

# A BREATH OF CLEAN AIR: INSIGHTS FROM LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK

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Community Research, February 2021

**TSIP**

Impact  
on **Urban**  
Health



# CONTENTS

- #01** Executive Summary
- #02** Introduction
- #03** The Research Journey
- #04** Insights
- #05** Recommendations
- #06** Conclusion
- #07** Appendix

**#01:**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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[The Social Innovation Partnership](#) (TSIP) and [Impact on Urban Health](#) (part of [Guy's and St Thomas' Charity](#)) have been working together to explore air pollution in Lambeth and Southwark. In particular, we wanted to engage communities most impacted by air pollution but whose voices are often not present in the agenda. This includes people from ethnic minority communities and lower-income households.

Through our amazing team of community researchers, we set out to understand the existing views and experiences of underrepresented communities on air pollution with the intention of providing recommendations for increasing and amplifying the voices of these communities in the space.

Our research project, which included creating a 'Have Your Say' survey, conducting interviews with local organisations and establishing an Air Pollution Forum, allowed us to identify seven key insights:

- People are not aware that air pollution is a universal issue or of how it affects them personally
- As people initially become aware of air pollution, they cannot prioritise the issue
- As people become more aware of air pollution, they are keen to engage in the agenda, but the relevant information is hard to find
- More research is needed to understand the barriers to engagement for different communities
- There is a strong desire to raise awareness for all in the short-term...
- ...but people within the community are less confident on actions to tackle air pollution in the long-term
- Collaboration between individuals, communities or organisation is key to tackling the problem of air pollution

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (CONT.)

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Informed by our insights, we developed a set of recommendations for Impact on Urban Health and other funders. These recommendations were categorised into three sections based on our initial research questions:

**1. Understanding the barriers to engagement through research**

In addition to conducting more research with underrepresented communities, more research could also be done to explore and share the links between air pollution and other social issues as well as research that builds on people's own lived experience of air pollution.

**2. Addressing the barriers to engagement through co-design**

Provide spaces for community-led action to take place as well as opportunities for individuals to champion awareness in their own communities. Solutions also need to be co-designed with the communities looking to be engaged to make them as effective as possible.

**3. Supporting community-led movements through collaboration**

Engaging local businesses, grassroots organisations and policymakers will provide community-led movements with the platform needed to make real change.

Throughout this research project, the most valuable outcome was bringing together a group of local people who have been informed and now feel empowered to create change.

The details of our findings and the full set of recommendations can be found in the full report. If you are interested in our work, [get in contact](#) – we would love to hear from you!

# #01: INTRODUCTION

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A photograph of a residential street in London, overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The street features parked cars, trees, and buildings. A prominent tree is in the foreground. A street sign on the right shows the number '139' and '909'. The text 'In London, 9,400 premature deaths are attributed to poor air quality<sup>1</sup>' is overlaid in white.

**In London, 9,400 premature deaths  
are attributed to poor air quality<sup>1</sup>**

# WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

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[The Social Innovation Partnership](#) (TSIP) and [Impact on Urban Health](#) (formerly [Guy's and St Thomas' Charity](#)) have been working together to explore air pollution in Lambeth and Southwark. In particular, we wanted to engage communities most impacted by air pollution but whose voices are often not present in the agenda. This includes people from ethnic minority communities and lower-income households.

Through our amazing team of community researchers, we set out to understand the existing views of underrepresented communities on air pollution. Given the scope of this research project, we also saw this as an opportunity to bring community members on our journey of discovery and learning into the impacts of air pollution and what can be done to combat it.

In this presentation, we share the findings from our research and a list of recommendations for Impact on Urban Health (and others).

These recommendations are categorised into areas for further research, raising awareness and taking actions to address air pollution in the short-term and long-term.





**#02:**  
THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

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# WHAT DID WE DO?

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## 1 Recruited our Community Researcher team

The Community Research programme is about equipping local people with lived experience of social issues to conduct research.



**Marcus Tayebwa**



**Sylvana Walcott**



**Muhammed Rauf**



**Betty Efemini**



**Femi Aseru**



**Paul Addae**

# WHAT DID WE DO?

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## 2 Conducted a literature review

Through our literature review, we set the foundation for our research project and identified five key insights which informed our research questions. These insights were:

- The current literature is lacking in authentic urban voices, it is missing an interdisciplinary approach and has a prevalence of white middle-class voices.
- There are links between deprivation, COVID-19 and minority communities.
- There is a history of environmental activism within Lambeth and Southwark and there is evidence of increasing initiatives within these boroughs to tackle air pollution, including initiatives heads by BAME individuals.
- There were four identified reasons for the lack of minority representation within air pollution, including language/accessibility, prioritisation, fear of speaking out and environmental racism.
- There are tensions between minority communities and environmental groups due to a lack of understanding, differing relationships with the police and a lack of representation.

# WHAT DID WE DO?

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## 3 Defined our research questions

On the back of our literature review, the six questions we decided to explore through this research project were:

- How can air pollution become an agenda that is relevant to and inclusive of underrepresented communities?
- What are the most effective ways to educate underrepresented communities on the impacts of air pollution?
- How would a community-led environmental group operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- Which of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution are more significant in different underrepresented communities?
- How can each of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution be addressed?
- How do the solutions to increase representation in air pollution differ for different underrepresented communities?

