

# What makes for a good life in Woking?

JANUARY 2021



Image (CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0) Courtesy of Pedro Palacios/flickr.com

RESEARCH AND WORKSHOP REPORT

**Susan Venn**  
**Kate Burningham**



# CONTENTS

1	<b>Background and Introduction</b>	3
2	<b>Our Approach</b>	4
3	<b>Research Findings</b>	5
	3.1 Regeneration and change in Woking.	5
	3.2 Who is Woking for?	6
	3.3 People and community	8
4	<b>Report from Workshop Discussions</b>	10
	4.1 Discussion period 1: Responding to our research	11
	4.1.1 Green spaces and high rises	11
	4.1.2 Community	11
	4.1.3 Effective communication in Woking	12
	4.1.4 Affordability	13
	4.1.5 Change and regeneration	13
	4.2 Discussion period 2: Towards a good life in Woking	14
	4.2.1 Reassessing existing assets	14
	4.2.2 Making Woking work for everyone	15
	4.2.3 Moving forward	16
5	<b>Conclusions</b>	16
	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	17
	<b>Appendix: Research Presentation Slides</b>	18

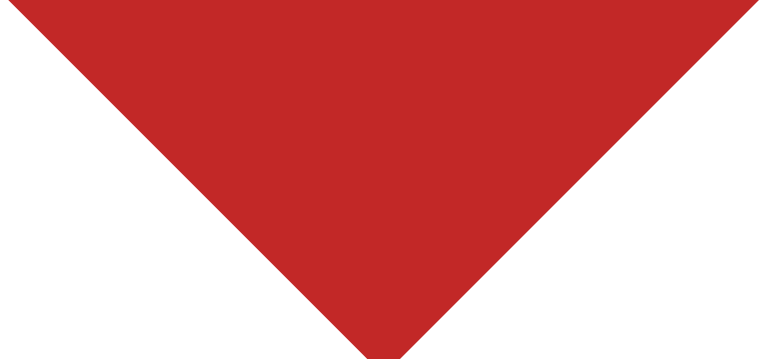


Image (CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0) Courtesy of Pedro Palacios/flickr.com

## 1 | BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this report forms part of our work within CUSP – the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity ([www.cusp.ac.uk](http://www.cusp.ac.uk)). A basic premise of CUSP is that the consumption patterns that characterise current day societies are environmentally unsustainable and require a shift to lower carbon lifestyles. However, any strategy that requires such a change can only be successful if people still feel able to live a ‘decent’ or a good life where they are capable not only of providing food and shelter for themselves and their families but also to participate effectively in the life of society.

As part of this work we have been speaking to people in different places and neighbourhoods to explore how visions of the ‘good life’ and ‘good work’ emerge in the context of their everyday lives. We are looking for how aspirations for living well may vary, but also whether there are any commonalities so that we may understand how people can live well and equitably, but in a way that is also environmentally sustainable. We have therefore conducted our research in three diverse case study sites – Stoke-on-Trent, Woking and Hay-on-Wye. We chose Stoke-on-Trent as a post-industrial city which has areas of social disadvantage, but which also has a rich cultural heritage; Hay-on-Wye is a rural market town on the Welsh/English border and Woking because it is often portrayed as an affluent commuter town, but also has areas of disadvantage.



The research questions guiding our work are:

- (a) How might understandings of the good life be informed by aspects of where people live and along existing lines of social difference, including age, gender, ethnicity, and religion.
- (b) How might these understandings diverge within even quite close knit communities, but also are there elements of consensus, common ground and shared dreams for a good life.

This report is the culmination of our research in Woking and presents a summary of the interviews we conducted, and feedback from a workshop we held with a variety of local people and stakeholders.

The report begins with an outline of our research approach before moving on to present some initial findings. We then present a summary of the discussions emanating from the workshop.

## **2 | OUR APPROACH**

Our research in Woking commenced with an in-depth case study of the town, comprising desk-based research and interviews with representatives of a variety of local organisations community groups, charities, and the local council. Our aim was to gain a clearer historically and contextually based understanding of the town, and to help in identifying the key issues which impact on local people.

