

UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY IN CLONE TOWN BRITAIN

A Research Paper

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Master of Regional Planning

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 2003, the British government initiated the Sustainable Communities Act to regenerate town centers across the United Kingdom. To investigate this policy's impact, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) conducted a survey in 2004, dividing towns into 'home towns' and 'clone towns'. These categories were based on their clone town score, the ratio of independent businesses to chain stores in town centers. Home towns were towns with a high ratio of traditional stores to chain stores, while clone towns had a high ratio of chain stores to traditional stores. The NEF hypothesized that home towns would be more sustainable than clone towns. This study investigated this hypothesis by analyzing economic, social, and environmental sustainability in six towns across London. The study's findings indicated that a town's clone town score has little impact on its social sustainability and environmental sustainability but was far more impactful on its economic sustainability.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lancelot Comrie's educational background started in 2016 when he made a bold decision to leave the United Kingdom and study at the University of California Irvine in California as an undeclared major. During his first planning class in the year 2019 where he understood the power of urban planning to empower disadvantaged communities across the world, and consequently, he felt this was the right field to pursue. His undergraduate experience was vast and ranged from providing GIS maps to aid various NGOs to experiences like competing in affordable housing competitions centered around sustainable TOD developments. With great determination, he excelled in his urban planning classes and successfully graduated in 2020.

Eager to improve his urban planning process, Lancelot enrolled in the City and Regional Planning program at Cornell University in 2021, where he chose the 'Designing the City' concentration. This path was chosen due to his passion for urban design, especially in sustainable urban development. In this program, he undertook a diverse variety of classes that covered important topics such as land-use planning, microeconomics, graphic design, and urban theory. His involvement in the AAP NYC semester program, where he worked with the NYC Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice (MOCEJ) on their Climate Resiliency master plan, allowed him to gain an understanding of how theory in urban planning is implemented in practice. Based on his diverse experiences in academia, Lancelot Comrie has been an advocate for sustainability-based urban planning, especially in the context of improving disadvantaged communities across the world

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
LIST OF MAPS.....	vii
PREFACE.....	xi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
BRIEF HISTORY OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE UK .....	3
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
METHODOLOGY .....	10
TOWN SELECTION .....	15
TOWN PROFILES.....	20
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION .....	27
CONCLUSION.....	56
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61
APPENDIX.....	62

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures 1: Trajectory of ‘clone town’ usage on Google Trends .....	5
Figures 2: NEF’s illustration of sustainability .....	7
Figures 3: Sustainability measurement .....	10
Figures 4: Clone Town Rating with pair groups .....	16
Figures 5: Crime Town Ratings with pair groups and clone town designations .....	19

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Translation of the human needs to spatial qualities in urban context.....	9
Table 2: Clone Town Scores in 2002 and 2024.....	18
Table 3: Comfort scores of towns.....	34
Table 4: Public Services score of towns .....	36
Table 5: Crime scores of towns .....	38
Table 6: Social inclusion scores of towns.....	40
Table 7: Diversity scores of towns .....	43
Table 8: Public participation scores of towns.....	45
Table 9: Economic vitality ranking .....	48
Table 10: Access to Open Space and Local Parks .....	51
Table 11: Public transportation accessibility .....	53

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATION

Illustration 1: Hampstead high street.....	21
Illustration 2: Highgate high street .....	22
Illustration 3: Brixton high street.....	23
Illustration 4: Lewisham high street .....	24
Illustration 5: Upton Park high street.....	25
Illustration 6: East Ham high street .....	26
Illustration 7: Highgate bulletin boards .....	42
Illustration 8: Queens Market: a famous market in Upton Park .....	47

## LIST OF MAPS

Maps 1: 26 Potential towns in London .....	15
Maps 2: Six selected towns in London .....	20
Maps 3: Community hubs in East Ham .....	28
Maps 4: Brixton districts .....	31

## PREFACE

# 1. Introduction

My journey in becoming passionate about this topic of sustainable communities started in my second year at Cornell where I was introduced to Kevin Lynch's 'Image of the City'. During a reading assignment in my first semester, I learned that Kevin Lynch, a renowned urban planner, had mapped out resident's perceptions of neighborhoods within several American cities. His analysis proved these perceptions were proven to be strongly influenced by people's memories of spatial elements in their neighborhoods. I was especially fascinated with Lynch's proposed idea that certain arrangements of spatial elements within neighborhoods can constitute these neighborhoods to have a strong sense of character and identity. As I continued my academic career at Cornell, I started to speculate if there was any sort of connection between sustainability and the unique spatial elements possessed by the successful neighborhoods shown in Lynch's 'Image of the City'.

It was at this point that I decided that I wanted to understand what constituted a successful 'sustainable' community in the context of the United Kingdom. My initial research led me to stumble upon the New Economic Foundation's Clone Town Britain report - an important paper created in 2004 that explored the decline of British high streets and highlighted the rise of the clone town phenomenon across the United Kingdom. The paper followed a massive survey conducted by the New Economic Foundation (NEF) that occurred in 2002, which looked at the ratio of chain stores to independent stores in over a hundred towns across the United Kingdom. This was done to determine if these towns fell into the following designations: home towns, border towns, and clone towns. In the report, clone towns were defined as town centers that had a high ratio of chain businesses to traditional stores. On the other hand, home towns were town centers with high ratios of traditional stores to chain businesses. Border towns were towns that lay in the middle of this spectrum. In the report, NEF hypothesized that home towns would be far more sustainable than clone towns due to

the assumption that they would have a strong sense of identity and better retail health. I was deeply fascinated by NEF's bold assumption and felt this claim was worth investigating in a final research paper that concluded my academic career at Cornell University.

In this paper, I investigated if there was a relationship between a town's clone town score and its economic, social, and environmental sustainability, as the NEF hypothesized in their report. Six towns in London were chosen to investigate this relationship, and they were as follows: **Hampstead, Highgate, Brixton, Lewisham, Upton Park** and **East Ham**. Each of these towns was paired in groups of three to compare towns with similar socioeconomic characteristics. In each pairing, the town with a higher clone town score was labeled **Higher CT Score Town** (HCST), and the corresponding counterpart was labeled as **Lower CT Score Town** (LCST).

This research paper is important because it provides an analysis of what sustainability means today in modern London and is subsequently a much-needed update to the New Economic Foundation's Clone Town Britain report conducted in 2004. Readers can understand how towns have changed regarding the different clone town designations and what this means for the residents living in these towns. The second reason this project is important to planners is because it provides multiple recommendations for urban planners to improve the sustainability of urban centers. Strategies such as incorporating community hubs within town centers can be seen to improve various components of sustainability within these town centers dramatically. Thus, this project is valuable as planning research in that it bridges the gap between urban academic research and practical urban policy solutions, especially in the context of sustainability. Ultimately, I want readers to know that local authorities do not have to be at the mercy of the clone town epidemic and can incorporate various strategies to protect their town's high streets during a national crisis.

## **2. Brief History of Sustainable Communities in the UK**

In order to understand in 2004 why the NEF hypothesized a relationship between a town's Home Town - Border Town - Clone Town (HBC) designation and its sustainability, we need to understand the political changes occurring in Britain during the late nineties. During this period, it was widely observed that there was a severe decline in the health of high streets, the main street within a town, as many traditional stores became vacant. This was due to a combination of two factors: large shopping malls were being constructed outside of towns and there were large-scale closures of high street banks. Both of these factors led to many people stopping shopping in their local high streets. As a result, many town centers across the United Kingdom entered a state of decay.

### **a. Tony Blair's New Labour government**

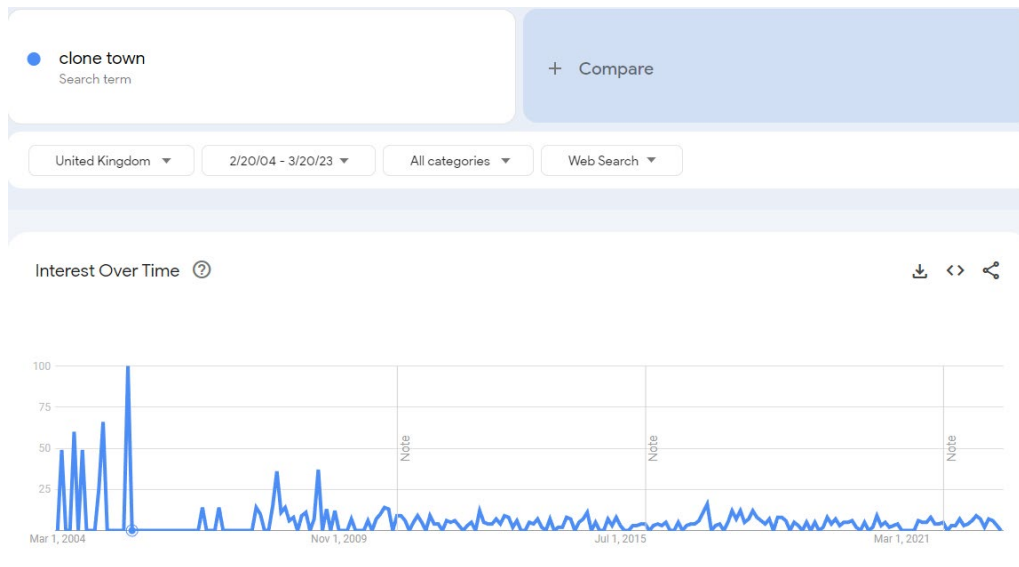
In 1997, the New Labour government came into power under the leadership of Tony Blair. With this new government came a new change in urban policy to fix these issues; "a stronger role for local government, the end of competitive bidding, more democratic partnerships, community-led regeneration and greater integration between regeneration funds" (Colomb, 2007). This brought a series of initiatives into the early 21st century known as the 'Urban Renaissance' which aimed to construct 'new sustainable urban realms' centered around "social mixing, sustainability, connectivity, higher densities, walkability, and high-quality streetscapes" and bringing back service-oriented "suburban knowledge" back into the inner city (Colomb, 2007).

