Physical Capital
Liveability in 2005

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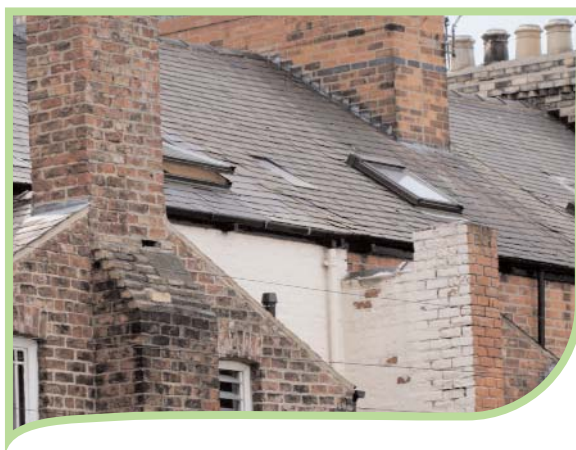
Cleaner Safer Greener
Communities

Contents

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Foreword

Creating sustainable communities is about more than housing - it means a better quality of life for everyone to enjoy. It means cleaner, safer, greener neighbourhoods in which people have confidence and pride. People want to live in attractive places that are clean and safe, with good parks, play areas and green spaces.

The public realm needs to be managed and cared for, and overall around £8 billion a year is spent on public spaces from all sources. Often it is not about spending more but harnessing all the available resources, public and private, to deliver better places.

We are committed to raising standards, delivering efficiencies and reinvesting in public spaces. For example, improving the quality of green and open spaces is an important part of our investment in the Growth Areas of the Thames Gateway.

The Government's vision and investment has stimulated local government, businesses, voluntary and community groups and individuals themselves to make noticeable differences to the quality of the local environment. Around the country, public and private investment has created more attractive and welcoming open spaces in which people mix and meet.

Today's follow up report shows the progress we have made since MORI's previous report on liveability in 2002. More people recognise that the physical appearance of their area is improving. Satisfaction with parks and open spaces, for example, is up from 63% to 71% over the last three years. There is less litter, fewer abandoned vehicles and better quality green spaces.

While this is encouraging, we know we need to spread the benefits more widely and close the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country. The Government's Cleaner, Safer, Greener programme will engage local people in decisions about the services they get, empowering them to trigger action to solve problems and make service providers responsive to their needs. In this way, together we can make a noticeable difference to every community by 2008.

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister

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Executive Summary

In 2002, MORI Social Research Institute published our first report on Liveability, called *"The Rising Prominence of Liveability - Are we condemned to a life of grime"*. Three years on, we revisit a subject area that has grown in importance to policy makers in key government departments. Our analysis is telling, and indeed, encouraging. Local government has woken up to its problems on the central Liveability issues and people are starting to notice changes on the ground.

Back in 2002, when we looked at trends in satisfaction with street scene, parks, and quality of life, we saw that in council after council, satisfaction levels were falling. Many pointed to the cuts in discretionary expenditure in what we now know to be vital areas such as street scene, compared to ring-fenced expenditure in social care and education, where there are fierce inspectorates. The street scene has no ring-fenced expenditure and no OFSTREET.

As the current Government entered its second term, the pattern was still one of parental satisfaction with education, but falling satisfaction with the street scene. In the case of the latter, this trend has now been reversed. Government and local government have woken up to the urgent need to create environments in which people feel safe and comfortable, where they can flourish, and to which they feel that they belong. This goes beyond a more one-dimensional programme of service improvement. We have witnessed the establishment of the Liveability Team in the ODPM and the creation of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit in the Home Office, as well as major regeneration programmes such as New Deal for Communities. The appointment of a Minister of Communities and Local Government, who becomes the ODPM's second Cabinet Minister, is further evidence of the focus on creating secure and sustainable communities.

At a local level, a seizing of the issue by individual authorities like Manchester, Stockton, Camden, Southwark and Enfield has made a real difference. Although the picture is by no means universal (some authorities are still not quite managing to get it together) the overall pattern is extremely encouraging. Results from the New Deal for Communities Household Survey also show this pattern is one which has been seen in some of our most deprived areas. The improvement in the ratings of local environments is vital to the recovery in local government's reputation, particularly if councils are able to harness this with a strong narrative about what they are doing and how they are making life better locally.

It is already clear that the Audit Commission's revised CPA methodology is likely to give more weight to liveability factors. We at MORI support this. At the moment CPA scores do correlate with public opinion in broad terms, but it is still the case that many of the services that the public notices most do not have to be brilliant in order for your council to be excellent at CPA. This is a clear dissonance if one is concerned about how accountable and visible systems of inspection and regulation are to the public.

So while policy makers have been focusing on the importance of social capital, deprivation and cohesion over the last few years, the evidence suggests that we should also be paying attention to the very structure and nature of the places we are creating. Our new Physical Capital Index, which features in this report, is as strongly related to overall satisfaction with an area as deprivation. We could, therefore, argue that physical capital should be taken into account when deciding on funding for local authorities and areas. Regional Plans for developing huge numbers of houses right across areas such as the South East mean there are opportunities to be seized. Similarly, dealing with declining populations in many of our northern towns and cities presents real challenges, including in the areas of traditional terraced houses which - controversially for some - are due to be bulldozed.

This Government would point to real successes in improving key services such as education - most people believe that standards have risen, more are satisfied and the number of people going to university is the highest ever. It would be one of the ironies of New Labour if that success in building opportunities was not matched by people feeling their local area falls short of their aspirations as a place to live.

This report therefore continues the story we began in 2002. We examine some of the key liveability trends - how priorities for communities have changed over time and how residents feel about the environments they inhabit. This leads us on to questions about what this means for local government and strategic partnerships. We also look at how the public frame the issue through the language they use when talking about where they live. We finish by presenting a new index which captures important data on physical characteristics of areas and explains how these relate to overall views. In short, what is it that drives perceptions of "visual quality"?

We hope you enjoy it.

Andrew Collinge   Bobby Duffy   Ben Page

June 2005

Acknowledgements

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1. Liveability Trends: Things are getting Better

This chapter examines the latest public opinion data on liveability. Throughout we look at how people's general views of their environment and their priorities for improving their surroundings have changed over time. We explore how outlooks and perceptions might differ given different social backgrounds and use case studies to give detailed pictures of local areas.

The Continuing Importance of Liveability

In our *"Rising Prominence of Liveability"* report from 2002 we looked at the factors people think make somewhere a good place to live generally, as well as the aspects of their own local areas that they consider to be most in need of improvement. This was based on an innovative piece of work we carried out with the Audit Commission which included qualitative research to ensure we had covered the issues people felt were most important in our questionnaire.

In 2005, just over three years since we initially asked these questions, we have revisited the exercise. The following charts show the latest findings.

The first shows factors generally seen as important in making somewhere a good place to live. Health services and decent housing feature prominently.

In the second, which illustrates those factors which are seen to be *in need of improvement locally*, liveability issues are much to the fore. Activities for teenagers, low incidence of crime, facilities for young children and clean streets all feature. Even the seemingly moribund road and pavement repairs is seen as being in need of more urgent attention <u>locally</u> than the big ticket public services such as health and education.

We would not expect *general* expectations about quality of life to have changed too dramatically within this kind of timeframe, and they have not. Most notable though is the increased emphasis on economic factors, namely decent and affordable housing and job prospects. The key public services of education and health are also given more weight by people in 2005.

What makes Somewhere a Good Place to Live: Change over Time

*Q   Thinking generally, which of the items on this list would you say are most important in
making somewhere a good place to live? You can choose up to five.*

☐ 2001

☐ 2005

	2001	2005
Low levels of crime	56%	53%
Health services	39%	45%
Affordable decent housing	37%	45%
Shopping facilities	28%	22%
Public transport	27%	24%
Education provision	25%	35%
Job prospects	25%	31%
Clean streets	24%	26%
Activities for teenagers	23%	26%
Facilities for young children	22%	20%
Wage levels/cost of living	21%	19%
Access to nature	17%	15%
Open spaces	16%	19%
Low levels of traffic congestion	15%	12%
Access to culture	15%	8%
Sports and leisure facilities	14%	14%
Low level of pollution	14%	13%
Community Activities	11%	12%
Race relations	9%	8%
Road and pavement repairs	8%	6%

Base: 2,031 GB adults aged 15+, interviewed 18-22 October 2001

Base: 2,017 GB adults aged 15+, interviewed 17-21 February 2005

Source: MORI

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Improvements to Local Areas: Change over Time

Q   Thinking about this local area, which of these things, if any, do you think most need improving? Again, you may choose up to five.

□ 2001
■ 2005

Category	2001	2005
Activities for teenagers	43%	43%
Low levels of crime	29%	28%
Road and pavement repairs	28%	22%
Public transport	27%	22%
Facilities for young children	25%	20%
Clean streets	23%	24%
Low levels of traffic congestion	22%	18%
Shopping facilities	18%	13%
Job prospects	17%	20%
Health services	16%	18%
Affordable decent housing	16%	27%
Community Activities	13%	15%
Sports and leisure facilities	12%	16%
Access to culture	11%	5%
Wage levels/cost of living	10%	12%
Open spaces	7%	8%
Low level of pollution	7%	9%
Education provision	7%	10%
Access to nature	4%	5%
Race relations	4%	4%

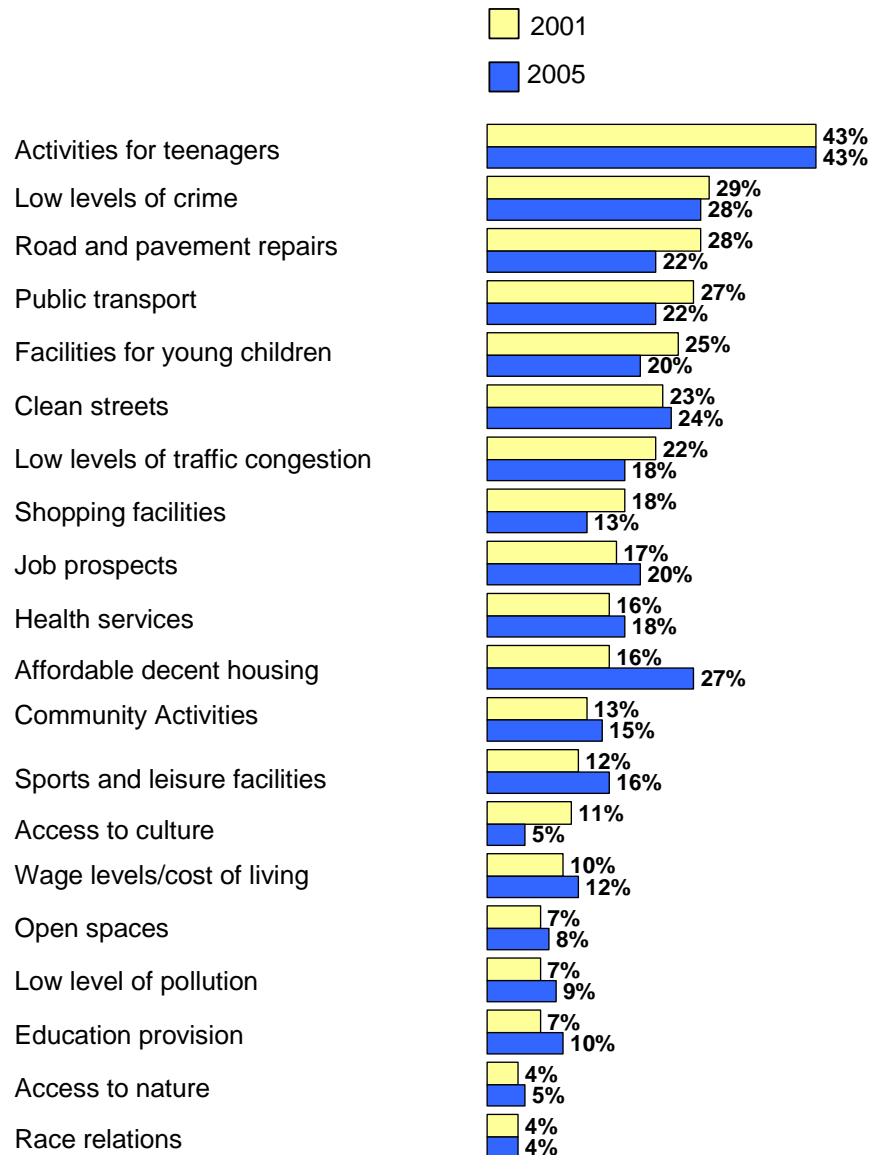Base: 2,031 GB adults aged 15+, interviewed 18-22 October 2001

