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DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEIVED SOCIOECONOMIC BENEFITS OF GATED COMMUNITIES TO URBAN RESIDENTS. A CASE STUDY OF ASPINDALE PARK IN HARARE

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING AT BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

- JUNE 2026-

DECLARATION

I, Kupakwashe Chida (Student Number: B223859B), hereby declare that this dissertation titled "An Analysis of the perceived socioeconomic benefits of gated communities to urban residents. A case study of Aspindale Park in Harare" is my own original work. All sources used have been properly acknowledged. This work has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any university.

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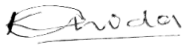

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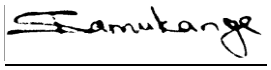
APPROVAL

I hereby certify that I supervised Kupakwashe Chida in her research on **an Analysis of the Perceived Socioeconomic Benefits of Gated Communities to Urban Residents. A Case Study of Aspindale Park in Harare.** This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Science Honors in Development Studies.

MR. Samukange (Supervisor) Signature  Date: .30/05/26

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DEDICATION

To my family for their unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices throughout my academic journey.

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I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Samukange, for the invaluable guidance throughout this research. I thank the Bindura University of Science Education for providing the academic environment for this study. I also extend my appreciation to the residents and participants of Aspindale Park who took part in the interviews and shared valuable information that contributed to this research.

ABSTRACT

Gated communities continue to shape urban landscapes in Zimbabwe, however there is limited empirical evidence on their perceived socioeconomic benefits from residents' perspectives. This study assessed the perceived socioeconomic benefits of gated communities on urban residents, using Aspindale Park in Harare as a case study. The study utilised a mixed-methods case study design, collecting quantitative data from 57 questionnaire respondents and qualitative data from 8 key informant interviews. Findings unveiled overwhelmingly positive perceptions across three objectives. Residents strongly agreed that the gated community provides economic benefits through improved security and faster property value appreciation *(mean = 4.68/5, SD = 0.191).* Contrary to classical reviews, high levels of social cohesion were found within the enclave *(mean = 4.73/5, SD = 0.325),* with residents actively participating in WhatsApp groups, neighbourhood watches and social events. More so, 91.2% of respondents rated privatized utilities including water, electricity, roads, waste management and security as better than deteriorating public services in greater Harare. Although benefits are clearly experienced by residents, the research also highlights broader developmental concerns including urban inequality, social segregation and the emergence of a two-tier citizenship where quality service access is determined by purchasing power rather than universal rights. The study recommends that Harare City Council explore public-private partnerships, that government develop regulatory frameworks for gated community contributions to surrounding neighbourhoods.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBD	Central Business District
HOA	Homeowners' Association
KII	Key Informant Interview
MS Excel	Microsoft Excel
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Housing has long been one of the most contested dimensions of urban life in Zimbabwe. For much of the post-independence era, the majority of city dwellers struggled to secure shelter that met even basic standards of adequacy, let alone comfort. That picture has shifted in recent years. Residential land acquisition has expanded noticeably, and a new class of master-planned, walled estates has taken root in Harare and other major urban centres. Aspindale Park and Arlington are among the most visible examples of this trend. Whether these enclosed developments represent a genuine step forward for urban residents or simply a retreat into exclusivity remains deeply contested. It is precisely that question what do people who actually live in these places think they are gaining? that this study sets out to answer. The chapters that follow explore the perceived socioeconomic benefits of gated community living from the vantage point of Aspindale Park residents in Harare. This opening chapter lays out the context and rationale, clarifies the research objectives and questions, explains who stands to benefit from the findings, and defines the key concepts that run through the work.

1.2 Background of the Study

The rise of privately governed, walled residential estates is one of the more striking features of contemporary urban planning debates worldwide. These developments defined by perimeter walls or fences, controlled entry points, and internal management of shared spaces are typically promoted as offering residents a degree of security, social selectivity, and amenity provision that the surrounding city cannot match. Yet a substantial body of research has shown that the same features that make these estates attractive to their residents can simultaneously fragment the wider urban fabric. By concentrating affluent households within purpose-built enclaves,

gated communities sharpen the visible contrast between those who can afford managed living environments and those who cannot. That contrast, some scholars argue, does not merely reflect existing inequalities but actively deepens them hollowing out the sense of the city as a place that belongs to everyone (Almatar & Alshuwaikhat, 2025).

Looking beyond Zimbabwe's borders, the evidence from countries with longer histories of gated development presents a nuanced picture. In the United States, China, and parts of Europe, studies repeatedly find that residents choose enclosed estates primarily because they believe these environments keep them safer, offer a more predictable and controlled way of life, and carry a social prestige that open neighbourhoods cannot replicate (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005). These perceived advantages are also tied to economic calculations: property within a well-maintained, access-controlled estate tends to hold or increase its value more reliably than equivalent property in the unmanaged public realm, making ownership an attractive investment proposition.

There is, however, a counter-argument that deserves serious attention. Critics point out that the gains enjoyed by enclave residents are frequently achieved at a broader social cost. When wealthier households withdraw into private communities complete with their own security, water, electricity, and roads they reduce their dependence on the public systems that less affluent residents rely on. Over time, this withdrawal can weaken both the political will and the financial capacity of city authorities to maintain and improve services for the general population (Glasze, Webster & Frantz, 2006). The tension between what is good for the individual household within the gates and what is good for the city as a whole sits at the heart of this debate, yet research that explores it from the residents' own perspective rather than from a structural or planning standpoint remains limited, especially in developing countries.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, the gated community phenomenon carries additional layers of meaning shaped by colonial history and the particular challenges of post-colonial urban governance. In cities like Cape Town and Nairobi, researchers have noted that enclosed estates derive much of their appeal from their ability to supply reliable piped water, consistent electricity, and regular waste collection services that municipal authorities provide erratically, if at all (Lemanski, 2006). Beyond utility provision, these communities are also spaces for forging professional networks and social connections through residents' clubs and shared events, generating a form of social capital that has tangible economic value. At the same time, the physical barriers that make all of this possible reinforce and normalise social stratification, limiting meaningful contact between those inside and the far larger population living just beyond the perimeter walls (Mycoo, 2018). The African literature has been more attentive to these structural effects than to the detailed, lived-experience perspectives of enclave residents themselves a gap this study directly addresses.

In Zimbabwe, the growth of gated estates like Aspindale Park cannot be understood without reference to the economic turbulence and housing scarcity that have defined Harare's urban trajectory over the past two decades. Kamete (2012) has argued that for Zimbabwean urban dwellers with the means to access them, gated communities serve a dual purpose: they protect the physical security of residents and, just as importantly, they function as a relatively stable store of asset value in an economy where other forms of wealth preservation have proven unreliable. The provision of private amenities and recreational facilities within these estates compensates, to some degree, for the systematic deterioration of publicly funded services in greater Harare. Nevertheless, empirical work that captures the socioeconomic experiences of residents within these communities as distinct from academic analyses of their macro-level effects remains scarce. Muchadenyika (2015) has drawn attention to precisely this shortcoming, observing that Zimbabwean scholarship on housing and urban planning has

tended to focus on broad systemic questions while giving little attention to the granular perspectives of people who actually live within enclave developments. This study takes that observation as its starting point.