## **b. NEF Clone Town Survey**

In 2002, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) launched a groundbreaking survey to investigate the state of town centers across the United Kingdom. In their investigation, they divided British towns into the three categories of ‘clone town,’ ‘border town’, and ‘home town.’ Home towns were described as towns that had high ratios of traditional stores to chain stores. Inversely, clone towns were places that had high ratios of chain stores to traditional stores. Border towns were towns that were situated in the middle of this spectrum.

In 2002, NEF launched a series of reports known as “Clone Town Britain” to document what factors were causing the epidemic of clone towns across the United Kingdom and the repercussions of this. Additionally, they also provided recommendations for local governments to amend these issues. In the report, NEF hypothesized that the town's designation as a home town would mean it would contain thriving, diverse, resilient local economies within its high streets. Simultaneously, the NEF also inferred that a town being designated a clone town would mean its high streets would be struggling economically, lacking in diversity, and be vulnerable to economic changes. Through hypothesizing a town’s designation and various conditions within the town, NEF was inferring a link between the designation of a town and its overall sustainability.

The results of the NEF received a large amount of media attention in the period between 2004 and 2005. A lot of this traction was due to local media outlets reacting to certain towns being designated as clone towns and subsequently pressuring local authorities to act. To better understand the usage of the term ‘clone town’ in a modern context, it is important to analyze when the term was most frequently used and by whom.



**Figure 1: Trajectory of ‘clone town’ usage on Google Trends**  
*Source: Google Trends*

Through using Google Trends, we can see the unpredictable trajectory of the term from 2004 to 2022. The high peak seen in 2004 marks the explosion in media coverage from parties like the Independent, the Guardian, and Daily Mail. In particular, the Daily Mail seems to revisit this topic frequently from 2004 to 2014. The media discourse surrounding clone town soon led to over 100 organizations going to the parliament and pressuring the British government to finally act. In 2007, the government enacted the Sustainable Communities Act and gave local authorities new regulatory powers to curb the influence of major chain stores in British high streets. The act also enacted many urban regeneration projects across the United Kingdom.

**c. What are clone towns' relevance today?**

The term ‘clone town’ is arguably still relevant today due to prominent media outlets such as the Daily Mail and the Guardian still referencing the term when talking about the state of British high streets. Furthermore, there were political discussions to combat an ongoing epidemic of clone towns in 2011, when the Brighton Pavilion MP Caroline Lucas advocated

for an update to the Sustainable Communities Act in the British Parliament. During her speech, she noted in one decade, Britain has lost a “quarter of its post offices, a quarter of independent newsagents, and a fifth of its bank branches” (Green Party, 2011). *In her view* an updated Sustainable Communities Act would streamline the bureaucratic process to make it easier for local authorities to use regulatory powers in their towns.

Santer and Callende’s article ‘Life after death: how to reinvigorate UK high streets’ highlights that in 2023, one in seven shops across the United Kingdom are now empty, which illustrates this is still an ongoing issue (Santer & Callende, 2023). The lack of any clone town surveys conducted by the NEF since 2004 has only increased the difficulty in solving this phenomenon, as it is unclear where the NEF’s recommendations are relevant to the situation today.

### 3. Literature Review



**Figure 2: NEF’s illustration of sustainability**

*Source: Clone Town Britain*

An initial read of the NEF’s ‘Clone Town Britain’ report makes it apparent that there is very little information on how the organization defines sustainability itself. There was evidence that the NEF had divided sustainability into three components: economics, environment and society, however there was virtually no explanation on how these components were defined themselves (NEF, 2004). It was thus imperative to conduct a literature review on sustainability to understand its history and how it is typically defined in modern day academia. Through my literature review, I observed the components of social sustainability varied considerably across various academic papers in large contrasts to environmental and environmental sustainability. In both sustainability lenses, there was generally very little academic discourse on their components at all especially from urban planning viewpoints. The repercussions of this will be further explained later in the methodology section. The results of my literature review are shown below.

#### **a. Historical background of sustainability**

According to academics, the narrative of sustainability began in the 1920s where Modernism started to integrate with urban development. At this time, modernism was blamed for creating communities with “clean lines and a lack of human scale” (Asma & Farzaneh, 2017) which resulted in high crime rates and social problems. Policymakers and academics soon started to question modernism and the environmental economic and problems that arise with it. The term sustainability gained prominence in the Brundtland Commission Report as experts started to think about other methods of urban development patterns” (Asma & Farzaneh,

2017). During this time, sustainability was generally looked at from an economic and environmental lens. At the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992, the scope of sustainability started to broaden as “the human development and social dimensions of sustainability” was now being considered (Asma & Farzaneh, 2017). In the early 2000s, the term social sustainability was finally coined and primarily measured the satisfaction of “basic human needs and the subsequent continuation of basic human needs.”

In this time period, these basic human needs were initially analyzed more through an economic lens than a social one (Asma & Farzaneh, 2017). Academics often equated employment and poverty alleviation as being important variables to determine social sustainability. As years went by, social sustainability started to be incorporated into more research and started to shift in definition. The term soon incorporated more soft social variables like “happiness, social mixing and sense of place” which were now agreed upon as important measurements (Asma & Farzaneh, 2017). Another important component of measuring social sustainability is whether towns promote social mixing and personal well-being for its populace. These concepts were far more difficult to measure than poverty and unemployment due to often being subjective in nature.

#### **b. Measuring social sustainability**

In order to determine the way social sustainability is defined and measured in this paper, I investigated Asma and Garzaneh’s paper ‘Social Sustainability in Urban Context: Concepts, Definitions, and Principles’ which provided six generalized components of social sustainability and their corresponding spatial quality in urban design.

**Table 1: Translation of the human needs to spatial qualities in urban context**

<b>Human Needs Residents</b>	<b>Spatial Qualities in Urban Design</b>
<b>Physiological Needs</b>	Comfort/Public Services/Firmness and Balance
<b>Safety Needs</b>	Privacy/Legibility/Safety
<b>Belongingness/Love Needs</b>	Social Amenities/Social facilities/Sense of Place and Identity
<b>Esteem Needs</b>	Inclusiveness/ Preservation of Local characteristics
<b>Self-Actualization Needs</b>	Diversity/Public Participation
<b>Beauty Needs</b>	Visual Richness/Visual Proportions/Visual Distinctiveness

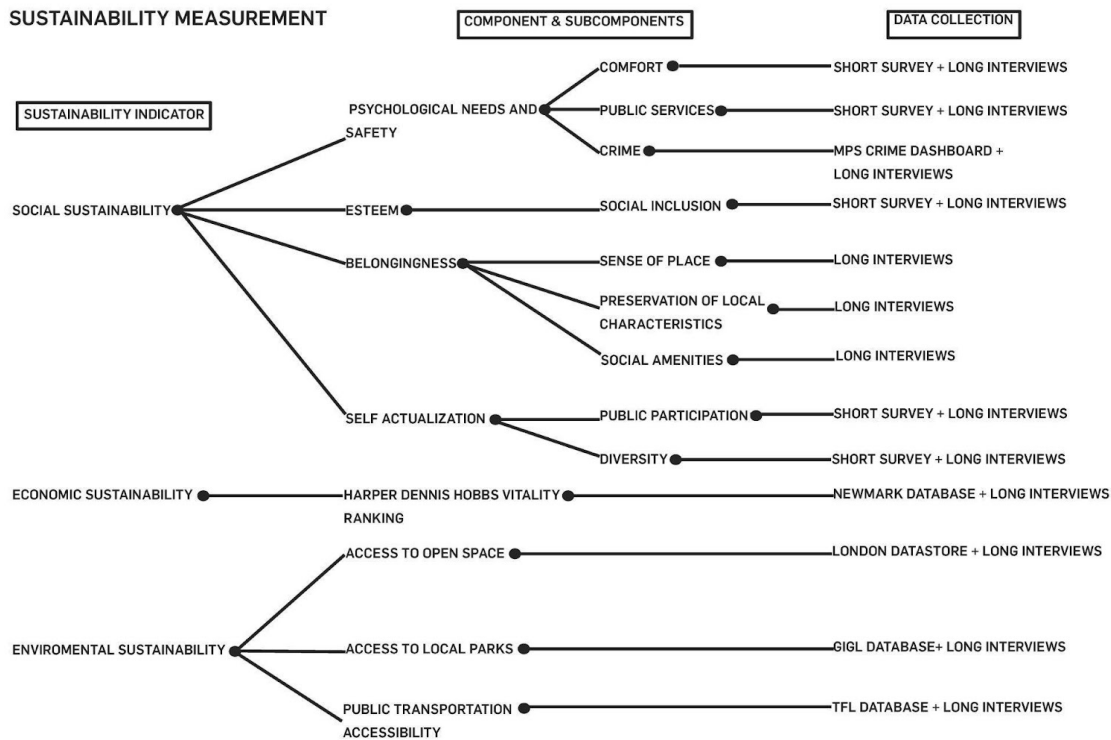
*Source: Mehan, A & S, Farzneh. (2017). Social sustainability in urban context: Concepts, definitions, and principles*

A table taken from the research paper with the six generalized components of social sustainability is shown above. Asma and Garzaneh’s paper was chosen as the basis of defining social sustainability because of its objective in clarifying “the social sustainability definitions, principles, and frameworks through reviewing the existing literature” (Asma & Farzaneh, 2017)). By doing so, it consequently reveals which definitions and components of social sustainability are the most widely accepted in academia. It reveals Maslow’s hierarchy is the most widely agreed upon framework to guide how social sustainability should be measured. In this framework, social sustainability can be broken down into the subcomponents of Belongingness, Esteem needs, Self-actualization needs and Beauty needs. Ensuring that my surveys and interviews were correctly capturing these components meant the methods of my study needed to agree with the existing literature on social sustainability.

