came together during lockdown

Be it over a WhatsApp message or via the bedroom window, our survey has shown that during lockdown people interacted with their neighbours more than before. Something, intuitively that maybe a lot of us knew and felt was happening. Prior to lockdown, 34 per cent of people said that they did not interact at all on a weekly basis with their neighbours. However, during lockdown only 25 per cent of people did not do so. The number of people who interacted with their neighbours on a weekly basis more than four times more than doubled (from 11 per cent to 28 per cent).

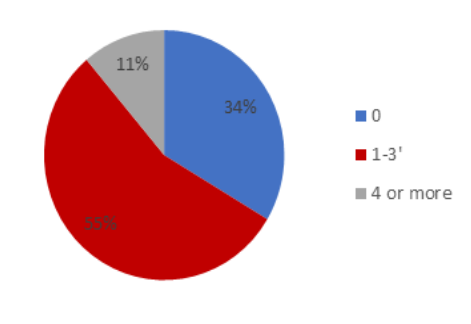

Figure 1: How many times a week people interacted with their neighbours, before lockdown

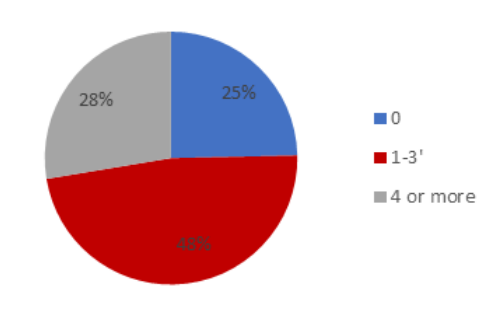

Figure 2: How many times a week people interacted with their neighbours, during lockdown

Unsurprisingly, more interactions were associated with knowing more people. Whether it was helping the vulnerable with essential shopping or sharing child care duties as the lockdown relaxed, across the country, communities came together. Before lockdown, 11 per cent of people said that they did not know anyone that they would speak to on their street. This fell to 9 per cent after the lockdown.

Even more starkly, the proportion of people knowing six or more of their neighbours increased from 29 per cent before lockdown to 37 per cent during it. Controlled neighbourliness (i.e. talking to your neighbours when you want to) can be an important driver of health and well-being. This finding is therefore a potentially important silver lining to all the health and economic challenges of 2020.

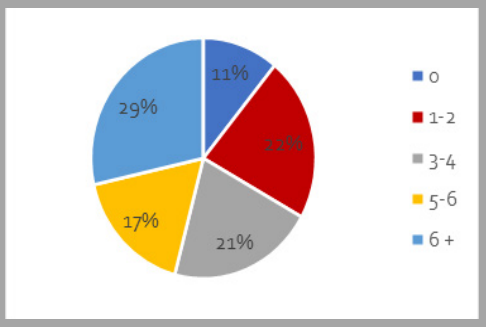

Figure 3: How many people would you say that you knew on your street to speak to, before lockdown?

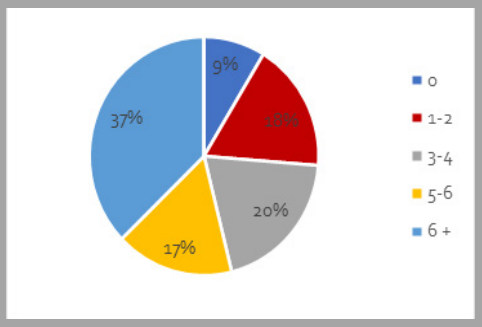

Figure 4: How many people would you say that you knew on your street to speak to, during lockdown?

In this context, the next focus of our survey was therefore on how we can design and manage places to foster neighbourliness. What physical and other factors were associated with people's positive and negative experiences of lockdown.

Terraced street, Poundbury, Dorset. [1]

[1] Photograph: Nicholas Boys Smith [1]

2. Design was strongly associated with positive (and negative) experiences of lockdown

Our survey compared how connected people felt with their neighbours during lockdown given their physical environments. We considered the following:

- What type of homes respondents live in;
- What form of transport respondents used during lockdown;
- Respondents' access to greenery;
- Space immediately outside respondents' front doors;
- Respondents' neighbourhoods (rural, suburban or urban); and
- Respondents' tenure.

