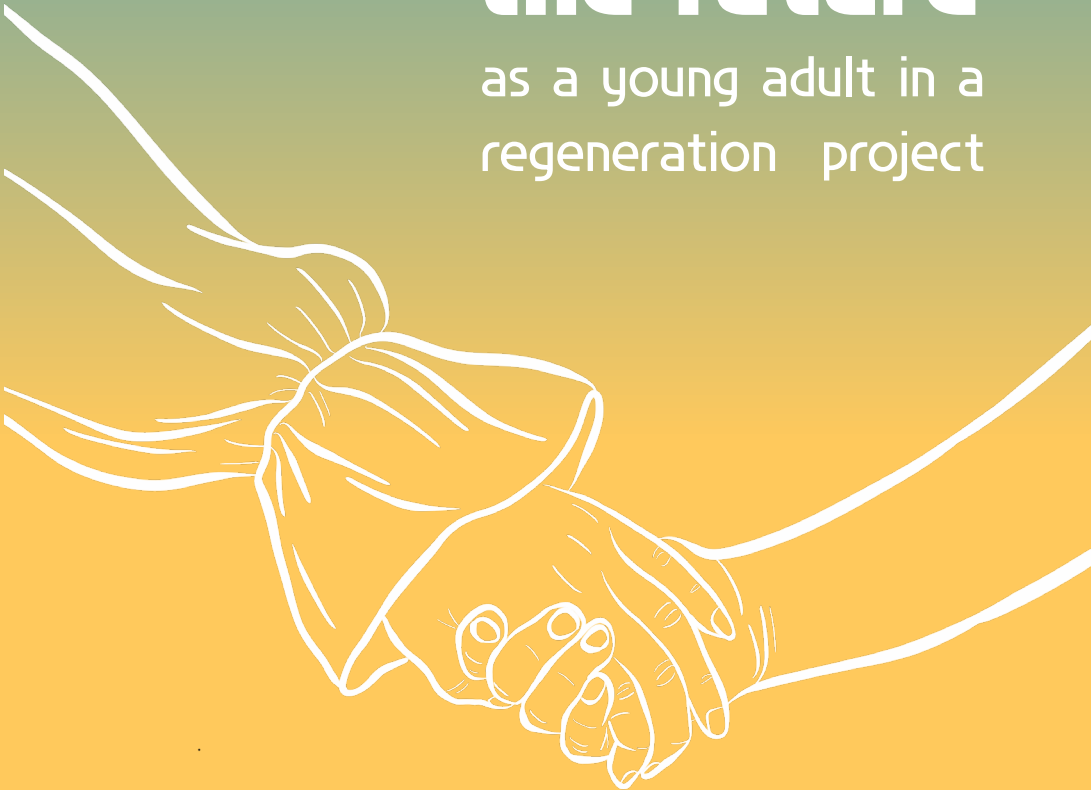


Planning for

the future

as a young adult in a
regeneration project



Zarah Oke

I am a resident of Wornington Green, a residential square in North Kensington, where I have grown up. For more than a decade, we have been living through an extended regeneration project led by Peabody Housing Association, for which construction started in 2012 and is not due to be completed until at least 2026. This means that all my teenage years and most of my twenties will have been spent living in a construction site.

Living in an ongoing regeneration project has major implications for how young people experience their neighbourhood and how they think about the future. It shapes whether or not we will be able to live in the area in the future, and where we call home. This regeneration project is unusual in London as it offers young people the chance to gain their own homes. Young Adults 18+ are being classified as Adult Household Members and can be rehoused separately from their families. This is a huge opportunity, especially at the moment, when we are in the middle of a housing crisis. Londoners are facing incredibly high private rents and are finding it increasingly harder to get on the property ladder in the long run.

Being a young adult resident of Wornington Green who is going through this process, I decided to make this the focus of my research project, reflecting on my experiences and how young people are engaged – or not – in the neighbourhood's plans for the future.

My main research questions were:

- What are the impacts to young adult residents undergoing the Wornington Green regeneration?
- What opportunities does the regeneration create for young adults?
- What is their vision for the future (does the regeneration make this possible)?
- How do Peabody engage with young adults in their regeneration planning?

Access to important information:

During my online research, I aimed to try to understand the background and vision for the regeneration project. I discovered that there was an abundance of information on the history, proposal

and current plans for Wornington Green but there was little to no information on the Young Adults position in this.

I also found it very hard to access anyone that could help me gain this information. Information on key people in the regeneration and their roles were not available on the Peabody website.