# WHAT DID WE DO?

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## 4 Explored our research questions

To explore our research questions, we used three methods. This allowed us to explore our questions in-depth, but also bring in more voices from the local community. Through this research project we:

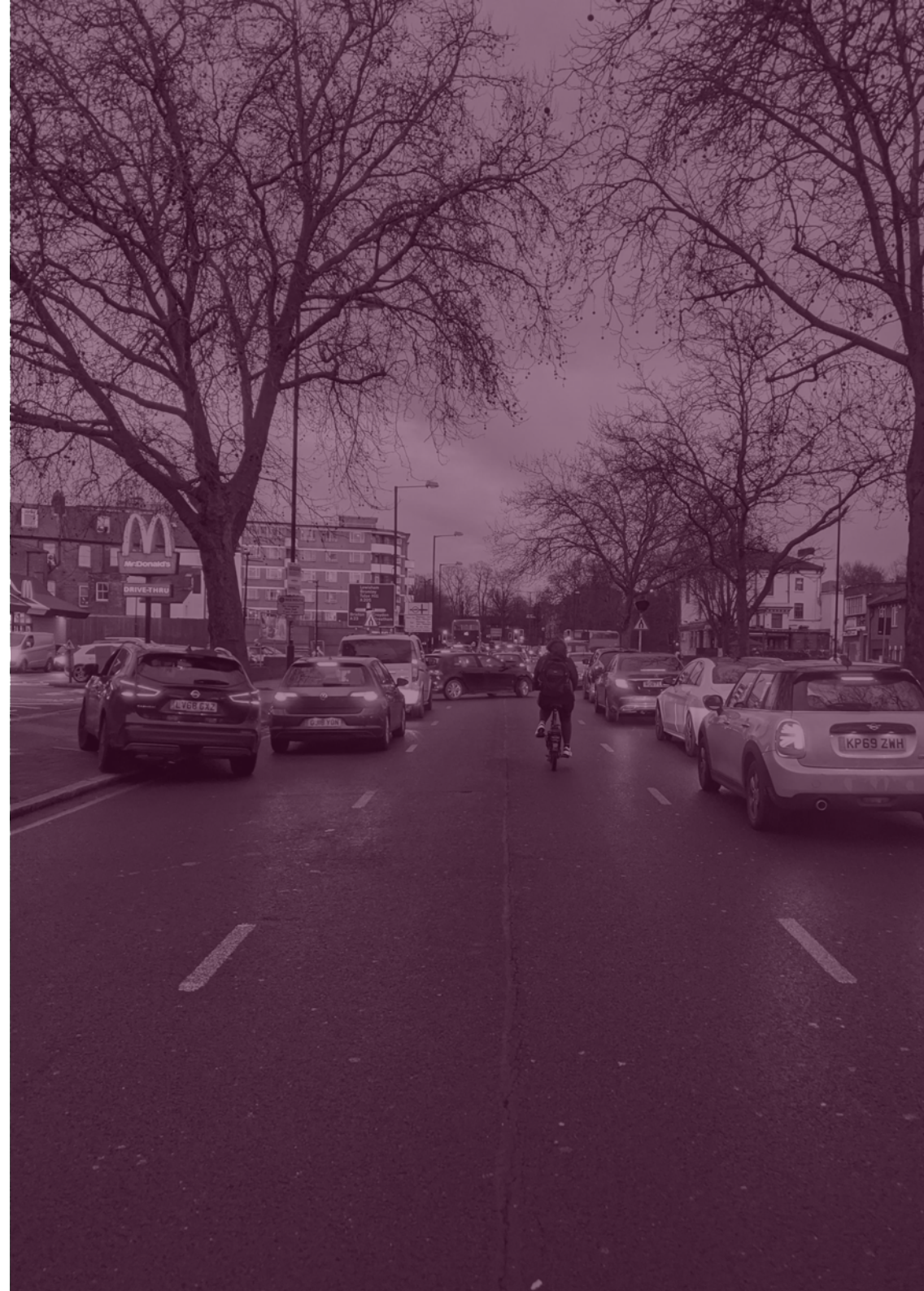
- Set-up the Air Pollution Forum. We recruited 14 community members from diverse backgrounds to meet fortnightly and discuss a variety of issues surrounding the air pollution agenda.
- Interviewed organisations/individuals working on the air pollution agenda including:
  - **Simon Birkett**, Founder and Director of Clean Air London
  - **Jemima Hartshorn**, Founder of Mums for Lungs
  - **Emma Hibbett**, PhD Researcher of Pollution, Justice and Civil Society
  - **Manny Hothi**, Director of Policy at Trust for London
  - **Kaydine Nyalima**, Co-Founder of ChokedUp
- Created a 'Have your say' survey. This was completed by 81 community members (with 68% of those coming from Lambeth and Southwark). More information on who completed the survey can be found in the appendix.

## SYLVANA'S JOURNEY, COMMUNITY RESEARCHER

When starting this project, I had very little knowledge about air pollution. Even though I do know that it's a problem, it wasn't something that was on my mind. It's also not something that is being discussed in my close circle.

Being on this project has been an awareness journey. Learning about the different causes of air pollution and the differences between indoor and outdoor air pollution has been worrying, but insightful. Realising that some of our favourite walks are actually in high polluted areas isn't nice, but definitely necessary.

With air pollution being called a 'silent health crisis', my view around it has changed in the sense that I've realised that it's not something that I can just ignore, just because I don't have the answers to the problem. My aim now is to spread this awareness and hopefully be part of equitable and long-lasting solutions led by the communities affected the most.



**#03:**

INSIGHTS

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# KEY INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

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The insights listed below bring together our findings from the survey, interviews and Air Pollution Forum.

1. People are not aware that air pollution is a universal issue or of how it affects them personally
2. As people initially become aware of air pollution, they cannot prioritise the issue
3. As people become more aware of air pollution, they are eager to engage in the agenda, but the relevant information is hard to find
4. More research is needed to understand the barriers to engagement for different communities
5. There is a strong desire to raise awareness for all in the short-term...
6. ...but people within the community are less confident on actions to tackle air pollution in the long-term
7. Collaboration between individuals, communities or organisation is key to tackling the problem of air pollution

In the following slides, we explore the insights listed above in more detail. Where quotes from survey respondents have been shared, we have used pseudonyms.



