Somewhere to go: an evaluation of the Wyndham and Comber estate half-court

How the half-court contributes to residents' health and wellbeing.

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Supported by

Southwark Council

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ABOUT THIS EVALUATION

Southwark Council commissioned this evaluation, which was completed without financial compensation under a Memorandum of Understanding. The evaluation was conducted independently. Southwark Council supported participant recruitment through existing contacts, but was not involved in data collection or analysis.

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Contents

	Executive summary	4
	Abbreviations, figures and tables	6
1	**Background**	7
	Evaluation question and aims	8
2	**What we did**	9
	2.1 Data collection	10
	2.2 Analysis	11
3	**What we found**	12
	3.1 Participants	12
	3.2 Consultation and design process	12
	3.3 Use, access and reach	13
	3.4 Outcomes delivered by the court	15
	3.5 How the court works	18
4	**What this means**	20
	4.1 Development, commissioning, design and consultation	20
	4.2 Outcomes of the facility for residents	20
	4.3 How the facility produces its effects	20
	4.4 Strengths and limitations of the evaluation	21
5	**What we learnt**	22
	References	24

Executive summary

In March 2026 a half-court for basketball and football opened on the Wyndham and Comber estate in Camberwell, Southwark. It was funded by the council's Public Health team and drew on findings from a 2024 resident consultation about estate priorities. This evaluation sought to understand how the half-court contributed to residents' health and wellbeing and what lessons can be learnt.

The mixed-methods evaluation used a realist-informed approach, asking what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why. Methods comprised a review of council documents, mapping of the court's location against nearby green space and sports facilities, a resident survey (29 responses), and interviews with 6 professionals and 14 residents, including two young people. Interview transcripts were analysed using an artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted pipeline, with researcher review. Triangulation of findings across data sources focused on understanding what works with regard to the half-court and the mechanisms through which outcomes were achieved.

49
people took part: 29 surveyed, 14 residents and 6 professionals interviewed

12 → 2.5
minutes: median walk for Comber residents to an open-access court or pitch

4
features help explain the outcomes

Findings revealed that the court was well used by a wide range of people, with the primary user group being boys between the ages of roughly 8 and 16. The court appeared to be most used by residents living directly beside it (within a 2 to 3-minute walk) on the Comber estate. For Comber residents, their median walk to an openly accessible ball court or pitch reduced from roughly 12 to 2.5 minutes.

Resident participants reported many benefits: children made friends, parents met on the bench, a place was created for young people to do physical activity and possibly avoid being drawn into crime.

Initial complaints of noise were mitigated by locally imposed opening hours (enforced by locking the court). Views on this were split. Some residents complained of antisocial behaviour at the court, but professionals interviewed thought this reflected existing behaviour that now took place at the court, rather than an overall increase.

Four features of the court help to explain these outcomes: **proximity** to people's dwellings, **safety** through enclosure of the court, **local ownership** and the **quality and fit for purpose** of the court.

Limitations of this evaluation include the relatively small sample sizes and limited recruitment beyond the Comber estate. We report perceptions of the court's impact on health and physical activity through qualitative approaches. The court had been open for around six months at the time of evaluation, which allows limited time for the development of expected outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both residents and professionals participating in the evaluation felt the court brought many benefits to the estate, including feelings of social connectedness, and a place for young people to go. The success appeared to come from the court being hyperlocal, which also allowed (and benefited from) local problem solving. The implication of this for scaling the observed benefits would, therefore, suggest a similarly hyperlocal approach; a network of relatively small local interventions.

WHAT WE LEARNT

1. Coproduction with residents needs to be followed through and continued.
2. Engage with a wide range of local and professional stakeholders beforehand to ensure buy-in for the facility.
3. Ensure high quality and durable equipment is used.
4. Agree long-term maintenance and responsibility before the court opens.
5. Consider inclusion by design from the outset of developing the court.
6. Small, non-traditional sports spaces appear to offer high value to people living nearby, especially given their relatively low cost.

Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
API	application programming interface
CCTV	closed-circuit television
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
GIS	geographical information system
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
NHS	National Health Service
ODbL	Open Database Licence
OS	Ordnance Survey
QR	quick response (code)
TRA	Tenants and Residents Association
WHO	World Health Organization

Figures and tables

FIGURES

Figure 1	Photographs of the site before (left) and after (right) the half-court was built
Figure 2	Location of the half-court on Redcar Street within the Comber estate
Figure 3	IMD 2025 decile for each LSOA around the court
Figure 4	Open-access green spaces and sport and recreation facilities within 5-, 10-, and 15-minute walking catchments of the court
Figure 5	Perceptions regarding the inception of the court and whether it met an unmet need (n=28)
Figure 6	Survey participants' perceptions of the court (n=29)

TABLES

Table 1	Participants involved in the evaluation

SECTION 1

1 Background

Physical inactivity is one of the leading modifiable risk factors for non-communicable disease and premature mortality, contributing to the burden of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and poor mental health.[1] The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults undertake at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week,[2] yet the Active Lives Adult Survey Report found 35.4% did not meet this threshold.[3] For children and young people aged 5 to 17, the WHO recommends an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity per day.[2] Physical inactivity has been estimated to cost the National Health Service (NHS) £1.06 billion per year.[4] A report by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities found that among people in the most deprived decile of English neighbourhoods, just over half meet physical activity thresholds, compared with three-quarters of those in the least deprived areas.[5]

Public health experts have highlighted that physical activity should be understood not as an individual choice, but as a product of the conditions and places in which people live.[6] The availability, quality, and affordability of places to be active form part of the physical environment that shapes population activity levels. Outdoor sports facilities are more than places to exercise; they serve as a location for play and social interaction. Community cohesion and social capital are recognised determinants of wellbeing and are associated with better mental and physical health outcomes.[7,8] For many people, the social dimension is an important driver of participation in physical activity.[9]

In 2024, Southwark Council's Resident Health and Wellbeing Programme worked with residents of the Wyndham and Comber estate to understand what interventions could improve their health and wellbeing. This exercise was led by the organisation Social Life and included a survey of 68 residents and a workshop in August 2024. Residents asked for more activities for children and families, better use of the community hall, and for the estate's sports cage (a multi-use games area) to be reopened. This last request could not be actioned as the sports cage is closed while heating works are underway on the estate.