Base: 2,017 GB adults aged 15+, interviewed 17-21 February 2005

Source: MORI

It is this story which is again evident in the BVPI General User Surveys for 2003-2004. When you ask people, as the surveys for every single English local authority did, "What's important in making somewhere a good place to live?", crime, health, education and shopping all feature highly. However, when the public is asked what needs fixing where they live, a very different order and priority emerges. What is so noticeable about this is that low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, teenagers hanging around, clean streets, road maintenance, and pavement maintenance, all stand out as the things to which people attach the most priority locally.

**Quality of Life in BVPI User Satisfaction Surveys:
Ideal and Needs Improving**

% Most need improving locally

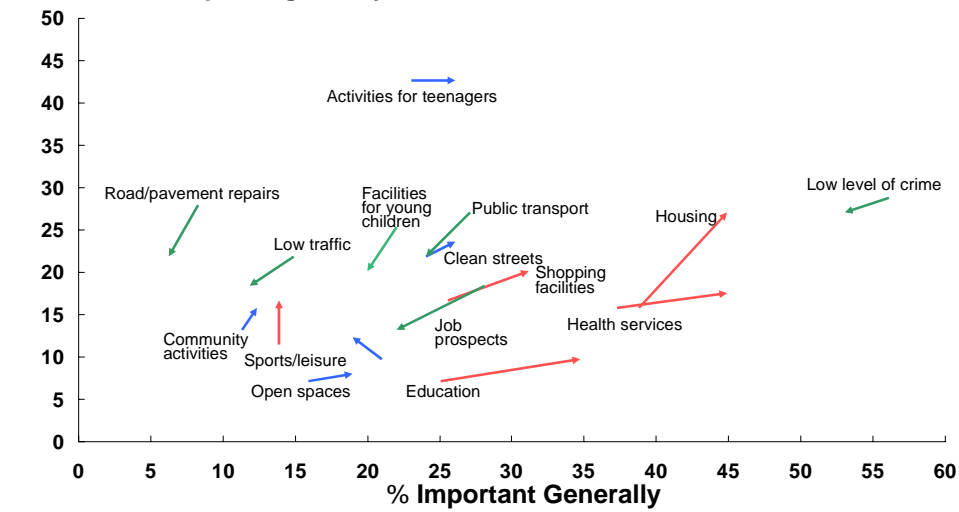Base: c.596,000 valid BVPI responses   Source: MORI
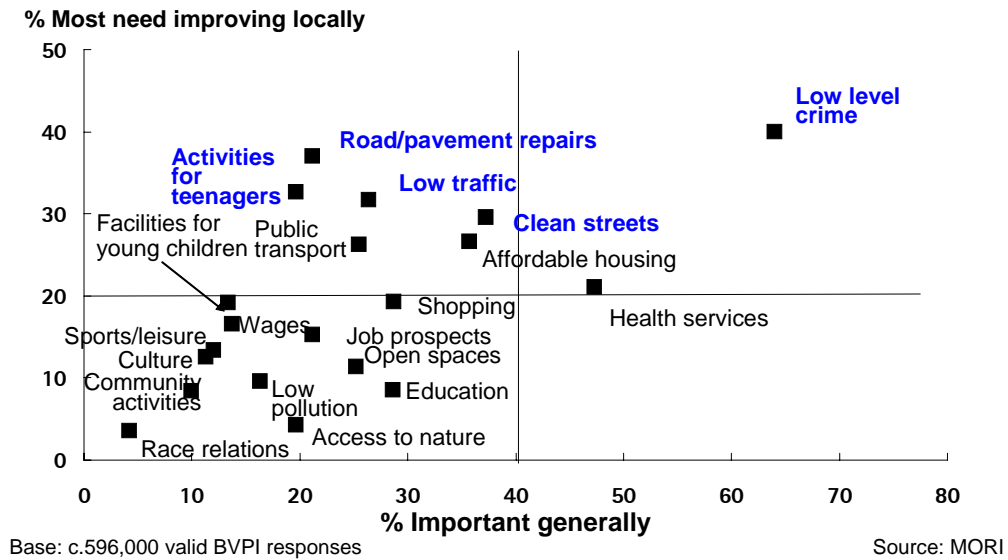
Looking at Change

The level and direction of change between the surveys conducted in 2001 and 2005 is easier to see in the chart below, which plots the answers to questions on local priorities given in our two surveys.   Red arrows indicate a negative movement while green arrows indicate a movement in a positive direction. Blue arrows signify little or no significant change.

The chart does suggest some key liveability issues, such as road and pavement repairs, traffic and crime are less prominent priorities than in 2001. This is counterbalanced by the increased focus on issues such as housing, health and education services. However, this greater focus on the general importance of education and health in particular is likely to partly reflect the fact that fieldwork took place in the run-up to the general election.

Quality of Life Revisited: Direction and Extent of Change

% Most need improving locally

Road/pavement repairs
Facilities for young children
Public transport
Activities for teenagers
Low level of crime
Housing
Low traffic
Clean streets
Shopping facilities
Community activities
Sports/leisure
Job prospects
Health services
Open spaces
Education
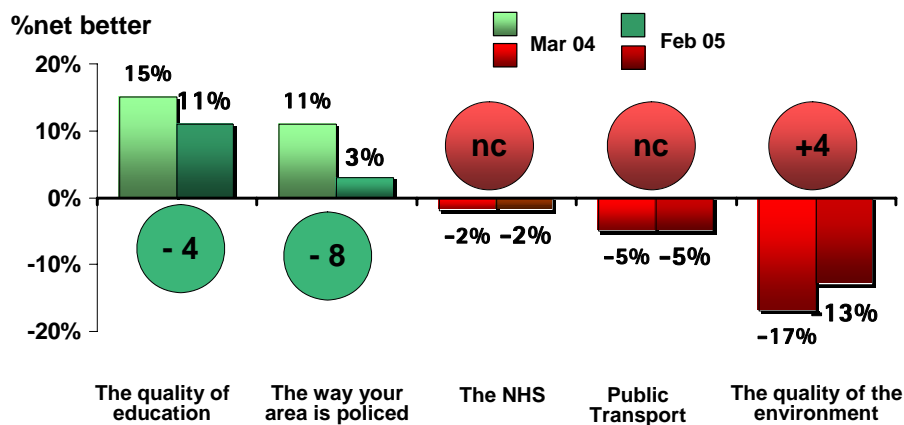
% Important Generally

Base: 2,031 and 2,013 British adults, interviewed face-to-face, October 2001 and February 2005

Source: MORI

These general trends tally with our regular tracking work on key aspects of public services. While the local environment remains a key concern, with more people thinking it will get worse than better, it is the only factor for which we have seen an improvement over the last year. Expectations of other key aspects of public services have either remained static (the NHS and public transport) or declined (education and policing).

Broader Public Service Expectations: MORI Delivery Index

Q   Thinking about… over the next few years, do you expect it to get better/worse?

%net better

Mar 04   Feb 05

15%
11%
11%
nc
nc
+4
3%
- 4
- 8
−2% −2%
−5% −5%
−13%
−17%

The quality of education
The way your area is policed
The NHS
Public Transport
The quality of the environment

Base: 963 British adults, 25-28 February 2005
Source: MORI Social Research Institute Delivery Index

Source: MORI

Three examples of improved perceptions of the local environment also emerge from the very large British Crime Survey, which highlights the reversals of rising trends in concern about litter and graffiti, anti-social behaviour, and dumped cars.

Concern about Liveability is now falling

% saying very or fairly big problem

Source: British Crime Survey   Source: MORI
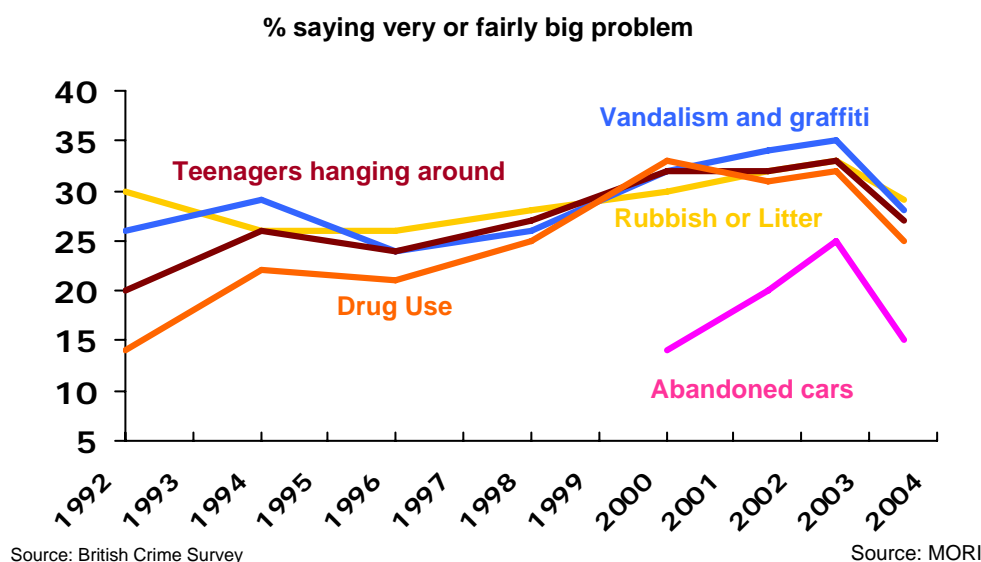
How do Views vary by Area?

After looking at the national picture, we now look at how, if at all, attitudes towards liveability issues vary across regions and local areas.

A basic regional analysis of highest and lowest local priorities reveals some interesting contrasts.

While they are least likely to point to affordable and decent housing, residents of the North East are most likely to point to activities for teenagers and road and pavement repairs than their counterparts in other regions.

Reflecting recent events, and perhaps more pertinently, media coverage of them, those living in the East Midlands are most likely to say that they prioritise reducing crime.