Good fences make good neighbours – terraced houses were the best COVID beaters. Respondents living in terraced houses spoke to more neighbours than in those living in other types of house or in flats. 40 per cent interacted with neighbours more than four times a week as opposed to 33 per cent of those living in semi-detached homes or 23 per cent in detached homes. Those living in flats in purpose-built flats were the least likely to speak to their neighbours. 45 per cent of those living in apartment blocks did not interact with their neighbours in any way (over double the rate for terraced homes). Only 12 per cent of those living in purpose-built flats had more than four interactions (a quarter of the rate for terraced homes.)

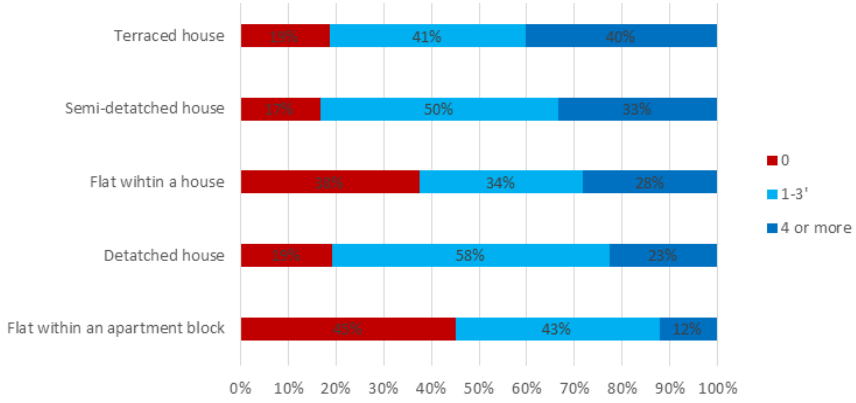

Figure 5: How many times a week people interacted with their neighbours, during lockdown, by house type

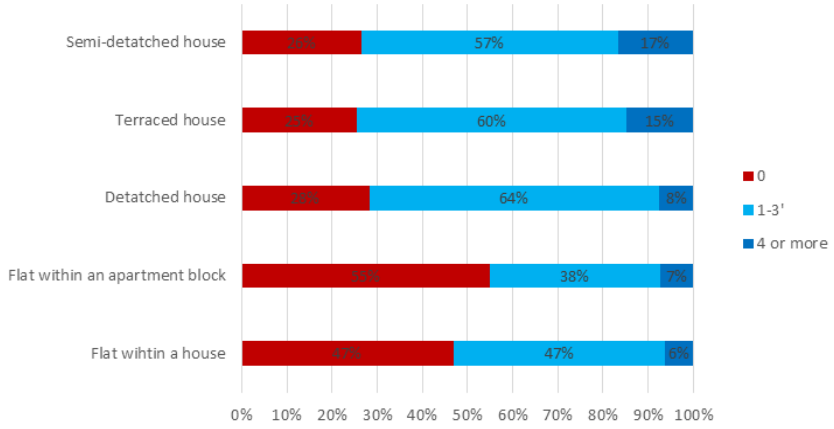

Figure 6: How many times a week people interacted with their neighbours, before lockdown, by house type

Nor was this just a matter of lockdown. A similar pattern was seen in the levels of local connectedness before lockdown. These indicative findings from 2020 corroborate many findings over many years some of which were summarised in our study of the relationship between design with well-being, *Heart in the Right Street:*

'When the internal scale of a large building matches their external scale, large buildings can 'atomise' and dehumanise by taking away from residents any 'control' over who they will meet as they travel between their flat and the public realm. This can increase withdrawal and anonymity and decrease friendships. Residents may meet more people but they will know fewer of them. Research suggests that 'the richest social environments are those in which we feel free to edge closer together or move apart as we wish. However, living in large buildings can undermines these bonds of social interdependence'.[2] *In one study residents of low-rise buildings had fifty per cent more local friends than residents of high-rise buildings.*[3]

