



image #1

The abandoned side of  
North Woolwich

1 Poverty: reliance  
on food bank  
services and cuts  
to benefits

2 Lack of employment  
and discrimination

3 Abandoned and  
closed facilities

4 Poor transport  
links

5 Youth crime



[credits #1](#)

These are the thoughts, images, and findings of Twinkle and Terry, local residents and citizen social scientists from Beckton and Custom House, Newham.

Twinkle and Terry conducted research on the obstacles to prosperity that local residents in North Woolwich experience, as part of the Prosperity in east London 2021-2031 Longitudinal Study.

To find out more about Twinkle, Terry and Prosperity in east London 2021-2031 take a look at the final pages of this zine.

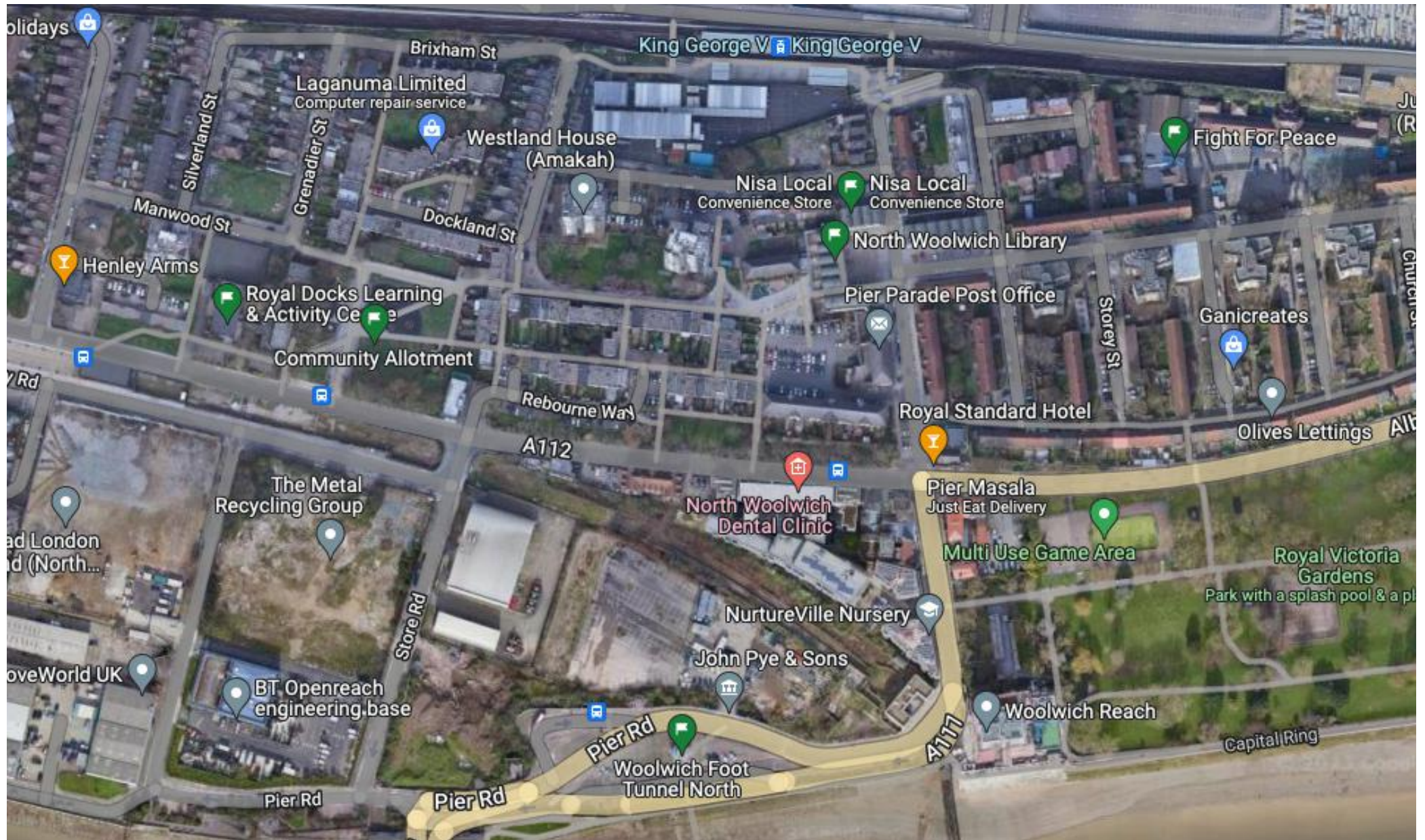




map #1

North Woolwich (roughly shaded in yellow) in respect to other parts of east London. North Woolwich is separated from Woolwich (to the south) and the rest of Newham (to the North) by the Thames and large infrastructural sites





map #2

An overview of North Woolwich. Some of the sites mentioned in the zine are pinned with green flags



1

Poverty:  
reliance  
on food  
bank  
services  
and cuts to  
benefits



image #2

The Food Bank is what brings many people to the RADLAC (Royal Albert Docks Learning and Community Centre), just south of the King George V DLR station. Food bank employees have noticed a huge increase in the number of people relying on their services. Glynnis - who grew up in North Woolwich and has most of her family in the area - works as a coordinator at the Food Bank. Though she describes herself as having a good life, her concern is for her younger family and community members who have been less fortunate.