Most need improving locally	Overall	Scores for Government Office Regions	
		Highest	**Lowest**
Activities for teenagers	43%	North East (64%)	London (26%)
Low level of crime	28%	East Midlands (39%)	South West (17%)
Affordable/decent housing	27%	South East and South West (both 37%)	North East (16%)

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A reflection of perceptions around price and supply, 'affordable and decent housing' is seen as most important by residents in the South East and South West, while people in the North East place least emphasis on the need to improve housing supply in their own local area.

As a measure of how closely perception meets reality, we can take a key issue - here we use crime - and compare our research results with official statistics. The findings are telling. Home Office crime statistics for the East Midlands show that incidence of crime equals the national average. However, in urban areas within the region, such as Nottingham, crime is much more prevalent (8.5 incidents per thousand residents compared to 4.6 at the county level[1]). This translates directly into far fewer city residents feeling safe (62% of this group say they feel safe in their area during the day, compared to 84% of all other county residents[2]). Furthermore, the 62% who say they feel safe in Nottingham marks a fall from 71% in 2002. In the South West, which posts the second lowest incidence of crime figures in the country, survey respondents are least likely to highlight crime as a priority issue in their local area.

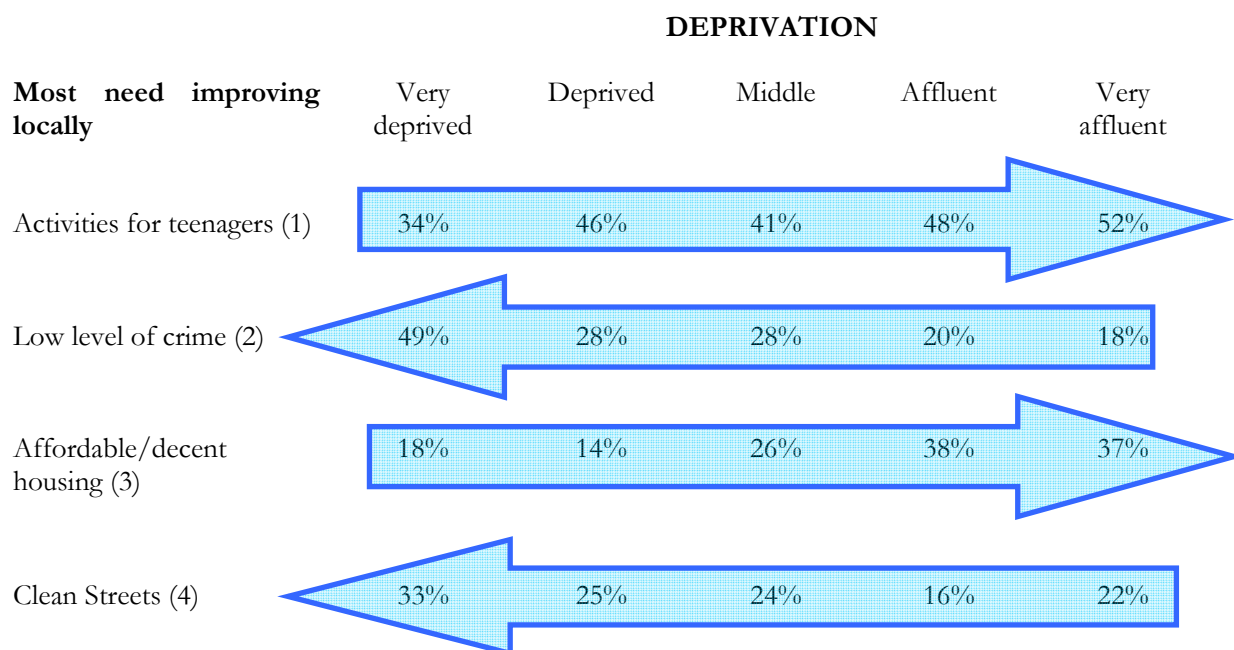## Different Priorities in Different Types of Area?

MORI's Frontiers of Performance report highlights the potential of examining views on local authority performance not just according to where people live, but also by taking into account the nature of the areas we are looking at. Analysing results from our questions on local priorities by the level of deprivation[3] in an area shows some interesting differences in residents' viewpoints.

The more affluent the area, the higher the proportion of residents saying activities for teenagers is most in need of improvement. When we look at reducing crime, however, the pattern runs in the other direction, with residents in very deprived areas nearly three times as likely as those living in very affluent areas to say that this is a local priority. Residents in deprived areas are <u>less</u> concerned about affordable decent housing than those in more affluent areas. For the key liveability attribute of clean streets the pattern is slightly less clear, although treating clean streets as a local priority does increase with rising deprivation. In short, crime and clean streets remain central issues for people living in our poorest communities. But assuming these are the two key issues across the nation would be wide of the mark. If people feel reasonably safe in their area and positive about their local environment, they will go on to focus on other things such as maintaining the positive aspects of what they have already.

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[1] Home Office Crime Statistics for England and Wales (www.crimestatitics.org.uk)

[2] Survey of Nottinghamshire residents, 2004, MORI/Nottinghamshire CC

[3] The Index of Multiple Deprivation combines indicators across seven 'domains' – income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment deprivation, and crime - into a single deprivation score and rank at small area level in England. In our analysis here "very deprived" is the 10% of most deprived areas, "deprived" the next 15%, "very affluent" is the least deprived 10%, "affluent" is the next 15%, and "Middle" is the 50% in the middle.

DEPRIVATION

Most need improving locally	Very deprived	Deprived	Middle	Affluent	Very affluent
Activities for teenagers (1)	34%	46%	41%	48%	52%
Low level of crime (2)	49%	28%	28%	20%	18%
Affordable/decent housing (3)	18%	14%	26%	38%	37%
Clean Streets (4)	33%	25%	24%	16%	22%

Base: 2,017 GB adults aged 15+, interviewed 17-21 February 2005
Nb. Figures in brackets represent overall order of priority

London: A Case Study

Survey evidence from recent years points to a positive direction of change on some key liveability indicators in our capital city. In MORI's surveys for the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority, we have seen a year-on-year decline since in concern about litter, noise and pollution in London. People feel safer too, as the second chart shows.

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Views of Londoners:
Litter, Noise and Air Quality seen as Less of an Issue

Q   Thinking about your quality of life in London, how much of a problem,
if at all, do you consider each of the following to be?
%

% saying major problem

Litter

Noise   Air quality

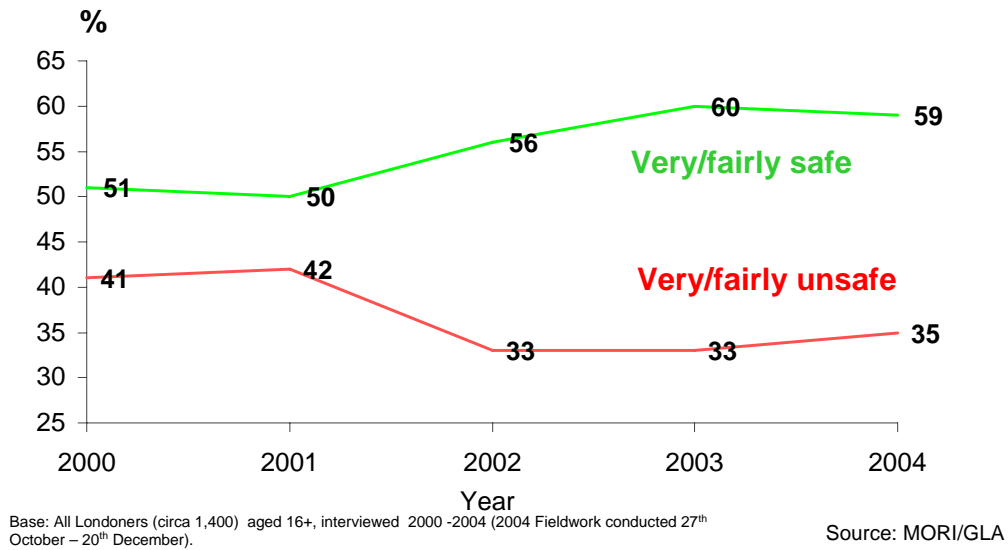|	2001	2002	2003	2004
Litter	38	43	24	23
Air quality	32	28	21	17
Noise	26	23	13	12

Base: All Londoners (circa 1,400) aged 16+, interviewed 2000 -2004 (2004 Fieldwork conducted 27th
October – 20th December).   Source: MORI/GLA
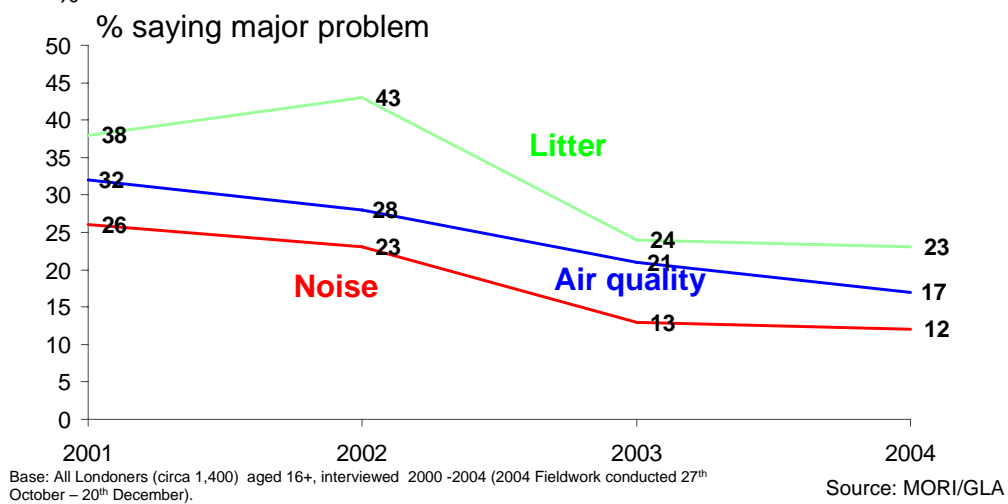
Views of Londoners: They now feel Safer

Q   How safe do you feel walking outside in this neighbourhood in the
evening by yourself …….
%

Very/fairly safe

Very/fairly unsafe

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Very/fairly safe	51	50	56	60	59
Very/fairly unsafe	41	42	33	33	35

Year

Base: All Londoners (circa 1,400) aged 16+, interviewed 2000 -2004 (2004 Fieldwork conducted 27th
October – 20th December).   Source: MORI/GLA

Indeed, looking across a broader range of local authority areas, we have seen improvements in views about street cleaning services. Readers will recall that it was satisfaction with these services that caused concern at the time of our first liveability report. As we will see later, our analysis indicates that performing well in street cleaning is influential in improving attitudes towards councils, so this upturn may be significant on a number of fronts.