## 4. Methodology

### a. Overview of Sustainability components

In this next section, I lay out my methodology for measuring social, economic, and environmental sustainability. I also detail the methodology for conducting a clone town survey, which is based on the official instructions of NEF's Clone Town survey.



**Figure 3: Sustainability Measurement**

Source: (Author)

The diagram above summarizes the complex subcomponents that make up the components of my environmental, social, and economic sustainability methodologies. The components of social, environmental, and economic sustainability were based on my interpretation of

academic research on measuring these variables. As I will discuss later, there were some adjustments to preexisting subcomponents of academic scholars due to several reasons. The first was that certain components overlapped with each other. I made minor changes to the components measured. Due to my understanding that the component of ‘beauty’ is extremely subjective and is hard to grade in comparison to the other subcomponents, I decided to omit it from my study. During my research, it became apparent to me that the subcomponent of Historical Preservation very much overlapped with “sense of place”.

**b. The theory of ‘First, Second space and Third space’**

After identifying the various components that comprise the three lenses of sustainability, I realized it was important to understand how these various components are typically measured in urban field work. As I understood many of the components above were subjective in that they relied on a resident’s perceptions, I explored urban planning research papers to understand common methods of collecting this information. Through my research, I understood Edward Soja’s theory of ‘first, second space and third space’ (Bustin, 2019) was a powerful method in obtaining and analyzing feedback from residents.

The concept of ‘first space’ focuses on the ‘built environment’ and its “growth, form and function” (Bustin, 2019). An example of utilizing ‘first space’ would be to map out all social amenities within a specific area manually.

The second space is ‘representational’ and explores how residents view the space around them (Bustin, 2019). An example of utilizing ‘second space’ would be to investigate how residents perceive these social amenities within a specific area (Bustin, 2019).

The ‘third space’ is lived space and explores how the first space and second place combine to illustrate a lived experience. To process the ‘third space’, the interviews could be transcribed

and coded into data to start discussing emerging themes that convey the general lived experience. (Bustin, 2019).

### **c) Measuring Social Sustainability**

#### **i) Short Survey**

In order to gather information on the components of social sustainability, I followed Richard Bustin's recommended method (cite) of handing out short surveys to individuals in the town center as well as conducting longer interviews with individuals who showed an interest in these interactions. The short surveys consisted of a comfort survey, a public service survey, and a social inclusion survey. Each survey had 5 possible answers scaled from one to five, where the fifth answer was typically the most positive response (e.g., Excellent) and the first answer was the most negative response (e.g., Extremely poor). After the short survey questions were completed, the respondents' answers would be tallied up in a points system to see how each town center is being graded in relation to the three components. The components of **comfort**, **privacy**, and **social inclusion** were chosen for the short question format due to my belief that these components were less personal than the other components, which would improve the survey completion rate.

#### **ii) Long Interview**

If a respondent shows great enthusiasm in the short survey, I will ask to conduct a longer interview. The long interview explores questions surrounding social inclusion, social amenities, social facilities, sense of place and identity, safety, public participation, and diversity. During this long interview, I would note down important points or observations during my ongoing conversations with the interviewee. Through these long interviews, interviewees would provide new points of interest in the town centers to investigate as well as

new contacts to interview. The accompanying interaction strategy of engaging in small conversations with respondents not only complements the quantitative data but also adds qualitative depth, providing a more holistic view of the town.

### **iii) Mapping**

The first method would involve manually sketching out the various streets, towns, nodes, and landmarks within the town centers that are noticeable and their corresponding characteristics and usages. For several days, I would walk around the town center with a printed map with its outline. I would then manually label streets, nodes, landmarks, and towns onto the printed map generally in conjunction with Kevin Lynch's symbology in the *Image of the City* (Lynch, 1960). Additionally maps of social amenities, social facilities, public transportation, and open spaces were also made. These were done in preparation for the analysis of social inclusion, public services, and comfort survey results.

In the second space phase of the research, respondents' answers to the surveys would be spatially matched to the relevant element on the map. Labeling these answers would start to give an idea of how residents perceive and interact with the various elements of the town center.

### **d. Measuring Economic Sustainability**

To measure economic sustainability, I utilized The Harper Dennis Hobbs Vitality Ranking (HDH, 2022), which is an index that measures a whole range of economic factors like vacancy rates, resident's movement and suitability to local consumer demands to score the economic sustainability of a high street within a town. It was created by the Harper Dennis Hobbs company which is a commercial real estate agency located in the United Kingdom.

### **e. Measuring Environmental Sustainability**

Through analysis of various scholarly sources such as the Stockholm Environment Institute's Urban Sustainability Metrics guide (Stockholm Environment Institute, 2022), I created a metric that assesses a town center's access to open space, parks, and public transportation. Access to open space and parks was retrieved from a dataset 'Access to Public Open Space and Nature by Ward' which was created by the 'Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GiGL)'. Access to public transportation was based of the town's score in the 'Public Transport Accessibility Levels' (PTAL) dataset owned by the local government body 'Transport for London'. More obvious factors such as 'pollution', 'recycling initiatives' were not included due to the information being readily available for some towns (Highgate and Brixton) but completely scarce for others (Upton Park and East Ham).

As the last NEF clone town survey was conducted in 2004, it was imperative for me to conduct a new survey on the six selected towns in London. Once the six towns were chosen, I followed NEF's methodology on conducting a clone town survey. I Positioned myself at one end of the town's main high street of your selected town and recorded information about the first 50 shops I came across. Once this was done, I calculated the clone town score using the following formula:

$$\text{Clone Town Score} = \frac{(C \times 5) + (A \times 50) + (B \times 5)}{T}$$

**where T = Number of shops (50)**

**C = Types of shops**

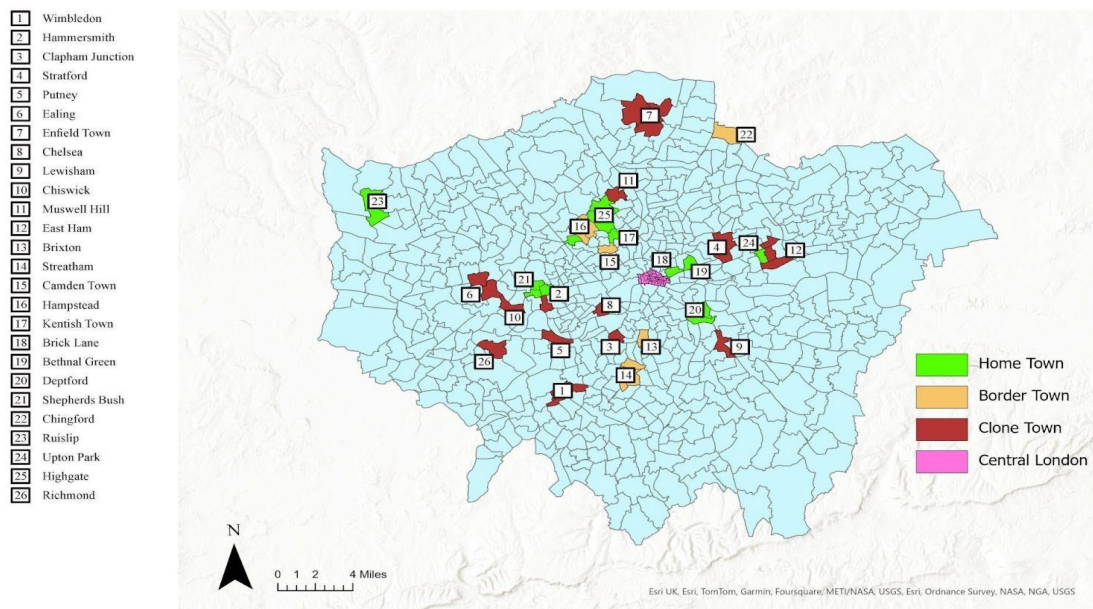
**A = Number of stores that were independently owned**

**B = Number of stores that were chains**

## 5. Town Selection

### a. Mapping Clone, Home, Border Towns in London

At the start of the research process, I had the choice of 26 potential towns to focus my research. They are listed below in the corresponding Clone Town, Border Town, Home Town designations.



Map 1: 26 Potential Towns in London

Source: (Author)

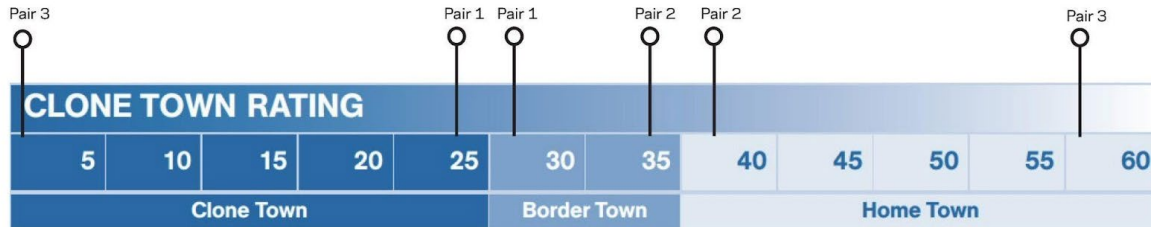
**Clone towns:** Wimbledon; Hammersmith; Clapham Junction; Stratford; Putney; Ealing; Enfield Town; Chelsea Lewisham; Chiswick; Muswell Hill; East Ham

**Border towns:** Brixton Streatham Camden Town Hampstead Chingford

**Home towns:** Ruislip Upton Park Highgate West Hampstead Kentish Town Brick Lane Bethnal Green Deptford Shepherds Bush

## b. Town selection method

To test the claims of NEF on home towns scoring better in sustainability, and to realistically undertake the necessary survey methodologies, I decided that I would pick 6 out of the 26