40 %

of terraced house residents interacted with neighbours more than four times a week during lockdown

Modern terraced street with gardens and shared streets, Marmalade Lane, Cambridge.[4]

[2] Boys Smith N. (2016), *Heart in the Right Street*.
[3] Cited in Gifford, R. (2007), "The Consequence of living in High-Rise Buildings" in *Architectural Science Review*, vol. 50. p.10.
[4] Photograph: David Butler

Not so much new cycling? We asked what form of transport respondents used most often during lockdown. Of the 438 respondents, 289 (66 per cent per cent) said they had mainly walked while 18 per cent mainly drove and 15 per cent mainly went by bike. Almost no one mainly used public transport. This was very different from life pre lockdown with reductions in car use (from 43 per cent to 18 per cent as the primary mode) and of public transport (from 24 to less than 1 per cent). Walking increased from 20 per cent to 66 per cent as the primary mode. The increase in cycling was very modest from 13 per cent to 15 per cent as the main way of getting around.

There was more cycling uptake in urban and suburban areas than in rural ones which saw only 10 per cent using this form of transport, during lockdown. Respondents in rural areas were also more reliant on cars to move around.

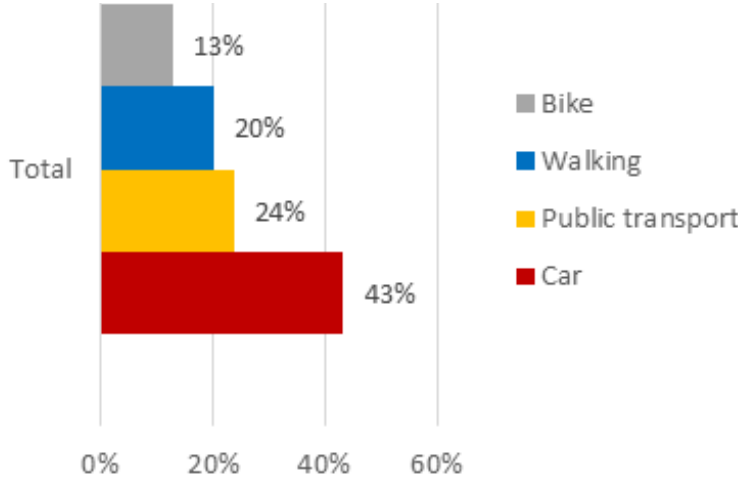

Figure 7: Primary form of transport, before lockdown

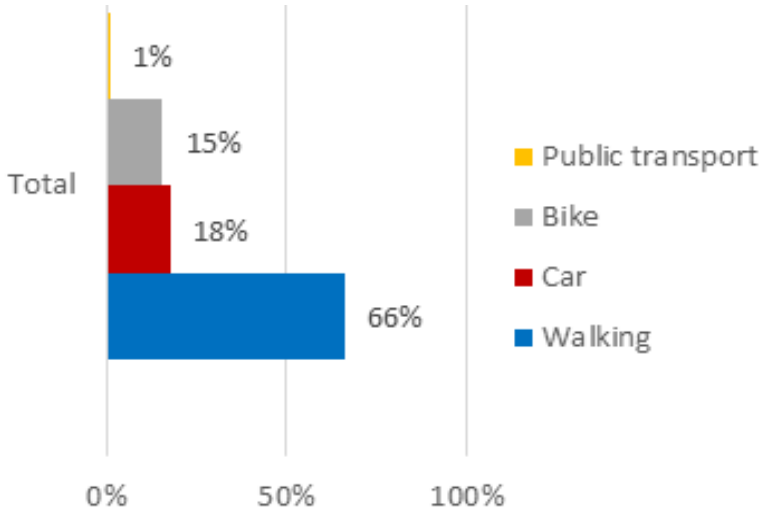

Figure 8: Primary form of transport, during lockdown

Cars appear to stifle neighbourliness. During lockdown, those who used cars as their main form of transport were less likely to interact with their neighbours in any form (31 per cent), during and after the lockdown, compared to those who walked (25 per cent) or cycled (13 per cent).[5]