Satisfaction with street cleaning: MORI Examples
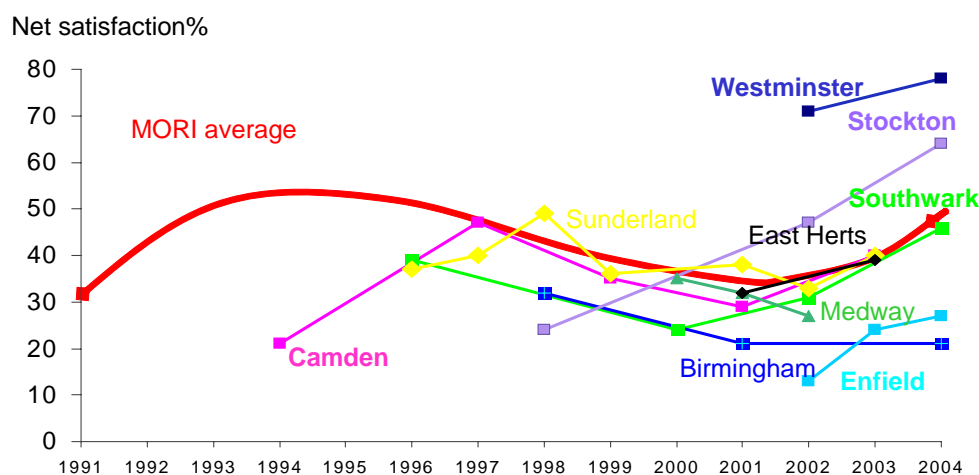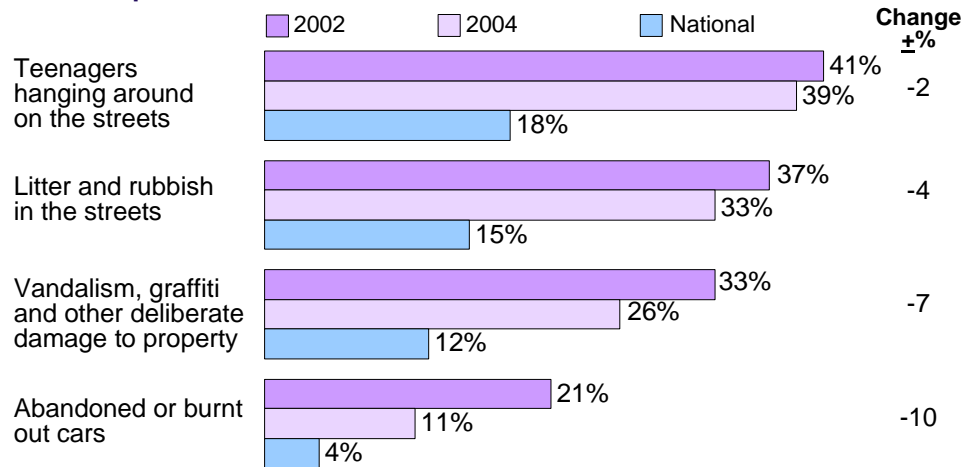

Source: MORI

Are things getting Better in Deprived Areas? Evidence from NDC

What happens when concerted efforts are made to improve the quality of life of people living in deprived areas? Here we are fortunate to have the example of New Deal for Communities, one of the Government's key regeneration programmes, which is spending around £2bn on 39 of the most deprived areas in the country over a ten year period. The chart below shows results from the Household Survey element of the evaluation.

The signs to date are encouraging. When we compare views in 2002 with those in 2004, we can see residents are starting to notice the impact, with significant declines in the proportions seeing litter/rubbish, vandalism/graffiti and particularly abandoned/burnt out cars as serious problems. However, teenagers hanging around is still seen as the largest problem and this has not improved over the last couple of years. It also has to be said that there remain significant gaps between NDC areas and the country as a whole on all of these measures, but it is still encouraging that attitudes are shifting on some key liveability issues.

NDC Areas: Local Environment

% serious problem in area

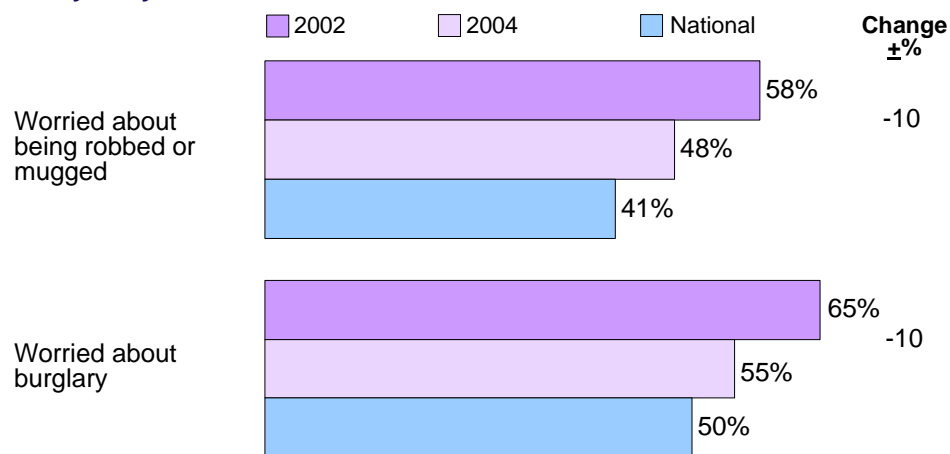|	2002	2004	National	Change ±%
Teenagers hanging around on the streets	41%	39%	18%	-2
Litter and rubbish in the streets	37%	33%	15%	-4
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property	33%	26%	12%	-7
Abandoned or burnt out cars	21%	11%	4%	-10

Base: All respondents: 19,574 (2002) & 19,633 (2004), NDC Household Survey
National: Survey of English Housing 02/03 and MORI Omnibus 2004 (2,032 adults aged 16+)

Source: MORI

Indeed, there have been similar improvements in community safety, with worry about burglary and mugging declining significantly, although again people remain more concerned in NDC areas than nationally.

NDC Areas: Fear of Crime

% very/fairly worried

	2002	2004	National	Change ±%
Worried about being robbed or mugged	58%	48%	41%	-10
Worried about burglary	65%	55%	50%	-10

Base: All respondents: 19,574 (2002) & 19,633 (2004), NDC Household Survey
National: British Crime Survey 2002/03

Source: MORI

Clearly the gap between NDC areas and the rest of the country remains, but the divide - particularly on community safety - is narrowing.

For whom are Perceptions about the Physical Environment Improving?

We can also look at which groups of the population are most and least likely to think the physical appearance of their area has improved. This can be done using a statistical technique called CHAID (Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detector), which divides the population under study down into groups that are as dissimilar as possible from each other, by using a series of statistical tests. It allows us to identify how different characteristics interact and therefore identify those people most and least satisfied with their quality of life. The data being used here are from an on-going study for the Liveability Unit at ODPM, tracking attitudes to general liveability issues.

The chart below summarises the analysis, starting from the whole population at the top (with an average score of 6.4 out of 10) and then splitting it into progressively smaller groups as we move down. The groups have been organised so that the most likely to think their area is improving are to the left and the least likely are to the right.

The first factor CHAID brings out is age. Interestingly, it is the older age group who are most critical of changes in the physical appearance of their area, while those aged 16-34 are most positive. This is surprising, as older groups are usually more satisfied with a range of aspects of life, while it tends to be the middle age groups, often from 35-54 years, who are most negative. But on the other hand, older groups are often more pessimistic about recent change, something that may be related to length of residence in the area (generally longer-standing residents are more likely to feel their area is getting worse).

CHAID Analysis: Who are Most and Least Likely to think Physical Appearance of Area is improving?
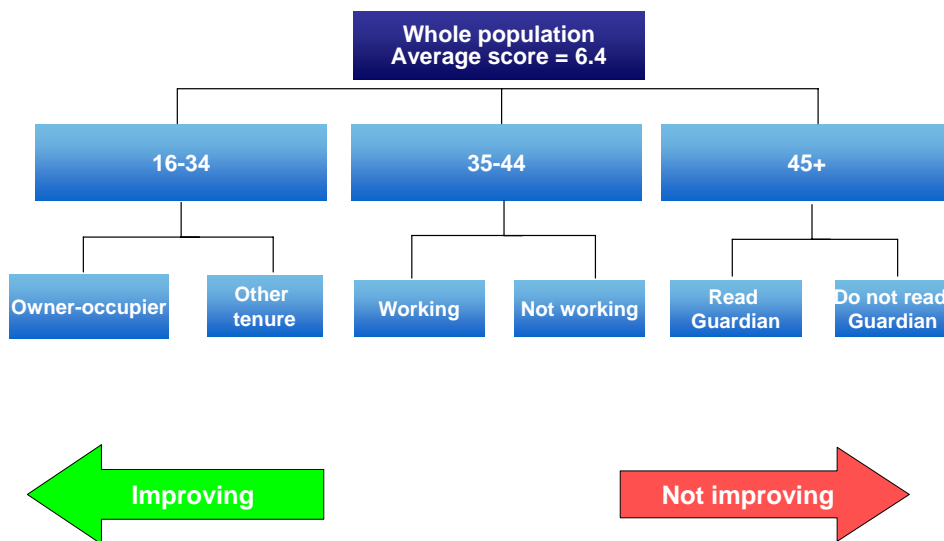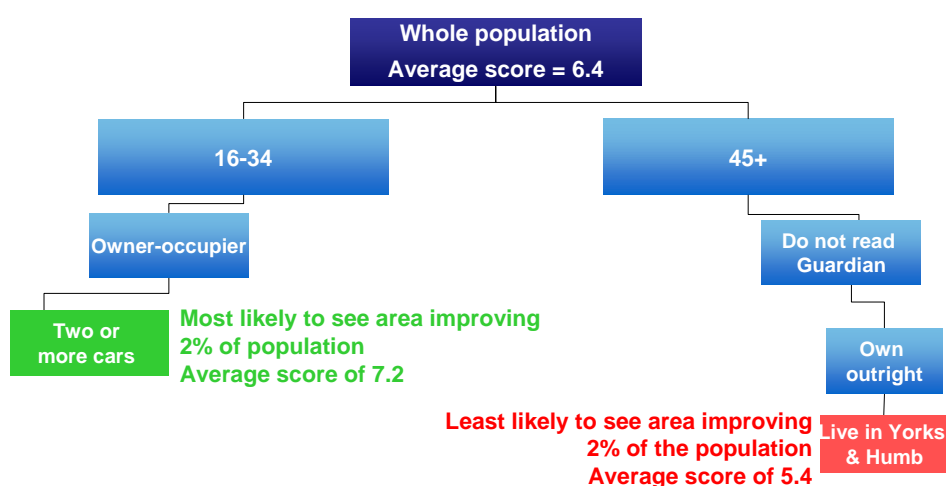

Source: MORI

These age groups are then broken down by the factors that come out as most significantly related to attitudes among each group - in this case, these are tenure for the younger age group, work status for the middle age group and whether the respondent reads the Guardian or not for the older age group. Guardian readership may also seem to be a surprising factor to come out in the analysis, but as we have seen in other recent analysis,[4] it is strongly related to a number of attitudes. This is likely to be partly explained by political sympathies, as Guardian readers are more likely to be Labour supporters.

The model continues breaking the population down by a series of factors that come out as the strongest predictor at each level. This is easier to see in the chart below, which shows only the extremes.

The least positive about changes in the appearance of their area are those aged 45 or over, who do not read the Guardian, own their own home outright and live in Yorkshire & Humberside. This group, who make up 2% of the population as a whole, is significantly less positive than the average, although even here their average score is more positive than negative (5.4 out of 10).

On the other hand, the most positive group are basically better-off younger people – those aged 16-34, who are owner-occupiers and have two or more cars in their household. Again this is only 2% of the population, but they are a key group to reach – they do not have a great deal of contact with other public services, so their views are likely to be disproportionately influenced by liveability issues.