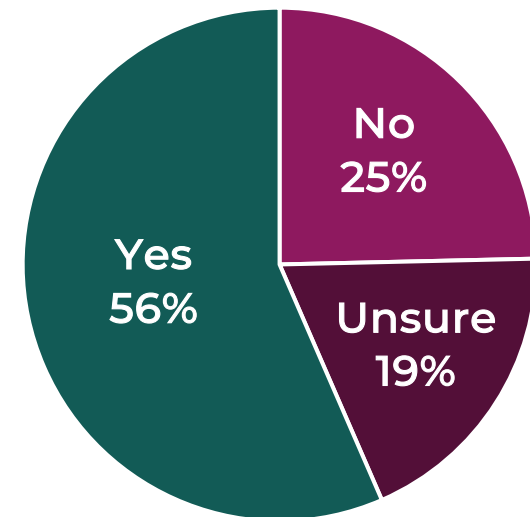
# PEOPLE ARE NOT AWARE OF HOW AIR POLLUTION AFFECTS THEM PERSONALLY

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In the 'Have your say' survey, which provided us with a snapshot of the views of local community members, one of the first questions we asked was "Do you think air pollution is an issue in your local area?"

- Most responders (53%) thought air pollution was an issue in their area, and this was significantly higher amongst residents of Lambeth and Southwark (69%).
- While this sounds encouraging, what this really tells us is that just under 1 in 3 people do not see air pollution as an issue in their local area (or are unsure).
- Furthermore, as shown by the chart opposite, nearly 1 in 2 people do not think air pollution affects them personally (or are unsure).
- This lack of awareness is resulting in communities not seeing how their lived experience fits into the air pollution narrative.

## DO YOU THINK AIR POLLUTION AFFECTS YOU PERSONALLY?





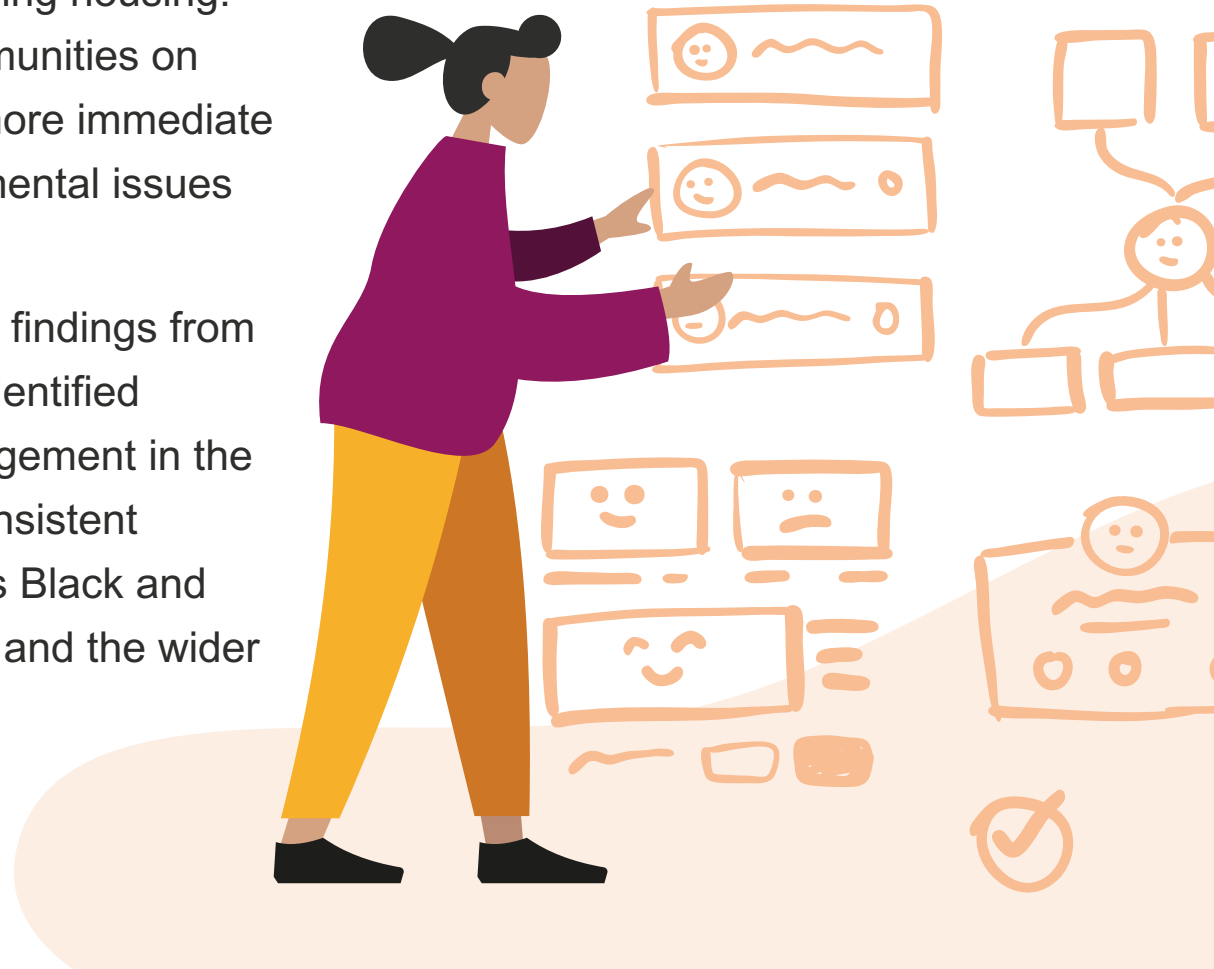
**Most polluted area in Southwark:  
Haddon Hall Tower Bridge Road<sup>2</sup>**

**Most polluted area in Lambeth:  
Brixton Road<sup>2</sup>**

# AIR POLLUTION IS NOT A PRIORITY

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- Our second insight from the research was that as people initially become aware of air pollution, they can not prioritise the issue.
- During forum discussions, it was shared that different communities have different priorities, so air pollution will not be prioritised for as long as it is spoken about in isolation. For example, an immigrant to the UK may prioritise finding housing. Therefore, there is a need to inform communities on the links between air pollution and their more immediate concerns as well as other social/environmental issues they already care about.
- The insights from the forum align with the findings from our survey in which people consistently identified prioritization as their main barrier to engagement in the air pollution agenda. This ranking was consistent regardless of whether people identified as Black and across the Lambeth/Southwark residents and the wider population of respondents.



