

### **Somers Town, Camden**

Camden is a borough located in north-west London. It contains King's Cross- St. Pancras, Euston Station, The British Library, the British Museum, and more. Today, Camden holds nearly one hundred schools. The majority of all the schools are primaries, but there are also secondary, special and alternative, and nursery schools.<sup>4</sup> The Camden Council is very interested in young leadership because of the high student population. Their website is easy to use and easy to understand, and it has a video that shares the financial challenges the borough is going through.<sup>10</sup> The recent cuts to funding have led the Council to call on all of its residents to be a part of the conversation and decision on where the now limited funding will go. The borough is asking the community to come together and think of the motto: "Not for self, but for all".<sup>2</sup>

Somer Town was originally granted to John Somers, and is a rectangle bounded by Pancras Road, Euston Road, Eversholt Street, and Crowndale Road.<sup>13</sup> In the 18th century, the first housing was built and Somers Town was known for mountainous landfills. Part of the housing built during this time was called The Polygon. This was where Mary Shelley was born and Charles Dickens resided, and was home to people fleeing the French Revolution.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-19th century, this was where London's most notorious slums were located then it became a period of mass improvement to the area, with the construction of the great railway. Railway companies transformed the neighborhood with new lines and stations. It overlaps with the parish and district of St. Pancras, and now has various council flats, schools, and community centers.

In Somers Town, there are four primaries, two secondaries, and one nursery school. However, there have been two school closures this year due to changing demographics; Camden has one of the lowest birth rates in the country, and this is causing low enrollment.<sup>6</sup> The only nursery school in the area was one of two schools to close. The nursery was run by volunteers as an extension of the Somers Town Community Association (STCA) charity. This means that the STCA's funding paid for the school. Organizations that fund the charity include Camden Council, BBC Children in Need, and more;<sup>7</sup> However, less enrollments meant less funding.

The school officially closed in July 2019. Many of the parents as well as past students were upset at the news as the school was a close and affordable option for families and a place that past students had fond memories and enjoyed going back to volunteer.<sup>7</sup> Somers Town and Camden are trying to work out a solution to this closure and possible future closures. They have

provided alternate options for early years education and nursery schools, the closest of which is a twenty minute walk to the other side of Euston Station.<sup>5</sup>

In the Borough of Camden, Somers Town is the 8th most common area for violent crimes.<sup>1</sup> (The victim does not necessarily need to get injured for it to be considered a violent crime.<sup>9</sup>) Its highest crime is theft, but that is largely due to and concentrated by the train stations, especially as there are large amounts of business people and tourists in the area. Somers Town's lowest crime is sexual offences.<sup>8</sup> There are a multitude of other crimes being committed in Somers Town including: burglary, robbery, drugs, anti-social behavior, and more.<sup>8</sup> The police do not disclose the demographics of those who committed recent crimes. Somers Town is spreading awareness stabbings of youth and gang related violent crimes through Arts Award which encourages and empowers young people to be leaders of change in their communities. The organization hosted an event called "One Mic, One Life" event was a cultivation of the 2017-2018 year's workshops that act as a way to keep young people off the streets.<sup>3</sup>

Somers Town is religiously diverse. It is 34.3% Christian, 27.8% Muslim and 17.5% of no religion.<sup>11</sup> There are also Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Sikhs. Economically, religions offer a culture and civilization that has economic percussions. For example, with a high number of both Christians and Muslims there has been state funding for a Catholic school and Islamic Cultural and Education Center. There is also a lot of religious diversity in an area of only 6,500, with multiple faiths represented. This is also an accurate reflection of the borough of Camden. In terms of creativity, some places of worship have gotten creative in ways to raise money for their parish. St. Pancras Old Church wanted to raise money to restore and preserve its historical building so in 2015 they offered community events for a ticket entrance that included film, music, architecture and history. One of the events was on April 18th, Professor Carole Levin from Nebraska gave a talk titled: 'Can a Woman Rule? Can a Woman Rule Alone?'<sup>15</sup>