CHAID Analysis: Who are Most and Least Likely to think Physical Appearance of Area is improving?

	Whole population
	Average score = 6.4

16-34	45+

| Owner-occupier | Do not read Guardian |

| Two or more cars | **Most likely to see area improving** **2% of population** **Average score of 7.2** | Own outright |

| **Least likely to see area improving** **2% of the population** **Average score of 5.4** | Live in Yorks & Humb |

Source: MORI

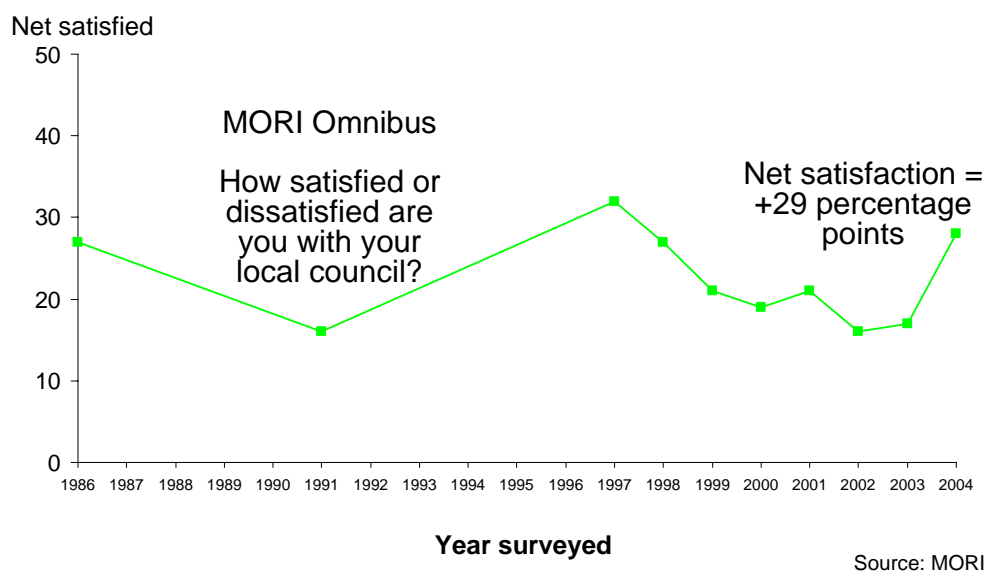[4] *You are what you read?*; Duffy, B and Rowden, L; MORI; April 2005

An Improving Reputation?

So what are the implications for how government, and local government in particular, are viewed? As MORI's report on the drivers of public satisfaction for the LGA shows[5], while education and social care receive the lion's share of funding, how this money is spent is something we tend not to see in our day-to-day lives, particularly if we are among the majority of people who do not use the services.

For these reasons, if you are looking at how the public views local government as a whole, unless social services and education are provided extremely well or badly, they make little difference to local government's reputation: instead it is the liveability agenda - whether somewhere is clean, green and safe, that matters much more.

As the chart below shows, overall satisfaction with local authorities has recovered from a low point in around April 2003, and is now back to almost where it was at the time of Tony Blair's first election in 1997 - an impressive turn-around in just 2 years.

Satisfaction with Council - Trends

Net satisfied

MORI Omnibus

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local council?

Net satisfaction = +29 percentage points

Year surveyed

Source: MORI

This is being mirrored in many - but not all - of the regular resident tracking surveys MORI conducts for individual local authorities.

The improvement in fortune is evidently not all down to being seen to make improvements to the local environment. Increased effectiveness in communications and council tax being held back for a second successive year have both helped. However, the correlation between satisfaction with discretionary local council services such as street cleaning and overall satisfaction with local authorities cannot be ignored.

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[5] *Drivers of Perceptions of Local Government*; MORI for LGA; 2005

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Regression Analysis of BVPI General User Survey Data:

Drivers for BV3 - Overall Satisfaction

Showing Strength of Drivers
55% of Satisfaction explained by model

BV89 – Sat cleanliness

71%

BV3 – Overall Satisfaction

15%

BV4 – Sat complaint handling

13%

BV119a – Sat with Sport & Leisure Facilities
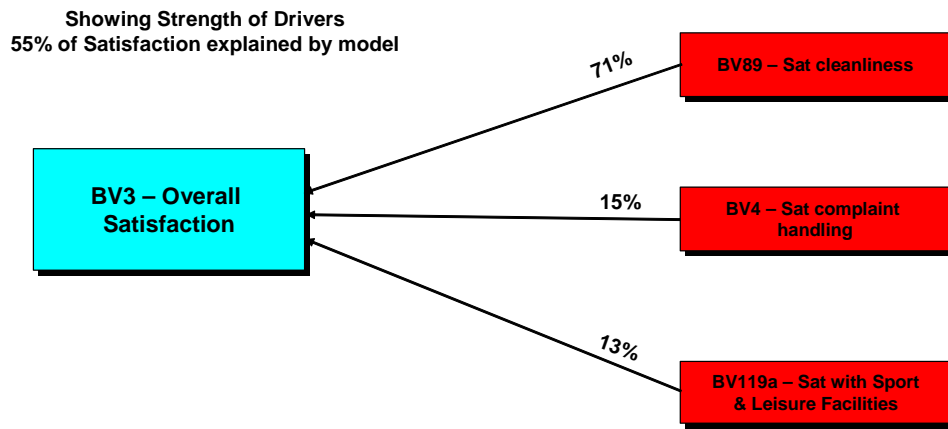
Base: 387 LA Units (incl counties)

Source: MORI

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2. Understanding Liveability and Local Perceptions

This section explores what people understand by the term 'liveability'. How do they see the different factors interacting and more generally how they describe - not their council area - but their locality, looking again at how this varies between different types of area?

The Language of Liveability

Although 'liveability' undoubtedly moved up the agenda in recent years, the term itself is still relatively unknown amongst the general public. Tony Blair first used it in April 2001 and since then we have seen a number of policies aimed at tackling liveability and general quality of life issues. The actual roots of the term go back further than this though. According to the Fabian Society, "*the credit for coining the term probably should go to Robert McNulty, who established the Partners for Livable Communities ('livability' gained an 'e' when it crossed the Atlantic) in 1975. Since then, Partners has been largely responsible for engendering a quiet revolution in American municipalities, which has seen 'quality of life' brought centre stage in city politics.*"

'Liveability' was brought to the mainstream in the USA by the Clinton administration before being taken up by the Labour Government in this country. The terminology is still fluid however, with service providers and government coming to terms with what is encompassed in the liveability programme but often using different terms of reference.

As we have seen, quality of life issues continue to be important to people in their everyday lives, with local cleanliness, low level crime and quality green spaces important considerations. But while these issues are commonly cited as local concerns by residents across the country, the term 'liveability' is not used by residents to describe them.

To an extent, this may not be important; if people are engaging with the issues, is there a need to engage with the terms? The answer to this will depend on whether there is any intention to promote activity in this area under a single heading or unit. This could be beneficial, as it helps give the impression that (local) government sees the issues as linked, as local residents themselves do, and that someone is co-ordinating different activities. However, it seems unlikely that local "Liveability Teams" will be promoted – which is probably the correct decision, as long as the message does get across that someone locally is looking at these issues as a whole.

MORI has recently conducted discourse analysis of discussion groups and in-depth interviews undertaken over the course of the last two years to identify common themes in language used to describe what we define as liveability and to try to understand how these definitions come together.

When we specifically look at how people describe their local area we can see, both in terms of positive and negative associations, that similar points come out time and again. Most frequently, words and phrases relating to the cleanliness and safety of the area are top of mind with a general desire for a more *friendly, clean and safe place* with *no littering or graffiti*. Issues relating to *green space* are also widely mentioned:

> *All we've got is filth and graffiti and rubbish.*
>
> Kingston

> *They just throw their paper in the road.*
>
> Barnsley

> *Terrorised by teenagers and the hot-spots of the pubs and the diners.*
>
> Richmond

These findings are consistent across a range of demographic groups highlighting that, in general, people want to live in a clean, safe environment, ideally with some access to some form of 'green space'. And while public perceptions of what constitutes 'green space' vary to a degree, both urban and rural residents think first of outdoor, grassy public space when prompted.

It is notable that media coverage of these issues often groups the terms *clean* and *safe* together as a connected set of issues, while *green* is talked about as a separate idea and is connected more with design and planning of urban spaces.

Liveability and Local Communities

For many people the surrounding physical environment is seen as being key for producing a welcoming place with good community spirit. Indeed, when talking spontaneously about these issues (the local environment, safety and community) people link them all together in intricate ways, with virtuous and vicious cycles very evident to residents. For example, it is common for residents to feel that problems with crime need to be resolved before the local environment can be improved in a sustainable way, but at the same time feel that characteristics of the local environment encourage crime. And both of these elements in turn help encourage or destroy feelings of community, which itself is seen as vital to improving local areas.

Residents in focus groups conducted for the national evaluation of NDC make these points very clearly. Firstly the link between crime and the environment and in particular how crime takes precedence over all other factors is seen in the following quotes:

> *Without them sorting the crime part out of it, the violence, the drugs, all that [effort is] wasted because they're tidying up and they're just ruining it.*
>
> Doncaster

It's pretty pointless giving them the most fantastic parks with football grounds or a basketball court if it's not safe for them to use.

Wolverhampton

We have drug users - it's not so much needles as slovenly, there are mattresses on the stairs.

Lambeth

Drugs are the reason why the houses are like that; drugs are the reason there is crime...heroin is destroying this area.

Hartlepool

One of the most common effects of high crime or high fear of crime is felt to be a reduced level of interaction between residents. Many participants believe this often prevents people from engaging with their wider community and sometimes makes them feel isolated and insular:

This area is so full of trouble, you just don't know who you can trust.

Wolverhampton

But on the other hand people also see that the local environment clearly affects crime. For example, boarded up properties and derelict land are seen as unsightly focal points for criminal activity (e.g., drug dealers, gangs or squatters):

[Boarded up properties are a] hooligan's paradise.

Liverpool

It's just awful now, the state of some of the properties. And then the properties are getting burned down and that's just because they're standing empty forever. There's houses …where the backs are all smashed in… and they're going in and sitting drinking and taking whatever drugs they're taking, and then going and raising hell basically about 11 o'clock on a night, wherever they can just go and do it.

Sunderland

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It is also clear across a range of discussions that an area's physical appearance is seen as having the greatest influence on visitors' perceptions of the area. What other people think of their area is important to people, particularly as it implies something about the residents themselves:

> *It's not the people; it's the actual buildings themselves.*
> *They're vacant and boarded up and it makes the place look*
> *scruffy and untidy and God knows what else. And people*
> *drive by and think, 'what a dump' and it is a dump.*
>
> Coventry

However, as seen earlier in survey data from the NDC evaluation, people have noticed improvements lately, and this does have a clear impact on overall attitudes. It has made people feel greater pride and even increased interaction between residents:

> *People have changed around our area. It is more open and*
> *friendly, you can talk to people. The place is cleaner and*
> *people feel better about it.*
>
> Bradford

> *It does look nice now. People aren't so scared to come down.*
> *People didn't come down because of the reputation it had*
> *but people from outside are coming in now.*
>
> Plymouth

It is important to note that all this does not necessarily mean people just want clean, bland, "safe" spaces to live in. Looking more widely across our work, it is clear that liveable areas would be very different for different groups, and many positively value the rougher edges in some areas:

> *I like to see Big Issue salesmen, they're making an effort.*
>
> Brighton

> *You have to admit we get the energy of being in*
> *Westminster, there are tourists and people rushing through.*
>
> Westminster

This was also seen in work we conducted for the Urban Task Force[6] where the "soul" of an area was seen as an important attribute. It is something that is specific to the area, giving it its local character and something that generally cannot be planned. In this context, it is important to note that people are generally very critical of the idea and practice of planning and design in towns and cities, as seen in the quote below from a different study.