**Figure 4: Clone Town rating with pair groups**  
*Source: Modified from NEF (2004). Clone Town Survey.*

London areas of the NEF Studies. Despite these areas being wards within the city of London, I followed NEF's logic that for the purpose of research, they would be considered towns with their high streets or central commercial areas being considered their town centers. Six areas were chosen so that a large variety of towns would be compared in relation to their scores in the clone town survey. It was important that I had a logical method in determining which towns were paired with each other. My method of determining which towns were paired with each other was through comparing two towns with similar social and economic characteristics on edge of clone town classification schemes. This allowed fair comparison between towns due to socioeconomic and demographic circumstances being similar. In each of the pairs, each town had a separate clone town designation yet lied just on the edge of their designation range. For example, a clone town that had a score just beneath the border town range would be compared to a border town that had a score just above the clone town range. This led to the following arrangement:

We can see the following combination:

**Pair 1: Affluent/not diverse: Higher Border Town & Lower home town**

**Pair 2: Middle income/semi-diverse: Upper clone town & Lower Border Town**

**Pair 3: Lower income/very diverse: Lowest clone town & Highest Home Town**

Utilizing this town selection method allows fair comparison between towns due to socioeconomic and demographic circumstances being similar. Due to separate classifications being compared to one another, we can understand better the differences between them with regards to metrics. However, due to each town lying on edge of classification schemes, it is even easier to compare the towns. This led to the following towns to be selected; **Highgate & Hampstead** (pair 1), **Brixton & Lewisham** (pair 2) and **Upton Park & East Ham** (pair 3). Upon carrying out a new clone town survey in each of these towns, I found that the clone town designations had changed remarkably in 2024 since the last survey was carried out in 2002.

**Table 2: Clone Town scores in 2002 & 2024**

	<b>clone town score (2002)</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>New CT Score (2024)</b>	<b>Designation</b>
<b>Highgate</b>	37.2	home town	37.7	home town
<b>Upton Park</b>	36.6	home town	47.8	home town
<b>Hampstead</b>	33.2	Border Town	27	Border Town
<b>Brixton</b>	27	Border Town	29.2	Border Town
<b>East Ham</b>	24	clone town	28.7	Border Town
<b>Lewisham</b>	17.1	clone town	26	Border Town

*Source: (Author)*

The results revealed that there are no longer any clone towns in this group, as both East Ham and Lewisham have become border towns. Virtually all towns have had an increase in their clone town score except for Hampstead, which had a 6.2 reduction from 33.2 in 2002 to 27 in 2022.



**Figure 5: Crime Town ratings with pair groups and clone town designations**  
 Source: Modified from NEF (2004). Clone Town Survey.

The diagram above illustrates where these towns now sit in the clone town rating spectrum and their corresponding pair number. The town with the highest clone town score in each pair was known as a Higher CT Score Town (HCST), and the town with the lowest score in a pair is known as a Lower CT Score Town (LCST). By comparing the HCST to the LCST, I could still see how the difference in clone town scores in two towns with similar characteristics could impact their sustainability score.

**Pair 1: Affluent/not diverse: Highgate (HCST) & Hampstead (LCST)**

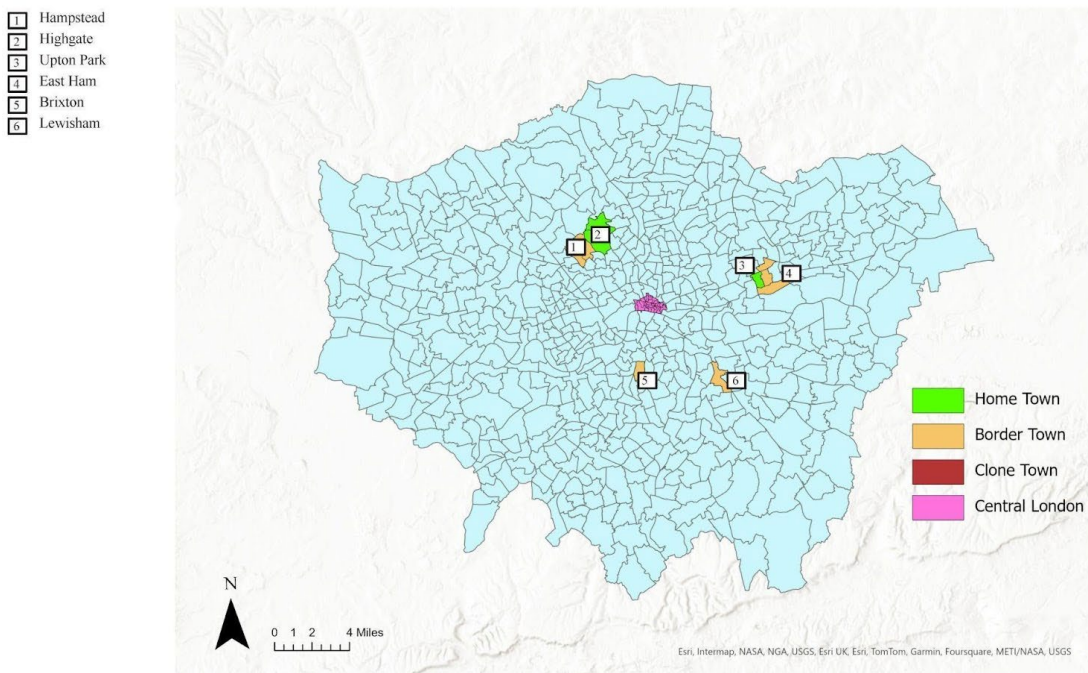
**Pair 2: Middle income/semi-diverse: Brixton (HCST) & Lewisham (LCST)**

**Pair 3: Lower income/very diverse: Upton Park (HCST) & Highgate (LCST)**

Above is an updated illustration of the town pairings and whether a town is an HCST or an LCST.

## 6. Town profiles

In this section, the final six towns will be discussed in relation to their socio-economic characteristics. Important socio-economic factors important in profiling each town include: % of BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic), % of residents who are economically deprived % and the educational achievement of residents.



**Map 2: Six selected towns in London**

*Source: (Author)*

The map above illustrates the distribution of towns across London. Visually, it is apparent that many of the towns lie similar distances away from central London. Their basic profiles are shown below:

## a. Hampstead



**Illustration 1: Hampstead high street**

Source: Tahmid Hussain

Hampstead, situated as a border town within Camden borough, is famous for its picturesque high streets filled with diverse types of stores and its nearby large local park Hampstead Heath. Every weekend, tourists from across London flock to its streets to eat in its boutique cafes and its famous traditional pubs. In recent years, it has lost its traditional antique market and many of its historical shops due to a lack of resistance to incoming developers. It has a predominantly white population constituting 77.7%, whilst 22.3% consists of individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. In terms of socio-economic indicators, Hampstead is characterized as having extremely low deprivation, standing at only 6%. It is a well-educated populace with 75.2% of its residents having achieved education levels at Level 4 or above, indicating a well-educated populace. Unsurprisingly only 5.5% of its populace report having no formal qualifications.

## b. Highgate



**Illustration 2: Highgate high street**  
Source: Tahmid Hussain

Highgate is a home town that belongs to both the boroughs of Camden and Haringey. It is famous for its leafy affluent streets, large amounts of parkland and its famous landmarks such as Karl Marx's Graveyard. It also hosts two prominent organizations: The HLSI and Highgate Society - which both collectively organize events and protect the interests of its local population. Post-pandemic, shopkeepers have struggled to stay afloat with extremely high rents charged by local landlords. The community is predominantly white as this group constitutes 70.6% of its population, while only 29.4% represents individuals from BAME backgrounds (slightly higher than Hampstead). In terms of socio-economic indicators, Highgate has a deprivation percentage of 10.1%, which suggests there is a little more economic diversity than Hampstead but still very affluent overall. Approximately 66.3% of residents have attained education levels at Level 4 or above which suggests it is a well-educated populace. Similarly to Hampstead, very few residents have had no formal qualifications (8.7%)

### c. Brixton



**Illustration 3: Brixton high street**  
Source: Tahmid Hussain

Brixton is a border town within Lambeth borough that is famous for its multicultural indoor malls, its economic outdoor market situated at Electric Avenue and culturally important landmarks to its long-established Caribbean community. The area is also experiencing controversial levels of gentrification as its famous indoor markets have been purchased by private developers who are being blamed for the vacancy of traditional stores. Additionally, its high streets have large amounts of drug activity which has led to chronic levels of anti-social behavior. It also hosts the Lambeth town hall, making it the administrative hub of the borough. It is a diverse community with slightly more than half of the population belonging to the BAME community (54.6%). It has large populations of Caribbean, African and Latin American communities. Brixton's town center has a substantial portion of residents that are considered deprived sitting at 16.3%, making it a mixed-income community. It has a fairly educated population with around 56% of residents having education levels at Level 4 or above. However a sizable portion have no formal qualifications at all (13.4%).

#### d. Lewisham



**Illustration 4: Lewisham high street**

Source: Tahmid Hussain

Lewisham is a border town within the Lewisham borough that is famous for its huge bustling outdoor market as well as possessing one of the largest shopping centers in Southeast London: Lewisham shopping mall. In recent years, Lewisham is rapidly being transformed by huge developments near its transit hub. Many residents have questioned whether these developers will uplift the community and help fight rampant anti-social behavior and drug usage at nighttime. It is very diverse as 53.8% of its residents are from BAME backgrounds, which is slightly less than Brixton's percentage. Similarly to Brixton, it has large populations of Caribbean and African heritage. It has a slightly higher deprivation level than Brixton as 17.5% of residents are classified as being deprived. It has a substantially lower percentage of residents who have education levels at Level 4 or above (48.9%) than Brixton yet maintains a similar proportion of residents without any formal qualifications (16.9%).