*"IT'S HARD TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE, THE  
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ON THE STREET IS VERY  
LOW AND IT HITS POOR PEOPLE, THEY TOO BUSY  
WORKING THEIR "ASS" OFF TO SURVIVE."*

- DWAYNE,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT

# RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT AIR POLLUTION IS HARD TO FIND

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- Through the forum, we also found that people want quick, easy and reliable sources of information. At present, there is a lack of local representation within the air pollution agenda, and this is key if sources are to be determined as being reliable. This goes beyond seeing people of the same race or gender - there is a need for local representation from people with the same lived experience.
- This finding was further emphasised in the 'Have your say' survey. Although most people who responded were interested in the air pollution agenda (72%), almost nobody had engaged in any activities relating to it (7%).
- While we did not ask why this was the case, our own experience can provide some insight into possible explanations. For example, during the research project, we reached out to several local environmental groups but struggled to get a response from them, and we were made aware of members of the forum experiencing the same difficulties with local government. People need to know *how* they can engage.



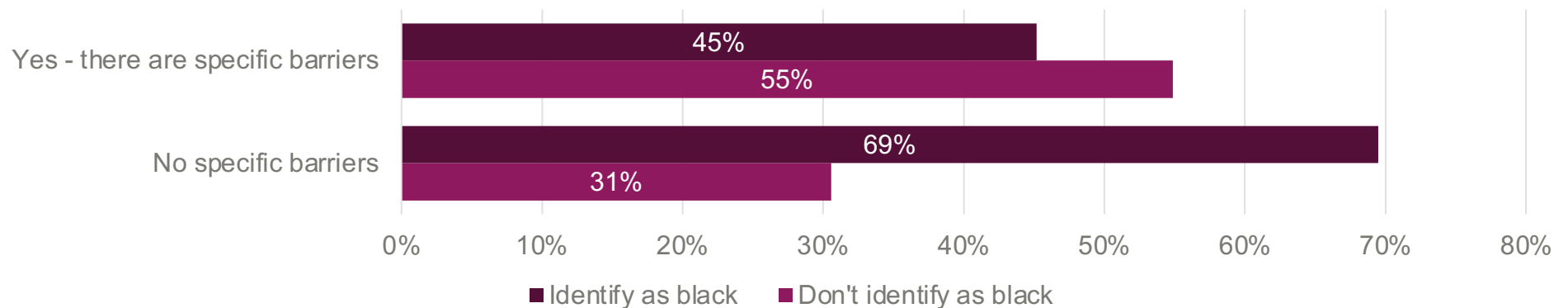
*“DON'T SEE MUCH ABOUT IT IN MY MAIN CHANNELS – E.G. SOCIAL MEDIA, NEWS ... JUST MEANS I DON'T SEE OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED OR DOESN'T CROSS MY RADAR.”*

- ALI,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT

# BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT ARE NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD

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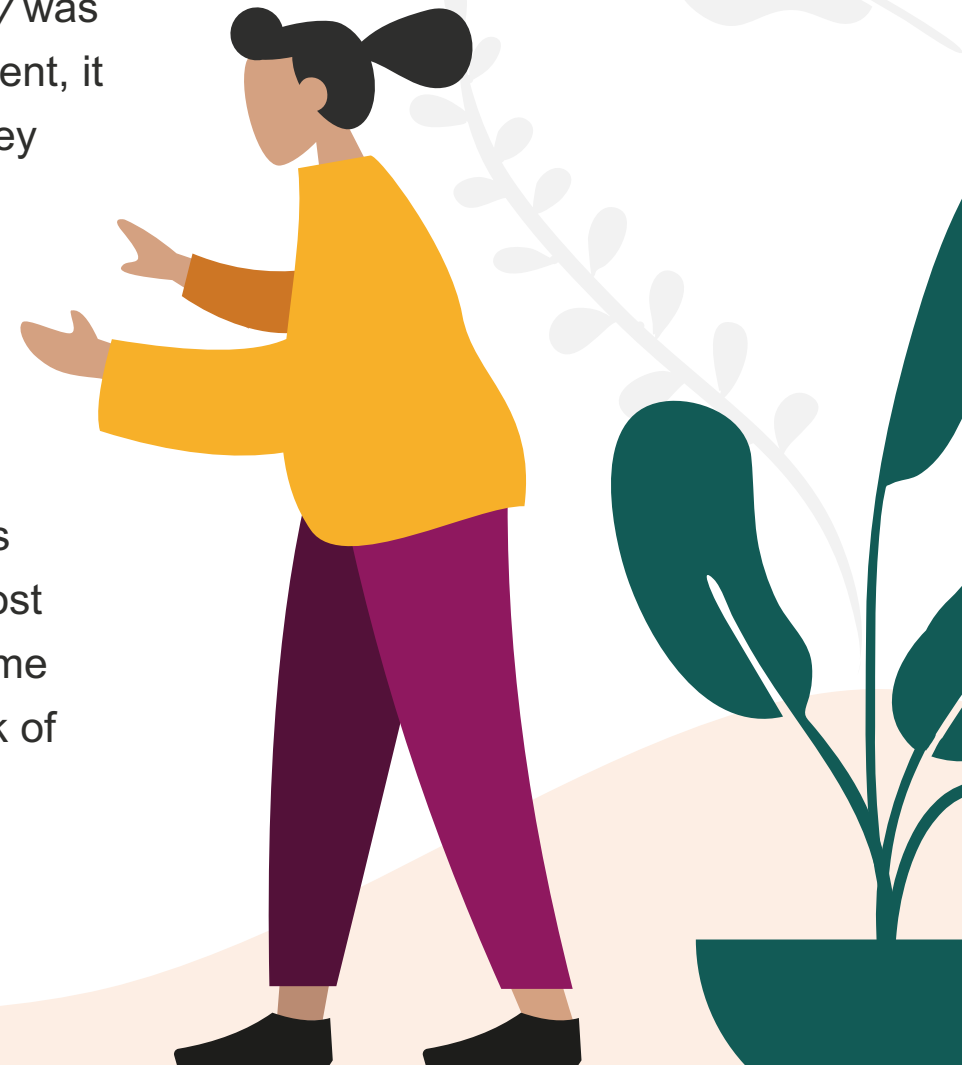
- Given the scope of this research project, there is a general understanding that the current voices in the air pollution agenda are not fully representative. While some organisations we interviewed showed an understanding of this reality, others did not. One of our research participants stated, “[The community] may not have noticed they may have had something implemented... but I don't believe it's fair to say people are not being heard on [the air pollution] issue.” This suggests a lack of understanding from institutions, that the voices currently being heard (even when they are voices of the “community”) are not representative.
- Interestingly, of those who said there were no specific barriers to minority communities engaging in the air pollution agenda, these individuals were more likely to have identified themselves as Black (as shown by the diagram below). This is particularly interesting because environmental racism was consistently ranked as the second most significant barrier to engaging in the agenda in a previous question which would appear to contradict the finding below.



## BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT ARE NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD (CONT.)

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- We asked survey respondents to rank the four barriers to engagement that had been identified in the literature review – language/accessibility, prioritisation, fear of speaking out and environmental racism. While *language/accessibility* was ranked as the third most significant barrier to engagement, it is important to remember that the ‘Have your say’ survey was only provided in English resulting in 85% of respondents being native English speakers. Therefore, it is possible that this barrier would rank more highly among communities speaking English as a second language.
- In the survey, space was also provided for respondents to share other barriers to engagement. Some of the most frequent barriers shared included: a lack of available time (6), a lack of awareness of how to get involved (5), lack of familiarity with the issue (3) and apathy/a sense of powerlessness (2).





*“FEEL LIKE MY VOICE WON’T  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”*

- JOSEPH,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT

# RAISING AWARENESS IS A POPULAR SHORT-TERM ACTION

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- Community members shared the need to raise awareness on air pollution and the inequities that exist – this means raising awareness with everyone, not just those who are impacted most by the issue. Key messages to share when raising awareness include:
  - Air pollution and poor air quality affects everyone
  - Air pollution is impacting some people more than others and we need to recognise who is particularly vulnerable
  - Some people/organisations are contributing to air pollution more than others and they need to be identified
- During the forum, community members shared that by controlling the digital narrative of air pollution activism, the community would be able to bypass others “hijacking” environmental activism. In addition, more education in schools and working with young people was highlighted in the survey as a popular route for raising awareness both among children and parents.
- Even among the individuals and organisations we interviewed, many of them spoke to some of their biggest achievements being the number of people they were able to engage in their activities.

A photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a cyclist wearing a dark jacket and a helmet is riding a bicycle on a paved sidewalk. To the left, a double-decker bus is stopped at a bus stop. The bus has 'Marble Arch 159' displayed on its destination sign. The bus is white with a dark lower section. The background shows a street with trees, a building, and a few pedestrians. The entire image has a semi-transparent purple overlay.

**Research conducted by Natural England found that:**

- **63% of the white British population visited green spaces weekly, compared to just 46% of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic British population<sup>3</sup>**
- **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Britons are exposed to particulate matter pollution at rates 19-29% higher than White Britons<sup>4</sup>**

# THERE IS LESS CERTAINTY ON EFFECTIVE LONG-TERM ACTIONS

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- At present, there is a lack of understanding in how the current system works, such as how policies are made or how local councils distribute funding, and this results in local communities not knowing where there are opportunities to influence change. Beyond raising awareness, the community members we spoke to during the forum struggled to see where else they could have an impact.
- The forum members were keen to advocate for more green, open spaces as “*there is no Richmond Park of South London*”. The larger green spaces that are available are plagued by crime, with a lack of necessities such as appropriate lighting and accessible toilets. However, how this would practically be achieved was unknown.
- Through our conversations with the forum and organisations, we identified that short-term and long-term actions need to operate at different levels; from the individual to the system. This could include:
  - Reducing personal air pollution contributions
  - Reducing daily exposure to air pollution
  - Increasing the costs of inaction (political, social, financial, etc.)
  - Influencing policies

*“WORK WITH CREATIVE YOUNG PEOPLE TO  
DEVELOP ADVERTS AND SCHOOL PROJECTS.”*

– ELIZABETH,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT

# COLLABORATION IS KEY TO TACKLING THE PROBLEM

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- Our interviews highlighted that existing environmental organisations are already collaborating, but more funding is needed to promote further collaboration.
- In collaborating, the individuals, communities and organisations coming together should align on a long-term vision while having the freedom to approach air pollution from their own perspective. Each community needs a champion that will advocate for them and their lived experience, ensuring that others are informed of how air pollution interacts with other social issues.
- During our interviews, two barriers to collaboration were identified - power dynamics and generational differences. What is particularly interesting is that the power dynamics were identified by an individual specifically working on policy change while the generational differences were identified by an individual from a relatively young campaign group. Therefore, as we bring more community voices into this space, it is important to ensure that those facilitating these conversations are aware of the potential barriers to hearing the voices of those seated around the table.



**Two million Londoners - including more than 400,000 children - are living in areas which exceed legal limits for air pollution<sup>5</sup>**

# ADDITIONAL CONTEXT PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

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## Do you have any additional insight/context as a community researcher?