Our plan for the next phase of the research was to conduct a series of focus groups with a range of residents to elicit views on what it means to live well in the town and what might be improved. However, the onset of Covid-19 and accompanying restrictions meant that it was not possible to meet in groups, so we instead conducted a series of individual interviews over the telephone, or via online platforms.

In total we conducted 25 in-depth interviews with 19 females and 6 males, who ranged in age from early 20's to mid-80's. Participants were mixed in terms of living alone or in families, working or retired, and were from different parts of the town and surrounding districts.

During these interviews we explored a variety of issues related to: perceptions of place; participation in the community; local culture; ability to be involved and influence local decisions; employment and education opportunities and regeneration, change and stability in the area.

We subsequently analysed the interviews by exploring emerging themes within and across them to identify key issues, both positive and negative, which people identified as being important in relation to living well in Woking currently and in the future. In presenting these research findings and workshop discussions we emphasise that we are sharing participants own narratives and perspectives.

## 3 | RESEARCH FINDINGS

The preliminary analysis of the interviews we undertook revealed three key themes (a) experiencing regeneration and change in Woking, (b) defining what Woking is and who it is for and (c) definitions and understandings of community and the role of community in making Woking a good place to live.

### 3.1 REGENERATION AND CHANGE IN WOKING

Woking has been undergoing significant regeneration and change in recent years, including major changes to Victoria Square in the town centre where existing buildings have been demolished and replaced with new housing, retail and leisure facilities. Alongside these developments there have also been substantial changes to transport systems across the town centre. Regeneration projects are also underway or planned for other parts of the town and nearby, including plans to redevelop Sheerwater. This regeneration work has had consequences on Woking residents' everyday lives and was often alluded to by participants.

Several of the people we spoke to expressed strong feelings about the process of regeneration, and the challenges of living through it. They found the everyday task of navigating through the road and building works was both difficult and relentless, and that the pace of change was unsettling:

*"It's this constant feeling of like this has been going on for years now. Every time you go into town – you know, it's this constant change for change's sake. And, you go into town and you're having a conversation and a pneumatic drill kicks off, or you get smothered in a cloud of building dust"*

However, several commented that over time they had come to feel that the constant changes to the town had also become a normal part of their everyday lives, and they had reconciled themselves to the ongoing regeneration projects by acknowledging that the town needed improving, and that change was an inevitable part of progress: *“But I guess that’s progress, that’s growth; you’ve got to kind of put up with the pain for a little while to hopefully see something better”*.

Several participants also commented on the positive changes that had taken place across the town and how it made Woking a better place to live, including that the town looks more modern, more inviting to visitors and residents alike. But also to the way Woking feels in that it is cleaner, more attractive for visitors, and generally people felt safer being in the town centre, particularly at night: *“Physically the environment in town looks better. It’s a lot cleaner. It’s a lot brighter.”*

They also felt the town was already more vibrant, with increased opportunities for eating out and were hopeful of greater opportunities to come for work and leisure activities.

The forthcoming redevelopment of Sheerwater was also mentioned by several participants who explained it was a well-established neighbourhood with a diverse community. It has, however, also been identified by Woking Borough Council (WBC) as an area in need of regeneration through the building of new homes, and other key infrastructure to support the area and its residents. Plans to do that have been approved and WBC has made a compulsory purchase order to progress the regeneration, meaning that if confirmed, many more residents will have to move out in order for the new development to proceed. Several participants expressed concerns about the impact of these changes on the existing residents as well as the long-term future of those who have already moved as it was feared that any new housing would not necessarily be affordable, that leisure facilities and green spaces would be insufficient, and that existing communities will be lost.

### 3.2 WHO IS WOKING FOR?

We spoke to people of different ages whose experiences of living in Woking varied depending on which stage of the lifecourse they were at. However, a common thread across all ages was the issue of the cost of living, that is having the ability to live well now and in the future in Woking very much depended on the ability to afford housing, transport and general living costs.