1.3 Problem Statement

Urban Harare is caught in a difficult bind. On one hand, the proliferation of gated residential communities has become one of the most visible signs of private-sector investment in the city's housing stock a development that many observers welcome given the long history of inadequate public provision. On the other hand, serious questions persist about whether these enclaves deliver genuine, lasting benefits to those who live in them, and whether the broader city pays a hidden social and fiscal price for their existence. Kamete (2012) captures the tension well, noting that gated estates simultaneously address real problems insecure property, unreliable municipal services, volatile housing markets and create new ones, most notably the deepening of social stratification and the erosion of collective urban identity. What makes this problem more acute is the absence of adequate empirical evidence about how residents within these communities actually experience and evaluate their circumstances. Without that evidence, debates about the value and the costs of gated development in Zimbabwe remain largely speculative. This study aims to fill that gap by grounding the conversation in the documented perceptions of people who live in Aspindale Park.

1.4 Research Aim

The central aim of this study is to assess the socioeconomic benefits of gated residential communities as perceived by the urban residents who inhabit them, with Aspindale Park in Harare serving as the focal case.

1.5 Specific Objectives

i. To determine the perceived economic advantages specifically those related to security provision and property value growth as reported by Aspindale Park residents.

ii. To evaluate the degree of social cohesion that exists among residents living within the Aspindale Park community.

iii. To examine how Aspindale Park residents rate the quality of privately managed utilities within the estate relative to publicly delivered services elsewhere in Harare.

1.6 Research Questions

i. What economic advantages linked to security and property value appreciation do Aspindale Park residents associate with gated community living?

ii. How strong is the sense of social cohesion among residents within the Aspindale Park community?

iii. In what ways do Aspindale Park residents contrast the quality of private utility provision within the estate against publicly delivered services available in greater Harare?

1.7 Justification of the Study

1.7.1 Urban Planners and Housing Authorities

Planning departments in Harare and comparable Zimbabwean cities have so far had limited access to resident-generated evidence about the actual experience of living in gated communities. This study provides that evidence in a structured and measurable form. By identifying which socioeconomic outcomes residents attribute to their living environment, the findings give planners a firmer empirical basis for deciding whether to encourage, regulate, or reorient the development of enclosed residential estates. They also provide a starting point for genuine cost-benefit analysis one grounded in residents lived experience rather than theoretical projections which can inform decisions about land use, infrastructure investment, and housing policy more broadly.

1.7.2 Current and Prospective Urban Residents

Many people navigating Harare's housing market have little reliable information about what life in a gated community actually looks and feels like from the inside. This study offers a transparent account of what residents themselves report gaining and potentially sacrificing by living in an enclosed estate. That knowledge has practical value: it allows prospective buyers and renters to make genuinely informed choices, rather than decisions shaped by marketing claims or second-hand impressions. For those already living in gated communities, the findings may surface shared concerns or overlooked advantages that could inform how they advocate for improvements in their own estates or in the wider city.

1.7.3 Academic Researchers

The Zimbabwean scholarly literature on urban housing and planning is notably thin when it comes to resident-level, empirically grounded research on gated communities. Most existing work approaches the subject from a macro-level policy or planning perspective, leaving the detailed experiential dimension largely unexplored. This study contributes a locally contextualised, data-driven perspective that can serve as a foundation for future comparative and longitudinal research in Zimbabwe and across the southern African region.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The geographic scope of this study is confined to Aspindale Park, situated on the western edge of Harare's Central Business District, with all analysis confined to this single gated community and its immediate surroundings in Kambuzuma, which serves as a comparative reference. Temporally, the study focuses on the period from 2020 to 2025, a span long enough for participants to have developed substantive and reflective judgements about their community's socioeconomic conditions. The findings are therefore specific to this setting and period and should be interpreted accordingly, rather than as a basis for sweeping generalisations about all gated communities in Zimbabwe.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

1.9.1 Gated Community

Throughout this study, the term 'gated community' refers to a planned residential estate characterised by physical perimeter structures such as high walls or fences, controlled access points, and a system of private governance typically a homeowners' association or estate management body that oversees shared infrastructure, enforces community rules, and coordinates service delivery independently of municipal authorities (Roitman, 2020). Concretely, this means developments like Aspindale Park: purpose-built, internally managed estates that restrict public access and provide residents with services and amenities not available through the general public realm.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The study is arranged across five chapters. Chapter One, presented here, establishes the context, rationale, objectives, and conceptual framework. Chapter Two reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on gated communities, with attention to global, African, and Zimbabwean scholarship. Chapter Three details the methodological choices that shaped data collection and analysis. Chapter Four presents and interprets the primary findings. Chapter Five draws together the study's conclusions and translates them into practical recommendations for residents, planners, policy makers, developers, and future researchers.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter established the foundation on which the rest of the study rests. It traced the background to the research problem, articulated the statement of that problem, and set out the aims, objectives, and questions guiding the investigation. It also explained why the study matters and for whom, defined its geographic and temporal limits, and clarified the meaning of its central concept. Chapter Two builds on this foundation by engaging with the body of

literature that has shaped how scholars understand the socioeconomic dimensions of gated community living.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Every serious research effort stands on the shoulders of scholarship that came before it. This chapter surveys that scholarship, drawing on studies from around the world, from the African continent, and from Zimbabwe itself, to build a picture of what is already known about the socioeconomic dimensions of gated community living. The chapter opens with the theoretical framework that guides the study, then moves through a historical account of how these developments evolved globally before examining the specific thematic areas economic benefits, social cohesion, utility provision, and negative impacts that correspond to the study's research objectives. Only literature directly relevant to those objectives has been included.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Enclave Theory

This study is anchored in Enclave Theory, originally formulated by Blakely and Snyder in 1997 as a way of making sense of the rapid spread of fortified residential developments across American cities. What made their framework compelling was its insistence that gated living is not simply a matter of architectural taste or real estate fashion. People choose to wall themselves off, Blakely and Snyder argued, because powerful social forces push them in that direction. Specifically, the theory identifies three motivating drives: a desire for personal safety in an urban environment that feels increasingly unsafe, an aspiration toward a particular social status and lifestyle, and a preference for living among people who share the same economic circumstances and values (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). Taken together, these drives amount to a conscious decision to step back from the shared, unpredictable life of the wider city and invest instead in a carefully managed private one.

That framing fits the Aspindale Park context with considerable precision. When residents report that they feel safer within the estate, that their properties are worth more because of where they are situated, and that they enjoy a quality of community life that the surrounding city does not offer, they are articulating exactly the motivations that Enclave Theory predicts. The theory also helps to explain why private utilities are so highly valued within these communities: consistent water, electricity, and waste collection are not luxuries in this framework but are the practical infrastructure of the controlled, curated lifestyle that drew residents to the estate in the first place (Roitman, 2020). The superior quality of life residents perceive is, in other words, produced by the very boundaries physical and social that define gated living.

The theory is not without its critical edge, however, and that edge is equally useful for this study. Enclave Theory recognises, almost by definition, that creating a privileged interior means creating a less privileged exterior. The homogeneity and exclusivity that residents value are precisely what scholars identify as drivers of urban fragmentation and diminished collective responsibility (Atkinson & Blandy, 2016). Applying Enclave Theory therefore allows the study to hold two things in view at once: the genuine socioeconomic advantages that residents experience, and the broader costs that this form of residential organisation may impose on the city of Harare as a whole.

2.3 Historical Overview of Gated Communities

To understand where gated communities stand today, it helps to trace how they got there. Historically, enclosed residential developments were the preserve of aristocrats and the super-rich, symbols of extreme social distance rather than an everyday housing option. That began to change significantly from the 1980s onward, particularly in North America and Western Europe. Several forces converged to transform the gated estate from a rare curiosity into a mainstream suburban product: heightened public anxiety about urban crime, a growing

disillusionment with the quality of public services, and the broader influence of neoliberal thinking that favoured private solutions to problems previously addressed collectively. By the 1990s and 2000s, gated living was no longer the exclusive territory of the very wealthy it had become a routine aspiration for middle-class families across many parts of the developed world (Wu, 2020).