- Given the current context of COVID-19, people feel empowered to make a change and take action on social issues. There is a heightened wave of self-determination spreading through communities.
- Communities need to be given transferable skills so that the skills gained from tackling the inequalities in air pollution can be applied to tackle other social and environmental issues. This will ensure that communities are increasingly able to own the issues that impact them.

*“It’s not yet a norm within our culture for us to feel our voices and opinions are valued enough to create the necessary changes which is why I think we can see such an institutional disconnect in these conversations where it counts. I heard a massive silence in the space where community problem solving should be and I think that this should be our next point of action moving forward.”*

**- Muhammed Rauf,  
Community Researcher**





*“AIR POLLUTION IS AFFECTING DAILY LIFE BUT  
WILL HAVE MORE IMPACT ON FUTURE  
GENERATIONS THEREFORE NEEDS TO BE  
LOCKED DOWN BEFORE CRISIS POINT.”*

- ABDUL,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT



## FEMI'S JOURNEY, COMMUNITY RESEARCHER

My views on the air pollution agenda before being on the project was that air pollution was a massive problem living in such a populated city, but it has just been recognised by the government and they have only scratched the surface when it comes to dealing with the issue, such as Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) and Santander bikes.

Through this project, I have learned how much we are affected by air pollution and how little power we have to reverse it by acting alone. My view has changed somewhat as to how we can find a solution for it without having a massive paradigm shift from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy. For example, air filtration, plants at home and the need to have regular trips out of the smog.

**#04:**  
RECOMMENDATIONS

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*“ALL GREAT IN EDUCATING, BUT WE NEED HELP TO BE ABLE TO HOLD PEOPLE TO ACCOUNT AND DRIVE CHANGE FROM THE COMMUNITY. GIVE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY SOME PR TRAINING, ENGAGE THE MEDIA. SHOW THE TRUE HARSH SAD TRUTH. MANY ISSUES STEM FROM THE COMMUNITIES LACK OF ABILITY TO COME TOGETHER. (WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE TO DIE FIRST?)”*

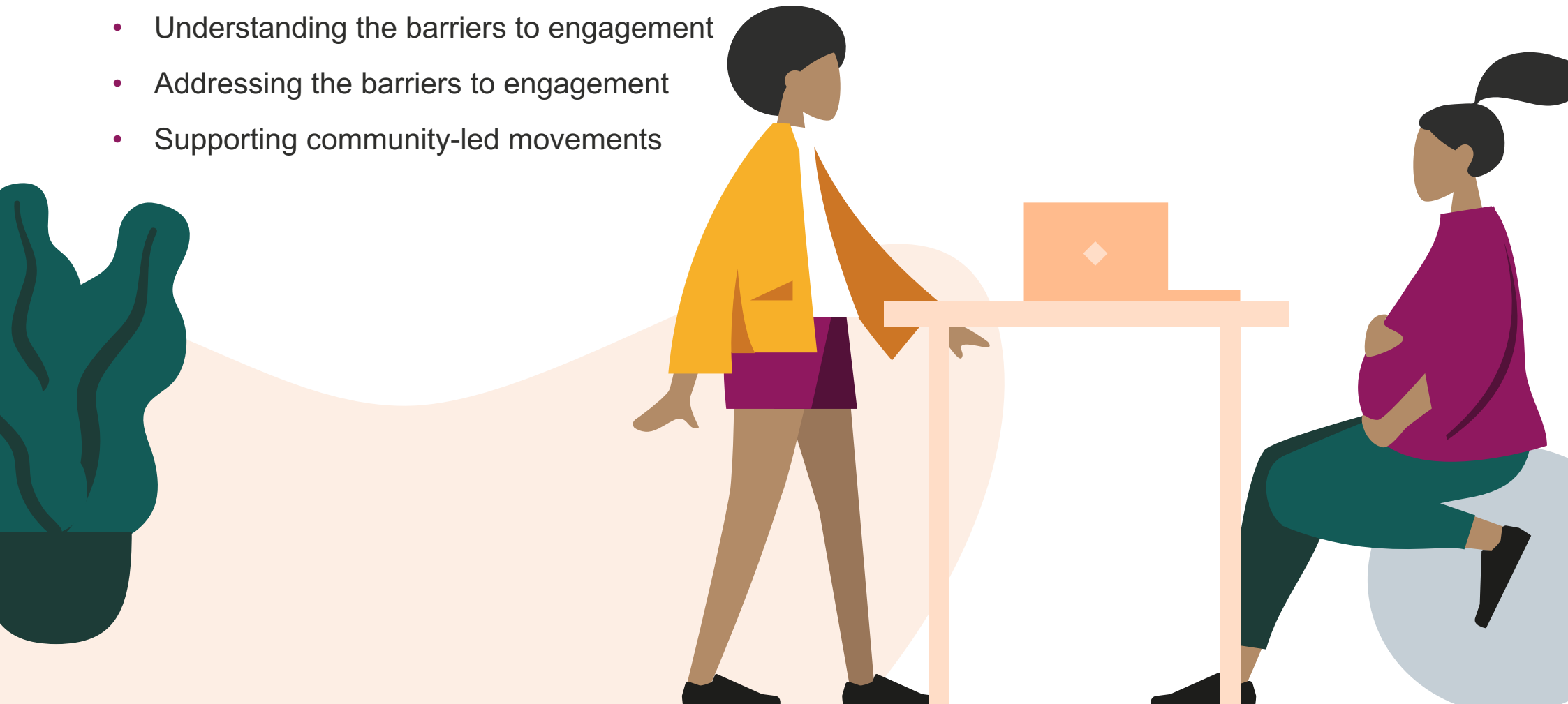
– NATASHA,  
SURVEY RESPONDENT

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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In the following slides, we provide recommendations for Impact on Urban Health and other funders on steps that can be taken increase and amplify the voices of underrepresented communities in the air pollution agenda. We present these recommendations by showing how they link back to our initial research questions which looked at:

- Understanding the barriers to engagement
- Addressing the barriers to engagement
- Supporting community-led movements



# UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

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## Our research questions

- **How can air pollution become an agenda that is relevant to and inclusive of underrepresented communities?**
- **Which of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution are more significant in different underrepresented communities?**

## Our recommendations

1. **Conduct further research into the barriers to engagement for different underrepresented communities**, particularly communities that speak English as a second language, by establishing relationships with local community organisations.
2. **Explore opportunities for researchers from the community and researchers from academic institutions to conduct new research** into air pollution that builds on their lived experience of air pollution.
3. Explore and share the links between air pollution and other social issues that underrepresented communities are already engaging with.

# ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

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## Our research questions

- **How can each of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution be addressed?**
- **What are the most effective ways to educate underrepresented communities on the impacts of air pollution?**
- **How do the solutions to increase representation in air pollution differ for different underrepresented communities?**

## Our recommendations

1. **Re-launch the Air Pollution Forum as a local community-led action group that could start by leading a community-led campaign to increase public understanding about air pollution.** Participants should be reimbursed for their time and provided with a small funding pot to carry out their actions. The group's work could be informed by [Clean Air in London's 10 Steps for Clean Air](#).
2. Find local champions from the neighbourhoods worst affected by air pollution to promote awareness in those areas, offering them opportunities to upskill in relevant areas (e.g., public speaking).
3. Collaborate with underrepresented communities to co-design new ways to engage them in the air pollution agenda.

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-LED MOVEMENTS

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## Our research question

- **How would a community-led environmental group operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

## Our recommendations

1. **Provide funding** to explore how local communities, grassroots movements and policymakers can best work together.
2. **Collaborate with other local environmental organisations to outline what allyship looks like within the air pollution agenda.** Create a code that individuals and organisations operating in this space can publicly sign up to.
3. **Advocate for more progressive MPs and councillors from underrepresented backgrounds** who can speak from lived experience on the air pollution agenda.
4. Explore opportunities to engage local businesses in reducing air pollution.



# #05: CONCLUSION

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## WHAT DID WE FIND OVERALL?

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Our research into air pollution in South London has highlighted just how little our communities understand the severity of the issue and the urgency at which it needs to be addressed. For this to happen, people need to become more aware of air pollution and its impacts in general as well as how air pollution impacts them personally and where their own lived experience fits into the narrative. Furthermore, beyond raising awareness, underrepresented communities need to be shown what can practically be done to influence the air pollution agenda and improve local air quality.

In this report, we offer a range of practical next steps. These recommendations include recruiting local champions, re-launching the Air Pollution Forum and greater collaboration with existing environmental organisations and other institutions.

The most valuable outcome from our research was bringing together a group of local people who have been informed and now feel empowered to make a change. This mobilisation of the community is what we need to continue - and succeed in – within our work towards achieving clean air for all.

# APPENDIX

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# SURVEY QUESTIONS

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- Please choose your London home postcode district
- What is your age?
- What gender do you identify as?
- Do you have any children?
- What is your first language(s)?
- Are you living with a lung or heart condition?
- What country were you born in?
- What ethnicity/ethnicities do you identify as?
- Do you identify as Black?
- What do you think are your main sources of cultural identity?

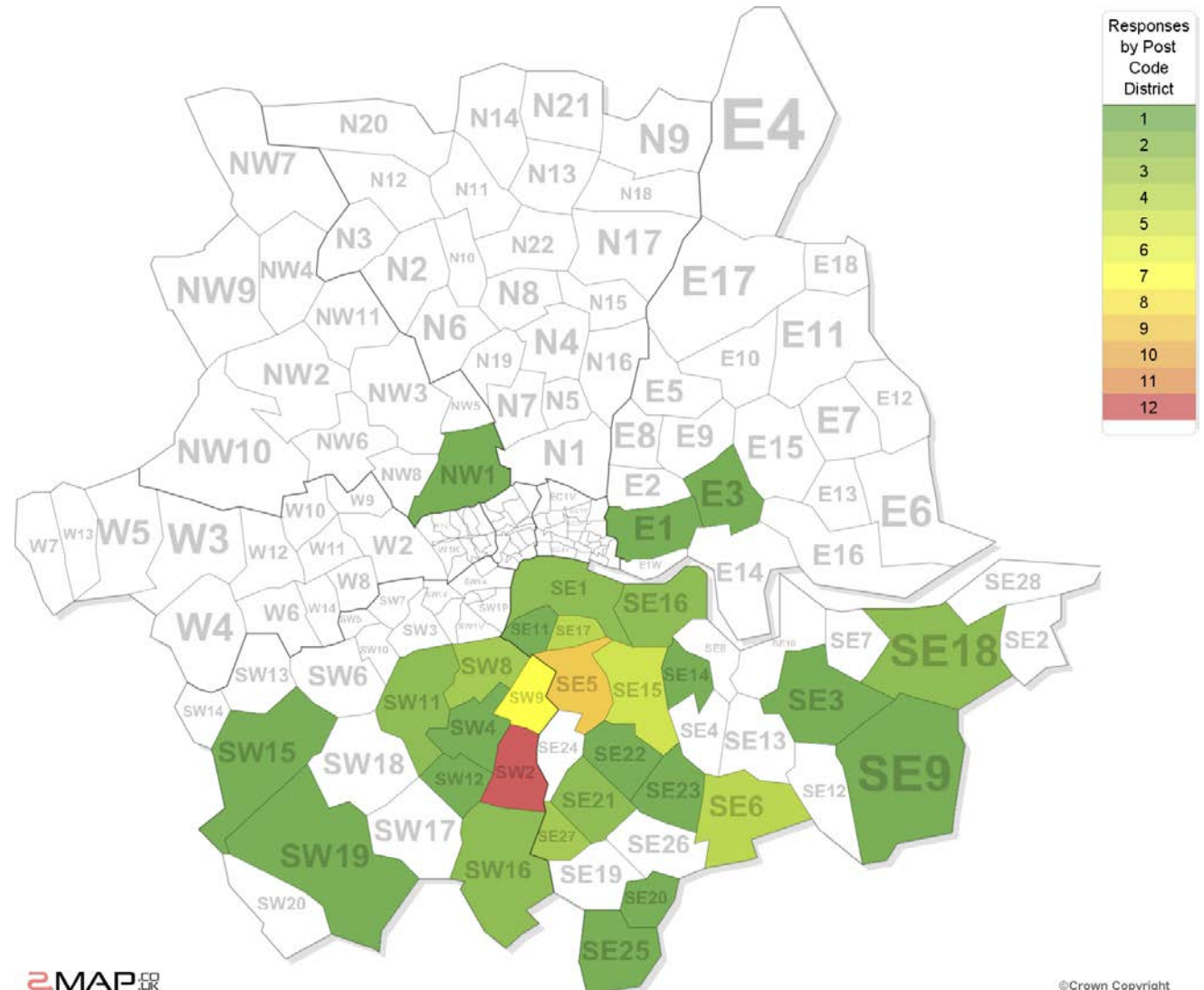
## SURVEY QUESTIONS (CONT.)