One outcome of the consultations was a decision to create a new half-court for basketball and football, to be built on a space that children already used for informal games. The half-court (Figure 1) opened in March 2026 and cost £50,000. Funds were provided by the Public Health team at Southwark Council. An additional £42,700 for maintenance of the court was provided by the developer of a new development on Wyndham and Comber, through a section 106 agreement.

£50,000
cost of the court, funded by Southwark Council's Public Health team

£42,700
for maintenance of the court, provided by the developer through a section 106 agreement

March 2026
the half-court opened

The initial programme theory was set out in the logic model developed by Social Life and confirmed through informal conversations between the research team and Southwark Council. The programme theory set out how developing the court would increase physical activity and social connectedness among residents of the estate, especially young people. This outcome would be achieved by making the space a designated sports area with the necessary equipment.



Figure 1. Photographs of the site before (left) and after (right) the half-court was built

This evaluation examines the impact of the half-court, approximately six months after it opened, against its intended outcomes of increased physical activity and social connectedness.

PRIMARY EVALUATION QUESTION

How does the half-court on the Wyndham and Comber estate contribute to residents' health and wellbeing and what lessons can be learnt?

Specifically, the evaluation aimed to:

1. Examine how the facility was developed, including the commissioning, design, and consultation process.
2. Assess the outcomes of the facility for residents, including whether it met their needs, whether it improved young people's access to and opportunities for physical activity, and the perceived social value of the space, including social connectedness and community cohesion.
3. Examine how the facility produced its effects by identifying the mechanisms through which it supported, or failed to support, residents' wellbeing, together with the contextual conditions that enabled or constrained the operation of these mechanisms across different groups.
4. Understand how the facility could be improved over time and identify lessons for local decision makers.

SECTION 2

2 What we did

To answer these questions, we adopted a realist-informed approach.[10] Rather than asking only whether the half-court works, a realist evaluation asks what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why.