The Global South tells a somewhat different story, shaped by the legacies of colonialism, rapid urbanisation, and stark economic inequality. In China, the enclosed residential compound known as the xiaoqu became the default format for urban housing expansion following the economic liberalisation of the 1980s. It was not a fringe or elite choice but the standard model endorsed by the state for managing modern urban growth. In Latin America, particularly in cities like Buenos Aires and São Paulo, sprawling private residential complexes known as barrios privados or condominiums fechados multiplied rapidly against a backdrop of some of the world's most pronounced socioeconomic inequality. These developments are, in many respects, a physical map of the social divisions they reflect (Coy, 2021).

Africa's encounter with gated community development is bound up with its own particular history of colonial spatial planning and post-colonial governance challenges. In countries like Ghana and Kenya, new enclosed estates are typically marketed at returnees from the diaspora and at a growing urban professional class who have found public infrastructure too unreliable to depend on. The South African case adds another layer of complexity: the legal dismantling of apartheid was not accompanied by a dismantling of spatial inequality. Instead, class-based residential separation effectively replaced race-based separation, as affluent households of all backgrounds sought security in enclosed environments (Grant, 2021).

Zimbabwe's trajectory is distinctive and deserves to be understood on its own terms. The country's gated community sector grew rapidly in the years following the Fast Track Land

Reform Programme of the early 2000s and the economic crisis that accompanied it. For urban households with the financial means to access private housing, the collapse of public infrastructure in water, electricity, sanitation, and security made enclosed estates not a lifestyle choice but a practical necessity. Gated living offered something that the public city could no longer reliably provide: a functional, reasonably stable place to live (Mabhiza, 2021).

Research specifically focused on Zimbabwe reinforces this reading. Developments like Aspindale Park are understood in the literature not simply as upmarket housing products but as strategic responses to national conditions of institutional fragility and economic instability. Ownership of property within a secured enclave is documented as a form of wealth preservation in hyperinflationary conditions, while the social life within these developments involves the construction of a class identity that is explicitly distinguished from the hardships of the wider city (Chirisa et al., 2017). This local specificity is one of the reasons a study grounded in resident experience in Harare is so necessary.

2.4 Economic Benefits: Security and Property Value Appreciation

Security is, by a considerable margin, the most consistently cited reason why people move into gated communities. Study after study, across countries and continents, finds that residents place enormous value on what they describe as feeling safe: safe to leave their homes unattended, safe to let children play outside, safe from the threat of robbery or assault that they associate with life in the unmanaged public city. What is particularly interesting is that this perception of safety is powerful regardless of whether enclosed estates actually produce statistically lower crime rates. The management of fear the elimination of the nagging anxiety that accompanies urban insecurity is itself a genuine and valued benefit (Jürgens & Lang, 2021). Research from South African cities illustrates this well: residents describe the ability to control who enters their community not primarily as a crime-prevention measure but as a way of reclaiming a sense of everyday peace of mind.

The economic relationship between gated living and property value is equally well established, if more complicated. Properties within enclosed estates tend to command a premium over comparable properties in non-gated neighbourhoods, and that premium is generally understood as reflecting the bundled services security, landscaping, amenity access, professional management that residents receive as part of their occupation of the estate. Brazilian research on condominiums fechados found this dynamic operating clearly in local real estate markets, with enclosed properties consistently outperforming equivalent non-enclosed ones on a per-square-metre basis (Cardoso & Ortega, 2022). For residents, this makes ownership not merely a housing decision but an investment strategy.

It would be a mistake, though, to treat the security-property value relationship as straightforward or guaranteed. Some researchers have pointed out that the very existence of a heavily fortified estate in a neighbourhood can signal underlying urban dysfunction that the area is unsafe enough to require this level of protection which may have a depressing effect on property values in the surrounding area even as values inside the estate hold firm. The investment case for gated living is therefore contingent: it depends on the sustained perception of external threat, on the continuing quality of internal governance, and on a pool of future buyers who share the same assumptions about value (Cheshire & Golland, 2023).

In Zimbabwe specifically, the economic calculus takes on an additional dimension. In a country that has lived through hyperinflation and repeated currency collapses, tangible assets offer a form of security that financial instruments simply cannot. Owning property within a managed enclave one that maintains its physical condition and service standards regardless of what is happening in the wider economy functions as both a home and a hedge. The appeal of this dual function is not hard to understand (Mudzimbabwe & Gumbo, 2024).

2.5 Social Cohesion among Residents in Gated Communities

The social life of gated communities is more complex than either their critics or their advocates tend to suggest. Critics have traditionally argued that these developments breed social isolation: behind their walls, people cocoon themselves from the diversity and unpredictability of city life and end up with weaker, shallower social ties than they would have developed in an open neighbourhood. The empirical record, however, does not straightforwardly support that critique. Research from China, for example, has documented that the shared environment of master-planned estates with common parks, clubhouses, and shared amenities facilitates frequent, repeated interaction among residents who already share broadly similar backgrounds and outlooks. The result, in many cases, is a degree of neighbourly solidarity and mutual support that open urban neighbourhoods often struggle to achieve (Li & Wu, 2020).

Formal governance plays a supporting role in this dynamic. Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) do more than collect levies and arrange maintenance: they create a structured platform for collective decision-making, organise social events, mediate disputes, and cultivate a shared sense of stakeholder ship in the community. Research in the United States has linked the presence of active, well-run HOAs with higher levels of resident satisfaction and a stronger subjective sense of community belonging (Rosenblatt & Cheshire, 2021). The governance structure, in other words, does not merely manage the estate's physical assets it actively produces the social fabric of the community.

That social fabric, it must be acknowledged, is woven from a particular kind of thread. The cohesion that develops within gated communities is largely cohesion among people who are already similar similar in income, in education, often in occupation and life stage. The perimeter walls that make this enclave community possible also prevent it from ever becoming the diverse, cross-class social environment that urban scholars have long argued is the hallmark of a healthy city. The bonding capital created inside the gates thus accumulates partly at the

expense of the bridging capital that broader urban contact would generate (Salcedo & Torres, 2022).

In the African context, and in Zimbabwe specifically, the picture is further complicated by the realities of urban poverty and municipal failure. Research suggests that in developing cities, gated community residents frequently develop strong collective bonds not because they are naturally inclined toward neighbourliness but because they have to: the state has failed to provide the services they need, and only by pooling resources and acting collectively can they secure adequate water, electricity, and security (Landman & Du Toit, 2022). This mutual vulnerability is, paradoxically, a unifying force. It produces a kind of solidarity that is genuine even if it is also bounded strong inside the estate, limited beyond its walls. Atkinson and Ho (2023) add that modern gated communities increasingly cultivate cohesion deliberately, through WhatsApp groups, organised watch schemes, and programmed social events that serve both practical and community-building functions. Social cohesion, in this reading, is not an accidental byproduct of proximity but a managed outcome (Pow, 2018; Sigler & Wissink, 2020).

2.6 Quality of Privatised Utilities Compared to Public Services

For residents of gated communities in cities with failing public infrastructure, private utility provision is not a bonus it is the reason they are there. Research across multiple countries consistently finds that access to reliable water, uninterrupted electricity, and regular waste removal is among the most highly valued features of enclosed estate living. A study in Indonesia found that many gated developments had invested in completely independent infrastructure systems: deep boreholes and private treatment facilities for water, backup generators for electricity, private contractors for waste all designed to function entirely outside the public grid (Mulyandari & Sari, 2023). For residents, the result was a predictability of daily life that neighbours outside the gates simply did not have access to.