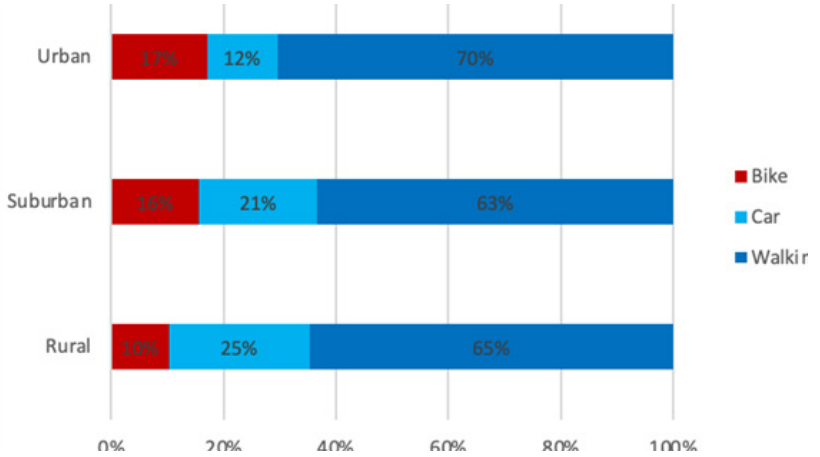

Figure 9: Primary form of transport during lockdown, by setting

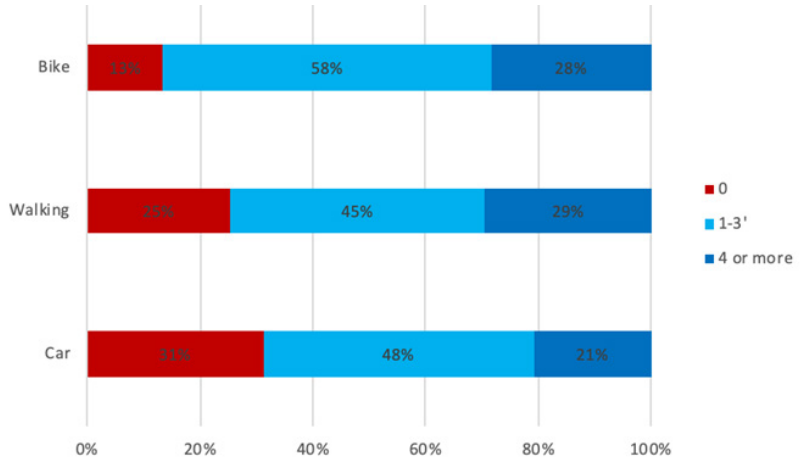

Figure 10: Number of interactions with neighbours during lockdown, by primary form of transport

[5] The same appears to be true for those who used public transport as their primary mode. However, the sample size is too small to use the data.

Access to greenery always helps. There was a clear relationship between access to private greenery and private or shared gardens and levels of neighbourly interactions during lockdown. Those with no access to personal or shared green space were, by far, the least likely to interact with their neighbours. 59 per cent had no interactions of any kind as opposed to 33 per cent from all other groups. Those with private gardens (320 respondents), private balconies (36 respondents) or shared gardens (39 respondents) were the most likely to interact with their neighbours (82 per cent, 66 per cent or 65 per cent respectively).