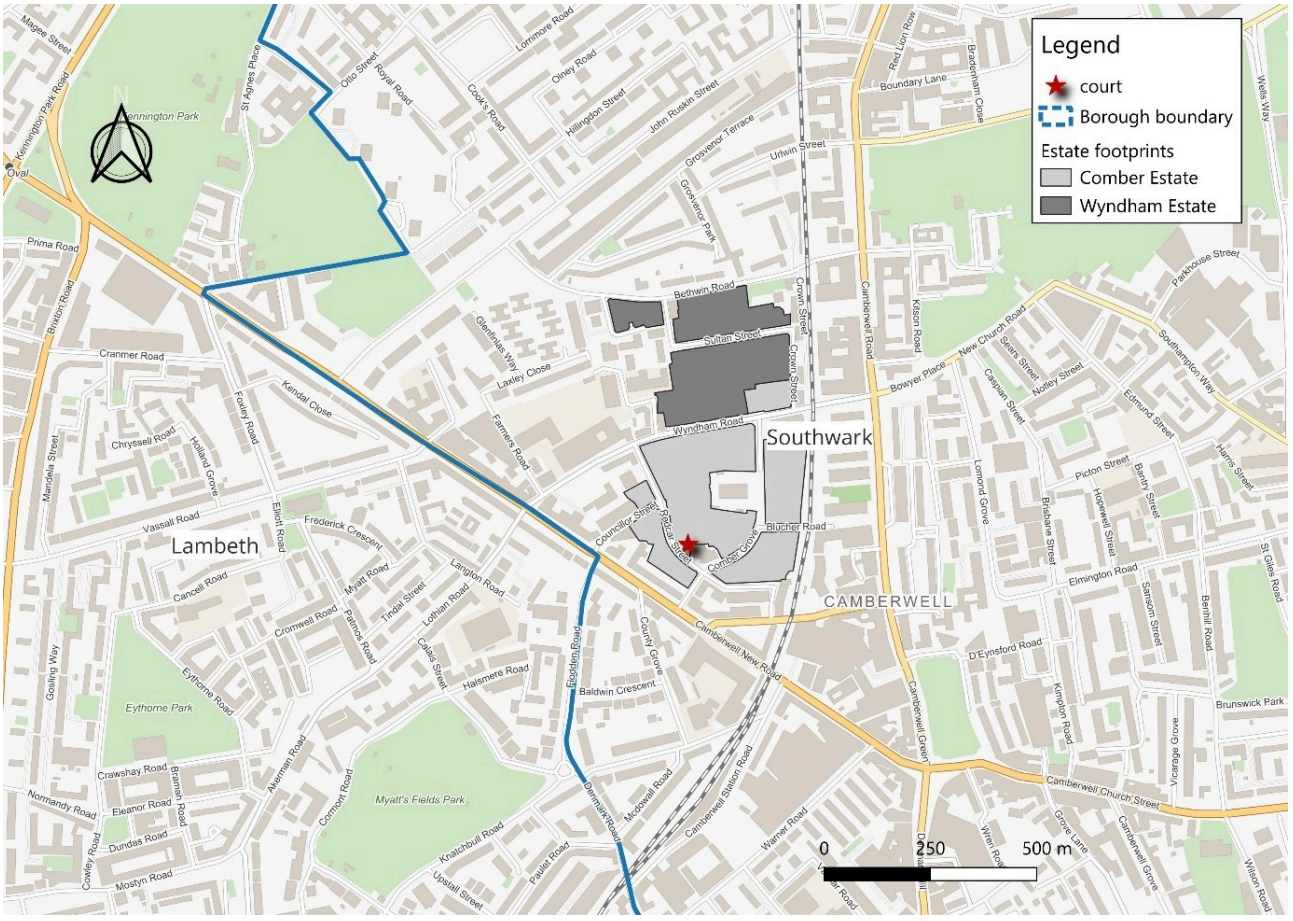


Figure 2. Location of the half-court on Redcar Street within the Comber estate, and the neighbouring Wyndham estate to the north across Wyndham Road, Camberwell, London Borough of Southwark. The Southwark–Lambeth borough boundary runs along Camberwell New Road (A202) immediately south-west of the estate.

The Wyndham and Comber estate (Figure 2) is a large mixed-tenure residential area managed by the London Borough of Southwark in Camberwell, south London. The estate is predominantly located within neighbourhoods that fall in decile 3 on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (see Figure 3), placing them among the 30% most deprived areas in England.

Wyndham and Comber estate is part of the Camberwell Green electoral ward in Southwark. Camberwell Green is ethnically diverse; 40% of residents are White, 35% Black British, and 8% Asian. Southwark is one of the most economically deprived boroughs in England and 52% of houses in Camberwell Green are socially rented.[11] The Social Life interim report highlighted concerns around isolation and loneliness, long-term conditions, overcrowding, and older people living in poverty.

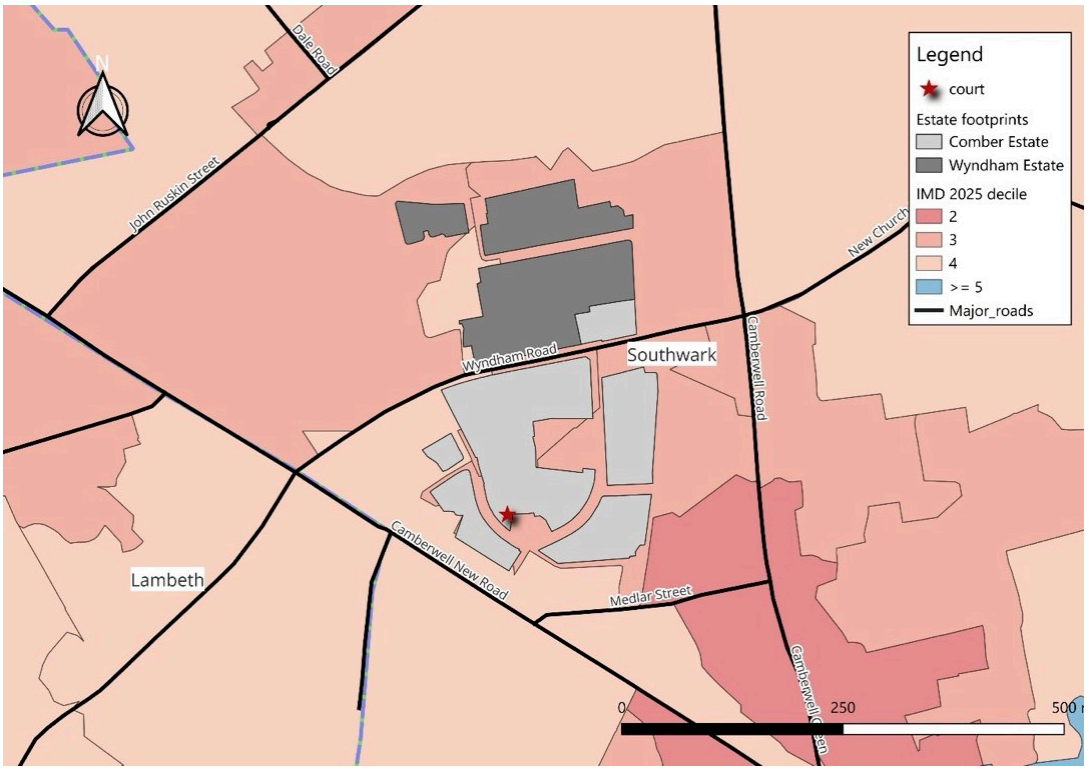


Figure 3. IMD 2025 decile for each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) around the court (1 = most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England). The estates fall primarily within decile 3.

2.1 Data collection

The evaluation drew on multiple data sources: document review, spatial analysis, a resident survey, and interviews with professionals and residents. These are described briefly below.

Documents	Existing documents relating to the court were provided by Southwark Council and reviewed. These included reports from the initial consultation and co-design phase of the Resident Health and Wellbeing Programme, email correspondence, and planning documentation. Documents were used to establish the needs residents had identified, what was built and how, and to inform survey and interview questions.
Spatial analysis	For the spatial analysis, a geographical information system (GIS) was created, drawing on open-access maps and data. The GIS was used to map the location of the court relative to schools, other sports facilities, and green space.
Survey	A short online survey was used to collect data on residents' awareness and use of the court, their reasons for using or not using it, and their views on its value for physical activity, social connection, and community cohesion. Multiple approaches were used for survey recruitment: leaflets posted around the relevant areas, distribution through key contacts, and the estate WhatsApp group. The survey collected 29 responses.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with professionals and residents. Interviews explored the planning and development process as well as perspectives on the benefits and challenges related to ongoing use of the court.

Interviews with professionals and residents were conducted between July and September 2026. We started with a standard list of questions developed specifically for realist approaches to evaluation and adapted it to this evaluation's research questions.[12]

Professionals

Professionals involved in the development, running, or upkeep of the court were identified with the support of Southwark Council. These included roles such as council officers, contractors, the police, and others involved in developing the court or in the earlier health and wellbeing consultation. Potential participants were contacted by email and provided with a participant information sheet before agreeing to take part. Professional interviews were conducted by phone and on Microsoft Teams.