There is, of course, a troubling underside to this arrangement. Every household that opts out of the public utility system and manages its own supply privately is one fewer voice calling for improvement of the public system and one fewer set of taxes supporting it. Research from Pakistan documents how the concentration of affluent households in private utility arrangements can hollow out the political and financial foundations of public service improvement, making the conditions that drive people toward gated living worse rather than better over time (Khan & Mohmand, 2022). It is a cycle that is difficult to break once it has taken hold.

What makes private utility provision feel so different from public provision is not just technical quality but accountability. Within a gated community, the management team responsible for water and electricity supply answers directly to the residents through the HOA. A burst pipe or power outage is not an abstraction to be reported to a distant bureaucracy it is an immediate problem that the management has a financial and reputational interest in resolving quickly. That directness of accountability produces a more responsive service model that residents consistently distinguish from the impersonal, bureaucratic character of dealings with public utility providers (Wijaya & Lee, 2023).

In Harare, the contrast between private and public service provision has become stark to the point where it barely requires elaboration. Municipal water supply in many parts of the city is irregular or absent. Power outages measured in hours per day are common. Refuse collection is unreliable. Against that backdrop, the independent systems operated within enclosed estates like Aspindale Park are not perceived by residents as a premium upgrade they are experienced as basic necessities. Research on the Zimbabwean context confirms that this perception is grounded in the lived reality of constant contrast between what life inside the estate provides and what the wider city does not (Ndlovu & Brown, 2024).

2.7 Negative Socioeconomic Impacts of Gated Communities

No account of gated communities would be complete without examining the costs they impose on the cities they inhabit. The most widely cited criticism is that these developments deepen urban inequality in ways that are physically embedded and difficult to reverse. When high walls divide the city into serviced and under-serviced zones and when access to the serviced zone is conditional on purchasing power the result is what some scholars call 'splintering urbanism': a city that has fractured into fragments with fundamentally different life chances, rather than a shared urban environment with legitimate aspirations to equity and inclusion (Ribeiro & Fonseca, 2023).

The economic costs are not limited to the abstract. Walled estates physically disrupt the street grid, redirecting traffic and blocking pedestrian routes that previously connected neighbourhoods. They also have fiscal implications: as residents become less dependent on public services and less engaged with the wider city, their appetite for paying taxes that cross-subsidise public parks, libraries, roads, and sanitation for other residents tends to diminish. The downstream effect of this fiscal withdrawal can be a gradual deterioration in the quality of the public realm that the majority of urban residents depend on (Huang & Li, 2022).

There is also a less tangible but no less significant cost in the realm of public space and civic culture. Gated communities represent the privatisation of what were, or could have been, public streets, parks, and gathering spaces. Urban scholars have long argued that it is precisely the unpredictable, mixed, and spontaneous quality of public space that gives cities their democratic and cultural vitality. When that space is replaced by access-controlled, consumption-oriented enclaves, something important is lost not just for those excluded from the enclave but for the character of urban life as a whole (Kovacs & Hegedüs, 2023).

From a long-term planning perspective, gated communities also tend to promote car-dependent, low-density development patterns that run counter to compact city and sustainability objectives. In Global South contexts, critics draw uncomfortable parallels between the spatial logic of private enclaves and colonial patterns of residential segregation. Both involve a privileged minority withdrawing from the problems of the majority into a managed, protected space and both ultimately make it harder to build the kind of integrated, collectively governed city that equitable urban development requires (Agyeman & Okechukwu, 2024).

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter traced the theoretical and empirical terrain that frames this study. Beginning with Enclave Theory as the conceptual anchor, it moved through the historical development of gated communities globally, in Africa, and in Zimbabwe, before examining the specific thematic areas most relevant to the research objectives: economic benefits, social cohesion, utility quality, and the broader socioeconomic costs that enclosed living can impose. The picture that emerges is one of genuine but bounded advantages for those within the gates, set against costs that are real but largely borne by those outside them. Chapter Three turns from what is known to how this study sought to generate new knowledge through its choice of research design, sampling strategy, data instruments, and analytical approach.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological decisions that shaped how the study was conducted. It explains why particular choices were made about research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis and situates those choices within broader debates in research methodology. It also describes the study area in enough geographical and socioeconomic detail to make the findings intelligible, and it outlines the ethical principles that governed all interactions with participants throughout the research process.

3.2 Description of the Study Area

Aspindale Park sits on the western fringe of Harare's Central Business District, occupying what was once peri-urban land on the edge of the city's older low-density residential belt. What distinguishes it most visibly from the neighbourhoods that surround it is its physical enclosure: tall perimeter walls running the length of its boundaries, a controlled entry and exit point staffed by private security personnel, and internally managed roads and communal spaces maintained independently of the Harare City Council. The estate is laid out on master-planned principles, with spacious residential stands, maintained green areas, and private recreational facilities that include children's play parks.

Socioeconomically, Aspindale Park is recognisably an upper-middle and high-income environment. The cost of property within the estate puts it beyond the reach of the majority of Harare residents, and the community's profile in terms of education, occupation, and household income reflects that reality. One of its most practically significant features is its independent water and sanitation system, which insulates residents from the intermittent supply failures that affect large parts of greater Harare. Electricity backup arrangements provide a similar buffer against load-shedding. Taken together, these characteristics make Aspindale Park an apt and

analytically productive case through which to investigate how residents of a purpose-built, privately managed enclave experience and evaluate their socioeconomic circumstances.

Figure 3.1 below shows the geographic location of the study area.



Figure 3.1: Map of Aspindale Park Gated Community, Harare [see original submission]

3.3 Research Design

The study employed a case study design, and the choice of that design was deliberate rather than incidental. Case study research is particularly well suited to investigations that seek to understand a specific, bounded phenomenon in depth and in context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context in which it occurs are not sharply drawn (Yin, 2018). Aspindale Park fits this description well: it is a bounded social and physical system with its own internal dynamics, its own governance structures, and its own relationship to the wider city a relationship that is part of what the study is trying to understand. Treating it as a case meant that multiple data collection methods could be deployed within the same site, generating different kinds of evidence that could then be read together to produce a richer and more credible account than any single method alone could provide.

3.4 Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was adopted for this study. The rationale for this combination was straightforward: the study needed both the measurability that quantitative methods provide and the interpretive depth that qualitative methods offer. Using the two approaches concurrently meant that the limitations of each could be offset by the strengths of the other, and that findings from one strand could be tested and enriched by findings from the other.

3.4.1 Quantitative Methods

Quantitative methods were used to generate structured, measurable data from a representative sample of estate residents. Following Babbie (2010), quantitative research is grounded in the objective measurement of variables and the statistical analysis of numerical data, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, measure the strength of attitudes, and make defensible generalisations about the population from which the sample was drawn. In this study, structured questionnaire responses were the primary source of quantitative data, and they were analysed using descriptive statistics to produce the findings reported in Chapter Four.

3.4.2 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods were incorporated to capture what numbers alone cannot convey: the texture of residents' experiences, the reasoning behind their judgements, and the contextual nuances that give meaning to statistical patterns. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as an inquiry that foregrounds the qualities and meanings of social phenomena rather than their frequency or magnitude. In practical terms, this meant gathering data in the form of spoken accounts and interpretive descriptions through key informant interviews, which were then analysed thematically to surface the patterns of meaning running through participants' responses.

3.5 Target Population

The population for this study comprised all permanent household heads or their designated representatives living within Aspindale Park at the time of data collection. Based on available records, the estate contains approximately 1,200 fully serviced and occupied residential stands (Mazikana, 2022). What unites this population as a research group is the defining characteristic they share: direct, sustained experience of life within a privately managed, access-controlled residential environment. That experience is precisely what the study sought to understand, which made all occupying households within the development eligible for inclusion, and the entire occupying population the frame from which a sample was subsequently drawn.