> *Undemocratic, un-environmental – that's what I think of when I hear "urban design".*

> Westminster

Describing Local Areas

The very strong level of attachment people have with their local area may partially explain why they generally describe their neighbourhood in positive terms. Across Britain almost half describe where they live as *friendly*, almost three in ten associate their area with *good local services*, whilst *safe* (26%) and *green* (17%) are used by significant proportions of respondents. Just one in eight describe their area as *noisy*, with slightly fewer saying that where they live is *congested* or *shabby*.

Perceptions of Local Area: All (GB)

Q   Which two or three of these words, if any do you most associate with your local area?

POSITIVES?
- Friendly — 45
- Good local services — 28
- Safe — 26
- Green — 17

NEITHER/NOR?
- Changing — 28
- Busy — 18
- Racially mixed — 16
- Up and coming — 10
- Diverse — 8
- Lively — 7

NEGATIVES?
- Noisy — 13
- Congested — 11
- Shabby — 11
- Run down — 9
- Dangerous — 8
- Crowded — 6
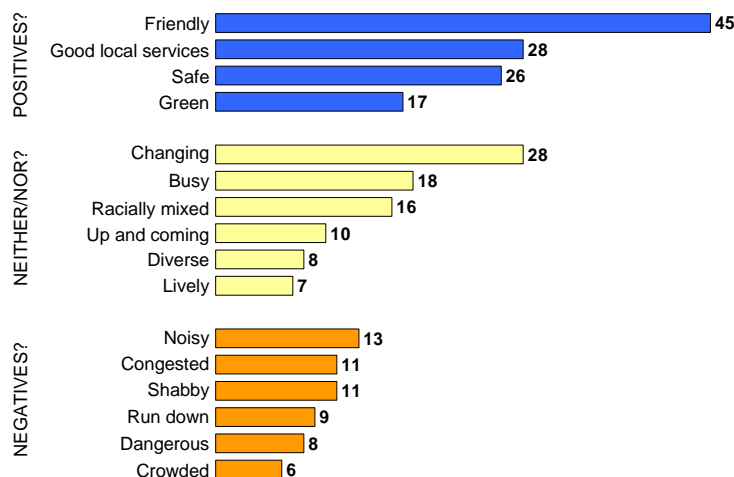
Base: All respondents in GB (2,121), Omnibus Survey, Oct 2004   Source: MORI

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[6] *But would you live there? Shaping attitudes to urban living*, Urban Task Force paper 1999

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But there are significant variations depending on the type of area people live in. Firstly, as we might expect, urban areas are seen to be noticeably less *friendly* and *safe* by their residents than more rural areas. Those living in rural areas are three times more likely than those in urban areas to associate where they live as both *safe* and *green*. Residents of rural areas are also far less likely to describe their area as being *shabby*, *dangero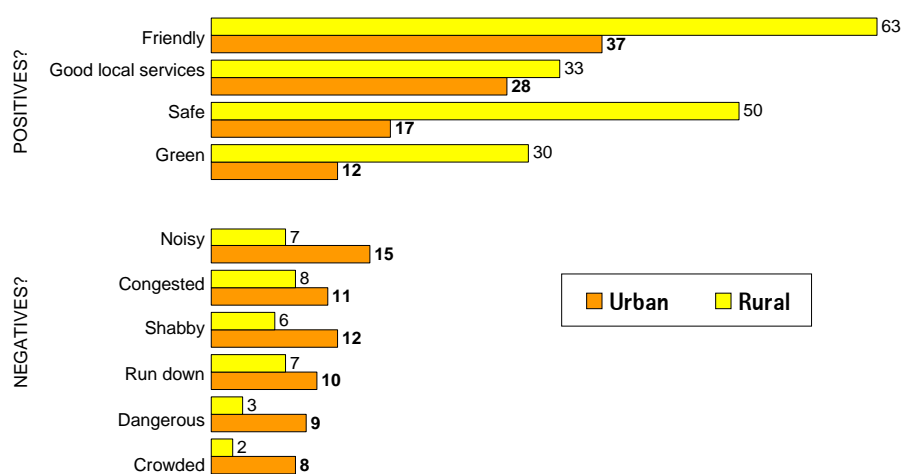us*, *crowded* or *run down* - and interestingly no less likely to say that they have good local services, despite this often being raised as a key problem in rural areas.

Perceptions of Local Area: Urban/Rural

Q Which two or three of these words, if any do you most associate with your local area?

POSITIVES?

Friendly — Rural 63, Urban 37
Good local services — Rural 33, Urban 28
Safe — Rural 50, Urban 17
Green — Rural 30, Urban 12

NEGATIVES?

Noisy — Rural 7, Urban 15
Congested — Rural 8, Urban 11
Shabby — Rural 6, Urban 12
Run down — Rural 7, Urban 10
Dangerous — Rural 3, Urban 9
Crowded — Rural 2, Urban 8

Legend: ■ Urban □ Rural

Base: All respondents in GB (1,541), Omnibus Survey, Oct 2004

Source: MORI

When the relative deprivation[7] of areas is considered there is a similar divergence in the descriptions chosen. Affluent areas are more likely to be described as *friendly*, as having *good local services*, as well as being *safe* and *green*. Deprived areas are three times more likely to be considered *noisy* and four times more likely to be described as *shabby*. But we cannot simply point to a linear relationship between deprivation and feeling negative about the local area. In the chart below, concerns are certainly more widespread in deprived areas, but there is no single indicator which registers more than 20%. To take this further, we have developed a new framework for analysis, using Physical Capital. This is discussed in the next chapter.

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[7] Again using IMD 2004, and taking the deprived definition as the top 25% most deprived areas, and the affluent definition as the 25% with the lowest deprivation scores.

Perceptions of Local Area: Deprived/Affluent

Q   Which two or three of these words, if any do you most associate with your local area?

POSITIVES?

Friendly — 56 | **33**
Good local services — 40 | **23**
Safe — 36 | **15**
Green — 29 | **6**

NEGATIVES?

Noisy — 6 | **19**
Congested — 11 | **10**
Shabby — 4 | **16**
Run down — 2 | **15**
Dangerous — 4 | **13**
Crowded — 3 | **9**

☐ **Deprived** ■ **Affluent**
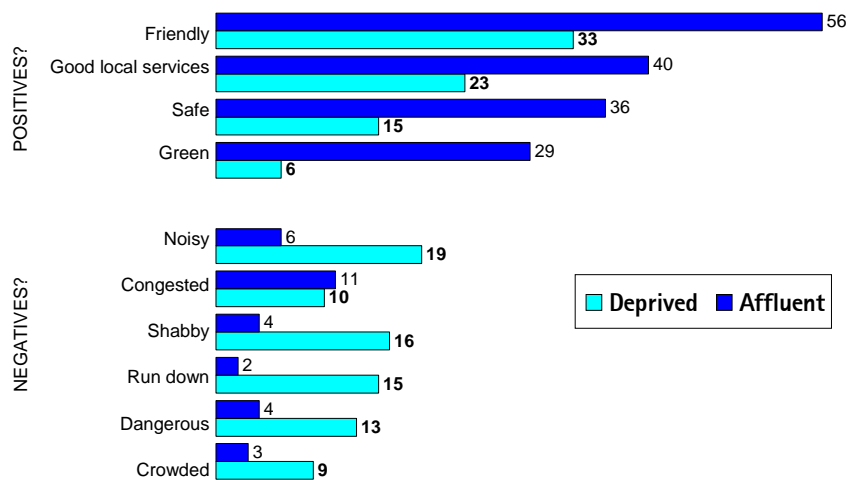
Base: All respondents in GB (825), Omnibus Survey, Oct 2004

Source: MORI

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3. Physical Capital: Measuring the Physical Quality of Areas

We have seen that the nature of local areas seems to impact on perceptions of quality of life. This section takes our analysis one step further, particularly looking at whether we can create an index that captures important physical characteristics, how this relates to overall views and drives perceptions of "visual quality".

Physical Capital: as Important as Deprivation?

We have known about the relationship between satisfaction with an area as a place to live and deprivation levels for a number of years. You can see how strong this is in the chart below, which plots area satisfaction in around 65 local councils where MORI has recently conducted survey work against the deprivation level locally, again measured by IMD 2004. As we can see, those areas with higher levels of deprivation (to the right of the chart) tend to have less satisfied residents. This is useful to provide context, and the Index is of course grounded in a range of variables that are likely to be relevant such as income, employment, health, crime, education and local service factors.

Satisfaction with Area versus Deprivation

Net satisfaction with Areas (%)

Base: All   Source: MORI
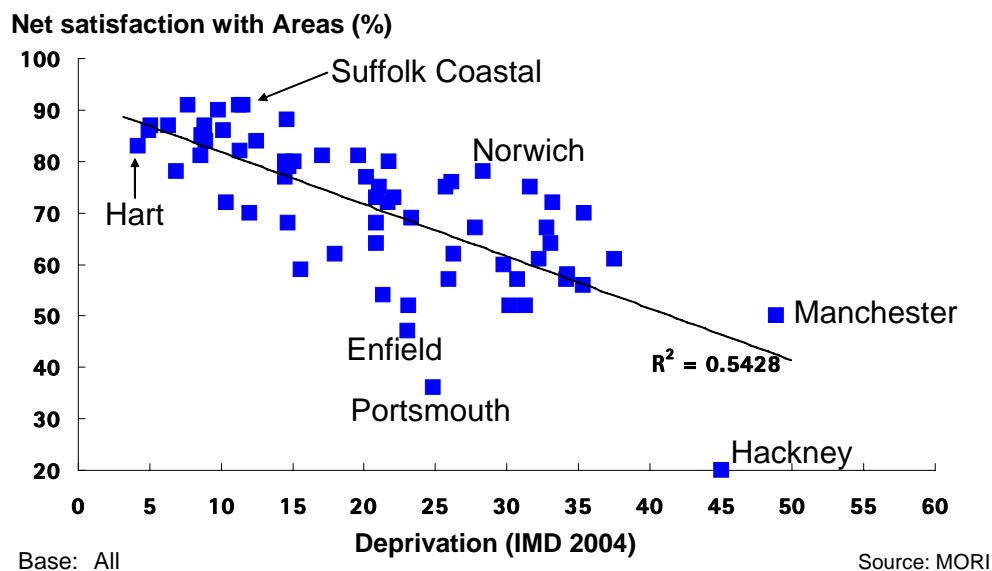
However, the Index is relatively weak on physical factors, and includes little that gives an indication of the quality of the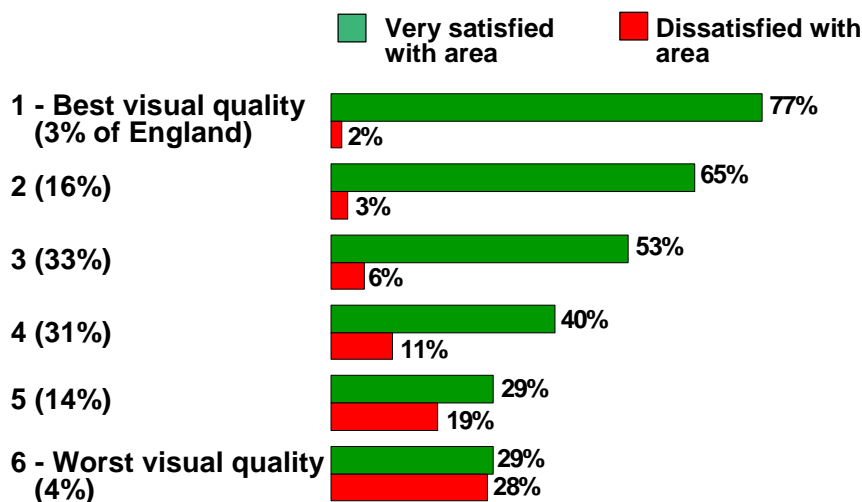 local environment. Given how important people say these environmental issues are in determining how they feel about local areas, we wanted to explore possible sources of information that could give an objective feeling for local "physical capital". The most direct data we could find was from the English House Conditions Survey (EHCS) that we conducted in 2001. As part of this project fully qualified chartered surveyors were asked to make an assessment of the visual quality of the area around each of around 11,000 addresses identified for interview.

