# PRESTON, TADWORTH

This case study provides a profile of the suburb and assesses its current state of health. It considers the need for improvement and potential for renewal before raising some policy issues.
It is based on a visit, a workshop with representatives of local interests, and data from a range of sources including the 2001 Census, Local Knowledge, CACI, and FPD Savills.

Tadworth, and the Preston ward within it, presents the issue of how to improve and regenerate an area with a concentration of deprivation, located within an otherwise attractive suburb, which includes a major development opportunity in public ownership.
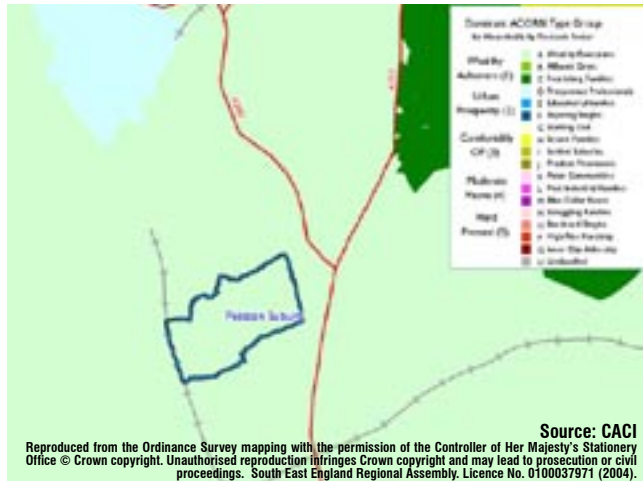
What type of suburb is Preston?
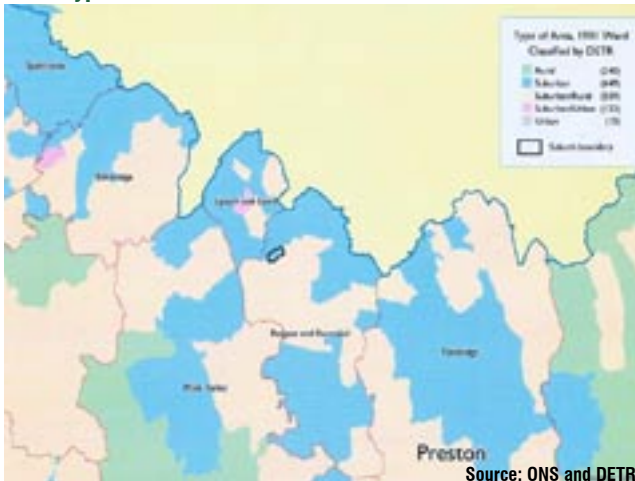
Source: ONS and DETR

Defined by ONS as suburban

Source: CACI

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Dominant Acorn Type Group (with transport links shown)
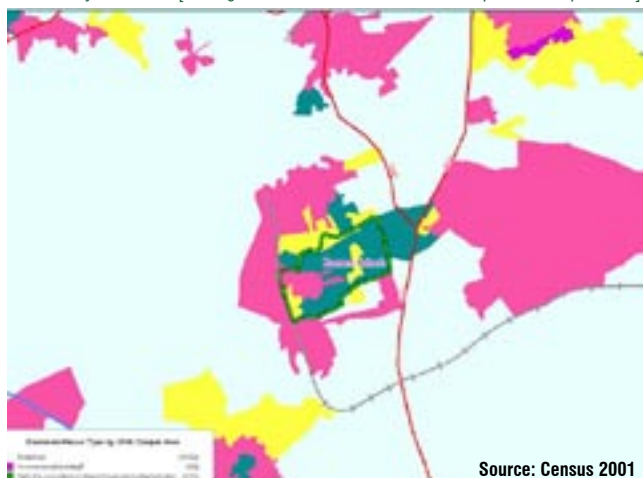 • Wealthy Executives [although this does not reflect the Preston 'pocket of deprivation']
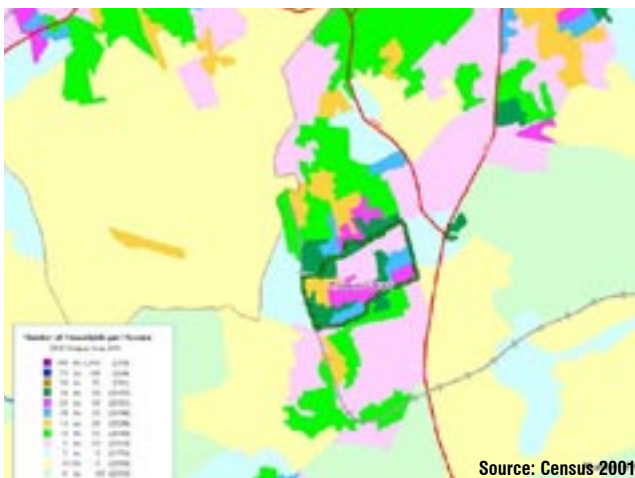
Source: Census 2001