3.6 Sample Size

Drawing a sample rather than surveying the entire population was necessary for practical reasons, and the guiding principle was to produce a sample large enough to be representative while small enough to be manageable within the constraints of a single-researcher study. Creswell (2012) defines a sample as a subset of the target population selected with the intention of drawing conclusions that can be generalised back to the wider group. For a sample to perform that function reliably, it must closely mirror the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn (Sreejesh et al., 2013).

Five percent of the target population of 1,200 households was selected, producing a working sample of 60 respondents after rounding. This figure was supported by Kar and Ramalingam (2013), whose work indicates that a sample of at least 30 is generally sufficient for quantitative inference a threshold this study comfortably exceeds. A separate group of 10 key informants was identified from outside the estate, including local authority officials, community leaders in adjacent neighbourhoods, and estate administrative staff, to provide contextual and comparative perspectives that estate residents themselves were not positioned to offer.

3.7 Sampling Methods

3.7.1 Systematic Sampling

Systematic sampling was used to select the 60 households for questionnaire administration. This is a probability-based technique in which participants are drawn from the population at a fixed, pre-calculated interval, ensuring that every household has an equal chance of being included (Thomas, 2020). The sampling interval was calculated as follows:

$$i = \frac{N}{n} \quad \ldots\ldots (1)$$

$$i = \frac{N1200}{60} \quad \ldots\ldots (1)$$

$$i = 20$$

Where N= target population and;

n= sample

i= interval/ order

i = N ÷ n = 1200 ÷ 60 = 20

The interval of 20 meant that every twentieth household encountered in a systematic traversal of the estate was included in the sample. This approach removed any possibility of the researcher consciously or unconsciously favouring certain households over others, thereby minimising selection bias and strengthening the representativeness of the sample.

3.7.2 Purposive Sampling

The 10 key informants were selected using purposive sampling a non-probability technique in which the researcher deliberately identifies participants on the basis of their particular knowledge, experience, or perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach was appropriate because the value of key informant testimony lies not in its statistical

representativeness but in the depth and specificity of the insight it provides. Each informant was selected because they possessed direct, substantive knowledge of conditions within or immediately around Aspindale Park that would be difficult to obtain through a random sampling approach.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

3.8.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended Likert-scale and open-ended questions was designed and administered to the 60 sampled households. The questionnaire was structured directly around the study's research questions and objectives, ensuring that every item contributed to addressing one or more of the study's core concerns. Instruments were hand-delivered to participants and collected after two to three days, giving respondents the opportunity to complete them at their own pace and without time pressure. This approach is consistent with the view that questionnaires, when well designed and administered with care, minimise interviewer-induced bias and allow for standardised comparison of responses across a relatively large sample (Fellows et al., 2008).

3.8.2 Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight of the ten originally targeted key informants. The interview format was chosen because it allows the researcher to follow a pre-established line of inquiry while remaining flexible enough to pursue unexpected insights or probe responses that warrant deeper exploration (Creswell, 2014). Interview questions were guided by the same research objectives that shaped the questionnaire, ensuring comparability and coherence between the two instruments. Participants were given the questions in advance so they could reflect on them before the interview, a practice that tends to produce more considered and substantive responses. Before each interview began, the

researcher explained the purpose of the study and the conditions of participation, and informed consent was obtained from every participant.

3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data from the returned questionnaires were entered into SPSS (version 20) and cross-checked in Microsoft Excel for accuracy and consistency. Records containing obvious errors or incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis to preserve data integrity. Descriptive statistical analysis was then applied to generate frequency counts, mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions, which are presented in Chapter Four through histograms, bar charts, and summary tables. Qualitative data from the key informant interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically: responses were first coded at the level of individual statements, then grouped into broader thematic clusters that mapped onto the study's research questions. Representative direct quotations are used in the findings chapter to give texture and voice to these thematic patterns.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Every participant in this study, whether completing a questionnaire or taking part in an interview, did so on a fully voluntary and fully informed basis. Before any data were collected, the researcher provided each potential participant with a written statement explaining who was conducting the research, what it was about, what participation would involve, and how the resulting information would be used. No one was enrolled in the study without having first indicated, freely and without any form of pressure, that they were willing to take part. Rudestam and Newton (2001) are clear that informed consent is not merely a procedural formality but a fundamental expression of respect for the autonomy and dignity of research participants — a principle this study took seriously.

3.10.2 Confidentiality and Privacy

Participant privacy was protected throughout the research process. Questionnaire responses were fully anonymised: no name, address, or other identifying detail was attached to any response, and data were stored and reported in aggregate rather than individual form. Interview participants were similarly assured that their contributions would not be attributed to them by name or by any detail that could identify them in the final report. No participant was pressured to share information they were uncomfortable providing, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point, without giving reasons, was communicated clearly and respected (Tashakkori & Charles, 2008).

3.10.3 Transparency and Debriefing

The researcher-maintained transparency about the study's purpose from the outset and committed to sharing findings with participants and relevant stakeholders once data collection and analysis were complete. In line with the ethical principles of debriefing outlined by Welfel (2012), participants were reminded that they could request access to the study's conclusions and that no deception of any kind had been involved in how the research was designed or conducted. This commitment to openness was viewed not as an optional extra but as an integral part of the research relationship.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explained the methodological logic of the study, from the description of Aspindale Park as the research site, through the case study design and mixed-methods approach, to the specifics of sampling, data collection, analysis, and ethical practice. Each decision was guided by the dual imperative of generating credible findings and treating participants with the respect their involvement deserves. Chapter Four presents what that process produced: the primary findings of the study, drawn from both the questionnaire data and the key informant interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the data gathered during fieldwork at Aspindale Park. The chapter is structured around the three research objectives, working through each in turn: the perceived economic benefits of gated living, the level of social cohesion within the community, and the residents' evaluation of private utility provision compared with public services in greater Harare. Quantitative findings from the questionnaire survey are presented through frequency tables and histograms, while direct quotations from key informant interviews are woven into the discussion to give the statistical patterns a more grounded, human dimension.

4.2 Response Rate

Of the 60 questionnaires distributed across the sampled households, 57 were completed and returned a response rate of 95 percent. Of the 10 key informants originally targeted, eight agreed to participate, yielding an interview response rate of 80 percent. Across both instruments combined, 65 out of 70 targeted participants contributed data, giving an overall participation rate of 92.85 percent. These figures are summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Category	Targeted	Responded	Response Rate
Questionnaires	60	57	95%
Interviews	10	8	80%
Total	**70**	**65**	**92.85%**

Table 4.1: Participation Rate by Instrument

A questionnaire response rate of 95 percent sits well above the 60 percent threshold that Baruch and Holton (2008) identify as the minimum acceptable benchmark for survey research, signalling strong participant engagement. The 80 percent interview participation rate similarly

exceeds what Sutton and Austin (2015) describe as adequate for qualitative depth purposes. The high combined response rate across both instruments is a meaningful indicator of the study's internal validity: it suggests that the findings represent the views of the target population with a high degree of reliability, rather than reflecting the selective perspectives of a small and potentially unrepresentative minority (Fincham, 2008).

4.3 Background Characteristics of Participants

Before turning to the substantive findings, it is worth pausing on the demographic profile of those who participated in the study. The profile matters because it confirms whether the sample reflects what the literature leads us to expect about the social composition of gated communities, and because it shapes how the findings should be interpreted.