The impact of a changing neighbourhood:

I carried out many walking ethnographies at different times throughout my research and collected many pictures and videos of the current area and the current Phase of the construction works. Although I have been living in the project, and the regeneration has been ongoing for what seems like forever, by taking photographs and looking more closely I was able to see the different phases of work and consider the different ways in which construction work can change a neighbourhood very fast.

I reflected a lot on my own neighbourhood throughout this process. Finding the online proposals and plans for the regeneration and the current plans for the next phases, and then comparing this to what I saw in my walks around the regeneration project caused me to reflect on the neighbourhood visually in a different way. The difference between the online visions and the on the ground experience could be quite different. I understood how much a community needs to be involved during a regeneration otherwise in order to ensure companies like Peabody can be accountable for the promises originally made.

Interviews:

I carried out interviews and informal conversations with many professionals/key informants in the regeneration project. To my surprise, finding Young Adult residents of the completed buildings proved much harder. I was not able to interview or have any informal conversations with any Young Adult who had moved into, or planned to move into, the new buildings. I did however reflect on my own process of moving as a Young Adult being offered the same opportunity.



image source Peabody



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Young and old have different ideas about change and the future

Affordable and sustainable housing is a large part of living a good life in North Kensington. For residents that have lived in the area for 30+ years, their communities are a large part of their lives. When a regeneration starts it can cause a large amount of anxiety for the future for those long-term residents. I found that for most long-term residents, many of whom were keen to express their concerns, they prefer as little change as possible when it comes to the design and layout of streets and buildings. They also can get very restless the longer the regeneration takes.

Whereas younger residents (children of those living here 30+ years) seemed to be generally less involved in their community, at least until it becomes necessary for them. This can mean that

they find themselves not knowing anything about the regeneration and their place within it up until it is time for them to move.

Young Adults lack of Community Engagement

The Golborne Forum Chair (Community group), while not directly affected by the regeneration plans but who is a resident of Wornington Green, expressed getting involved with the regeneration plans as soon as he found out the park outside his house would be affected by the regeneration for a long time. His concerns for the park made him become very interested in the plans for the regeneration as he expressed keeping up with the plans every week. When I asked about Young Adults' participation in the Golborne

“They are open meetings, so anyone could come if they wanted to.”

Golborne Forum Chair

forum, he explained that they used to come sometimes but not so much anymore.

He was keen to invite me and observed that my age group should be more involved in the regeneration and the area as we will be the ones living here at the end of it.

These sentiments were confirmed in my interview with the Senior Development

Manager and my informal conversation with the Rehousing Coordinator. They both stated Young Adults tend to get more involved in the regeneration when it will directly affect their housing rather than when it is more about general community engagement.

“When people think it’s their time to start moving, you start to see a real pickup in things” -

Senior Development Manager

Changing responsibilities

Planning for a future can become hard when housing lacks security or when there is uncertainty about what kind of a neighbourhood might exist in the future.

The regeneration has had a long history of disappointment for some of the residents and therefore community engagement is proving hard in Wornington Green.

Since 2010 when the regeneration project was confirmed, the housing association that owns the estate – and is thus responsible for the regeneration – has changed three times. The construction company has also changed three times. Inevitably,

this has brought a lot of uncertainty. There has been conflicting information, different websites and emails that need to be accessed, and confusion about who is responsible for what.

Such changes have an impact on residents, who can feel disheartened or distressed by the unpredictability and uncertainty. My interview with the Senior Development Manager shed more light on the lack of community engagement that can occur when a regeneration is taking so long.

“a commitment from Kensington Housing Trust, at that time, who then turned into Catalyst housing to turn into Peabody housing as part of the residential charter.”