### e. Upton Park



**Illustration 5: Upton Park high street**  
Source: Tahmid Hussain

Upton Park is a home town within the Newham borough that possesses a prominent high street that is a popular place for London's Muslim community to buy wedding dresses. Its iconic family-owned wedding shops both bring in visitors from across the UK as well as European countries. Its prominent indoor shopping mall Queens Market is well liked by its local community but unfortunately has become under threat by developers who plan to redevelop the market into a new mixed development. A community group known as the 'Friends of Queens Market' has been leading a campaign against the developers to save the market from being redeveloped. It is extremely diverse with 87%, coming from the BAME Community. Upton Park is a working-class community with 23.8% of its residents being classified as deprived. Only 35.5% of residents have education levels at Level 4 or above and a whopping 25.3% report having no formal qualifications at all.

## f. East Ham



**Illustration 6: East Ham high street**

Source: Tahmid Hussain

East Ham is a clone town in the Newham borough that is simultaneously known as one of the most multicultural and deprived towns in London. Its town center is characterized by a one-way shared street (for buses, pedestrians and cars) running through its high street. Due to the presence of the East Ham town hall, the area is Newham's administrative hub. The area is also currently experiencing high levels of antisocial behavior as many shops experience shoplifting without very little repercussions. Around 83.1% of residents belong to the BAME community, which is slightly less than Upton Park. Its percentage of residents being classified as deprived is 21.4%, which is less than Upton Park. It has a slightly smaller university educated populace than Upton Park, as 34.2% of residents having education levels at Level 4 or above yet 24.6% report having no formal qualifications which is less than Upton Park.

## 7. Findings & Discussion

In this section, the results of the short surveys, long interviews and various data tables will be discussed. For the **belongingness** component, data collected was solely collected through the method of long interviews with residents. This meant its results were general trends made through an aggregation of resident comments about **social amenities, sense of place and Historical preservation**. For the **Social Sustainability** components of **physiological needs, safety, esteem, self-actualization**, the findings were determined through short surveys to residents about their respective subcomponents. **Environmental** and **Economic suitability** were calculated through various data tables pertaining to each of their subcomponents.

### a. Belongingness

#### i) Social Amenities

In terms of **social amenities**, it can be observed that two of the HCSTs (Highgate and Brixton) performed better in their usage of social amenities than their LCST counterparts. This was due to the abundance of positive feedback residents gave for the HCTSs social amenities such as the Highgate Society and Brixton library in comparison to their LCST counterparts. Residents in both towns were quick to point out how these social amenities provided multiple and useful functions to the locals in a manner that residents in their LCST counterparts simply did not do. However, the results show Upton Park as being a clear outlier in this regard due to clearly being outperformed by its LCST counterpart East Ham. Residents in East Ham praised the services of the Newham Library and East Ham Leisure center which was a direct contrast to the residents in Upton Park who felt they needed more social amenities.

At first glance, it might be tempting to conclude that two of the HCSTs performed better due to their clone town score but this is too simplistic as a conclusion due to ignoring the notable outlier of Upton Park. Despite being a higher clone town score than its LCST counterpart East Ham, it had significantly less social amenities and the few examples of amenities they had were far less effective than in East Ham. Through the analysis of the long interviews and spatial maps, there seems to be a more plausible explanation to the results which entails that the towns which have the most effective social amenities (East Ham, Highgate and Brixton) were the ones that possessed special districts known as **community hubs**. In these special districts, large libraries are located directly next to administrative buildings. These buildings would often collaborate and pool resources together to provide better services to residents and families. This differed greatly from Lewisham, Hampstead and Upton Park whose social amenities were often geographically spread out, underfunded and not directly coordinating with each other.



**Map 3: Community Hubs in East Ham**

*Source: (Author)*

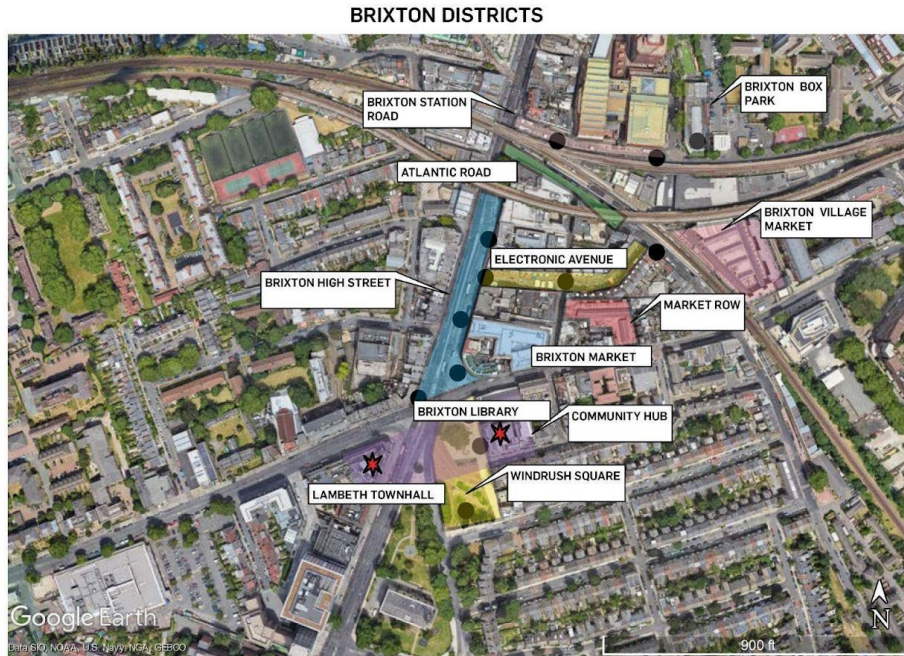
An example of a successful community hub is seen in the map above which displays where this special district is in East Ham. In this example, we can see the East Ham library is right next to administrative buildings and often coordinated together in providing educational and social programs to residents. In the long interviews, residents have praised the sheer scale and functionality of the East Ham library in that it offered an abundance of classes and social activities for families, young people, and adults alike. Its proximity to the East Ham town hall ultimately led the library to be pivotal space to launch community centered programs like the People Powered Places Initiative - a participatory planning policy that helps residents of Newham (the borough East Ham is in) to choose how to improve the borough. The popularity of the library allowed the People Powered Places Initiative to engage with a large number of people, which ultimately led to the proposals for the borough being reflective of what the Newham residents wanted. Additionally, there was evidence to suggest that HCST libraries also operate as a safe haven for extremely deprived families and homeless people who often relied on the library's close links with the town hall to resolve any domestic or immigration related issues (through legal advice). A similar dynamic can be seen in Highgate and Brixton; the educational hub of the HLSI coordinates with the administrative hub of Highgate society just as Brixton library collaborates with the nearby Lambeth Town Hall. It is recommended that towns lacking in social amenities should build their own community district for high quality social amenities.

## **ii) Sense of place**

In terms of **sense of place**, the findings suggest HCSTs residents generally have better knowledge of the **roads, nodes, districts, and landmarks** than their LCST counterparts. In terms of roads, nodes, and districts specifically, Local knowledge from the towns of Brixton and Upton Park was significantly higher than their LCST counterparts with the exception of Highgate. Hampstead residents generally were more knowledgeable of important roads,

specialized districts, and important meeting points than Highgate residents. Regarding landmarks, residents in all three HCSTs were unanimously far more knowledgeable on important landmarks than their LCST counterparts. HCST residents could often pinpoint all the important landmarks, be knowledgeable on the local histories and emphasize the importance of these districts to the local community.

It is difficult to conclude that HCTSs perform better than their LCSTs due to a higher clone town score due to Highgate having a higher clone town score yet still performing worse than Hampstead contradicts this argument. Despite the larger amounts of chain stores in Hampstead, locals in the area were generally more knowledgeable on the prominent roads, meeting points and districts in the neighborhood than Highgate's residents. One possible explanation in why Hampstead performed better is due to Hampstead's pubs being spread across the town center and their landmark status often meant residents or visitors would traverse through local roads, alleyways, and districts to reach these pubs. Doing so would inevitably lead to better knowledge of road names, the various districts and important meeting points in the town. This differed greatly from Highgate whose landmark pubs were only located on one road (Highgate high street) and thus residents had little reason to explore all the elements away from the High Street center. Thus, there seems to be a more plausible explanation that a **decentralized urban layout** has more of an effect on local knowledge of districts, roads and nodes than its ratio of chain to traditional stores.



**Map 3: Brixton districts**

*Source: (Author)*

This theory seems more plausible when we look at Brixton whose residents arguably had the best knowledge of local roads, nodes, districts, and landmarks. Brixton’s layout (as shown above) is structurally like Hampstead’s town center where alleyways lead into a variety of specialized districts and has a large scatter of important landmarks across the area. In Brixton, residents have the selection of 10 districts to explore - each of them has unique types of shops that are not available in other parts of Brixton. Residents looking to buy certain products or services will have to traverse these districts which will help them develop extensive knowledge of its layout, where important murals were located and the history behind these murals. Arguably it's the town’s development history that led to the unique spatial configurations that allowed residents to explore its spatial elements. This contradicts the notion that its clone town score has any significant impact on the sense of space.

### iii) Historic preservation

In terms of Historical preservation, there was evidence to suggest all three HCTSs contained better protection for its landmarks than their LCSTs counterparts. There was a clear general of LCSTs demolishing local landmarks to the dismay of local residents whilst in contrast local organizations in HCSTs were often effective local landmarks. These differences will be explored more thoroughly in the discussions section.

Due to the results indicating that all three HCSTs performed better in Historical preservation, the idea that a higher clone town score could be a prominent factor was far more plausible than was shown in the previous subcomponents. Initially, the long interviews provided very little insight into how the ratio of chains to traditional stores would affect the area's ability to preserve its local characteristics. However, upon closer inspection, there was plausible evidence to suggest towns with a higher clown town score seemed to possess the necessary conditions for **organic community organizations** to develop and protect the neighborhood from new developments harming its identity.