Table 4.2 summarises the key background characteristics.

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	38	58.50%
	Male	27	41.50%
Education	Ordinary Level	13	20.00%
	Advanced Level	27	41.53%
	Tertiary Level	25	38.47%
Employment	Not Employed	4	6.15%
	Formal Employment	42	64.62%
	Informal Employment	19	29.23%
Marital Status	Married	56	86.15%
	Divorced	6	9.23%
	Widowed	3	4.62%

Table 4.2: Background Characteristics of Research Participants

The demographic data paint a consistent picture. Eight in ten participants hold Advanced Level qualifications or above, and nearly two-thirds are in formal employment a profile that places

the Aspindale Park community firmly within the upper-middle and professional class. This is not unexpected: Landman (2019) has documented how gated estates in developing cities tend to function as residential spaces where economically advantaged individuals consolidate their status and seek security from the uncertainties of urban life.

Women make up a slight majority of respondents (58.50 percent), a finding that is open to several interpretations. One plausible reading is that women are more likely to be present in the household during the day and therefore more accessible to researchers delivering questionnaires. Another, consistent with Atkinson and Blandy (2005), is that security concerns weigh more heavily in women's daily decision-making, making them more attuned to and reflective about the security environment in which they live. The high proportion of married participants (86.15 percent) reinforces the family-centred character of the community, while the very low unemployment rate (6.15 percent) further underscores the estate's economic character a place where, as Roitman (2016) observes, professional networks are as much a feature of community life as shared physical infrastructure.

4.4 Perceived Economic Benefits: Security and Property Value Appreciation

The first objective of the study was to establish how Aspindale Park residents perceive the economic advantages associated with their community, focusing specifically on security provision and property value performance.

Figure 4.1 presents the distribution of Likert-scale responses on this theme

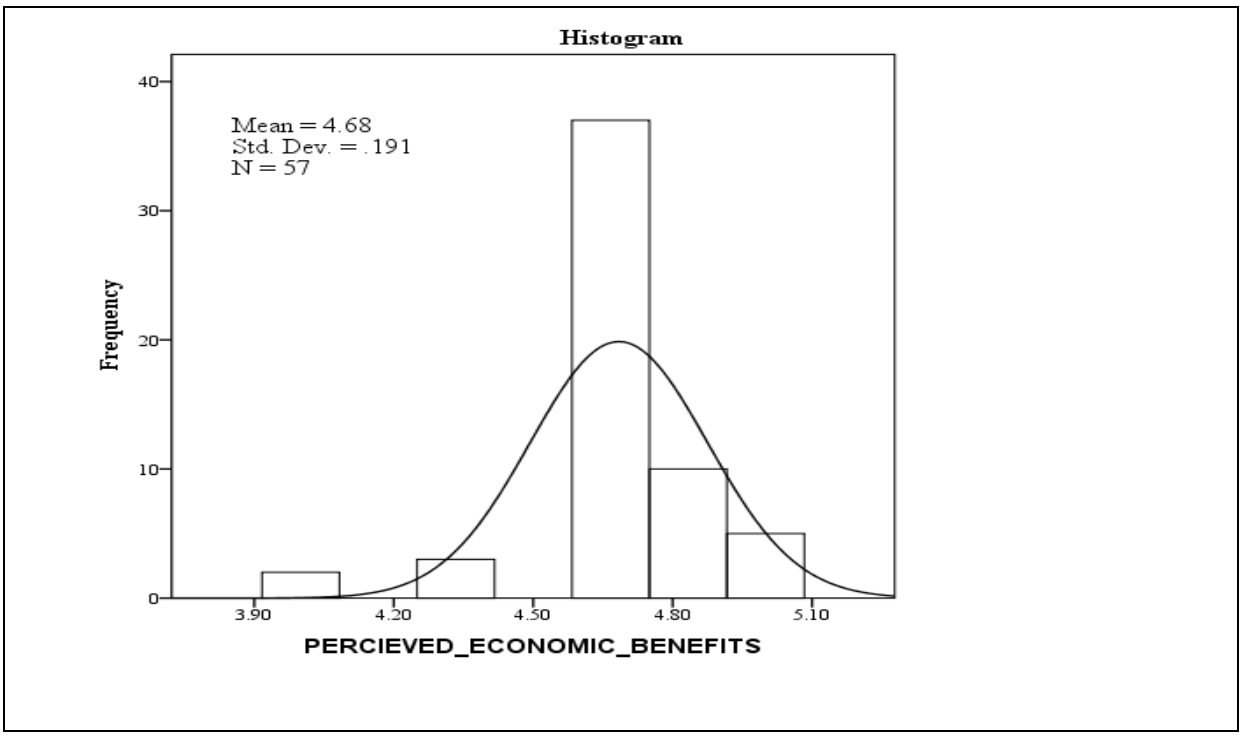

Figure 4.1: Perceived Economic Benefits of Living in Aspindale Park (N=57)

The statistical picture is striking in its consistency. The aggregate mean score of 4.68 on a five-point scale with a standard deviation of just 0.191 indicates not only that residents are overwhelmingly positive about the economic value of their community, but that this positivity is shared with remarkable uniformity. There is very little disagreement here: 64.9 percent of respondents scored at exactly 4.67, and a cumulative 91.2 percent recorded 4.67 or higher. The narrow standard deviation tells us this is a genuine consensus, not a statistical average masking a divided population. A key informant captured the spirit of these numbers directly:

> *"The economic case for living here is straightforward when you look at it carefully. Your property is protected in a way that most Harare properties simply are not, and the value keeps moving in the right direction regardless of what is happening in the broader market." (Key Informant)*

This convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the economic case for gated living is not merely a selling point that developers promote but a conviction that residents have arrived at through their own lived experience. Atkinson and Blandy (2005) observed something similar in their comparative work: residents of enclosed estates tend to develop and reinforce shared narratives about the security and investment soundness of their choice to live their narratives grounded in observed reality rather than wishful thinking.

What makes the Zimbabwean context particularly interesting is that the economic benefits residents associate with their community are not confined to the present moment but extend into the future. In a country where the value of currency and financial instruments has historically been precarious, owning property within a managed, access-controlled estate functions as a long-term strategy for preserving and growing wealth. Roitman (2016) has described such communities as islands of capital preservation a description that residents' responses suggest is well-founded.

4.5 Social Cohesion among Aspindale Park Residents

The second objective turned from economics to social life, asking how strongly residents feel connected to one another and to the community as a whole. The Likert-scale instrument used to measure social cohesion produced results that challenged some of the most persistent assumptions in the gated community literature. Figure 4.2 presents the distributional findings.