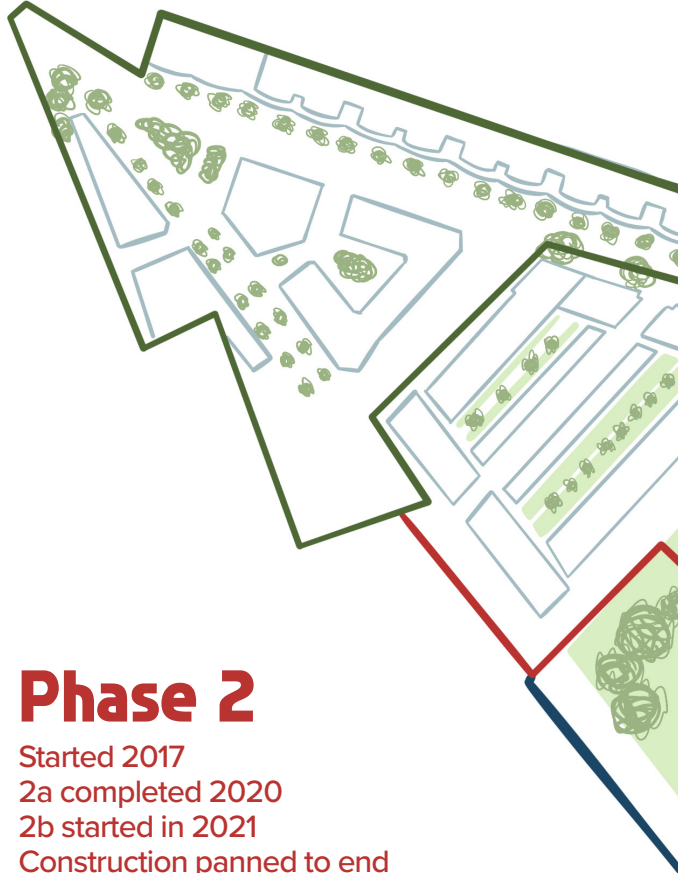
Senior Development Manager

“for some people [the length of project] can become so demoralising. [they can feel] like this has taken so long that they just don't want to engage anymore.”

Senior Development Manager

“We do need to do a bit more [engagement], because I think historically it has been lacking”.

Senior Development Manager



Phase 2

Started 2017

2a completed 2020

2b started in 2021

Construction planned to end
in Autumn 2024

Phase 3

Planned to start construction
in 2025 and end in 2030



Phase 1

Started 2012
Ended in 2016

Opportunities for Young People

One of the most surprising things to come out of my research is that there are actually a lot of opportunities for Young Adult residents within the regeneration project. However, these are often not known about due to poor communication channels. For example, there are job opportunities and schemes to help Young Adults with planning to move, but there is limited take up. This information needs to be much more accessible to the public and to young residents.

On the one hand, Peabody seemed to be completely aware of their failure to provide information in this area, but also did not seem to be doing much to change this fast enough. For example, not having up to

date information available on their website or clearly indicating where more details could be obtained.

Peabody were also aware that they needed to work more directly with Young Adults to improve engagement, rather than “us being in some sort of office trying to engage with people.” (Senior Development Manager). However, there did not seem to be any plans in place to put this idea into action.

One of the challenges is that because the regeneration project is taking so long, residents who were young adults at the start are now in their thirties, and those who were small children are now young adults. Regeneration takes years and someone

who was not 18+ initially could be by the time it is their phase to move. This means that any resident engagement strategy aimed at Young Adults must constantly keep up with a changing community. This has not been happening and so many do not know what is going on or what their options are. This makes it difficult to plan for the future.

Overall, I feel the biggest takeaways from my research are to find better and more efficient ways of providing information to Young Adults and the Young People that are soon to be offered re-housing.

This could include:

- The 'Here and Now' resident newsletter could be targeted at the families of young people to highlight the 18+ offer and the importance of getting involved.
- An accessible website for Young Adults to understand their offer, the support and schemes available to them to help with rehousing, the key people to get in contact with, and stories from newly moved Young Adults.

The regeneration of Wornington Green, and the decade-long construction we have been living through, has caused a lot of upheaval and distress for some residents. However, there are more opportunities for young residents than in many other urban regeneration schemes around London. Having the chance to move into your own space is not something to be taken lightly in London, one of the most expensive cities in the world. In theory this should allow us to make plans for the future and continue to feel like we belong to North Kensington rather than being displaced. But there is not enough being done to communicate with young adults who feel outside of the plans that will directly affect their futures.

It is important for Young Adults to be a part of the regeneration and their communities. Peabody need do more to improve their engagement, but we as young adults collectively need to be more intentional about being involved in what our community can become in the future.



The Good Life in North Kensington brings together a team of residents to explore what a 'good life' means for people in North Kensington, London, and what some of the barriers are to achieving it. In 2023, seven local residents became 'citizen social scientists' and carried out their own research projects, investigating issues which matter to them and their communities.

They have been trained and supported by UCL's Citizen Science Academy, based at the Institute for Global Prosperity, in collaboration with the University of Manchester and the Westway Trust. They have since been awarded the Citizen Science Certificate by the UCL Office for Open Science and are now working with local organisations to help ensure citizen voices are part of decision-making processes.

The Good Life North Kensington is part of a larger project on rethinking neighbourhood change and urban futures in the aftermath of housing tragedies. The project is led by Dr Constance Smith (University of Manchester) as part of a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship. For more information see www.highriselandscapes.org



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