Residents

Residents were recruited through existing contacts, leaflets with QR codes distributed around the court, and direct approaches at the court during four site visits, timed for when children were most likely to be there. Resident interviews were conducted by phone or in person and lasted between 5 and 30 minutes. All participants gave informed consent for the interview and for it to be recorded. Residents who took part were offered a voucher to thank them for their time, and juice boxes were provided for accompanying family members.

ETHICS AND DATA PROTECTION

This was a service evaluation commissioned by Southwark Council and thus formal ethics approval was not required. It was, nonetheless, conducted in line with established ethical principles for evaluation and social research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, DBS-checked researchers and the council's safeguarding procedures. Southwark Council is the data controller for the evaluation.

2.2 Analysis

Documents provided by Southwark Council were pseudonymised and analysed thematically. Survey data were summarised descriptively (as counts and proportions), and the open responses were analysed thematically.

For the interview data, a coding framework was developed by the research team in line with the research questions and iterated as early data collection progressed. Recordings of interviews were used to generate transcripts using Microsoft transcription tools. The research team subsequently pseudonymised each transcript, cleaned it, and checked it for accuracy. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using a custom AI-assisted pipeline (developed by Reflexivity Ltd, using Claude Opus 5.5 via the Anthropic API). The pipeline carried out first-pass coding against the coding framework, with researcher review and recoding where needed.

Findings from the document review, spatial analysis, survey, and interviews were then triangulated, focusing on understanding what works with regard to the half-court and the mechanisms through which outcomes were achieved.

SECTION 3

3 What we found

This section first outlines the details of participants in the research (Section 3.1), followed by key findings: Section 3.2 presents findings from the consultation and design process; Section 3.3 presents findings related to the use of the court; Section 3.4 presents findings related to whether court *outcomes* were achieved; and Section 3.5 provides analysis of the *mechanisms* by which outcomes were achieved.

3.1 Participants

A total of 49 people took part in the evaluation: 6 professionals and 14 residents (including two young people under 18) provided interviews, and 29 residents responded to the survey (Table 1).

We did not systematically capture interviewees' characteristics. All lived on the Wyndham and Comber estate, and they included a mixture of people who did and did not use the court. Five used the court themselves or visited it with their children. Nine did not use it but lived locally and saw people using it or were involved with the Tenants and Residents Association (TRA).

Table 1. Participants involved in the evaluation

Participants	n
Professionals (interviews)	6
Adult residents (interviews)	12
Young people (interviews)	2
Survey respondents	29
Total	**49**

3.2 Consultation and design process

Resident Health and Wellbeing Programme consultation

Ahead of the development of the half-court, Southwark Council's Resident Health and Wellbeing Programme ran a consultation with residents, through Social Life (described in Section 1). As well as the priorities set out in Section 1, residents most often identified teenagers and young people (particularly girls) and older people as needing extra support.

The original site of the court (Figure 1, left-hand image) was described as an open concrete area with a painted goal, a low wall, and a worn hoop. Accounts differed as to how much it was used, and one resident noted problems with vandalism. Many residents said it was not safe, as balls would often go over the wall onto the road. As a result, young people would often play ball games around the estate, not in designated areas, resulting in frustration for other residents.

Awareness of the consultation among participants of this evaluation was mixed: some had no idea how the court came about, while others knew about the consultation but did not take part. Only 5 of 29 survey respondents and 4 of 20 interviewees remembered taking part. Those who were involved described an intensive process. However, they were frustrated that communication had not continued during and after the build, and they were unclear how some decisions were made. For example, residents had chosen the colour of the court, but the contractor painted it a different colour by mistake. While the contractor subsequently provided a free bin and bench by way of apology, many residents were unaware that these features were a result of the initial oversight. One resident also said that CCTV and lighting had been discussed during the consultation, but neither was provided.

The lack of clear communication around the half-court also resulted in some safety issues. To meet safety standards, the court has two gates, which provide multiple exits so that no one can be trapped inside. However, residents were not aware of this and permanently locked one gate to better manage opening and closing times.

Stakeholder involvement

In addition to the consultation with the residents, many professional stakeholders were also involved in the design and maintenance of the court. These included the police, developers, the Cleaner Greener team, building contractors, and a member of the public with expertise in basketball courts. This co-design approach was intended to secure buy-in from local stakeholders for the court's location, materials used, and funding for ongoing maintenance.

3.3 Use, access and reach

The court was used primarily by residents of the Comber estate living within the area bounded by Camberwell New Road, Camberwell Road, Wyndham Road, and Medlar Street (see Figure 4). Within this group of residents, it was especially popular with people whose flats directly overlooked it. Proximity to people's homes encouraged use of the half-court. Twenty survey respondents lived less than five minutes from the court, and all the court users interviewed lived within a couple of minutes' walk. It was difficult to find people who were aware of the court, or willing to speak about it, who did not live in its immediate vicinity. While sampling did not explicitly target people who lived further away from the court, nevertheless, this finding supports the idea that most users are, in fact, very local. Spatial analysis showed that for Comber residents the creation of the court reduced the median walking time to an openly accessible ball court or pitch from 12 to 2.5 minutes.

12 → 2.5 minutes

For residents on the Comber estate, the court reduced the median walk to a court or pitch from 12 to 2.5 minutes.