Speaking about her sister, who works a minimum wage job, Glynnis describes the struggles she faces:

*“on paper she can live - in real life, she can't live.”*



image #3  
Boxes of free food, clothing  
and essential items outside the  
RADLAC



image #4  
Fresh vegetables inside the  
RADLAC, which will be packed and  
distributed to local families





image #5

Donated cake with the words  
"Best Wishes"

When we met Glynnis, it was autumn 2021 and Universal Credit had just been cut by £20 per week. Though the cost of living crisis had yet to gain extensive media attention, Glynnis noted the gap between expectations of what a certain income should provide, and the reality of what people can afford:

***"because you know, they say you need X amount...but you go into a shop and every time you go into a shop, something's [price has] gone up"***

She describes how in her capacity as Food Bank coordinator, she has noticed an increase in the people coming in to use their services as well as a change in the types of people relying on the Food Bank; she says that more and more families with children are coming in, as well as younger, working age people. Several of the people we interviewed who were using the Food Bank told us they were doing so for the first time – indicating new levels of economic stress on the local community.

## 2 Lack of employment & discrimination

Employment and sufficient pay were key concerns for residents of North Woolwich. Some interviewees described how despite wanting to work and applying frequently for jobs, they faced discrimination based on their mental health, disabilities, and age.

Kathy, who currently lives in Woolwich-Arsenal spoke about her struggles finding work:



image #6

Leaflets offering services and advice at the RADLAC, including one offering free employment services

***“I’ve been out of work for 13 years since 2008. So I’m trying to get back into work. But every application form I’ve sent in I’ve been rejected, because I’ve got a mental health problem as well. I hate it, I absolutely hate it. Sometimes I go home and cry...I go home and cry most days, because...if I go to an interview and tell them I’ve got a mental health problem, that’s it. They don’t want to know me after that”***



## RDLAC FOODBANK

The foodbank is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10.30am until 2.00pm.

In line with other Newham foodbanks as of Monday 4<sup>th</sup> October the following will be required before a food parcel is prepared for you.

### 1. Photo ID

2. Proof of name and address – a utility bill

3. Proof of benefits – unemployment, benefit,

4. Proof of children - letters from schools or doctors or benefit

Proof of the above must be on headed paper **NOT** on mobiles.

We will share with you food that is available on the day you visit which has been donated to the Foodbank.

**You are welcome to visit the foodbank ONCE a week only.**

image #7

The process for receiving food-bank donations, printed and pasted on a wall in the RADLAC

Lesley shared these challenges finding employment. In her case, she attributed this to age discrimination because she is elderly. She cited this as a major barrier to her living a good life.

*“[What would help would be] people not to be judgmental. Because like when you fill in application forms, you don’t want to give out your birthday. But it won’t let you process the application form unless you do and then a company works out your date of birth ...[and] you get turned down.”*

Both women felt that discrimination prevented them from finding jobs, which in turn kept them from earning enough money to secure a good life, leading to their reliance on the Food Bank for basic necessities.

3

# Abandoned and closed facilities

Near the RADLAC Food Bank is a Café, children's playground, and a community allotment within St. John's Green. But even in the middle of the day, it is often empty and attracts few customers. It does not have bathrooms, meaning that even those who work in the café are forced to go elsewhere in order to use the toilet. This has an impact on people's desire to spend time in the café or work on the allotment.

Dave, a long-time resident of North Woolwich in his 60s or 70s, explains why the cafe seems dead:



image #8

Children's playground at St.  
John's Green

***“a lot of people don't come here because there's no toilet facilities for people to use, even for the gentleman that runs the cafe. You've got a children's playground and they've got no toilets to use, unless they would go home or go to the RADLAC [which doesn't operate on weekends]. It's been like this since they opened it, you've got a little garden project there that the local people work on, and they've got no facilities to wash their hands or anything else.”***





image #9

Cafe at St. John's Green on a weekday afternoon

Other residents highlighted the closure of shops selling food and other necessary items. Lesley, who has lived in the area since 1987, spoke of how the community had lost several useful businesses, and linked this to gentrification and the construction of new flats:

***“Shops are closing and we need more shops, and more jobs so people can live a better life. It’s all well and good building nice houses and flats. But who can afford to live in them? If you ain’t got the shops then people aren’t going to move into the area. They’re gonna go where there’s...life”***