These community organizations were often composed of a dedicated group of residents who deeply cared about the town they lived in. It was interesting to note that virtually all local organizations were tied to an important landmark in the town. We can see this in Highgate where the local community group known as the Highgate society acts based in its landmark building operated as an informal planning organization that uses the legal expertise of their volunteers to directly choose which developments are implemented in their area. This contrasts with Hampstead which was often at the mercy of new developments that directly impacted the town's characteristics as shown by the demolition of its famous Hampstead Antique & Craft Emporium. This was devastating the local elderly population who often used it as a place to socialize. There was also evidence that the Highgate society regularly volunteered in the upkeep of elements central to Highgate's identity which included painting

telephone boxes and older buildings. In Upton Park, the local organization Friends of Queen Market was successful in disrupting the planned development of its Queen's Market as opposed to East Ham where there was no organized opposition to the demolition of East Ham Market.

It's important to note that the ability of these community groups to block new developments varies considerably in the examples above. Unlike the other two organizations, Highgate Society was made up of retired elderly residents with an abundance of legal experience through their careers. Their knowledge of the law and higher abundance of resources meant they launched successful legal lawsuits against developers to deter any changes to the neighborhood character. Other organizations like the Friends of Windrush Square or the Friends of Queens Market were not as affluent and experienced legal issues which often impaired their ability to combat developers. It is thus imperative that LCSTs mobilize community groups with more resources and more individuals with legal experience to defend the landmarks or characteristics residents feel important to them. More research needs to be completed to understand why places with higher clone scores seem to be breeding grounds for these community organizations.

**a. Physiological needs and safety**

**i) Comfort**

**Table 3: Comfort scores of towns**

	<b>Comfort</b>
Highgate	1.6
Upton Park	-0.75
Hampstead	1.1
Brixton	-2.0
East Ham	-2.3
Lewisham	-1.2

*Source: (Author)*

The sub-component **comfort** focuses on resident’s perception of the town center’s hygiene, spaciousness and air quality. For comfort, a subcomponent of physiological needs, **two of the HCSTs** (Highgate and Upton Park) score higher than their LCST counterparts, with Brixton being an outlier in scoring less than Lewisham. The town with the highest overall comfort score is Highgate (1.6), and East Ham has the lowest overall comfort score (-2.3).

Based on these results, it is difficult to conclude that clone town scores are the sole reason why they performed so well. Despite Brixton having a higher clone town score than Lewisham, it had lower levels of comfort than Lewisham. Through analyzing long interviews, there was no obvious evidence that a higher concentration of traditional stores would reduce littering issues or poor sanitation in these areas through locals having more pride in their area. Rather there was evidence to suggest that residents' perceptions of comfort in the area seemed to be related to their **perception of local authorities to resolve issues in the area**. This was seen in the observation that the comfort survey results strongly correlated with the results of the related public service survey question 'On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the responsiveness and effectiveness of the local authorities in addressing public concerns and issues in the town center?'. Through examining the long interviews, it was clear that residents in Brixton, Hampstead and East Ham (the towns that performed the worst in comfort) in particular often felt let down by their local authorities who were not doing enough to keep their area clean. Towns looking to improve their comfort levels for their residents should ensure their local authorities are listening to the resident feedback on town sanitation and waste management.

## ii) Public Services

Table 4: Public Services scores of towns

	Public Services
Highgate	1.5
Upton Park	1.3
Hampstead	1.8
Brixton	0.38
East Ham	1.1
Lewisham	0

Source: (Author)

The sub-component **comfort** focuses on resident's perception of essential services within the town center such as health facilities, the effectiveness of local authorities to resolve issues and the availability of public transportation. For public services, a subcomponent of physiological needs, **two of the HCSTs** (Upton Park and Brixton) **scored higher** than their LCST counterparts, with Highgate being an outlier in scoring less than Hampstead. The town with the highest overall public services score is Hampstead (1.8), and Lewisham has the lowest overall public services score (0).

Based on the research findings, it is problematic to conclude a clown town score would inevitably lead to better public services as only two of the three HCTSs (Brixton and Upton Park) performed better than their LCST counterpart. The important exception to this trend was Highgate which, despite scoring better in resident perception of local authorities, still scored worse in access to public transportation and essential services in comparison to Hampstead. Since the clown town score hypothesis seemed unlikely due to this finding, it was important to consider alternative explanations to the results. One initial thought was that the competency of the local authorities might improve the score in public services for the town. However, this is a problematic viewpoint as many of the town pairings were both located in the same borough and yet it is remarkable how different these towns scored in public services (e.g. East Ham and Upton Park). A possible clue to why certain towns scored better in public services lay in long interviews that occurred in Hampstead which was the highest scoring town in public services. Here residents often referenced the presence of a high-quality hospital in their area (Royal Free Hospital), the existence of an underground and an overground train station in the area. These factors are more to do with a **town's development history** through past transportation and local government policies. Despite towns like Hampstead and Highgate being in the same borough, they were ultimately developed differently and thus have different circumstances revolving around public transportation and health facility infrastructure.

## b. Safety

### i) Crime

Table 5: Crime scores of towns

	Crime
Highgate	74.6
Upton Park	92.4
Hampstead	87.3
Brixton	473.4
East Ham	172.6
Lewisham	509.8

Source: (Author)

The sub-component **crime** focuses on the level of crime within the town center based on the crime dashboard provided by the London Metropolitan Police Service. This dashboard aggregates the total crime in each town center including crimes such as theft, burglary and violence against the person. For crime, a subcomponent of safety, **all HCSTs had less crime** than their LCST counterparts. The town with the highest overall crime rate is Lewisham (509.8), and Highgate has the lowest overall crime rate (74.6).

Despite town pairs having similar socio-economic status and demographics, it is clear that HCSTs were remarkably safer than their counterparts. Through long interviews, it seems very plausible that a **town's concentration of chain to traditional stores does, in fact, affect its crime rate**. Residents often observed large amounts of crime occurring in spaces with an overabundance of low-value chain shops (such as betting shops), especially in lower-income LCSTs like Lewisham and East Ham. Additionally, the overabundance of fast-food chains like McDonalds was associated with large groups of criminal men and anti-social school children. From the Clone Town survey, it was very apparent that lower-income areas typically had more of these types of chain stores than wealthier areas. There was evidence to suggest wealthier areas would take action to prevent these establishments entering their high roads as shown by Hampstead's local community which advocated against the opening of McDonald's, which is a fast-food establishment that was often associated with antisocial behavior in the other LCSTs. It was also observable that there is a clear lack of respect for the well-being of certain chain establishments from the local community as seen in East Ham, where staff members in Greggs (a fast-food chain) were indifferent to shoplifting and vandalism which occurred in the shop every day. This contrasted with the high level of respect for older established traditional businesses in the HCSTs where there were numerous accounts of local community defending these shops from shoplifters or vandalism.

It is thus recommended that LCSTs enforce more regulation to reduce the number of low value chain stores in their area to reduce crime in their high streets.

**c. Esteem**

**i) Social Inclusion**

**Table 6: Social inclusion scores of towns**

Highgate	3.4
Upton Park	-0.8
Hampstead	1.2
Brixton	2.7
East Ham	0.29
Lewisham	-0.33

*Source: (Author)*

These subcomponent social inclusions focuses on the resident’s perception of inclusivity of social events, the availability of public spaces, how welcoming the social atmosphere is and the efforts made by local authorities to give residents a sense of belonging. For this subcomponent, **two of the HCSTs (Brixton and Highgate) scored significantly higher** than their LCST counterparts, with Upton Park being an outlier in scoring less than East Ham. The town with the highest overall score is Highgate (3.4), and Lewisham has the lowest overall score (-0.33).

Based on the fact that only two of the three HCSTs scored better in social inclusion than their LCSTs counterparts, there was more evidence to suggest the presence of **community hubs** had far more impact on social inclusion than the clone town score of the town. This should come as no surprise considering resident responses strongly linked social inclusion to the presence of strong social amenities. Through long interviews, it was clear residents felt social inclusion was often tied to the presence of social amenities that offered daily activities for residents as well as festivals for families to take part in. As mentioned before, the collaboration of administrative buildings, land and libraries in these community hubs often led to enhanced programs and services for residents which made many residents feel socially connected to the wider community. Through participating in these activities, residents would make new friends and build their network of social contacts.

Interestingly these community hub collaborations often led to the creation and management of large public events for residents to take part in every year. We can see this in how East Ham town hall worked directly with the library to create and advertise large festivals in the nearby park. Festivals like the *The Lord Mayor show*, *Under the stars* and *Newham Unlocked* were hosted in the local park and made many residents feel a stronger attachment to the local community in East Ham. In Highgate's community hub, the Highgate Society directly coordinated public festivals for the wider neighborhood including the Fair N Square festival, the Highgate Festival and various religious celebrations occurring throughout the year. This was met with great acclaim by the local community who felt more socially included to the wider community. This was in great contrast to Upton Park, Hampstead, and Lewisham where there were few such celebrations and residents reported feeling isolated.



**Illustration 7: Highgate bulletin boards**

Source: Tahmid Hussain

A key component of Highgate’s high score social inclusion was Highgate’s use of local bulletin boards throughout the neighborhood (as shown above). Each board was filled with local community leaflets and advertising of local businesses, which according to residents was an extremely effective method of keeping residents engaged with their local community. It is highly recommended for LCSTs to create community boards and have widespread local bulletin boards for residents to improve their social inclusion. Are there online social networks also?

## e) Self Actualization

### i) Diversity

Table 7: Diversity scores of towns

Highgate	0.13
Upton Park	0.23
Hampstead	0.15
Brixton	0.82
East Ham	0.38
Lewisham	0.5

Source: (Author)

The sub-component **diversity** focuses on how well the town caters to the needs of diverse social groups. For this subcomponent, **two of the HCSTs** (Highgate and Upton Park) **scored less** than their LCST counterparts, with Brixton being an outlier in scoring less than Lewisham. The town with the highest overall diversity score is Brixton (0.82), and Highgate has the lowest overall diversity score (0.13).