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- How much do you care about air quality in your local area?
- Do you think air pollution is an issue in your local area?
- Do you think air pollution affects you personally?
- How familiar are you with the air pollution agenda?
- Are you interested in the air pollution agenda?
- Have you ever engaged in any activities related to air pollution?
- Below are a list of barriers that stop people from getting involved in the air pollution agenda that we have identified through our research. For you personally, how would you order the following barriers?
- Are there any other barriers to you getting involved in the air pollution agenda that are not listed above?
- Do you think there are specific barriers to people from minority communities being involved in the air pollution agenda?
- Which of the following activities do you think could get more people from minority communities involved in the air pollution agenda?
- Are there any other activities that you think could get more minority communities involved in the air pollution agenda?
- Would you be interested in joining a community-led environmental group?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

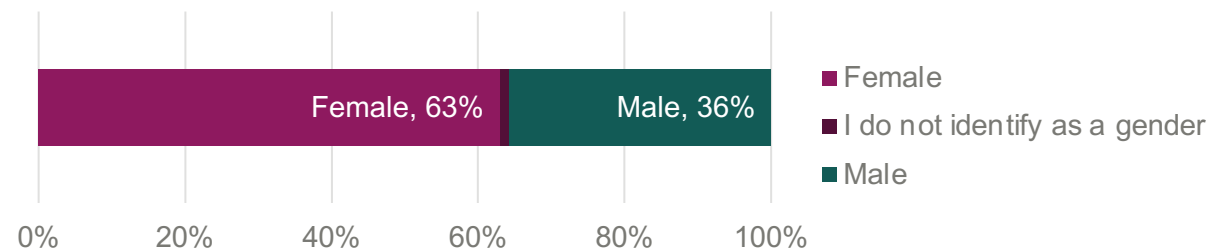
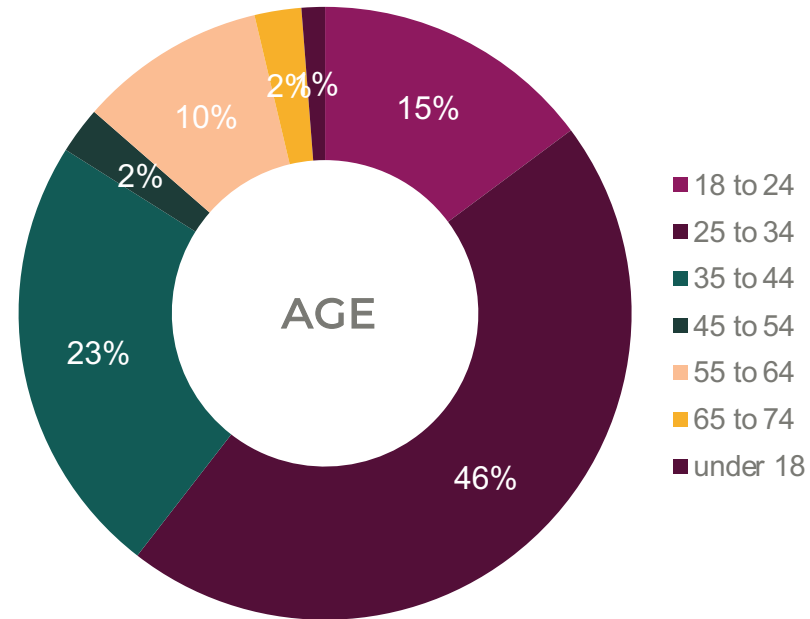
# OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- In total 81 responses were obtained through the community research contacts, local organisations and social media.
- Responses were largely centred around Lambeth and Southwark (68%), though there were some further responses from other part of south London and further afield including a few on the outskirts of London.



# OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS (CONT.)

- A range of ages but mostly aged between 25 and 44.
- More women than men.
- Just over half have no children, with the majority of the rest having at least one child under 18.
- In terms of health, 10% of respondents have a lung condition and 2% a heart condition.



## DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?



## OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS (CONT.)

- 85% of respondents are native English speakers, with the remaining having languages including Akan/ Twi fante, Bengali, Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Urdu and Yoruba.
- 67% of respondents were born in the UK – with the rest born in Nigeria, Jamaica, Ghana and 14 other countries.
- Respondents self defined their ethnicities in a number of ways. 57% self identify as Black.
- Most people ranked ethnicity as the main source of cultural identity.



### DO YOU IDENTIFY AS BLACK?



- No
- Prefer not to say
- Yes



# SOURCES

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<sup>1</sup> [London Councils](#)

<sup>2</sup> [London Air](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Natural England](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Natural England](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Mayor for London](#)

Thank you!

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**TSIP**