*“Woking is an expensive town, it’s really expensive, and if you go back to the comparison to Guildford it’s just not that much cheaper than Guildford at all. So I think it definitely is a matter of money. And, you know, Surrey is a rich county, this is where the rich people live and the people who can afford stuff”.*

Not only did young people themselves speak about the expense of living in Woking, other participants also commented on the difficulties young people face in being able to afford growing up there. Several people commented on the lack of reasonably priced things for them to do in the area, especially now many of the youth focused places had been closed through cuts to services. Parents of young people often said they doubted whether their children would be able to afford to stay in Woking once they had left home.

The young working people we spoke to living in Woking enjoyed how connected it was to other areas. They commented that transport networks were good and enabled them to easily get to places outside Woking, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. They also felt it had lots to offer for them nearby in terms of leisure and social activities, and employment opportunities, although access to leisure activities was of necessity restricted during the pandemic. However, they also commented on the expense of living in Woking and on the cost of travelling in and around the town. Several expressed doubts about whether they would be able to afford to buy a house, or move to a larger property in the future, with the prospect of moving elsewhere a distinct possibility.

*“I’m renting for now. I’d love to buy in Surrey, but I don’t think I can afford to, unless it was a garage. So, I’ll probably end up moving back to [town out of Surrey] to buy, just because it’s cheaper, that sort of neck of the woods.”*

Similarly, some of the people with young families we spoke with enjoyed Woking’s accessibility to destinations to take their children to, and to local activities in the area. But they found the price of these could be prohibitive especially when factoring in the cost of transport to leisure sites, and of parking near them. One participant suggested that a better, and affordable bus service would solve many of the transport problems in and around Woking:

*“All the chatter is around parking and making it easier for people to come into the town for shopping and stuff like that. So, in my ideal world, Woking would grasp the transport thing and seriously promote cycling and walking, and seriously discourage parking and driving, and replace that with a much better bus service that was actually affordable. So that’d be my one to reduce the air pollution.”*

The older people we interviewed were all long term residents, and enjoyed living in Woking, finding it had many cultural and leisure opportunities, although some commented on the escalating costs of accessing these facilities. It was felt that being able to use all that Woking offers in terms of cultural and leisure opportunities very much depended on them being able to continue to afford to do so. Rather than use public transport, which they found challenging, they explained they would prefer to be able to drive to the town centre and park, but that parking costs should be more reasonable.

It was noted that whilst Woking can offer a good standard of living, it is important to recognise that this very much depends on individual circumstances and that not everybody is able to live well and easily in the town. There is often an expectation that everyone is at least financially secure, if not well-off, because of Woking's perception of being a rich, commuter town. However, this can be problematic for those who are most disadvantaged as they may not be easily identified and supported.

### 3.3 PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

Being able to be a part of the community was identified as an important component of living well in Woking by nearly all the participants. Sheerwater was identified as having a particularly strong community spirit, where it was felt long term residents understood each other's needs, had considerable local knowledge about who lived there, who to support and in what way. However, it was believed that the strong sense of community that operated within Sheerwater was not necessarily visible to those outside it, and in particular to those who are involved in making decisions about its future.

Physical places where different communities can come together and where diversity can be celebrated and shared were particularly valued, and there were several ongoing initiatives, mostly run by volunteers, which focused on helping to make these interactions happen. One concern that was frequently raised was how the loss of community centres and cutbacks in support services have impacted on certain groups of people—particularly youth, the oldest old, and Muslim women. Many also commented on how the cuts to mental health, criminal justice and youth services were impacting the most at risk, and the reduction in these services has been both highlighted and made worse by Covid. The result, it was felt, is that existing inequalities in the town have been exacerbated, creating greater divisions between the most vulnerable, and those who are more financially secure.



*“I’m aware of the areas of where’s there more deprivation, and you can see they definitely don’t feel part of your community. And I suppose the very affluent areas too, there’s also a kind of a disconnect with them as well,”*

One positive aspect to emerge from the onset of Covid restrictions is how communities have come together in an imaginative variety of ways to support each other. Several people commented on how they had discovered and rediscovered friendships and support networks in their close neighbourhoods and online, and it was hoped that these connections would continue in the future.