Density: number of households per hectare (ONS)
A mixed area with middle range of density
  • from 5-10 at the lower end
  • to 30 -50 at the higher

Source: Census 2001

Dominant House Type (ONS)
  • Terraced housing
  • Semi detached
  • Purpose built block of flats or tenement

Physical features

a. Location Tadworth lies to the South of London, and close to the M25. It is on the Northern edge of Reigate and Banstead, next to Epsom Downs. At the end of a branch line, it is less than an hour from London by train, and some 15 miles from London.

b. Age Tadworth and Tattenham Corner are classic railway suburbs, with some fine large family houses and splendid bungalows. The suburb was developed following the opening of a branch line in 1900. After the war, Sutton and Merton (along with other Boroughs) developed council housing outside their boroughs. This included a mix of terraced housing and some blocks of flats in Preston. More recently a former school has been rede-

veloped as private housing, and there is another small private development.

c. Layout The suburb consists of a maze of cul-de-sacs, off a long road (Preston Lane) and is substantially cut off from the surrounding roads.

• Preston is a relatively low density housing estate, with barriers provided by Burgh Heath, a major football club and lack of through roads to the south, making it both isolated and impermeable.

• Bus routes run round the edges and the railway runs along the side, but the central area is cut off from facilities. However close by there is a good range of specialist shops at Tattenham Corner, while across Burgh Heath there is a large Asda.

• Apart from a run down parade of

shops, some of which have closed down, a doctor's surgery, a community centre, and a few small industrial units, there is only housing.

• About a quarter of the houses are semi-detached (lower proportion than the South East), and there are few very large houses or houses with less than two bedrooms.

• There are no buildings or features of any character in the heart of the suburb, though the countryside around, including both Epsom Downs and Tadworth Heath, is of very high quality.

• There is much underused, open green space and verges on the estate.

• The main development site is on the edge of the area and is the playing field of a school that has been redeveloped.
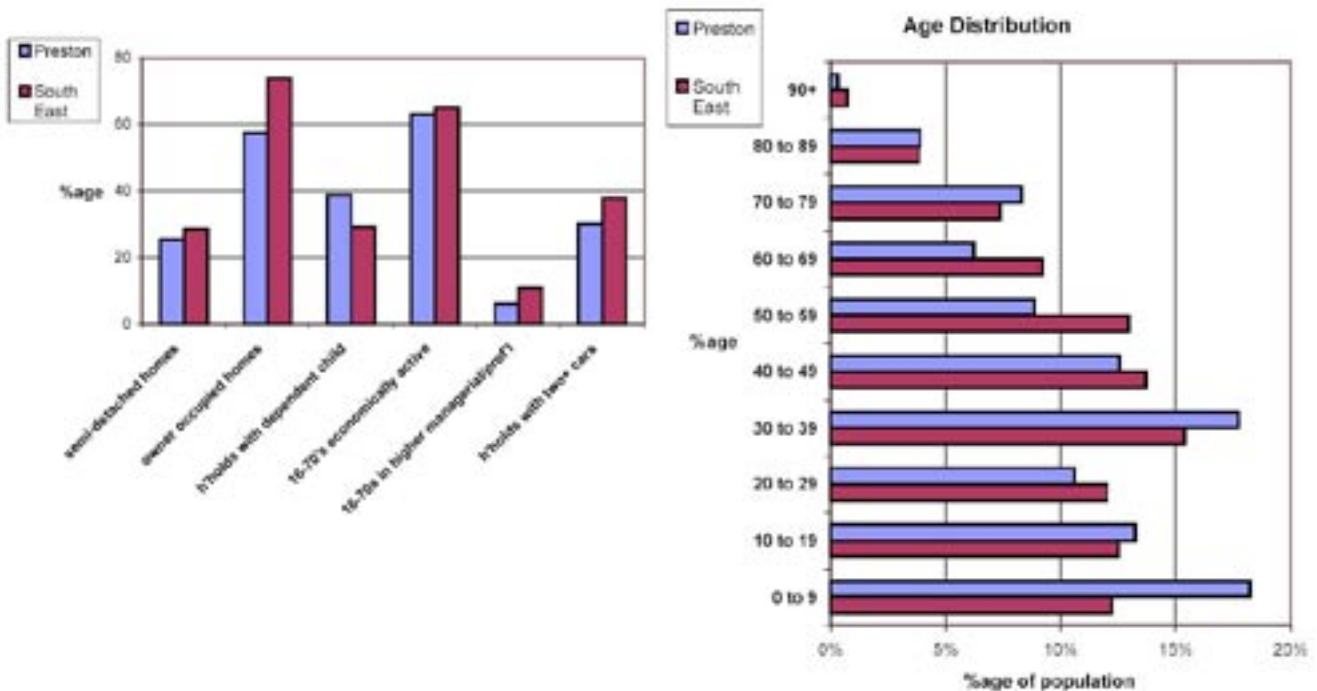
Neighbourhood features