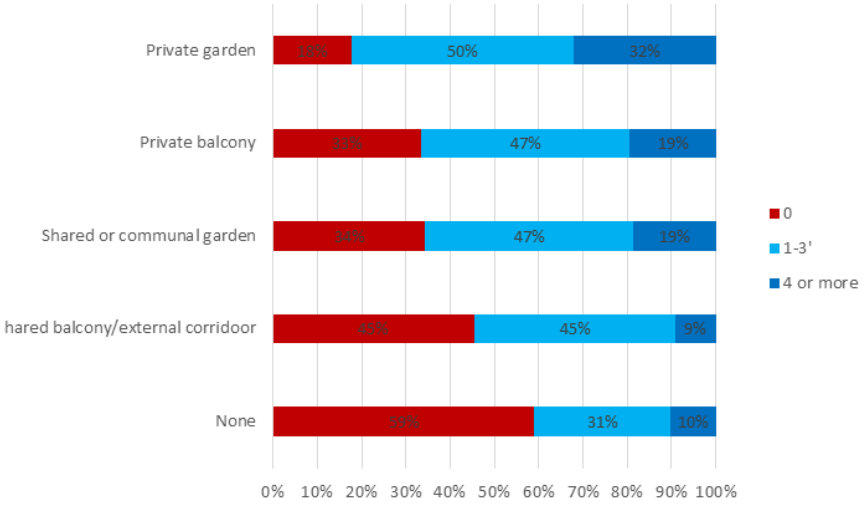

Figure 11: Number of interactions with neighbours during lockdown, by access to external space

Our findings corroborate older research on the relationship between gardens and social interaction. One study, in Melbourne for example, compared levels of activity over entire days on 17 residential streets, some with and some without front gardens. The most activity (69 per cent) very clearly took place in front of the houses with front yards or gardens. It was by these types of houses that neighbours stopped to chat or children played. However, front gardens which were too small to sit in had less of an impact.[6] There is also excellent recent evidence that suggests well managed communal gardens can be positively associated with high levels of neighbourliness, activity and community awareness. [7]

[6] Cited in Gehl J., (2010), *Cities for People*, pp. 82-3.

[7] Andersson, J. (2015), "Living in a communal garden" associated with well-being while reducing urban sprawl by 40%: a mixed-methods cross-sectional study, *Public Health*, July 2015.

Front doors and quiet streets are best. We also considered the relationship between the space immediately outside respondent's front doors and their experiences of lockdown. We found very strong results. 84 per cent of respondents with direct access onto front gardens interacted in some form with neighbours during and after the lockdown. In contrast, only 50 per cent of respondents living in a home with a shared external corridor or 55 per cent of those with a shared internal corridor interacted with neighbours.

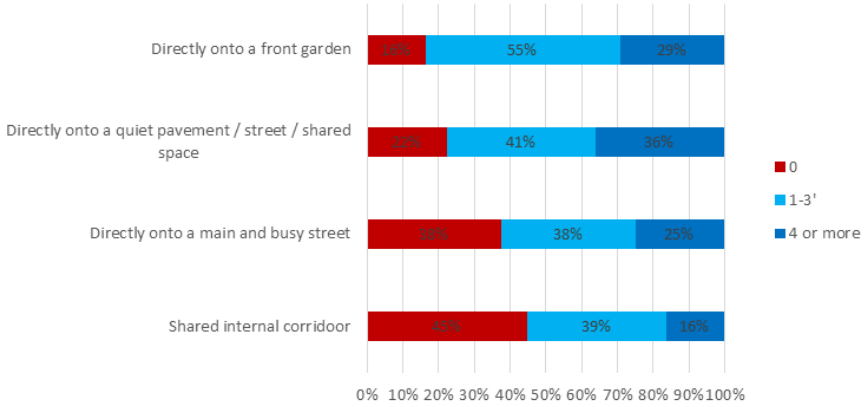

Figure 12: Number of interactions with neighbours during lockdown, by front door access

Again, this strongly corroborates previous findings. A 1980 study of 1970s social housing in Copenhagen found that:

'the front gardens were widely used by adults. They spent much time there sitting, eating, knitting etc. taking in the street scene and the sunshine in the process....the high activity level in and around the front gardens was seen to draw quite a few people from the upper two storeys down to the street scene. Thus "where people are, people will come."'[8]

We also found that heavily trafficked streets were associated with lower levels of social cohesion than quieter streets. 77 per cent of respondents on quiet streets or shared spaces interacted regularly with neighbours as opposed to 63 per cent on busier streets.