However, concerns were also expressed by several people about how the continuing regeneration and changes taking place in parts of Woking and nearby may destabilise existing communities as people move in and out of the area. There were also concerns about whether a sense of community would be enabled within the tower blocks of flats being built in the town centre given the possible lack of designated social and leisure spaces which help to facilitate the emergence of communities.

Additionally, many occupants will most likely be renting on a short term basis which is not conducive to creating a community spirit:

*“I highly suspect that there’s just going to be a very fast turnaround – that’s what you usually get. So it’s not going to encourage a community feel if... The flats that I live in now, there’s always someone moving in, moving out, moving in, moving out.”*

The interviews revealed that many residents feel Woking is in a transition phase, and whilst the future for some looks more promising, it is also unclear how all residents will benefit from the changes equally. Even when the building works are completed, it wasn’t entirely clear to everyone what aspects of Woking will change, what will remain the same, what Woking will become and who will benefit most from the changes. It was unclear to participants whether a new locally focused Woking would emerge, or whether Woking will feel increasingly like an extension of London.

Another area of uncertainty was what the legacy of Covid would be on everyday lives in Woking once the pandemic is over. The interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2020 in the earlier stages of the lockdown and many participants reflected on how the onset of the pandemic had led them to reflect on the good things about where they lived, including easy access to green spaces, and the need to have familiar people nearby, as well as rethinking and re-assessing what is most important to them overall:

*“I think it’s the positivity that is coming out of it [the pandemic], you know, and it’s almost like we’ve almost reached a tipping point because I think we’ve become almost entitled, you know - oh let’s just hop on a plane here and go there and, we’re going to the supermarkets and we can buy, like, whatever we want, whenever we want and I think now people are looking at each other in the eye when we’re passing each other and it’s almost like the community spirit has come back now, you know. We’re checking on our elderly neighbours, and our families, and it’s that good life now”.*

## **4 | REPORT FROM WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS**

An important aspect of our work is including the perspectives and views of local people and in each of our case study sites we held workshops to share our findings and encourage open discussions on topics of locally specific interest. As Covid-19 restrictions were still in place when we hosted the Woking workshop on 10th November 2020, we held it over an online platform. The aims of the workshop were:

- (a) to present the initial findings of our research and draw on the local expertise and knowledge of a range of different stakeholders and residents of the town to obtain their perspectives on that work, and
- (b) to consider how to make our own work most useful locally by initiating discussions and creating opportunities for networking.

We invited all the people we had already spoken to and encouraged others who were interested in our work to attend. A total of 30 participants attended who were mostly a combination of residents and representatives from local community charities as well as members from Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council representing a range of departments.

We commenced the workshop with a presentation of our early findings (see Appendix) to provide context for the afternoon, after which participants joined small breakout discussions which subsequently fed back to the whole group. Each group was assigned a facilitator from members of CUSP whose role was to encourage discussions, to ensure that each participant was able to contribute should they wish to, to take notes of the discussions and in some cases to provide group feedback to the whole workshop.

## 4.1 DISCUSSION PERIOD 1: RESPONDING TO OUR RESEARCH

In this first discussion period we asked people to reflect on the research data we had presented, and to consider how it related to their own experiences of living and working in Woking. The following are a collection of points made by the different groups in the workshop in response to this.

### 4.1.1 Green spaces and high rises

Several people highlighted the number and variety of green spaces that exist in Woking and suggested they are to be celebrated as an important, positive, aspect of living there. It was felt that there are many easily accessible parks and spaces that residents can walk to and enjoy, along with several cycle routes and these spaces were valued even more since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic for how they benefit wellbeing.

Maintaining them was regarded as essential, especially in the town centre which is currently undergoing considerable redevelopment. An important point was made about those places which people currently value as local green space in that they may not necessarily be classified as such in development terms, but rather are deemed 'brownfield' sites and may therefore not be subject to the same protection.