a. Role Tadworth is a very polarised suburb. On the edge are very desirable houses with large gardens while in the interior there is a very high number and proportion of social and rented homes. Both the wealthier and poorer areas are predominantly occupied by families with children. There is a high proportion of young dependant children (39% of households compared with 29% for the South East as a whole), and a particularly high percent of the population (19%) of the area is aged 0-9.

b. Image and identity The area suffers from a very poor image, as a place where people end up living out of necessity not choice. Many of the people living in social housing have been relocated from the boroughs of Merton and Sutton away from friends and relatives.

c. Demographics As elderly people have died, their place has been taken by young families. Preston has the 8th highest

rate of teenage pregnancy in the country. However, using the standard deprivation scores it does not rate as poorly as many rural areas, due to the proximity of a range of services, like hospitals and shops.

d. Housing demand There is considered to be an excess of social housing, and a shortage of affordable housing to buy. While in some parts many people have exercised the right to buy, overall the proportion of owner occupied housing in the Preston Ward is 57% compared with 74% for the South East as a whole. Among the rented accommodation there is a high rate of turnover, even though overall the population is relatively static. Despite the area's image, there is a demand for private housing: three bedroom former Council semis sell at £190,000, and the new houses built on the school site have proved very popular. The area is not

considered very suitable for elderly people due to the lack of facilities within walking distance, and flats intended for the elderly are starting to be let to key workers.

e. Social infrastructure The closure of the secondary school means that children go to school outside the estate, thus mixing with a wider range of people, which is desirable. There is a primary school, but little in the way of social facilities. As a result of this, fragmented ownership of the housing stock, poverty, and the physical layout, there is a very low level of community cohesion, one of the lowest in the country according to surveys that were carried out.

Health of the suburb: priorities and opportunities for improvement

The first part of the workshop comprised a scoring/ranking exercise using a ten category scorecard (5 physical and 5 social characteristics). Participants were asked to score questions within each of the ten categories, and the results used to stimulate discussion and reach consensus on priorities. A further ranking exercise enabled the priority categories below to be identified, together with some ideas for improvement. A broad consensus was reached both on individual factors and relative importance, and discussion focussed around four main factors:

Connectivity The most fundamental problem was seen as the poor linkages, which have been compounded by the withdrawal of the bus service running through the estate due to a combination of violence and the withdrawal of the County subsidy. The streets are empty, long and boring (with few front gardens). Visually the area feels like a maze (one participant said it was the first time looking at the map that he realised it was possible to get across the estate). The general consensus was that, in practice, residents require cars to reach basic services and shops.