In terms of housing, 6,500 people live in Somers Town in 2,650 households. There is a low population density in comparison to Camden as a whole. 9.3% of people are dealing with barriers to housing and only 10.9% own, while 68.6% social rent. <sup>13</sup> Economically, the price of housing is so high because Somers Town is a neighborhood alternating between major growth areas of the inner city making it part of the housing crisis. The average household income is £31,472 so many people cannot afford housing. Despite this, Somers Town is very distinctive in terms of socio-economic and demographic. 15.2% of people living there are Bangladeshi (6.3%

in Camden), 24.9% are under the age of 15 (16.6% in Camden), and 10.9% are unemployed. It has a high proportion of council and housing association tenants living in flats and is relatively deprived with low levels of economic activity, poor health and low life expectancy.

The housing problem is beginning to be addressed. Central Somers Town is designated an “Area of More Limited Change”. This means it is not expected to see major development itself, but instead will benefit from development in the two opportunity areas. Camden council sees these benefits as being jobs, training, open space and other community facilities.<sup>16</sup> Tenants fear that it will become the latest area to fall victim to the planning crisis. The Somers Town Neighbourhood forum was set up in 2013 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the area. The plan does not accept the removal of low-income communities as inevitable. The idea is to help communities to help themselves out of disadvantage.<sup>14</sup>

The environment continues to become one of the most talked about issues in our global society, Somers Town’s illegally low air quality and pollution included.<sup>22</sup> In regeneration efforts over the past decade, reconstruction and the prominence of the area being a public transportation hub have contributed to one of the biggest sustainability issues in London. More specifically, the redevelopment of St Pancras, King’s Cross, and Euston Stations, the British Library expansion, and building of the HS2 leads to construction sites putting more dust and soil in the air.<sup>24</sup> Construction has also brought the loss of green spaces, which many also link to lower air quality.<sup>17</sup> Aforementioned, busy roads like Euston Road outline the area; its six lanes of traffic are infamous for creating some of the worst air quality in the entire country.<sup>19</sup> While public transportation has its perks, the lack of train exhaust regulations or treatment technologies, and the building of HS2 are contributing factors to air pollution Somers Town suffers through.<sup>23</sup>

In attempts to improve air quality, Camden Council and Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum have made requests for research to be done at global and city-wide levels, since air quality problems impact everyone. Producing detailed construction plans with outlined safety procedures have become prominent for the reassurance of residents. While Somers Town does have a large amount of air monitoring stations already,<sup>18</sup> requests have also been made for more monitoring stations and testing to be done. To protect the health of the people living in Somers Town, Wellbeing Walks have also been promoted, redirecting pedestrians to avoid Euston Road.<sup>19</sup> With all of these propositions and city-wide problems, if any solutions are being put into action, funding comes from outside companies conducting research or London’s city-wide

efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Food is one of the greatest cultural tools we have to share as humans as it marries diversity and art in the form of flavor; Somers Town is a proponent of this art and diversity in the numerous restaurants available in the area. In a reflection of Somer Towns diversity it is no surprise that the area has an array of different cuisines and restaurants, distinctly including Malaysian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Nepalese, Mexican restaurants and Pubs.<sup>20</sup> Not only is there diversity and creativity found in the ethnic restaurants available, but also in the types of restaurants available, like Cheezelo, a cheese-centered restaurant with the best pairings of wine, dishes and most importantly, cheese. Two of the biggest food attractions in Somers Town are Roti King, a Malaysian restaurant that always draws a crowd at night, and the pubs. There are various pubs around Somers Town, but Somers Town Coffee House is always packed with locals grabbing a drink after work, which Cassandra can attest to based on her walks to and from lacrosse practice. There are very few restaurants in the area that air on the expensive side of dining and nearly all university student budget-friendly.

Somers Town is a larger residential area within the borough of Camden and London as a whole. It has a small population that is largely community based and religiously diverse. However, it is unfortunately a neighborhood facing the housing crisis and air quality issues. Even with these problems, it is still a hidden gem in London.

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