Fewer people during lockdown used cars as their main form of transport as our survey and many other datapoints shows. This in turn reduced traffic on busy roads. Although the sample was modest, those living on main or busy streets saw particularly sharp increases in neighbourly interactions. Respondents living on main or busy streets with zero interactions reduced by 16 percentage points (from 54 per cent to 38 per cent) during lockdown. This was a much starker increase than the 4 per cent increase for those living on quiet streets or shared spaces.

[8] Gehl, J.(1986), '"Soft Edges" in Residential Streets', *Scandinavian Housing and Planning Research 3*, pp. 89-102.

77 %

of respondents on quiet streets or shared spaces interacted regularly with neighbours

Unsurprisingly, quieter streets are safer and more appealing places, where children, and indeed all of us, can move about more safely without the constant concern of fast-moving vehicles. The reduction of traffic therefore had a sharper impact on neighbourliness in normally busy streets. Again, this finding corroborates older research. The best-known study of the impact of traffic on neighbourliness is now over 40 years old and its findings remain compelling. As can be seen from the diagram below, on busy vehicular streets people were found to know far fewer of their neighbours particularly from the other side of the carriageway. This must be in part due to differing lengths of residence. However, the researchers' notes on their interviews with residents are fairly convincing that traffic plays a far more than incidental role. They wrote of the lightly trafficked street: 'Front steps were used for sitting and chatting, sidewalks by children for playing, and for adults for standing and passing the time of day (especially around the corner store).' However, the heavy street had 'little or no sidewalk activity and was used solely as a corridor between the sanctuary of individual homes and the outside world. Residents kept very much to themselves so there was no felling of community at all.' [9]

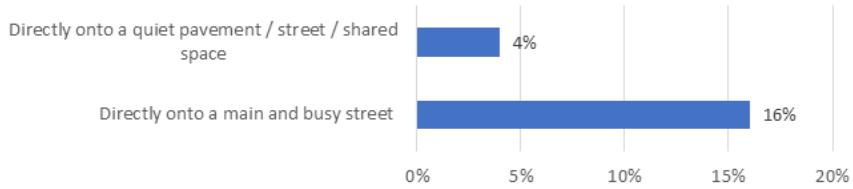

Figure 13: Increase in number of interactions from before lockdown to during lockdown, by front door access

In 2008 Joshua Hart and Graham Parkhurst replicated this study in Bristol. They took three streets with different levels of traffic and compared the average number of friends and acquaintances that people had on each street type. Then they compared the results with the mean values in San Francisco. The table below summarises the findings for both cities, showing the average number of friends and acquaintances in relation to the traffic volume for each street type. Both studies show that people living on streets with heavy vehicular traffic tend have fewer friends on their street and not many acquaintances. Those living on lightly trafficked streets appear to have three or four times as many friends and twice as many acquaintances. Lots of cars make for bad neighbours. [10]

[9] This is not a perfect study due to material differences in social demographics and length of tenure which cannot be completely controlled for. Appleyard, D, & Lintell, M., (1972) 'The environmental quality of streets: the residents' point of view', *Journal of the American Planning Association,* p.88

[10] Hart, J., Parkhurst, G. (2011) 'Driven to excess: Impacts of motor vehicles on the quality of life of residents of three streets in Bristol'.

Denser environments do not always guarantee tighter communities.
Rural areas had greater levels of social interaction during lockdown compared to suburban and urban areas. Despite proximity, 32 per cent of respondents from urbans areas stated they had no interactions with neighbours during and after lockdown. This was double the rate (16 per cent) of those who had no neighbourly interactions in rural areas.

Study area	San Francisco (1972)			Bristol (2008)		
Street	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Traffic volume	2,000	8,000	16,000	140	8,420	21,130
Avg. no friends	3	1.3	0.9	5.4	2.5	1.2
Avg. no acquaintances	6.3	4.1	3.1	6.1	3.7	2.8
Mean length of residence	8.0	9.2	16.3		-	
Percentage of renters	50	67	92		-	

Figure 14: Average number of friends and acquaintances in two studies over 40 years

Those living in the countryside also experienced a greater increase in neighbourliness – with the proportion of those having no neighbourly interactions reducing by 13 percentage points from 29 per cent to 16 per cent. In contrast, those in urban areas having no neighbourly interactions only reduced be seven percentage points from 39 to 32 per cent.