Due to two of the HCTSs having far less diversity than their LCST counterparts, there is no evidence to suggest this lack of diversity is solely due to clone town scores. In looking at the two least diverse towns, Upton Park and Highgate, residents often criticized the dominance of

specific ethnic and social groups in the area's politics and businesses. In Upton Park, the South Asian Muslim community had large ownership of the businesses in the area whilst in Highgate, the affluent elderly white British populace dominated the membership of Highgate Society and the HLSI. This contrasted greatly with Brixton, Lewisham, and East Ham which were often praised for their diversity, particularly in the cohesion of different ethnic groups. A possible explanation for this difference in diversity scores among the six towns is due to the social amenities in higher scoring towns **recognizing the multicultural populace in the area and offering culturally specific activities for its residents**. In the Brixton library, this could be seen through certain activities being promoted to families speaking Spanish or various West African languages in the library. This could not be said for the social amenities in Highgate or Upton Park which showed little evidence in recognizing the cultural and linguistic diversity in the area. Residents in towns scoring well in diversity also had multicultural businesses catered to an extremely diverse range of ethnic groups which is in large contrasts to the neighborhoods of Highgate, Hampstead, and Upton Park. This was especially apparent in sub districts like Lewisham Market or Brixton Market which were praised for hosting diverse immigrant owned small businesses. Thus, towns scoring less in diversity should consider making their social amenities better equipped for diverse populations and suggest the presence of multicultural sub towns could greatly increase its diversity score.

## ii) Public Participation

Table 8: Public participation scores of towns

	Public participation
Highgate	1
Upton Park	1.4
Hampstead	0.48
Brixton	0.35
East Ham	0.79
Lewisham	0.67

The public participation subcomponent focuses on residents' level of involvement in decision-making processes related to the town center. For this subcomponent, two of the **HCSTs** (Upton Park and Highgate) scored higher than their LCST counterparts, with Brixton being a clear outlier scoring less than Lewisham. The town with the highest overall public participation score is Upton Park (1.4), and Brixton has the lowest overall public participation score (0.35).

The fact that two of the HCTSs had more public participation than their LCST counterparts made it unlikely that the difference in public participation scores was solely due to a difference

in clone town scores. It was initially surprising that East Ham and Brixton did poorly given the presence of community hubs in these towns. It would be assumed that the presence of administrative buildings collaborating with local libraries would allow residents to feel more involved with the way their neighborhoods are run. This was especially surprising for East Ham where programs such as the ‘People Powered Places’ initiative were designed to allow residents to have choices in how the council’s budget is spent in their area.

However, upon analysis of the long interviews on public services, it was clear that many residents in East Ham and Brixton felt whilst their voices were heard on issues affecting the area, these councils were largely too inadequate or cash-strapped to do anything about it. Despite the town hall being located near the business owners of Brixton Market, they often felt they were ignored by the council against the rampant drug abuse and petty crime in the area. This feeling of alienation from constantly voicing their concerns to administrative headquarters yet feeling ignored could have led many residents to give more negative and harsher scores in public participation. This was similarly seen in East Ham library where residents disgruntled from not being able book an appointment with the East Ham town hall, would voice their issues to the library staff instead. This contrasted with the higher scores in Lewisham and Hampstead where residents seem to accept, they were powerless over the developments and the problems in the area. Rather than voicing their frustration at the local council, some residents hinted they took matters in their own hands through vigilante justice in their neighborhoods.



**Illustration 8: Queens Market: a famous market in Upton Park.**  
Source: Tahmid Hussain

Whilst it was initially puzzling why Upton Park enjoyed the highest public participation score in the short surveys, it became clearer as the long interviews proceeded. The two organizations of ‘Friends of Queens Market’ and Green Street Business Associations were extremely active in dealing with the local council. The Friends of Queens Market often attended council meetings on behalf of the Queens Market vendors and shoppers alike to express their views on how the Queens Market was managed. On the other hand, the Green Street Business Association was largely made of local business owners who coordinated in mass to attend meetings with the council to handle business affairs. This was also seen in Hampstead where shopkeepers in the Flask Walk district organized themselves to have better communication with the council about their needs. Highgate also had similar success in residents using the Highgate Society and Neighborhood Forum to voice their concerns. Thus, there seems to be evidence that **community organizations acting on behalf of the local community** seems to be more effective in public participation than launching public participatory programs like ‘People powered places. It is therefore recommended that towns with low public participation mobilize community organizations to give voice and agency to the public.

## f. Economic Sustainability

Table 9: Economic Vitality ranking

	Economic Vitality ranking
Highgate	55
Upton Park	431
Hampstead	27
Brixton	846
East Ham	382
Lewisham	237

Source: (Author)

A town's economic sustainability score is based off its ranking in the Harper Dennis Hobbs Vitality Ranking system (HDH, 2022) which measures a whole range of economic factors like vacancy rates, resident's movement and suitability to local consumer demands. For economic sustainability, the results showed that all **three HCSTs scored less** than their LCST counterparts. The town with the highest overall economic vitality rank is Hampstead (27), and Brixton has the lowest overall economic vitality rank (846).

The results illustrate the hypothesis that a higher clone town score would mean better economic sustainability is clearly false, and in fact, the opposite seems to be true. Contrary to

the hypothesis, all LCSTs had far economically healthier high streets than their HCST counterparts. Through the analysis of residential interviews, there seemed to be three main issues HCST was facing causing them to suffer in economic health. The first problem was that **traditional businesses were struggling to afford the higher rents enforced by landlords** because of inflation in comparison to chain stores. It was apparent that the companies behind the chain stores were far more affluent than their traditional store counterparts and could afford the higher rents. This meant the traditional stores had higher threats of becoming vacant due to not being able to stay afloat. In Highgate and Brixton, many traditional store owners complained of excessively high rents from landlords and stated they had received no financial help from the local council.

The second reason was linked to **the failure of traditional indoor markets in sustaining themselves in modern day London**. In both Queen's Market in Upton Park and the various indoor malls in Brixton, many traditional stores were made vacant due struggling to afford the high rents enforced by the market's landlords. This led to the market falling in a state of neglect as shopkeepers became increasingly disillusioned. In contrast, both East Ham and Hamsptead residents had reported that their indoor malls had been demolished in place for new development in the area. This decision was likely economically driven given the poor performance of these malls in the past and it is likely to help the town's position in the Economic Vitality Ranking. It was also important to note that the outdoor market towns of Brixton and Lewisham (which contained outdoor stalls rather than indoor venues) seemed to have far better economic health than indoor markets. This could be due to the fact that they are charged licensing fees from the council itself rather than face the high rents seen in the indoor malls. This could be a necessary strategy for certain towns to move indoor markets to smaller outdoor ones to ensure their survival.

The third reason for HCTSs failure could be due to the **lack of organization amongst traditional businesses especially in Brixton and Highgate**. In Hampstead and Upton Park, there were various business-oriented organizations that helped business owners directly coordinate with the authorities any demands they had. In Hampstead, which ranked the highest of all towns in the Vitality ranking, all local businesses received email notifications from Hampstead Society to directly inform them of any changes occurring in the town. There was even evidence that Flask walk, a narrow passageway filled with traditional businesses, had its own association which helped these businesses coordinate together on issues important to them. This contrasts with the business owners in Brixton Mall which had stopped all communication on a local WhatsApp group chat made during the time period of the Covid Epidemic. The lack of organization amongst small businesses in Brixton and Highgate often means they are unable to apply pressure on predatory landlords or unfair policies carried out by the local council.

**g. Environmental sustainability**

**i) Access to Open Space and Local Parks**

**Table 10: Access to Open Space and Local Parks**

	Access to Open Space	Access to Local Parks
Highgate	72.05%	41.45%
Upton Park	6.60%	12.65%
Hampstead	53.70%	28.70%
Brixton	98.20%	36.20%
East Ham	11.10%	28.80%
Lewisham	27.10%	68.10%

*Source: (Author)*

The subcomponents of access to open space and local parks measure what percentage of the towns are located within 400 meters of open space or local parks. For access to open space, a subcomponent of economic sustainability, **two of the HCTSs** (Highgate and Brixton) **scored higher** than their LCST counterparts with the outlier being Upton Park which had a lower percentage than East Ham. The town with the highest overall access to open space percentage was Brixton (98.20%), and Upton Park had the lowest overall access to open space percentage (6.60%). For access to local parks, another subcomponent of local parks, **two of the HCSTs** (Brixton and Upton Park) **scored less** than their LCST counterparts with the outlier being

Highgate which had a lower percentage than Hampstead. The town with the highest overall access to local parks was Lewisham (68.1%) and Upton Park had the lowest overall access to local parks (12.65%).

Based on these results, there is no evidence to suggest whether a town is a HCST or a LCST has any bearing on its access to open space or local parks as the findings have illustrated only two out of three HCTSs scoring better in both instances. Through looking at long interviews, a possible explanation for why certain towns performed better in access to open space or local parks is due to its **historical development**. Simply put, a town like Highgate built further outside of London is more likely to be near rural land that eventually became greenbelts in the late 20th century. Another possibility on why certain towns had more access to open space or local parks could be due to **local organization's efforts in preserving local parks and open space inside these towns**. One resident belonging to Highgate Society stated that the organization initially came together to protect local park life and open space from industrial development. Brixton, on the other hand, had the highest percentage of residents living close to open space which is not surprising given the campaigning of the local organization Friends of the Windrush Square to protect its open space. The success of preserving these important spaces can be further seen in the short survey responses to the question 'How would you rate the availability of public spaces for social interactions and gatherings in your town center', where residents in Brixton and Highgate had the highest scores out of all the other towns. It is thus recommended that towns with low access to open space or public parks utilize community organizations with legal experience to protect these spaces from being lost to development.