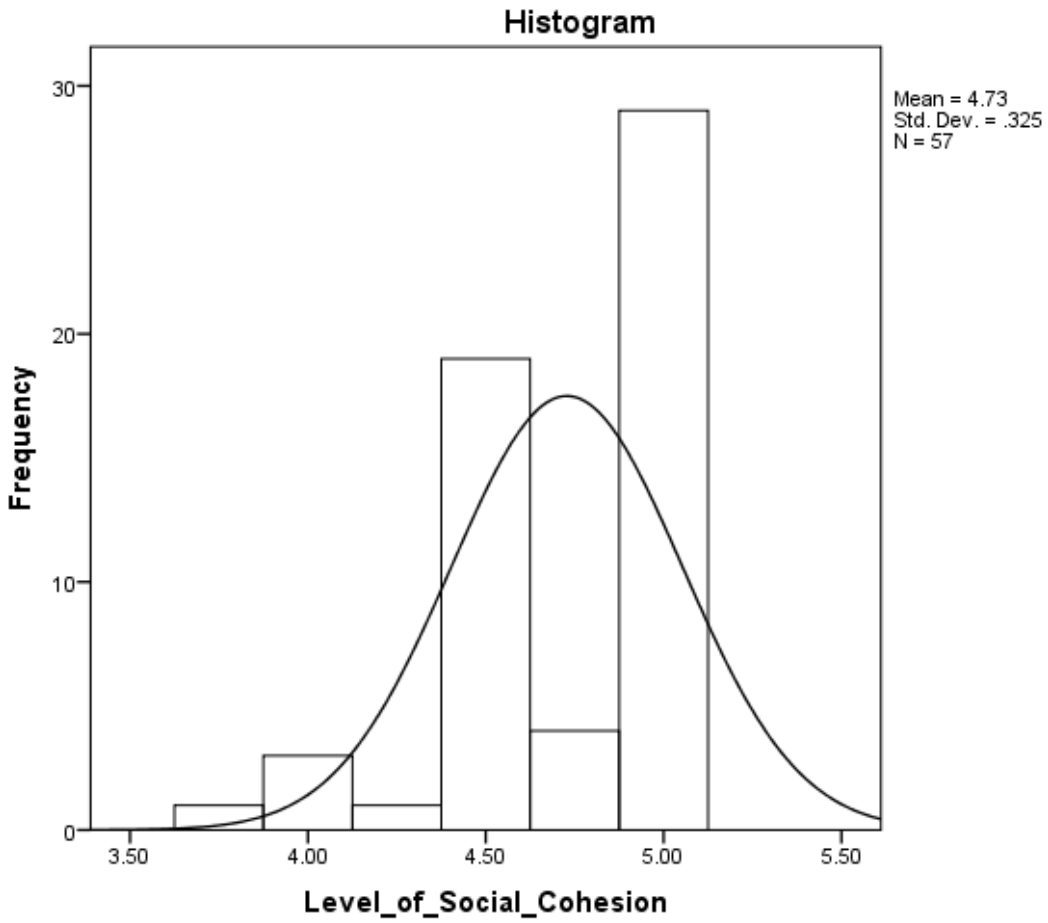

Figure 4.2: Level of Social Cohesion in Aspindale Park (N=57)

The mean social cohesion score of 4.73 (SD = 0.325) is high, and the distribution of responses is skewed firmly toward the top of the scale: 50.9 percent of respondents gave the maximum rating of 5, and a cumulative 91.2 percent scored 4.50 or above. These are not the numbers you would expect from a community characterised by social isolation and weak neighbourhood ties which is precisely what older accounts of gated living, including Blakely and Snyder's (1997) foundational work, predicted. A key informant's observation captures this contrast well:

> *"People on the outside often assume that Aspindale residents keep to themselves and have little to do with their neighbours. That is not what you find when you spend time here. If anything, the sense of community is stronger*

than in many open neighbourhoods they just express it mostly within their own walls." (Key Informant)

This finding is less surprising when set against the more recent literature. Lemanski (2019) and Roitman (2019) have both argued that the social dynamics of gated communities are more nuanced than early critics acknowledged, and that strong in-group social capital is a realistic and often documented outcome in communities whose members share similar socioeconomic backgrounds and face common external pressures. In Harare's context, those pressures are real and acute: crime, municipal service failure, and economic instability create conditions in which residents have strong practical reasons to co-operate and build trust with their neighbours.

Landman and Du Toit (2022) make the point directly: in developing countries, gated communities often produce strong social cohesion not because residents are innately neighbourly but because collective action pooling resources for security upgrades, lobbying management about service issues, organising shared responses to shared problems produces better outcomes than acting individually. Atkinson and Ho (2023) add that modern gated communities increasingly use digital communication tools and organised events to maintain social connection and reinforce community identity, and Aspindale Park appears to exemplify this pattern (Pow, 2018; Sigler & Wissink, 2020).

4.6 Perceived Quality of Privatised Utilities versus Public Services

The third research objective asked how residents rate the quality of the private utility services they receive within Aspindale Park, and how they compare those services to the municipal alternatives available in the wider city. Figure 4.3 presents the findings .

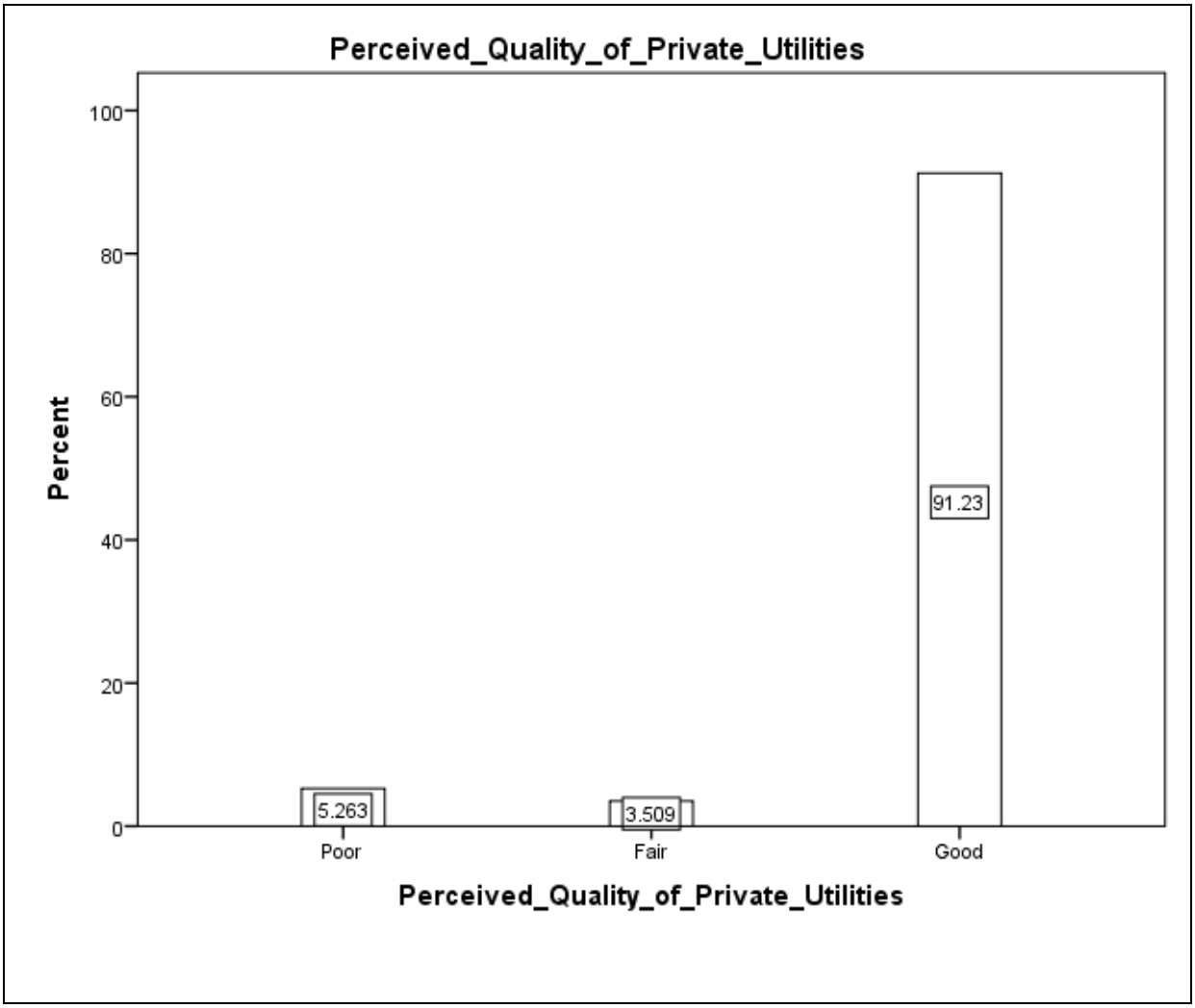

Figure 4.3: Perceived Quality of Private Utilities in Aspindale Park Compared to Greater Harare (N=57)

The results are unambiguous. An overwhelming 91.2 percent of residents rated the quality of private utilities within the estate as good; only 5.3 percent assessed them as poor, and 3.5 percent as fair. These figures are striking not only for their magnitude but for what they reveal about the experience of contrast: most of these residents have lived in non-gated parts of Harare and know from personal experience what municipal water, electricity, road maintenance, and waste collection look like. When they describe private provision as good, they are doing so against that lived reference point.