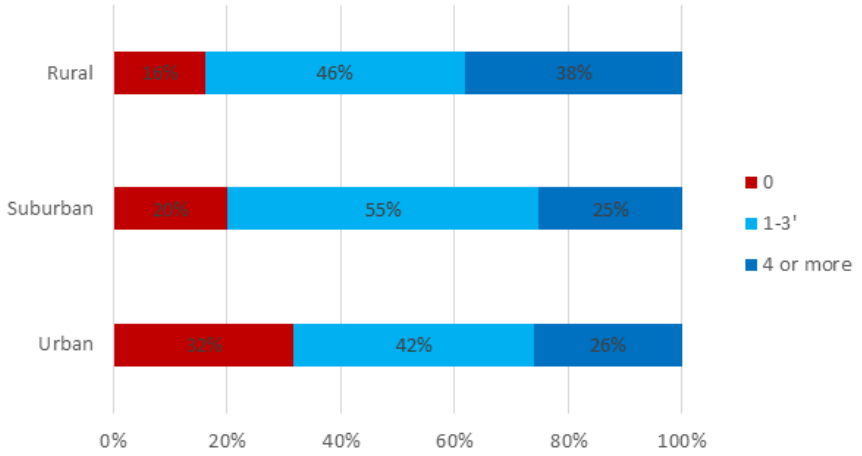

Figure 15: Number of interactions with neighbours during lockdown, by type of setting

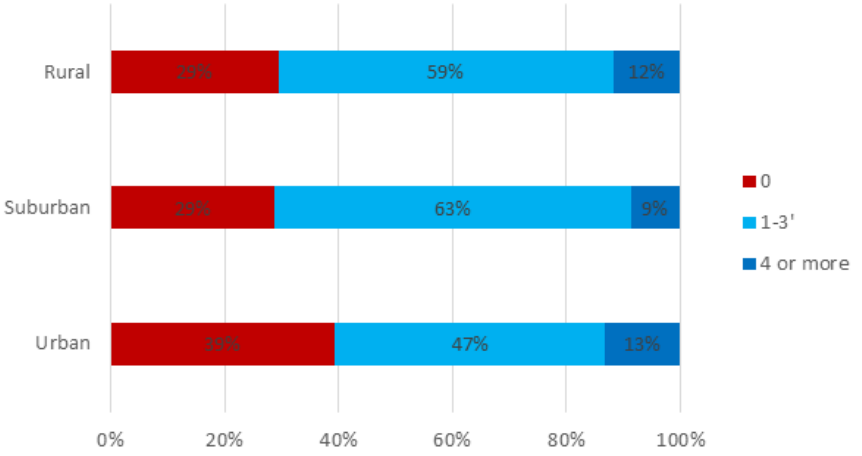

Figure 16: Number of interactions with neighbours before lockdown, by type of setting

A 2018 American poll had similar results. It found that 40 per cent of Americans living in rural areas said that they know all or most of their neighbours. In contrast, 24 per cent of those who live in urban areas and 28 percent in suburban areas said that they know all or most of their neighbours.[11] A 2015 YouGov poll in the UK agreed. It found that only 32 per cent of people living in urban areas knew all five of their nearest neighbours' names. In rural areas most (51 per cent) did and in towns and fringe urban areas, 47 per cent did.[12] Contributory factors probably include age of respondent and longer and faster turnover of housing stock in more urban areas.