A lack of jobs for local residents, unaffordable housing, and looming regeneration, all contributed to people moving out, shops closing down, and the overall degeneration of the area. Abandonment and neglect were visible in the built environment of North Woolwich. There were few, if any, open shops on the multiple trips Terry and Twinkle made to the area. Most were shuttered or empty.





image #10

Town square along Pier Road where the local Nisa store and North Woolwich library are. It frequently appeared empty.



image #11

Closed shops on a Tuesday afternoon along Pier Road





image #12  
Rubbish piling up along  
Claremont Close



image #13  
A derelict building and  
shuttered shops, rubbish  
piling up outside

4

# Poor

# transport

# links

Though Woolwich is one of the stops on the newly launched Elizabeth line, North Woolwich is across the river and not directly connected. Residents still need to take the DLR, foot tunnel or a ferry to reach the Elizabeth line. Many residents used to rely on a local bus that helped them get where they needed, including to shopping areas where they could buy groceries and supplies. This bus line was removed, and despite many local petitions, TFL has refused to reinstate it. Dave observes:

***“This is the only part of the Borough that needs two buses to get to all the shopping centres. If you’re a parent with***



image #14

King George V DLR line

***a couple of kids and a pram, it’s not easy. Why are people in the area having to struggle to get two buses to get to the main shopping areas whereas you can live outside the Borough, miles away, and get one?”***

Dave’s comments show a keen awareness of North Woolwich’s comparative isolation from the rest of Newham. His comparison with others “outside the Borough” highlights how unequal access to transportation shapes residents’ experiences of life in east London. Considering Kathy’s comments on the closure of shops, these observations on the difficulty of reaching nearby shopping centres are particularly urgent.





image #15

The edge of Pier Road.  
Looking out towards  
Woolwich on the other side



5

# Youth crime

Residents also lamented the lack of activities for young people in the area, Dave contrasted this with his own childhood:

***"When I was growing up around here there was two youth clubs to go to...there's nothing for kids to do around here, they get into mischief."***

Further conversations with residents confirmed the feeling among many that the lack of youth activities was directly linked to crime levels. While scoping the area, Terry and Twinkle came across the Fight for Peace Academy along Woodman Street, which offers free sports facilities, education and leadership programmes, mentoring, and career guidance to combat youth violence in the community. Youth crime clearly appeared to be an issue, but it was unclear whether the Academy's services alone were sufficient and what young people themselves thought about the role social infrastructure plays in reducing crime in their community.



image #16

Graffiti sprayed on the wall of an abandoned house with the words 'Infant Mafia'



If you could speak  
to a policymaker  
now, what would you  
say?

**#Twinkle Jayakumar:**

"Listen to what the people want in their area. Rather than keep on building and bringing new people in, improve the lives of the people who are already staying there. Wouldn't that be much better than making new plans? Moving new people in is not going to help the area develop. You need to improve the quality of life already there"

**#Terry Regan:**

"Listen to the people first, find out what they want - don't assume to know, get people involved. People need community centres, shops, and supermarkets with food at reasonable prices. Pubs have become wine bars, restaurants have become delicatessens, locals are being priced out. You're not keeping communities together who are earning a low wage, you're pushing communities apart for too many people's gains"



**#Twinkle and Terry (pictured above)**

Twinkle is a Citizen Social Scientist from Beckton, Newham. She has volunteered as school Governor and has done volunteering in a children centre for two years.

Terry is a Citizen Social Scientist from Custom House, Newham. He is an elected member of the Custom House Steering Group, PEACH and the Community Land Trust. He also runs a mental health support group called "Talk to Terry" that encourages men to talk openly about their mental health.

# PROSPERITY IN EAST LONDON 2021-2031

*Prosperity in east London 2021-2031* is a 10-year mixed-methods study tracing the effects of large-scale and long-term urban regeneration on local communities in east London. The study equips local residents with the tools to examine prosperity in their communities, producing citizen-centred insights on people's lived experiences of regeneration.

During wave 1 of the qualitative research, which took place between September and October 2021, 10 residents from 10 areas in east London, were employed and supported by east London community organisations: Compost CIC, Hackney Quest, and Leaders in the Community, to engage in 3-months of part-time research and training. Through [UCL's Citizen Science Academy](#), they received practice-led training on research design, ethics, qualitative data collection, and social impact strategies. The teams carried out interviews and walking ethnographies exploring obstacles to prosperity in their different neighbourhoods, and are currently involved in presenting this research to policymakers.

Managed by the Institute for Global Prosperity's (IGP) [Prosperity Co-laboratory UK](#) (PROCOL UK) in partnership with the [UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#), the study was co-designed with members of the [London Prosperity Board](#) – a cross-sector partnership between the IGP, UCL East, London government, public agencies, businesses, the third sector, and local communities in east London, to change the way decision-makers think and act for prosperity.



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