Possible Improvements:

a. Visual Clues to navigate the neighbourhood. These need not be pointy signs, but could include coloured bicycle paths or pavements to indicate through streets.

b. Formalise or Build Footpaths Simply making residents feel safer as they walk across the heath to Asda increases the connections from the estate to the surrounding areas and bus service. Formalising the footpath does not require

NEIGHBOURHOOD SCORE CARD - PRESTON

* 1. Poor   ** 1 to 5 where
   2. Adequate   1 = least important and
   3. Good   5 = very important

A. Physical capital	Score*	Rank**
1. Choice		
• can the area accommodate the stages in a family's life cycle?	1	2
• does it offer a mix of house types and affordability?	1	
2. Connectivity		
• can you reach services and jobs without too much stress?	1	1
• are there basic shops and quality open space within easy walking or cycling distance?	2	
3. Conservation		
• are natural resources being saved e.g. energy, water, materials (waste)?	1	5
• is bio-diversity being encouraged e.g. trees, wildlife?	1-2	
4. Character		
• does the area look attractive and cared for?	1-2	3
• has new development enhanced the area?	4	
5. Commerce		
• are there other uses in the area, such as employment or leisure?	1	4
• are there places to set-up a business?	1	
B. Social capital		
1. Community		
• do people feel a sense of pride?	1	4
• does the area readily accept newcomers?	2	
2. Civic life		
• are there enough places to meet others e.g. pubs, clubs, open spaces?	1	3
• are the shops and services welcoming?	1	
3. Crime		
• do residents feel safe when they go out?	1	5
• do residents feel their property is safe?	1	
4. Climate for enterprise		
• is it a good place to start a business?	1	1
• is there sufficient purchasing power to support local businesses?	1	
5. Capacity (and quality) of services		
• can you get to see a doctor without a long wait?	2	2
• can you get into an acceptable secondary school without a long journey?	2	

or other small but suitable improvements. The idea of building a road through the heath was raised, but the loss of green space required would be a substantial obstacle.

Choice Closely linked was the narrow range of housing available, which resulted in a restricted social mix. There was little available to provide the first rungs on the housing ladder, except for the former Council housing, and as people's situation improved they tended to move away. The private housing on the edges was in a totally different price bracket.

Possible Improvements

a. Market Housing for Sale Introducing a more balanced mix of housing types and tenures into the area could happen through redevelopment of outdated flats or through new build on the playing field of the old school.

b. Front extensions Empty space could be developed as porches or carports and/or front gardens.

Crime Residents are frightened about security, even though the rates of burglary are quite low. There is a concern about gangs of young people (in part perhaps

Development of a District Centre in Conjunction with a Highly Permeable Townscape

Illustrative only

Urban Design Principles
· creating an identifiable heart, with shops and community facilities, and residential above
· increasing the density of the 'heart' as high as 'appropriate'
· improving permeability and pedestrian circuits in an existing dendritic (cul-de-sac) street pattern
· celebrating the entrance gateways
· building/developing land to ensure effective use (where there is public-private realm confusion).

because there is no one else around, and getting anywhere else is difficult). The main problem seems to be crimes against the public realm, such as vandalism. Young people started to try to demolish a building while a community meeting was taking place inside it. There is also likely to be a concern about car theft, aggravated by people not putting their cars in garages, and often parking them on the verges.

Possible Improvements
a. Convert Public Space to Private
Creating private or communal gardens out of the existing 'empty' public space would give residents ownership of what is now vacant land and help combat problems of vandalism. It would also encourage more people to spend time outside, as they would feel comfortable in 'their' space, thus increasing the number of people and

eyes on the streets.

b. Community Wardens These have proved very successful in a number of places, both acting as 'eyes' and 'ears' in reporting (and preventing) wrongdoing, and also providing a street presence and getting fast action where there have been acts of antisocial behaviour such as graffiti and other vandalism.

Community Though there is a Partnership board, and a number of schemes are underway, such as a Summer play scheme, there is little involvement by local residents. Many people are out at work, though in poorly paid and low skilled occupations, and so may not be able or willing to put much time into community affairs. There is no heart to the suburb, and the Football Club is a private organisation, with very few members from the immediate area.

Possible Improvements:
a. Village/community hub There is a need for a cluster of facilities, such as a health centre, pharmacy, and places to meet that could help to bring people together as well as give the area more identity.

b. Community Management Scheme
The expanded use of the school might provide the impetus for a community management scheme to involve residents in various local community projects e.g. maintaining and upgrading public spaces.