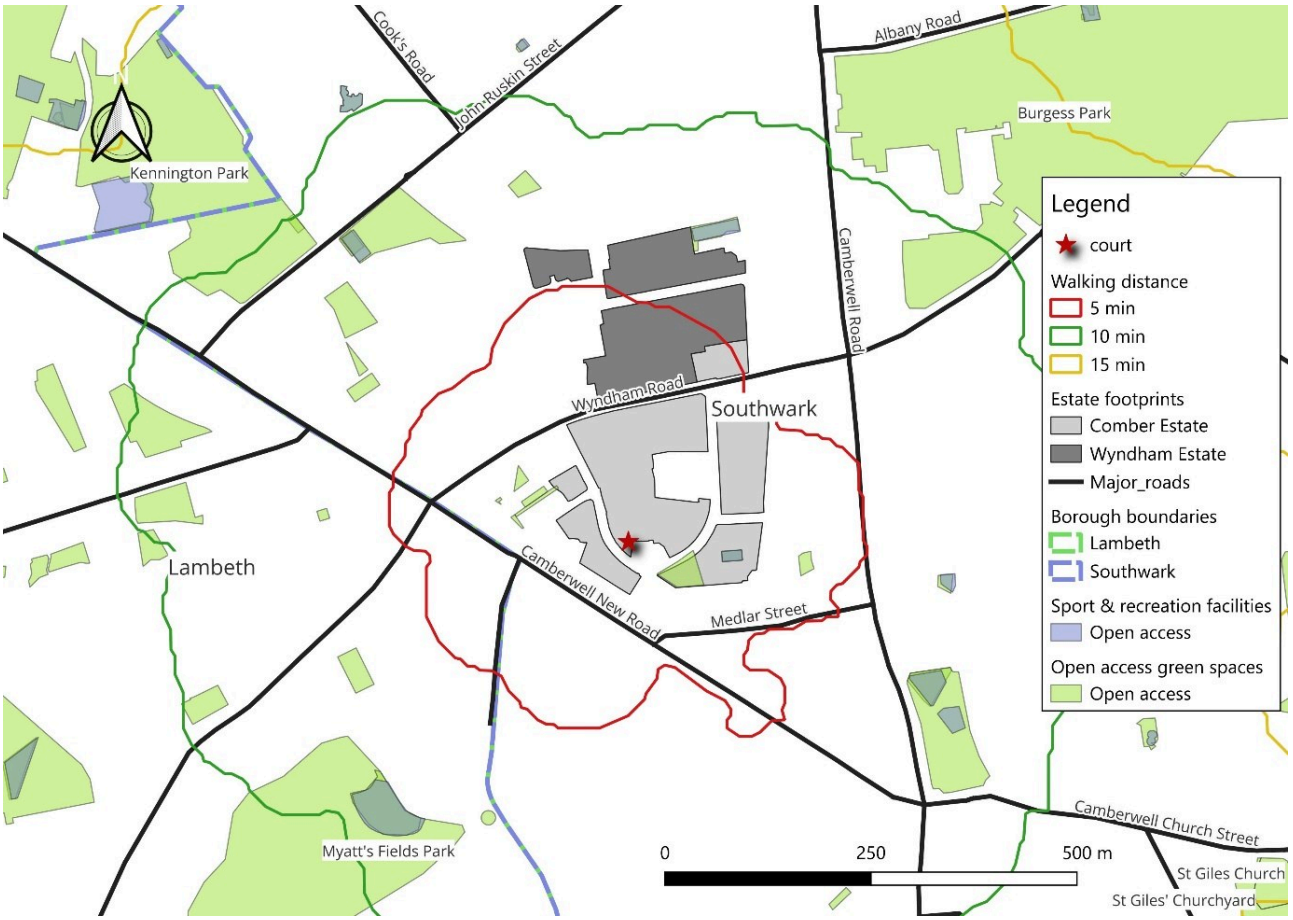


Figure 4. Open-access green spaces and open-access sport and recreation facilities within the 5-, 10-, and 15-minute walking catchments of the court. Myatt's Fields Park straddles the south-western edge of the 10-minute catchment and Burgess Park lies beyond it to the north-east, within 15 minutes; little open-access green space or sport provision lies within five minutes.

The court was particularly popular after school, during the holidays, and on weekends. Generally, it was considered well used. One resident noted, *"every time I come past [...] after school it is used quite a lot with young families [...]"* (R010). The main users of the court were reported to be boys between roughly the ages of 8 and 16, although girls of the same age range and, sometimes, small children used it too. Some parents felt it was not safe for small children when older children played ball games.

Older residents were not considered users, and one long-standing resident said there was nowhere for older people to sit and talk, saying, *"there's nothing left for us here"* (R011). However, another older resident enjoyed watching the children play.

> **there's nothing left for us here**
>
> **Resident, R011**

Although not primary users, parents frequently came to the court with their children and sat on the bench. One resident said, *"we get a lot of adults going there with their really small children to roll a ball around because obviously it's enclosed so they can let their children run around so it's quite nice to have that bench for them to sit on"* (R008). This resulted in mixing and friendships between parents as well as children.

Of survey respondents who used the court, a third played basketball, a third played football, and a third watched or sat nearby. The court was also used for things other than sport, including picnics and dancing.

⅓	⅓	⅓
played basketball	played football	watched or sat nearby

Survey respondents who used the court

The main access challenge identified was opening times. Following complaints about noise and antisocial behaviour at night in the summer of 2026, after it opened (see Section 3.4), the TRA put its own locks on the court and now locks it between 7.30pm and 7am.

Residents were split on this: some families were upset that the 7.30pm closure ended spontaneous visits and wanted longer opening hours, while others welcomed it on school nights and for the reduction in noise. One survey respondent said, *"I don't think it should be locked at 7.30pm in the school holidays. 9pm is a decent time for it to be locked as children still play there until 9"*; another said, *"Before the locks were there, it was absolutely horrendous and had no control over the place"*.