Whilst acknowledging that the new tall tower blocks in the town centre were not aesthetically pleasing, it was suggested that in order to preserve the town centre sense of community and its green spaces, it was preferable for building to be upwards, rather than spreading out and encroaching on those green spaces. Although it was also pointed out that it is important to be aware that there still remains the possibility of development taking place on greenbelt spaces around Woking.

### 4.1.2 Community

Several of the groups commented on the findings in relation to what was said by participants in the interviews about community. There were some reflections on how the look and feel of communities have changed from being sociable and close-knit to less integrated over the years as Woking has undergone significant regeneration and change. Echoing the responses of some of the interviewees, it was thought that this may be exacerbated in the future as the new build tower blocks of flats have limited capacity for residents to socialise.

There were also concerns expressed about how different neighbourhoods, such as Sheerwater, are perceived within the town and beyond.

Participants suggested that it was important not to be judgemental or make assumptions about what happens in those neighbourhoods. In particular it was felt there is a need to consider how everyone can be properly supported because not all communities have the same access to local services. There is a need to identify those places which have gaps in services that help to sustain communities, as well as celebrate those places, such as Horsell, which have greater capacity to work together.

One suggestion was that communities should work together to learn from each other and that this was particularly important in present times when usual forms of communication were limited. A further suggestion was that technology, training to use it, and enhanced digital connectivity should be made available to those who are most often left out of community discussions so that they can join in with online meetings and other ways of connecting.

It was pointed out that there are also several organisations in and around Woking that play an important role beyond their own local communities to help people across all of Woking, such as the Mosque, the food banks and the local churches. Their work has been significant during the Covid pandemic in helping different local groups and communities. One group also commented that the way local groups and communities have come together during the pandemic has highlighted the best of Woking.

### 4.1.3 Effective communication in Woking

Effective communication was considered to be a key aspect of improving community connectivity and in supporting community health and wellbeing. It was suggested that communication within and between different groups could be improved, and this includes the council and how they pass on information to the public. But it was also acknowledged that there should be an integrated and shared approach to knowledge exchange—the public needs to be proactive in accessing the information made available to them, and the Council needs to utilise a number of different modes of communication in order to reach all residents. In particular, it was suggested that more work needs to be done to encourage those most in need of support to access the services available to them, which includes finding ways to make that information more readily accessible.

#### 4.1.4 Affordability

Being able to afford to live in Woking was acknowledged as challenging, and it was noted that the cost of transport and housing was a real concern for young people in particular, who find it expensive to rent and to buy homes. It was also pointed out that older people are affected by housing issues as well, as the opportunities for them to move into smaller, age-suitable dwellings are limited. This then has consequences for the release of larger properties onto the market.

Whilst it was agreed there are benefits to the regeneration projects in that they have brought new shops and restaurants, it was also noted that these were often higher end businesses, and that some lower cost, more affordable retail and catering outlets have been forced to move away. The implication of this is that it also makes Woking less affordable to many local people.

There were different perceptions in relation to access and affordability of youth provision services. It was acknowledged there are lots of activities on offer in Woking, and in particular for those aimed at young people.

However, it was remarked that not all of these activities are affordable, and many families cannot therefore access them. This is compounded for these families by the closure of youth centres and a reduction in youth support services.

#### 4.1.5 Change and regeneration

All agreed with the responses from the interviews about the fast and disruptive pace of regenerative building projects and the impact of the changes to the transport infrastructure. The challenge, it was acknowledged, is in managing the speed of the change in a way that causes the least upheaval over a period of time. Given that the development works are likely to be ongoing for a number of years the question was posed whether it would be better to move as quickly as possible to end the disruption sooner, or to lessen the impact of building works by doing the regeneration over a longer period of time.

Perspectives on the building regeneration and developments in Woking varied in line with the interviewee's responses. Several in the discussion groups thought that the changes to the town centre would ultimately be beneficial, by not only improving the look of Woking, but also improving local life for families through the introduction of new forms of leisure activities, access to more retail opportunities and the possibility of more jobs.

Others, however, were concerned that some existing communities will be negatively affected by the town centre building works, the inevitable reshaping of existing spaces and the loss of what few green spaces there are. They echoed the concern of the interviewees that the influx of more residents would result in pressure being placed on existing services.