The chart below shows that this "visual quality" index appears to have a very strong relationship with satisfaction with the area when we look across Britain. The chart runs from a visual quality score of one, which is the best, down to six at the lowest. In short, there is a clear relationship between the professional assessment of the surveyor and the residents' wider ratings of what the area is like as a place to live.

Resident Satisfaction with Area versus Surveyor Assessment of Visual Appearance

	Very satisfied with area	**Dissatisfied with area**
1 - Best visual quality (3% of England)	77%	2%
2 (16%)	65%	3%
3 (33%)	53%	6%
4 (31%)	40%	11%
5 (14%)	29%	19%
6 - Worst visual quality (4%)	29%	28%

Source: EHCS 2001 unweighted data   Source: MORI

So the relationship between visual quality of an area and local quality of life appears to be strong at a national level, but does that also hold for more local areas? The answer, as seen in the chart below, is yes. Here we just aggregated all the assessments in each local authority area to give an overall visual quality score for that district and then plotted these against satisfaction levels from our recent surveys. Given that we were drawing on just one national survey, this means we only have on average 18 observations for each local authority area. However, these will be relatively well spread throughout the council area, and equate to roughly one per ward on average - they should at least give a good indication.

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Satisfaction with Area versus Visual Quality

Net satisfaction with Area (%)

Base: All   Source: MORI
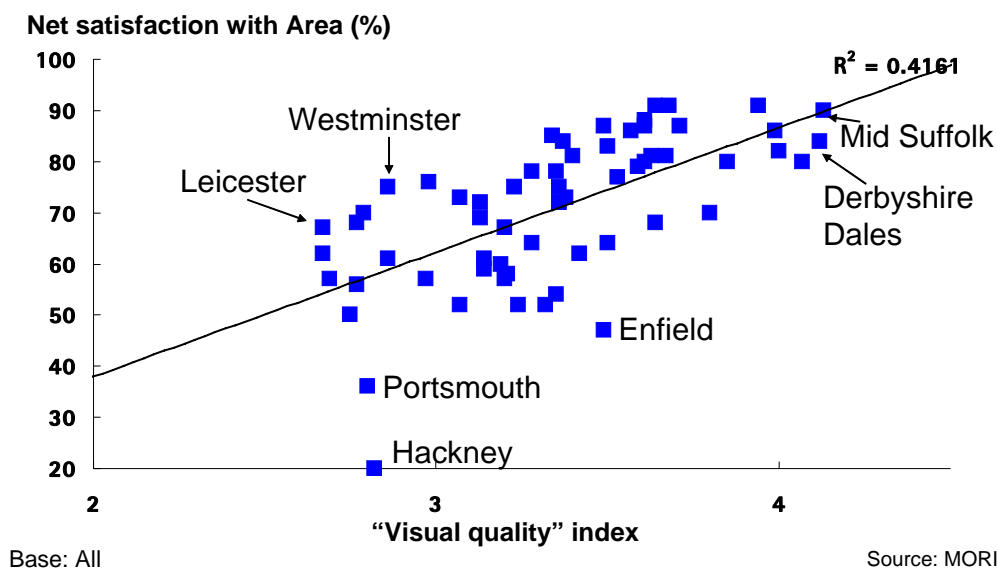
While this relationship is strong (nearly as strong as deprivation), it is not perfect and there are some areas that are a reasonable distance from the trend line. For example, Hackney and Portsmouth have lower levels of satisfaction with the area than we would expect from visual quality alone, and Leicester has a higher level of satisfaction than the visual quality index suggests.

We therefore wanted to find out if there were other physical characteristics that we could add to the model that would help explain satisfaction levels even more accurately. We brought together a wide range of variables that could be thought to describe the physical characteristics of areas[8] and ran regression models, to help identify which are the key drivers of area satisfaction.

From this analysis three factors came out as particularly strongly related to area satisfaction:

- our visual quality scores (positively related);

- the proportion of households living above the fifth storey (negatively related); and

- the proportion of local housing stock that is terraced (negatively related).

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[8] Including property type and tenure, urbanity, migration and turnover statistics, council tax band, vacant household space, floor level and distance to services.

Knowing only these three factors, we could explain 66% of the variation in satisfaction with the area seen in our recent local surveys – which is even higher than the full deprivation index. We then calculated scores for each local authority in England[9]. When we plot these against actual satisfaction levels for the areas we have surveyed, as shown in the chart below, the strength of this "physical capital" index is clear. Very few authorities re any distance from the line of best fit, with the only notable exceptions being Tendring and Portsmouth, which both have lower satisfaction levels than our physical capital score predicts.

Satisfaction with Area versus Physical Capital

Net satisfaction with Area (%)

$R^2 = 0.6647$

Babergh

Barking & Dagenham

Tendring

Portsmouth

"Physical capital" index

Base: All

Source: MORI
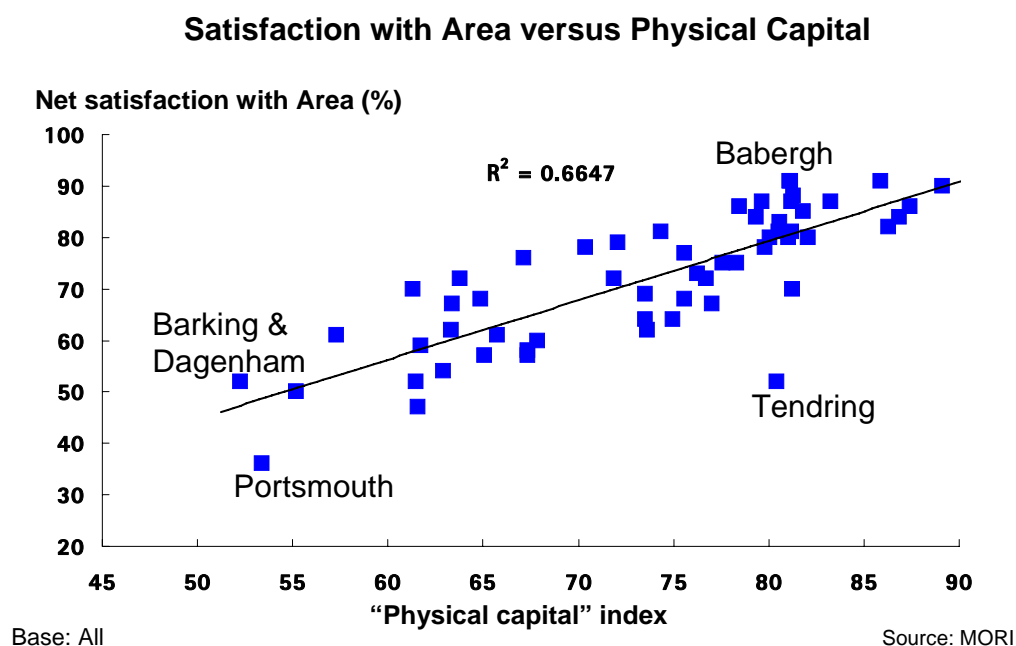
The full tables of physical capital scores are shown in the appendices, but the top and bottom 20 are shown below. It is clear from this that "physical capital" as identified in this model is much higher in rural areas, and lower in London.

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[9] We needed to exclude the City of London because of the very unusual nature of the local housing stock (where over 30% of households live above the fifth floor). Similarly, Westminster is excluded due to the atypical nature of the area it serves.

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Top 20 Physical Capital Scores

Authority	Score
Mid Suffolk	89.10
Wealden	89.00
Chichester	88.52
South Cambridgeshire	88.38
Malvern Hills	88.14
East Cambridgeshire	87.70
Castle Point	87.65
Berwick-upon-Tweed	87.50
Surrey Heath	87.42
Stratford-on-Avon	87.42
North Kesteven	87.37
East Dorset	87.19
East Lindsey	87.18
Bridgnorth	87.12
Rochford	86.94
Derbyshire Dales	86.88
Brentwood	86.83
South Norfolk	86.63
Boston	86.40
Wychavon	86.30

Bottom 20 Physical Capital Scores

Authority	Score
Liverpool	58.55
Newcastle upon Tyne	57.64
Lewisham	57.47
Birmingham	57.32
Manchester	55.22
Salford	54.40
Greenwich	53.57
Portsmouth	53.38
Barking and Dagenham	52.24
Lambeth	51.89
Kingston upon Hull	51.28
Hackney	47.78
Wandsworth	47.08
Islington	46.87
Hammersmith and Fulham	46.65
Newham	44.22
Kensington and Chelsea	40.72
Camden	40.53
Southwark	32.94
Tower Hamlets	17.61

And what drives Visual Quality of Areas?

What factors are most closely associated with assessments of visual quality? Knowing the answer to this question gives us some pointers as to issues we may be able to deal with, as well as the constraints local authorities and partners may be able to address on the ground. An interesting mixture of attitudes and local area characteristics seem to have the greatest impact. Firstly, residents' views of problems with litter/rubbish and scruffy gardens in the local area are strongly related to visual quality scores. This is as might be expected, but it is interesting that these come out as more important than other ratings included in the interview, such as vandalism/graffiti, the condition of pavements and traffic.

Deprivation level also comes out as a strong negative predictor of visual quality, along with whether the area is either urban or suburban. The advantages of rural areas are also suggested by the view that it is a long way to buy bread or milk (which will be an indicator of a rural area) being positively related. The other key positive driver of visual quality that comes out in the model is whether the houses in the area are mostly detached. This is likely to capture a range of characteristics about the design (including whether properties have gardens) and maintenance of an area.