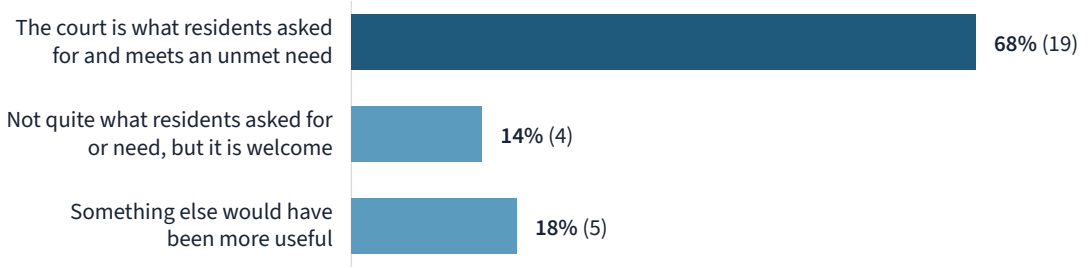
Locking also caused friction with young people who were asked to leave; the lock was cut off, and on one occasion young people climbed over the fence. It also appears that the opening hours are not always consistent, as one resident reported finding the court still locked at 11am one day.

3.4 Outcomes delivered by the court

Despite mixed views on the consultation process, residents generally felt the court was something the estate needed, with two thirds of survey respondents feeling that it was both what was asked for and what was needed (Figure 5). One resident noted, *"There was a real need for a space where young people can go in a safe environment"* (R014).

Figure 5. Perceptions regarding the inception of the court and whether it met an unmet need (n=28)

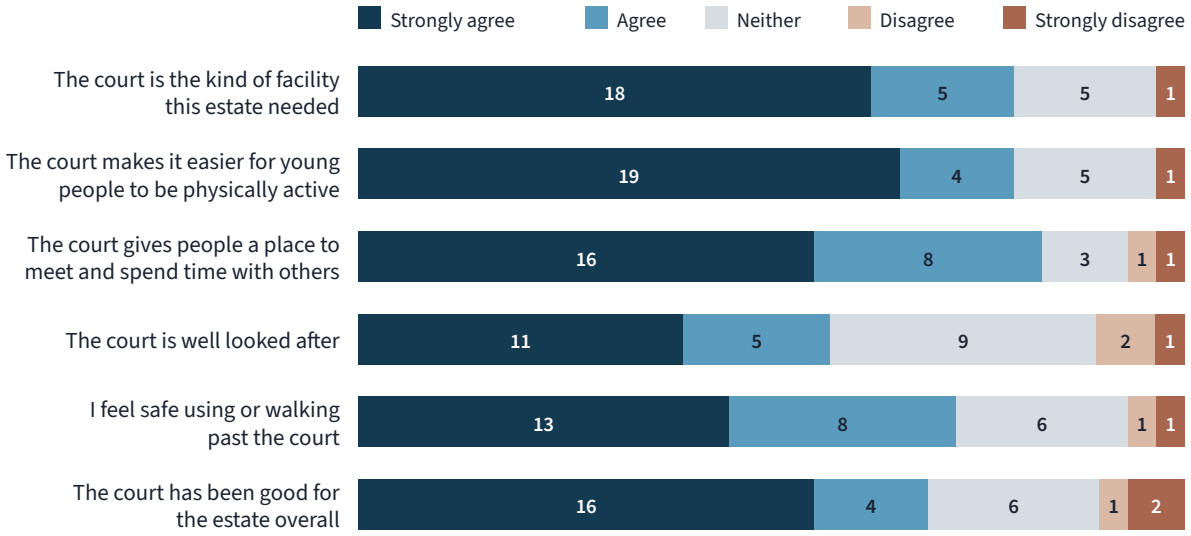
Thinking about what residents asked for and need on Wyndham and Comber estate, which of these is closest to your view?



Source: resident survey, n=28 who answered this question. Percentage of respondents, with number of respondents in brackets. One respondent skipped this survey question.

Figure 6. Survey participants' perceptions of the court (n=29)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: resident survey, n=29.

Perceptions of the court by residents were largely positive. Survey respondents mostly felt that the court was the kind of facility that the estate needed (23 of 28 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement) and had been good for the estate overall (20 of 29 respondents agreed or strongly agreed) – see Figure 6. One resident said, *"It's actually brought the community more together. Like, I have noticed now that the court is there, a lot more children are coming out to play"* (R002). Residents and professionals agreed that the estate had little for older children and teenagers before the court was built. The youth club had closed as had the sports cage, and most flats have no garden or balcony.

Most participants felt that more people used the court because of the new design, although one professional interviewee felt it mainly benefited the same children who had played there before, albeit more safely now. The court also instilled a sense of pride, with some residents showing photos of themselves playing. One survey respondent said:

> **The court is very important as the high-rise buildings don't have any outdoor space for people or children it feels like prison indoors and these type of outdoor space helps with peoples' mental health and also helps children to engage and socialise with friends and family**
>
> Survey response

Benefits also reached residents who did not use the court. The estate was described as looking brighter. One resident noted that young people used to play games around the estate, which caused friction with other residents, but now had a designated place to play.

Most residents valued having a place for children to play and get outside, noting that previously there was not anywhere for young people to go. Residents saw the social benefits (playing, meeting new people, and community cohesion) as the main benefit of the court, ahead of physical activity, although when prompted they also mentioned physical activity. One resident said, *"I just think it's somewhere for kids to go that is safe"* (R008), and another described it as *"somewhere where the teenagers can go"* (R007). However, most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed it made it easier for young people to be active (23 out of 28). There was a sense among some residents that the importance of having somewhere to play extended to preventing young people from being involved in crime:

> **There's not really that many places for [young people] to go and I do think that boys specifically [...] do get recruited into gangs [...] if they've got nothing to do, they're vulnerable.**
>
> **Resident, R014**

Related to community cohesion, a few participants said people had made friends at the court, and that it had become a place for parents to meet too. Families from different backgrounds talked to one another, and one resident linked this to non-English speakers improving their English.