Room for renewal and redevelopment

The special problems of Preston have been recognised for some time, and the availability of the County school playing field site has stimulated the commissioning of a masterplan aimed at both producing an exemplary scheme and also

funding improvements to the surrounding area. Several opportunities for redevelopment were identified in addition to the ones listed above:

• **Market housing for sale** There are major opportunities for redeveloping the blocks of flats, the open space around them, and probably the under-used garages as well, as a high-density housing scheme. It is possible that schemes might also include some of the terraced housing, which might be more intensively developed by bringing it forward to the road, and creating parking courts behind, thus improving the look and identity of the area.

• **Sustainable urban neighbourhood** The school playing field site is 15 acres, allowing the possibility of a major development that might act as a catalyst for the area's wider regeneration. Alternatively it might be better to keep some of the land as open space, and to develop elsewhere, for example by opening up a link road across the Heath.

Recommendations for policy

There is already a Preston Partnership, which brings together different agencies, and the process should be helped by the commissioning of the masterplan, which will spell out what different organisations need to do. A range of proposals came out of the workshop:

• **Design Toolkit** Ideas for the treatment of public space were needed, including providing for car parking, and also facilities where children could play, and elderly people sit without conflict. This needed to cover the use and layout of spaces in front of houses, and ideas included not only marking out private spaces, using low fences, but also allowing people to add front porches, and even providing community gardens on some of the verges.

• **Transport Planning** As well as undertaking Accessibility Audits, as are required, there is a need to focus on practical options for improving accessibil-

ity, such as upgrading footpaths, marking out cycle routes to provide a way through the maze of cul de sacs, and possibly improving links with the surrounding roads if the opportunity arose. Options for consideration included buses that were responsive to demand and taxi vouchers. The Wheels to Work scheme of lending mopeds out could be very relevant.

• **Community Action/Area Plans** Support was needed to encourage people to develop skills related to jobs in the wider world. Particular opportunities were identified in building skills, which are in short supply, and also childcare and running nurseries. However these depended not only on having suitable space, but also longer term community development.

• **Site Briefs** The Council needed to take a proactive role, not only in getting different social housing providers to join up, but also in preparing briefs for the kind of development it would like to see.

Summary findings from FPD Savills' Market* report on Preston

Residential

• Preston stands in sharp contrast to the rest of Tadworth, with its concentration of social housing, mainly in a pre-war council estate with later additions (58% of households rent from an RSL).

• Terraced houses sell for 25% less than in the rest of the Borough, (and the area contains a similar social profile to Leigh Park).

• However unlike Leigh Park it is surrounded by very affluent households, and in other parts of the borough former Council semis sell well, suggesting the area is stigmatised

• Latent unfilled demand is minimal according to a local agent, and value uplift is lagging behind that seen in the wider borough.

• While elsewhere developers have promoted small, upmarket infill schemes this would not work in Preston, and there are doubts over whether 'intensification' is feasible.

• However the leisure facilities could be a major draw, and a development for key workers and modestly priced residential units could work.

Retail and leisure, office and industrial

• With strong retail centres elsewhere, reflecting local affluence, there is not the customer base to support local shops, particularly as the road layout forms a maze, with little through traffic.

• However the leisure centre and football ground are a major draw, so that if retail units were located next to it, the two uses might reinforce each other.

• Though there has not been interest in developing new leisure facilities, the profile of the surrounding area could make this viable.

• There is healthy demand for small business units in the suburb, and a relatively high turnover.

• There are major offices elsewhere and, given the nature of the area and current conditions, there would be no demand for any new offices on the estate. However there could be demand from local start-up companies, or even for 'live work' units.

Future action

• The opportunity created by the development of the former school playing fields, plus the possibility of redeveloping some of the social housing, should be used to secure a quality mixed use scheme.

• The key to progress is improving links with the surrounding area, possibly through acquiring some houses, or even cutting through some common land.

• The potential values are such that a radical scheme with high quality design could be commercially viable, and in the process could make the area more cohesive.

* The full market report can be found at www.southeast-ra.gov.uk