It was also suggested that more could be done to celebrate what Woking already has, such as the World Wildlife Fund centre, the Lightbox and the Surrey History Centre. These are important assets which showcase Woking's history which is often neglected when talking about what Woking has to offer.

## 4.2 DISCUSSION PERIOD 2: TOWARDS A GOOD LIFE IN WOKING

During the second discussion period participants were asked to consider what is necessary to ensure fair, lasting and sustainable prosperity and how this can help towards achieving a good life in Woking. The following is a summary of these discussions and includes suggestions for how to tackle existing problems to enable Woking to develop in the future.

### 4.2.1 Reassessing existing assets

Whilst Woking is currently undergoing a number of changes, many of which will benefit the town, it was felt that it is not always necessary to build new and larger when regenerating an area and the town might benefit more from looking at what already exists and making it more suitable for the current residents.

Tackling the need for more affordable and social housing requires a rethink about, for example, housing density and the quality of new builds, and this includes a reappraisal of what exactly is meant by affordable housing before making sweeping changes. The need for a reconsideration of existing housing stock has particularly been highlighted by the Covid pandemic where people have had to stay inside small flats and houses, with little or no access to green spaces. It was suggested that now is the time to reflect on the suitability of existing housing, and to rethink how a mix of new housing could be created that considers everyone's needs.

A further concern was that the new housing development plans will potentially mean that demand for existing support services such as GPs, hospital and social care, and schools may be outstripped. It is therefore vital to make sure that integrated planning of homes and infrastructure is in place to ensure all the required services are available to support an influx of new residents.

Existing public transport services also need to be reconsidered in light of ongoing and future developments. Whilst getting out of town and around it works well, public transport in and across the town is expensive, and options are limited. These services should be improved in order to shift the current preferred option of travelling by car or taxi over public transport.

Other existing assets that were highlighted included the many cycle routes, which should be at least properly maintained, but also expanded. Whilst it was acknowledged that some youth centres had been lost, it was pointed out that there were still several good community centres in the town and surrounding areas and that these could probably be better utilised to allow for different groups to access them.

The strength of Woking's community spirit was felt to be an existing asset that became more tangible during the Covid pandemic with people coming together and new, spontaneous communities emerging. It was felt that this asset needs to be nurtured and encouraged, not only for possible future waves of pandemic lockdowns, but also beyond the end of the virus.

#### 4.2.2 Making Woking work for everyone

In order to make Woking a good place for everyone it was thought that residents should be encouraged to be part of any plans and discussions about its development. Identifying what people need, and where the gaps in current provisions are is an important aspect of any consultation process, therefore it was argued that dialogues need to be widened to include as many groups as possible in order to achieve a broader spread of opinions and voices. One way of ensuring this inclusivity is to make sure everyone knows about the existing opportunities for people to engage with what is happening in the town, such as the citizens' panels and green initiatives which are available for local people's input. Most importantly it was felt that young people in particular should be encouraged to join in any of these dialogues or discussions about their town. One way of doing that is by becoming a part of the Woking Youth Parliament.

Nevertheless, communication in both directions was deemed vital and a way forward needs to be found to facilitate that. The efforts of the Council to communicate were acknowledged, especially as people now expect to receive information from a wide variety of communication channels. The challenge for the Council is both in making sure all forms of communication are used, as well as having to compete with all the other organisations to get the information to where it is needed.

One of the difficulties the Council face is how to ensure people see the positive and the negative messages, the latter of which are more common. Dialogues such as those that took place in this workshop may be a way to find appropriate avenues for communication in both directions.

A further idea for encouraging inclusivity in the town was that there should be a way of communicating what the town has to offer to new residents, including where the different facilities are and how to access them. Suggestions were made to create a 'Welcome Pack' for new residents with information on the town, which would also help to make people feel more at home.