Most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe using or walking by the court (21 of 28 respondents). Two survey respondents said they did not feel safe using or walking by the court. In our interviews with residents, safety concerns centred on the court at night, mostly having to do with people gathering after dark. Interviewees noted that the cage and new surface had made the space much safer for users, as balls no longer ended up on the road or on cars.

While there were several perceived benefits of the court, there were also some complaints from residents about antisocial behaviour, particularly among teenagers. Specifically, in the court's first summer (2026), there were complaints about young people playing on the court late at night. One resident recalled reports of *"people in there at three and four in the morning, drinking, smoking, smashing glass, music blaring"* (R008). One survey respondent said, *"The court became a meeting point for alcohol drinking, social gatherings, cannabis use [and] playing loud music [...] into the very late hours at nighttime."* Most incidents were dealt with by residents, but on one occasion the police were called because of violent behaviour by someone who was drunk (not a young person). Noise was a particular problem for residents in the flats directly beside the court. However, these complaints were contested, as other residents said there had been no problems and they had not noticed any noise.

Professional stakeholders felt the court had not increased antisocial behaviour but changed where it was happening. For example, older teenagers already causing problems now used the court as an evening meeting spot. Locking the court at night appeared to resolve many of these issues.

Another challenge was the lack of a designated area for very young children, although other residents felt the court was not intended for them. One resident noted there could be challenges with groups of ages mixing *"when you get a group of teenagers in there and someone brings down their little toddler or something. But then I just say to them sometimes, to be fair, it is a basketball and football court. It's not really designed for little toddlers"* (R008).

Most users reported the court as clean and well kept, but some noted that the surface had begun to wear, with flooring lifting and paint peeling, and were concerned that there was no maintenance plan. The survey question relating to maintenance drew the highest proportion of neutral responses, with 9 of 28 respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing that the court was well looked after. A few residents were concerned that possible demolition near the site (in preparation for a new residential block) could damage or close the court.

Residents suggested several practical improvements to the court. These included having a net over the top to stop the ball occasionally going over the cage, lighting so it could be used in winter (although some residents felt this might increase antisocial behaviour), and more benches for people to sit on. In terms of greater inclusion, some suggested a designated place for small children to play and clubs for girls and women.

Perceived outcomes of the court

Community cohesion

Residents saw social benefits as the court's main benefit: children made friends, parents met on the bench, and families from different backgrounds talked to one another.

Health and wellbeing

Residents valued having somewhere safe for children to go and get outside. Some linked this to mental health and to keeping young people away from crime. Survey participants mostly agreed it made it easier for young people to be active.

Safety

The cage enclosure helped to keep balls off the road and small children inside, so parents felt able to let children play.

3.5 How the court works

Four features of the court and its setting help explain the outcomes described above.

Proximity

The court is well used because it sits directly beside residents' homes, it is easy to get to, and children do not need to cross busy roads to reach it. Many of the homes in the Comber estate overlook the court, allowing parents to watch from their windows. This was also helpful when issues did arise, as they could be resolved quickly. The bench enabled parents to be present.

Safety through enclosure

The fence keeps balls off the road and small children inside, so parents feel able to let children play. One young person said, *"I really like it because whenever I play football or something yeah if I want to shoot the ball it doesn't go outside or anything and you can play basketball here it's really good for the kids"* (R004). Another person pointed to the improved safety: *"we've seen a few near misses over the years and I was like it should really be caged up and this is a very good quality cage I must admit I was very impressed"* (R010).

Local ownership and engagement

The TRA's involvement helped bring the court about and now keeps it running, through locking, cleaning arrangements, and dealing with problems. Some residents, however, felt this should be the responsibility of the council, and that the TRA had taken on this responsibility by necessity.

Quality and fit for purpose

Good equipment and a proper surface make the court worth using and show residents that the estate is valued. One resident felt that this deterred the vandalism that had previously been a problem. The bench and bin were also noted as being particularly important: somewhere for parents to sit and the bin helped to keep the court clean.

SECTION 4

4 What this means

Below we discuss evaluation findings, limitations of the evaluation approach and conclude with lessons learnt.

4.1 Development, commissioning, design and consultation

The half-court grew out of the Southwark Resident Health and Wellbeing Programme and met a clear wish for somewhere for young people to play, albeit because an existing caged play area was closed for heating works and a youth club had also been closed.

Buy-in was strong among local stakeholders, but there was little post-consultation communication, leaving some residents with questions about why some decisions had been made despite the intensive consultation process.

4.2 Outcomes of the facility for residents

Residents' views of the court were generally positive. It turned an informal sports space into a more formal, safe and enclosed one that became a central meeting point for local children.

The court is used by residents living close to the cage (typically within a few minutes). Its users are mainly boys, and some residents felt very young children, girls and older residents needed more consideration.

Reported outcomes were farther reaching than the initial programme had foreseen, including improving the overall feel of the community and benefitting parents, with some residents even feeling it was important in preventing crime.

The primary aims of the court were to increase residents' physical activity and social connectedness. While many residents reported improved wellbeing, increased physical activity seemed to be a byproduct rather than the primary reason people were using the court. This aligns with findings from Public Health England, which identified "social belonging, friendship and fun" as key enablers for physical activity.[9]

Antisocial behaviour on the estate predates the court, but some residents felt that the court initially provided a new place for this to happen. Although not originally intended to have restricted access, complaints from some residents have led the TRA to take on the responsibility to lock the court at night.