## ii) Access to public transportation

Table 11: Public transportation accessibility

	Public transportation accessibility
Highgate	7.092783
Upton Park	11.6925675
Hampstead	7.838057
Brixton	29
East Ham	10.9887715
Lewisham	25.16583

Source: (Author)

The subcomponent of access to public transportation is based on Transport for London's PTAL scoring system which measures factors like walking time to public transportation, range of transportation services available and reliability of services. Public transportation options include local buses, the London Tube and railway stations. For access to public transportation accessibility, a subcomponent of economic sustainability, **two of the HCTSs** (Brixton and Upton Park) **scored higher** than their LCST counterparts. The town with the highest overall access to open space percentage is Brixton (98.20%), and Upton Park has the lowest overall access to open space percentage (6.60%).

Regarding public transportation accessibility, two of three HCTSs scored higher which disapproved the hypothesis that a higher clone town score would ensure better public transportation accessibility. Similarly to access to open space and parks, one possible explanation for the differences could be due to the **history of development of each individual town**. More suburban towns like Hampstead and Highgate that have low public transportation accessibility could have been built away from railway and bus networks in comparison to inner city towns like Brixton and Lewisham. Additionally, through looking at the long interview responses, it was apparent that traffic congestion had a huge implication of public transportation accessibility. One advantage East Ham had over the traffic congested Upton Park was that it had a one-way shared space road running through the high street and thus faced less traffic in comparison to Upton Park. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest East Ham's strategy towards public transportation circulation is working and could provide lessons for other towns looking to improve accessibility for their residents.

#### **h) Limitations**

During my research, I encountered several obstacles to my data collection that could limit the reliability of my results. A major obstacle to economic sustainability data collection was the fact that HDH did not provide a vitality ranking score for Highgate since its high street was too small for them to include it in their dataset. This meant I needed to estimate the score of the high street given the socio-economic conditions I observed during my field work. Through residential interviews and fieldwork, I was able to roughly predict the economic vitality ranking for Highgate. This would be a severe limitation to the reliability of economic sustainability score on Highgate. Based on this, I would propose further research should be conducted to determine the economic vitality ranking score of Highgate based on the methods of HDH.

Another major obstacle to my data collection was that obvious factors directly tied to environmental sustainability such as pollution and green initiatives were not measured in my research study. This was due to inconsistency in the availability of information about these factors across all towns. An example of this was seen in pollution levels where the lack of information in the Newham towns (East Ham and Upton Park) would have meant I would have to estimate their levels which would cause too many uncertainties for the results within environmental sustainability. Further research can be implemented to properly include these factors and create a more accurate assessment of economic sustainability in these towns.

## 8. Conclusion

The project's mixed method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods, can provide valuable lessons for other researchers in tackling multifaceted topics such as sustainability. Quantitative data collection was primarily utilized to understand each town's socioeconomic profiles and various economic topics such as clone town scores or economic vitality rankings. Qualitative data, however, was utilized to capture resident perceptions of various issues such as belongingness and 'sense of place. Through the implementation of the first space, second space, and third space methodology, subjective ideas such as 'sense of place' and 'belongingness' can be transformed into measurable components that provide an understanding of the lives of residents within these spaces.

With regard to social sustainability, it was overwhelmingly clear that whether a town was an HCST or an LCST had little impact on its ability to be socially sustainable. Instead, factors such as the presence of community hubs, active community organizations, and diversity-inclined social amenities seem to be far more instrumental in determining the social sustainability of a town. Local authorities looking to improve their social sustainability in a short period should realistically look to establish community hubs. Community hubs were especially important in this regard because they were strongly related to the esteem and belongingness performance of the town, determining social sustainability. A town's development history and the urban layout of its town centers are important factors; however, amending them might only be viable in a long-term, expensive redevelopment policy.

Councils looking to establish community hubs should note the contrasts between how they are implemented in affluent communities to low-income communities. In East Ham and Brixton, community hubs were spaces that provided esteem and belongingness to the diverse residents but, unfortunately, lacked resources to do little more. In contrast, in Highgate's community hub, not only did they provide esteem and belongingness, but their affluent

organizations could often hold local authorities accountable on various issues and enforce legal procedures to preserve local characteristics. However, Highgate did not facilitate diverse spaces for low-income or ethnic backgrounds as East Ham was able to despite East Ham being a far poorer neighborhood. It is imperative for local authorities to create community hubs that combine the strengths of East Ham, Brixton, and Highgate's community hubs to have really a strong effect on social sustainability in their town.

The Dennis Hobbs vitality score and the resident interviews clearly contradict NEF's claims that hometowns are more economically sustainable than their counterparts. All HCTSs scored consistently worse than their LCST counterparts. Based on interviews with business owners in HCST, this finding could be attributed to traditional businesses struggling to afford the highly inflated rent placed on them by landlords in a country currently gripped by a recession. The LCST counterparts simply had fewer of these businesses and more chain corporations that could better afford these rents. It is recommended that towns with high clone town scores practice some of the methods that certain towns have utilized to help protect their non-chain businesses. These towns should follow Hampstead or Upton Park's approach and ensure that traditional shops located in certain districts join well-organized local neighborhood groups that ensure good communication between the business owners and that the local authorities hear their opinions. It is also recommended that indoor markets become smaller outdoor market stalls, as seen in Lewisham or Brixton's Electric Avenue, where they pay cheaper rent and have higher footfall. Additionally, towns with large landmark buildings that currently are not being utilized could become spaces to host smaller indoor markets as shown by Highgate's use of Lauderdale House.

The findings of Environment sustainability contradict NEF's claims and illustrate a town's clone town score has nearly no relevance to the town's ability to be environmentally sustainable. A town's access to open space or local park seemed to be more tied with the

efforts of local organizations to preserve these spaces. It is thus further emphasized that towns create community hubs with organizations that will actively protect these open spaces. Cash strapped Local authorities looking to improve public transportation accessibility could consider redesigning high streets to a one-way shared road as seen in East Ham to improve circulation for local buses.

The paper's findings suggest NEF's HBCs designation is no longer relevant in modern Britain as they only denote a town's clone town scores and have very little to do with a town's ability to be sustainable in the way NEF hypothesized in their 2004 report. Regarding the future of these designations, it is important to observe the presence of community hubs and community organizations within a town, which was found to be extremely influential in seven environmental and social sustainability subcomponents. Given this large influence, it can be suggested that new designations, based on these factors, might be potentially created in the near future to denote a town's strength in social and environmental sustainability. Whilst a clear relationship between these factors and a town's sustainability has been established, far more research needs to be conducted to understand the basic dynamics of an effective community hub or community organization. Specifically for community organizations, more research needs to be done on what creations within a town lead to the creation of successful community organizations and the typology of these organizations. For community hubs, more exploration is needed in how these hubs were established and whether additional buildings or amenities can be added to enhance these hubs.

The findings illustrate that NEF's HBC designations have little relevance in modern Britain regarding economic sustainability. Despite a clear relationship between clone town scores and economic sustainability, this relationship is the opposite of what NEF intended for their designations. Research findings indicating that a higher clone town score resulted in less

economic sustainability suggests that a clone town is more economically sustainable than a border town or home town. A possible explanation for these findings could be that this relationship has more to do with traditional businesses struggling with inflated rents than suggesting that clone towns are superior designations that should be pedestalized over home or border towns. More research needs to be conducted on how national chains interact with the local economy; they are situated particularly around providing jobs, taxes, and contributions to the local community. Researching this issue could explain more concretely why clone towns are more successful and provide more solutions for towns scoring less in economic sustainability.

For future research projects, I would like to conduct this research on a larger selection of towns and expand the number of components analyzed for environmental sustainability. This could help increase the validity of my results and offer more insight into some of the unexplained findings seen in the research project.

## 9. Recommendations

As a result of research findings and the discussion above, the following recommendations can be made for towns looking to improve social, environmental, and economic sustainability:

1. LCSTs could benefit from building community organizations like the Highgate Society or Friends of Queen Market, which could lead to better historical preservation and higher rates of public participation for residents.
2. Neighborhoods lacking social inclusion could build community hubs—mini districts that contain a library and a town hall to facilitate community activities and cultural events, which often lead to higher rates of social inclusion.
3. It is recommended that HCTSs with high vacancy rates practice some of the methods that Hampstead or Upton Park have utilized to help protect their independent businesses. These methods revolve around constructing well-organized local neighborhood groups that ensure good communication between the business owners and the local authorities to hear their concerns.
4. It is also recommended that neighborhoods with struggling indoor markets replace these markets with smaller outdoor market stalls, as seen in Lewisham or Brixton's Electric Avenue district, where vendors would benefit from paying cheaper payments to the local council as part of their licensing.
5. It is recommended that local towns experiment with one-way shared spaces, as seen in East Ham, as this seems to improve public transportation accessibility through less traffic congestion.

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## APPENDIX

### **Short Survey Exceptions**

Each survey had 5 possible answers scaled from one to five, where the fifth answer was typically the most positive response (e.g., Excellent) and the first answer was the most negative response (e.g., Extremely poor). The only exception to this rule was the question ‘How would you describe the air quality in the town center?’ in the comfort survey. This question followed a reverse in this logic whereby the first answer was the most positive response, and the fifth answer was the most negative. This was due to the assumption that less noise was deemed more positive to residents as opposed to more noise. After the short survey questions were completed, the respondents’ answers would be tallied up in a points system to see how each town center is being graded in relation to the three components. The components of comfort, privacy, and social inclusion were chosen for the short question format due to my belief that these components were less personal than the other components, which would improve the survey completion rate.

Individuals who were more in a rush or wary of interacting with strangers were far more likely to answer less personable questions as opposed to deeper questions seen in the long interview. I typically handed out these surveys near the nodes, social amenities, social facilities, and landmarks I had labeled on my map where there was a large concentration of people. When individuals agreed to fill out the survey, I would often naturally engage in small conversations surrounding why they made their choices on the survey. This would be noted in my booklet to be added to the database table. If a respondent shows great enthusiasm in the survey, I would ask if I could conduct a longer interview.