### 4.2.3 Moving forward

The impact of Covid-19 on the town was discussed in the groups, and several possibilities were considered for how the pandemic might be a starting point for re-imagining a new and different Woking as people learn to adapt to new ways of working and living. For example, it was imagined that if fewer people are commuting into London this will place greater demand on services in the town centre, but this could also lead to more opportunities for existing retail and service outlets. If people are to continue to work from home, then there needs to be a reconceptualisation of the use of empty office spaces and commercial buildings. One possibility is that arts and culture facilities in the town centre could use these spaces, or young people could run pop-up venues and new, smaller enterprises in them.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

Our intention in presenting this research and holding a dissemination and local consultation workshop was threefold:

- to share some initial findings from the work we have been undertaking in Woking and receive feedback on it
- to work with local residents and representatives from various local charities, businesses and the city council to develop ideas of what makes for a good life in Woking, and
- to consider how to translate visions of a good life in Woking into practice.

We hope that these early discussions have initiated or affirmed long lasting collaborations and networks across the town and between different groups and individuals to continue the work of understanding what makes for a good life in Woking.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The workshop was run as part of the Festival of Social Sciences organised by the ESRC (Economics and Social Research Council) and we are grateful for their support. We would like to thank all those who attended the workshop and contributed to the discussions. Thanks also to Linda Gessner and Catherine Hunt for their support in running the workshop. Most importantly we would like to thank the many individuals and local residents who gave their time to talk to us about their town, including members of Woking Council and RoC Woking.

This project is funded by the Economics and Social Research Council, grant number ES/M008320/1.

Attending from CUSP:

Kate Burningham  
Ian Christie  
Linda Gessner  
Amy Isham  
Catherine Hunt  
Anastasia Loukianov  
Susan Venn

15 December 2020



# APPENDIX

Presentation: “What makes for a good life in Woking?  
Introducing our research and learning from you”, Dr Susan Venn and Dr  
Kate Burningham, Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable  
Prosperity, University of Surrey.



CC BY-NC 2.0 - Gimpert Rowland / Flickr



## Overview



- Situated understandings of the good life
- Research in Woking
- Emerging narratives
- Over to you...

## Our project : 'situated understandings of the good life'



- An environmentally sustainable society has to enable people to live a decent or good life.
- What does this mean to ordinary people?
- How are understandings informed by aspects of locality and along existing lines of social difference?
- Focus on diversity and consensus within and between different places
- In depth case studies: Stoke-on-Trent; Hay-on-Wye and Woking

## What we did

- Desk based scoping study
- Key informant interviews: learning from local knowledge; building networks
- Interviews with individuals, face to face, telephone and online
- Understanding what it means to live well in Woking
- What would make for a good life in Woking



## Woking: Narratives of Change



### Experiencing changes

- Change as inevitable, part of 'progress'
- Change is 'relentless' and pace is unsettling

### What changes bring

- Improves the look, feels safer, offering more opportunities
- Marginalises some and emphasises existing divisions

### Who are changes for?

- What will Woking be and who will it be for?
- How will changes affect access to all that Woking has?

.....

## Who is Working for?



### Youth:

- Lack of affordable activities, and social spaces
- Can they afford to remain?

### Young working people:

- Connected, sociable, opportunities
- Expensive to live longer term leading to impermanence

### Families:

- Existing communities and connections valued
- Ability to be part of this unequally experienced

### Older people:

- Affordability shapes experiences
- Concerns for longer term implications of service cuts

.....

## Place, space and people: understanding community



### 'Community' identified as essential component of living well

#### Where it works:

- In places where communities are valued
- Where different communities come together

#### Where it works less well:

- Where spaces and places are lost
- Where provision for places are not equally available

#### Future of and for communities:

- Re-imagining of new spaces in Covid
- Making space for communities that fit with changes in the town

## Breakout Session 1: Responding to our research



Reflecting on what we have presented, and the interview narratives you received consider:

How do our initial observations relate to your local knowledge and experience from living/working in Woking?



## Breakout Session 2 Towards a sustainable good life in Woking



In this project we have been interested in understanding what people in different places need to ensure fair, lasting and sustainable prosperity.

Thinking about what you have heard this afternoon so far, please consider what needs to be in place to achieve this in Woking.