4.3 How the facility produces its effects

The court appeared to work, primarily, through innovative use of a non-traditional space that was close to people's homes and community support.

Proximity appeared to outweigh the court's relatively small size, making it a more attractive option than larger facilities further away. Being overlooked by homes is one of four spatial principles for child-friendly spaces,[13] and natural surveillance is a long-standing principle of designing out crime. This is a potentially important finding that, if found to hold more generally, would imply a strategy of investing in multiple smaller play spaces rather than fewer, larger and more distant ones.

Although the space had always been open for exercise, enclosing it within a cage increased feelings of safety. This is consistent with wider work on estate sports cages, which argues that the fence is what allows young people to play freely, away from traffic.[14]

The success of the court also relied heavily on local problem solving, for example organising the locks and regular opening and closing times. Whilst there were some concerns about the wear of the court top, most felt that the quality of the court and fit were important in making it an appealing place to go.

4.4 Strengths and limitations of the evaluation

Strengths

This evaluation drew on several data sources; triangulating across them allowed accounts of how the court was used to be tested against one another.

Limitations

Samples were small, and recruitment relied partly on existing contacts and networks, which are likely to reach residents already active on the estate. Only two young people under 18 were interviewed. Most survey respondents and interviewees lived within a few minutes of the court, and the majority lived on the Comber estate.

Without any formal baseline of either health or levels of physical activity it is impossible to say, other than in qualitative terms, whether either has increased.

Finally, the court had been open for around 6 months at the time of fieldwork, so longer-term outcomes could not be assessed. As a single-site evaluation, findings may not transfer directly to other estates, although the mechanisms identified are intended to inform similar interventions.

SECTION 5

5 What we learnt

1 **Coproduction with residents needs to be followed through and continued.**

Ensure a wide range of opinions are heard, including those of young people. Residents need to be included in communications as to why decisions are made, and whether any parts of the consultation could not be followed through. Outreach should not end after the initial activities and should be included in plans for ongoing maintenance.

2 **Engage with a wide range of local and professional stakeholders beforehand to ensure buy-in for the facility.**

Identify key local stakeholders and professionals early to secure buy-in for the intervention. This may include local police officers, TRAs (or other local resident associations) and relevant teams within the council.

In the end, several aspects of the court's success relied on voluntary or semi-voluntary and unplanned interventions: the locking of the court; the provision of bin and bench; advice on materials etc. Ensuring active community involvement from the start creates opportunities for this kind of positive voluntarism to emerge.

3 **Ensure high quality and durable equipment is used.**

Many residents cited the high-quality cage and bench as part of the success of the court, mitigating vandalism and increasing pride in the court. Conversely, wear to the court surface was a cause of concern.

4 **Agree long-term maintenance and responsibility before the court opens.**

Residents were concerned that there was no maintenance plan, and some felt the TRA had taken on responsibilities, such as locking the court and dealing with problems, that should sit with the council. Agree who is responsible for maintenance, repairs, opening and closing, and resolving problems, and how this will be funded over time.

5 **Consider inclusion by design from the outset of developing the court.**

Courts that are left open with no organised activity tend to be dominated by one group, often teenage boys.[14] Consider options for teenage girls and very young children and be explicit about where and when they can use the court, or other spaces. This requires additional management responsibility but could include hosting local clubs and sports events, particularly for girls or specific age groups.

Parents or guardians should be considered in the design of the court. The bench at the court was particularly liked by parents who could sit and watch their children play.

6

Small, non-traditional sports spaces appear to offer high value to people living nearby, especially given their relatively low cost.

Much of this site's success seems to come from its proximity to a number of homes in a relatively small area. Scaling the benefits of the court or similar interventions would, therefore, need a network of similar spaces rather than a single site. Councils could review infill sites on estates to identify suitable locations for similar hyperlocal non-traditional sports spaces.

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Map sources

Figure 2

Court location: hand-placed from confirmed coordinates (July 2026).

Estate footprints: Southwark Council, "Housing estates (all types)", released under the Freedom of Information Act via WhatDoTheyKnow (accessed 1 October 2026).

Borough boundaries: derived from Office for National Statistics, Lower Layer Super Output Areas (December 2021) full-resolution clipped boundaries, Open Government Licence v3.0; contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2021.

Basemap: Ordnance Survey, OS OpenMap Local (April 2026) and OS Open Greenspace (March 2026), Open Government Licence v3.0; contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2026.

Figure 3

Deprivation: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, English Indices of Deprivation 2025 (File 7), Open Government Licence v3.0.

LSOA and borough boundaries: Office for National Statistics, LSOA (December 2021) full-resolution clipped boundaries, Open Government Licence v3.0; contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2021.

Major roads: Ordnance Survey, OS Open Roads (April 2026), A roads, B roads and classified unnumbered roads; contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2026, Open Government Licence v3.0.

Estate footprints and court: as Figure 2.

Figure 4

Green spaces: Ordnance Survey, OS Open Greenspace (contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2026, Open Government Licence v3.0), supplemented by OpenStreetMap where OS has no matching site (© OpenStreetMap contributors, ODbL); accessed 1 October 2026. "Open access" means public access recorded as open in the source, or assumed open for types such as public parks and playgrounds.

Sport and recreation facilities: OpenStreetMap (© OpenStreetMap contributors, ODbL), accessed 1 October 2026, showing only facilities tagged or classed as open to the public; the new court is not yet mapped in OpenStreetMap.

Walking catchments: Reflexivity analysis of the OpenStreetMap pedestrian network (© OpenStreetMap contributors, ODbL) as a travel-time surface, with walking times calculated along the network at 1.2 m/s and extended in straight lines up to 100 m off it, without crossing A roads or railway lines except where the network does.

Major roads: as Figure 3.

Borough boundaries, estate footprints and court: as Figure 2.