[11] Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, Richard Fry, D'vera Cohn And Ruth Igielnik, (2018), 'What [10] Unites And Divides Urban, Suburban And Rural Communities'

[12] YouGov, (2015), *Love thy neighbour? British people are barely friends with them*

3. Recomendations

2020 has brought untimely death to thousands and worry and economic hardship to millions. However, it has also helped re-forge bonds of neighbourliness and reminded us of what matters in ways which should perhaps never have been forgotten. The next few months and years are likely to be a period of flux in the spheres of planning, house-building and highways design. Amongst the certain or probable changes are;

- The government's *Gear Change Plan* for walking and cycling has provided £2 billion of funding to encourage walking and cycling;
- The new *Highway Code* is also expected to encourage more sustainable transport with a 'hierarchy of road users' where cyclists and pedestrians are at the top;
- The new *Manual for Streets 3* is expected to support street design which is less car-dominated building on the important work of Manual for Streets;
- The *Urban Tree Challenge Fund* is supporting the planting of at least 20,000 large trees and 110,00 smaller trees in English cities and towns;
- The new model *National Model Design Code* (following on from last year's National Design Guide) is expected to give local planning authorities clearer guidance on the creation of new places;
- The Government has said it intends to implement most of the findings of the *Building Better Building Beautiful Commission* which recommended creating a more predictable level playing field and bringing the democracy forward from development-control to plan-making; and
- The vision set out in the *Government's White Paper, Planning for the Future,* is likely to lead to much greater use of locally-derived design codes as local plans become more visual as opposed to verbal.

Shared surface terraced street, Van Gough Way, London.

In this context our indicative survey has several important suggestions for future highways and planning policy in order to support health, happiness, popularity and sustainability. If we want to maximise public health and connectedness, highways policy and design codes should:

- *Create gardens.* Local plans and local design codes should require front, back and communal gardens wherever possible (these can be modest in size). These are associated with speaking to your neighbours more which in turns is associated with personal well-being.

- *Create terraced streets.* Local plans and local design codes should, wherever possible, support terraced homes. In our COVID survey, these are associated with speaking to your neighbours more than purpose-built flats or semi-detached or detached homes whilst also being more space efficient.

- *Create quiet streets.* Local plans, master-plans and local design codes should create streets which design out fast speeds. These are associated with cleaner air and knowing more of your neighbours.

- *Support walking and cycling.* Local plans, master-plans and local design codes should create streets on which it is easy, pleasant and safe to walk or cycle. Making it easy to get about by walking or cycling is associated with more neighbourly interactions.

Report Authors
Lauren Lawson, Hugo Owen and Nicholas Boys Smith

[13] Photograph: Robert Kwolek / Create Streets

Appendix: summary of survey respondents vs. national averages

The survey was conducted between 23rd of May and 25th June 2020. It was carried out via social media. 438 people took part. It was not a controlled survey by age, geography or socio-economic status so can only be indicative. Nevertheless, as the table shows, the breakdown of home types and locations is a reasonable match for the British population with only a modest skew. It represents social tenants less well than private tenants or owner occupiers.

		Create Streets survey	*National averages*
Environment[14]	Urban	45%	83%
	Sub Urban	40%	
	Rural	15%	17%
Housing mix[15]	Semi-detached house	23%	25%
	Terraced house	23%	27%
	Detached house	27%	18%
	Flat within a house	8%	21%
	Flat within an apartment block	19%	
	Bungalow	-	9%
Private open space[16]	Private outdoor space	91%	88%
	No private outdoor space	9%	12%
Transport methods during lockdown	Car	18%	-
	Bike	15%	-
	Public Transport	1%	-
	Walking	66%	-
Front Door Entrance	Front Garden	53%	-
	Busy Street	5%	-
	Quite Street	21%	-
	Shared external corridor	5%	-
	Shared internal corridor	15%	-
Tenure[17]	Socially rented	2%	17%
	Privately owned	77%	63%
	Privately rented - shared tenancy	13%	20%
	Privately rented	6%	

[14] Department For Environment Food And Rural Affairs, (2015), Rural Population 2014/15 (online). Combined figure for Sub Urban and Urban. Department For Environment Food And Rural Affairs, (2015), Rural Population 2014/15 (online)

[15] *Bre Trust (2020), The housing stock of the United Kingdom (online)*

[16] *Defined as shared, private or balcony. ONS, (2020), one in eight British households has no garden (online)*

[17] *ONS (2018), Percentage breakdown of dwelling stock by tenure by Country/Region, England, 2012 to 2018.*

GET IN TOUCH

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