Key Drivers of Surveyor Rating of Visual Quality

Positive drivers   **Negative drivers**

		Problems with litter/rubbish
Mostly detached houses	—11%→	Deprivation level
		Problems with scruffy gardens
	Visual quality of area	Urban
Long way to buy milk/bread	—9%→	Suburban

-17% -16% -16% -16% -11%
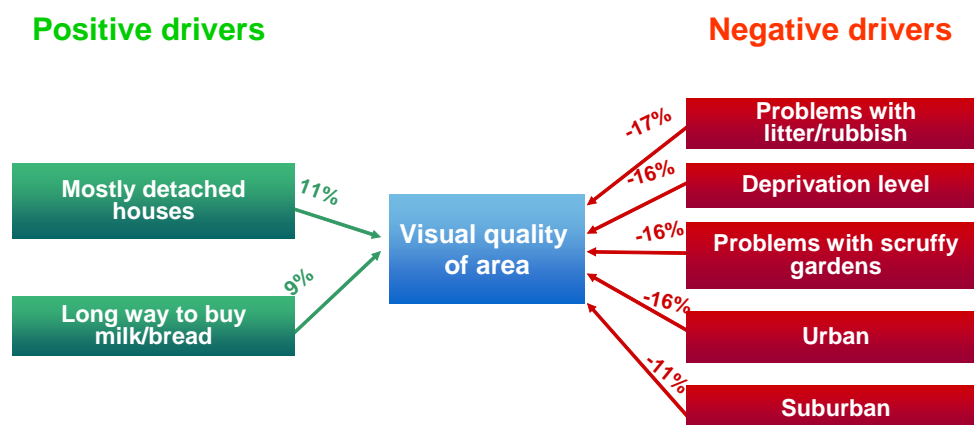
42% of variation in surveyor rating of visual quality

Source: MORI

So in general a sense of space, both in terms of detached housing and rural settings, seems to be key to ratings of visual quality. This emphasises the challenge facing local and central government; while there is a need for higher housing densities in many parts of the country the preference very clearly remains for traditional housing types in a more 'spacious' visual environment. Dealing with these potentially conflicting forces will be a real challenge and will require creativity and innovation at a rather higher level than we have seen in much of Britain's post war planning.

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Appendices: What About Your Area?

The table below outlines the full list of physical capital scores for all local councils (excluding the City of London, due to the unusual nature of the local housing stock in that borough).

Authority	Physical Capital Score
Mid Suffolk	89.10
Wealden	89.00
Chichester	88.52
South Cambridgeshire	88.38
Malvern Hills	88.14
East Cambridgeshire	87.70
Castle Point	87.65
Berwick-upon-Tweed	87.50
Surrey Heath	87.42
Stratford-on-Avon	87.42
North Kesteven	87.37
East Dorset	87.19
East Lindsey	87.18
Bridgnorth	87.12
Rochford	86.94
Derbyshire Dales	86.88
Brentwood	86.83
South Norfolk	86.63
Boston	86.40
Wychavon	86.30
Tandridge	86.11
Broadland	85.96
South Oxfordshire	85.95
Suffolk Coastal	85.90
Selby	85.83
East Hampshire	85.70
Forest Heath	85.54
Horsham	85.39
Forest of Dean	85.35
Three Rivers	85.20
Harborough	85.14
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	85.07
Maldon	85.07
North Norfolk	85.04
West Somerset	85.01
Kennet	84.74
Mole Valley	84.65
Rutland	84.55
Tewkesbury	84.54
South Staffordshire	84.40

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Harrogate	84.22
Vale of White Horse	84.12
South Bucks	84.08
South Holland	84.07
Shrewsbury and Atcham	84.06
Tunbridge Wells	84.04
Huntingdonshire	84.00
Waverley	83.83
North East Derbyshire	83.77
Fenland	83.64
Staffordshire Moorlands	83.55
South Shropshire	83.48
St. Edmundsbury	83.48
North Dorset	83.47
Winchester	83.42
Uttlesford	83.36
Guildford	83.35
Wokingham	83.26
Richmondshire	83.25
West Dorset	83.25
Sedgemoor	83.25
Rother	83.19
Epping Forest	83.19
Daventry	82.99
Bromsgrove	82.94
South Kesteven	82.94
West Oxfordshire	82.76
South Northamptonshire	82.76
South Ribble	82.69
South Lakeland	82.68
South Hants	82.63
South Derbyshire	82.46
Lichfield	82.30
Tonbridge and Malling	82.25
North Cornwall	82.19
Teesdale	82.18
Eden	82.17
Mid Sussex	82.16
Salisbury	82.09
Breckland	82.06
Braintree	82.04
Stroud	81.97
West Lindsey	81.94
West Berkshire	81.89
New Forest	81.85
Blaby	81.80
East Riding of Yorkshire	81.70
Woking	81.69
Herefordshire County	81.57
Cherwell	81.52
Kettering	81.44
Hinckley and Bosworth	81.44

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Tynedale	81.37
Aylesbury Vale	81.35
Cannock Chase	81.32
Colchester	81.28
Sevenoaks	81.28
Hertsmere	81.23
East Hertfordshire	81.22
Chelmsford	81.19
Babergh	81.15
St Albans	81.11
Oswestry	81.11
High Peak	81.04
Rushcliffe	80.96
Test Valley	80.90
Gedling	80.87
Mid Bedfordshire	80.73
East Northamptonshire	80.73
Carrick	80.71
Alnwick	80.70
Hart	80.60
Hambleton	80.58
West Devon	80.56
Mid Devon	80.53
Newark and Sherwood	80.52
Harrow	80.51
Tendring	80.41
Arun	80.27
Chesterfield	80.27
Castle Morpeth	80.19
Fylde	80.16
Fareham	80.11
Waveney	80.07
Craven	79.92
Wycombe	79.90
Ipswich	79.90
Epsom and Ewell	79.80
Rugby	79.75
Oadby and Wigston	79.66
Cotswold	79.64
North Somerset	79.44
Reigate and Banstead	79.33
Mendip	79.28
Melton	79.28
Restormel	79.22
Vale Royal	79.12
Christchurch	79.08
Purbeck	78.94
Chiltern	78.78
Isle of Wight	78.78
Lewes	78.78
Kerrier	78.77
Charnwood	78.76

West Wiltshire	78.67
North Wiltshire	78.64
East Devon	78.61
Ryedale	78.59
Bromley	78.57
Elmbridge	78.56
Scarborough	78.50
North Hertfordshire	78.46
North Devon	78.38
Maidstone	78.35
Milton Keynes	78.33
Bassetlaw	78.32
Congleton	78.30
Wyre	78.30
Ashford	78.11
Amber Valley	78.08
Eastleigh	78.06
Stafford	78.05
Copeland	77.88
Telford and Wrekin	77.84
West Lancashire	77.58
York	77.57
North West Leicestershire	77.41
Bury	77.39
Ribble Valley	77.14
Ashfield	77.02
South Bedfordshire	76.98
Cheltenham	76.97
Teignbridge	76.87
South Gloucestershire	76.77
Runnymede	76.73
Windsor and Maidenhead	76.72
Rushmoor	76.70
Wigan	76.67
Durham	76.60
Torridge	76.57
Barnet	76.53
Chester	76.51
Welwyn Hatfield	76.49
North Shropshire	76.48
Cambridge	76.44
Bolsover	76.39
Wellingborough	76.32
Great Yarmouth	76.31
Warrington	76.28
Dudley	76.23
Caradon	76.18
South Somerset	76.17
Rotherham	76.16
Torbay	76.11
Dartford	75.78
Hillingdon	75.74

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Crewe and Nantwich	75.72
Erewash	75.68
Chester-le-Street	75.66
Worthing	75.63
Trafford	75.60
Broxbourne	75.59
Broxtowe	75.59
Bracknell Forest	75.58
North Lincolnshire	75.48
Blyth Valley	75.46
Redcar and Cleveland	75.43
Chorley	75.41
Worcester	75.32
Ellesmere Port & Neston	75.26
Shepway	75.23
Warwick	75.22
Carlisle	75.19
Bedford	75.16
Poole	75.14
Bournemouth	75.05
South Tyneside	74.97
Weymouth and Portland	74.94
Mansfield	74.93
St. Helens	74.91
Macclesfield	74.89
Stockport	74.82
Allerdale	74.64
Adur	74.60
Penwith	74.50
Kingston upon Thames	74.45
Canterbury	74.42
Barnsley	74.42
Havant	74.41
Tamworth	74.36
Wakefield	74.26
Corby	74.21
North Warwickshire	74.17
Spelthorne	74.17
Basingstoke and Deane	74.17
Bath and North East Somerset	73.95
Redditch	73.95
Gloucester	73.93
Wyre Forest	73.86
Gravesham	73.85
Taunton Deane	73.83
Havering	73.82
Newcastle-under-Lyme	73.75
Stockton-on-Tees	73.64
Derby	73.56
Peterborough	73.52
Swale	73.51
East Staffordshire	73.43

Solihull	73.39
Eastbourne	73.39
North Tyneside	73.18
Nuneaton and Bedworth	72.89
Dacorum	72.85
Lancaster	72.77
Exeter	72.70
Dover	72.58
Darlington	72.27
Richmond upon Thames	72.24
Doncaster	72.16
Rossendale	72.12
Crawley	72.09
Southend-on-Sea	71.89
Sutton	71.70
Sefton	71.57
Bolton	71.51
Pendle	71.40
Basildon	71.26
Northampton	70.96
Halton	70.93
Oxford	70.55
Norwich	70.37
Sedgefield	70.16
Wirral	70.13
Swindon	70.08
Redbridge	69.92
Lincoln	69.87
Kirklees	69.69
Blackpool	69.69
Sheffield	69.67
Thanet	69.64
Preston	69.57
Gosport	69.29
Barrow-in-Furness	69.06
Bexley	68.85
Croydon	68.80
Wansbeck	68.14
Tameside	67.85
Middlesbrough	67.73
Bradford	67.72
Derwentside	67.68
Luton	67.43
Sunderland	67.37
Brent	67.34
Plymouth	67.13
North East Lincolnshire	67.06
Wear Valley	67.02
Thurrock	66.87
Rochdale	66.64
Easington	66.61
Burnley	66.16

Blackburn with Darwen	65.75
Merton	65.67
Wolverhampton	65.44
Leeds	65.22
Oldham	65.06
Knowsley	64.96
Walsall	64.94
Slough	64.88
Calderdale	64.31
Ealing	64.15
Gateshead	63.81
Hartlepool	63.58
Leicester	63.37
Medway	63.34
Harlow	62.92
Hastings	62.57
Reading	62.42
Hyndburn	62.20
Southampton	62.08
Haringey	62.01
Stoke-on-Trent	61.87
Stevenage	61.72
Hounslow	61.67
Enfield	61.58
Waltham Forest	61.49
Sandwell	61.34
Nottingham	60.66
Bristol City	60.55
Brighton and Hove	60.10
Coventry	59.71
Liverpool	58.55
Newcastle upon Tyne	57.64
Lewisham	57.47
Birmingham	57.32
Manchester	55.22
Salford	54.40
Greenwich	53.57
Portsmouth	53.38
Barking and Dagenham	52.24
Lambeth	51.89
Kingston upon Hull Cit	51.28
Hackney	47.78
Wandsworth	47.08
Islington	46.87
Hammersmith and Fulham	46.65
Newham	44.22
Kensington and Chelsea	40.72
Camden	40.53
Southwark	32.94
Tower Hamlets	17.61

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