Chirisa and Dube (2020) have documented the long-running deterioration of Harare City Council's service delivery capacity in detail, tracing how underfunding, infrastructure ageing,

and governance failures have combined to push middle and upper-income households toward private and collective solutions for services that were once the city's responsibility. The Aspindale Park experience fits this pattern precisely: the estate's resident association collects levies, contracts service providers, and manages infrastructure maintenance in ways the council cannot match. The result as 91 percent of residents confirm is a measurably superior service environment.

What deserves equal attention, though, is the discomfort that sits alongside this satisfaction. The gap between what Aspindale Park residents' access through private provision and what their neighbours in Kambuzuma depend on from the municipality is not merely a quality difference it is a structural division in urban citizenship. Matamanda et al. (2022) frame this starkly: when access to reliable water, electricity, and sanitation is determined by purchasing power rather than by the rights attached to urban residence, a two-tier system of civic entitlement has taken hold. The residents of Aspindale Park may be the immediate beneficiaries, but the city as a whole bears a cost that is easy to overlook from inside the estate's walls.

4.7 Chapter Summary

The findings reported in this chapter paint a coherent and revealing picture. Aspindale Park residents are strongly and consistently positive across all three dimensions the study explored. They believe their properties are economically valuable and secure in ways that properties elsewhere in Harare are not. They experience a degree of social connection and mutual support that confounds the stereotype of gated living as socially isolating. And they rate the private utility services available to them as substantially better than anything the public system offers. The discussion has, in each case, situated these findings within the relevant scholarly literature and flagged the broader urban questions they raise. Chapter Five draws these threads together into conclusions and actionable recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws together what the study has found, what it means, and what should happen next as a result. It opens with a summary of the key findings from each of the three research objectives, moves into a set of integrated conclusions that address the study's central aim, and closes with practical recommendations directed at the different groups who have a stake in how gated communities develop within Zimbabwe's cities.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

5.2.1 Perceived Economic Benefits on Security and Property Value Appreciation

The data gathered on the first research objective tell a clear story. With a mean score of 4.68 and a standard deviation of only 0.191 on a five-point Likert scale, Aspindale Park residents expressed near-universal agreement that life within the estate delivers concrete economic advantages. The very low variance is as telling as the high mean: it signals a genuine shared conviction rather than a divided or ambivalent population. Residents associate the estate with a reliable security environment, and they believe based on experience and observation that their properties hold and grow their value in ways that would not be possible outside the gates. In the context of Zimbabwe's volatile economic history, that combination of physical security and financial resilience carries particular weight.

5.2.2 Social Cohesion among Residents in Aspindale Park

The findings on social cohesion were, in some respects, the most surprising of the three. A mean score of 4.73 (SD = 0.325), with 50.9 percent of residents giving the maximum rating and 91.2 percent scoring 4.50 or above, paints a picture of a community that is actively and genuinely connected. This runs counter to longstanding assumptions in the gated community literature about the socially isolating effects of enclosed living. What the data suggest instead

is that shared socioeconomic circumstances, a common experience of external urban pressures, and the deliberate community-building mechanisms of the estate's governance structure together produce a level of social solidarity that compares well with and in some respects exceeds what open urban neighbourhoods typically achieve. The qualitative evidence reinforced this: key informants consistently described Aspindale Park as a community where people know each other, look out for each other, and act collectively when it matters.

5.2.3 Perceived Quality of Privatised Utilities versus Public Services

The third set of findings was the most one-sided. Ninety-one percent of residents rated the quality of private utility provision within the estate as good, and the qualitative testimony confirmed that this assessment was grounded in direct, ongoing comparison with the public services available in surrounding neighbourhoods. Water supply, electricity, waste collection, road maintenance, and private security were all cited as substantially more reliable and better maintained within Aspindale Park than they are in greater Harare. These findings reflect, as much as anything else, the state of Harare's municipal infrastructure which has deteriorated to the point where the bar for comparison is not high. Nevertheless, the consistency and strength of resident satisfaction with private provision is a significant finding in its own right, and one with implications that extend well beyond Aspindale Park.

5.3 Conclusion

Taken together, the findings offer a clear and empirically grounded answer to the study's central question. Residents of Aspindale Park perceive their community as delivering meaningful socioeconomic benefits across all three dimensions the study explored. They feel economically secure in a way they associate specifically with the managed, enclosed character of the estate. They are socially connected in ways that challenge the image of gated communities as atomised, privatised enclaves. And they have access to utilities and services whose reliability far exceeds what the surrounding city can provide.

These findings matter because they are based on the lived experience of people who actually inhabit these environments a perspective that has been underrepresented in the Zimbabwean urban planning literature. They also matter because they complicate the debate. The picture that emerges is not one of straightforwardly selfish privatisation or straightforwardly beneficial community development. It is more nuanced than that. Residents are gaining real things: safety, investment value, functional infrastructure, social belonging. But those gains are achieved within a system that also generates real costs urban inequality, differential access to services based on purchasing power, and the progressive withdrawal of relatively affluent citizens from the public institutions on which the majority of Harare's residents depend.

The honest conclusion is that gated communities like Aspindale Park are rational responses to the failures of urban governance in Zimbabwe and that the very success of that response makes it harder to address those underlying failures. The residents are not the problem. But the conditions that make gated living so attractive to them are, and any serious engagement with urban equity in Harare has to start from that recognition.

5.4 Recommendations

i. To Aspindale Park Residents

The social cohesion that has developed within Aspindale Park is a genuine asset, and it is worth preserving and strengthening. Residents are encouraged to build on the community mechanisms WhatsApp groups, neighbourhood watch programmes, resident events that have contributed to the strong sense of connection the data reveal. Beyond the estate walls, there is also an opportunity to consider what role Aspindale Park as a community could play in the life of the surrounding neighbourhood. Even modest gestures of civic engagement contributing to local school improvements, supporting public infrastructure in adjacent streets, participating in broader city consultations would begin to bridge the divide that the perimeter walls inevitably create.

ii. To Harare City Council

The contrast between the service environment inside Aspindale Park and the one available to the rest of Harare is not primarily a story about the estate's excellence it is a story about municipal failure. The city council needs to take seriously the model of responsive, accountable, levy-funded service delivery that private estate management demonstrates, and explore whether elements of that model can be adapted for non-gated residential areas. Structured public-private partnerships, in which the city provides a regulatory framework and private operators deliver services on performance-based contracts, offer a possible avenue. The goal should be to raise the floor of service quality for all Harare residents, not simply to accommodate the continuing withdrawal of wealthier households into private provision.

iii. To the Government of Zimbabwe

There is a regulatory gap in Zimbabwe's current urban planning framework when it comes to gated communities. These developments make significant demands on city infrastructure roads, drainage, electricity networks and their residents benefit from public goods even as they opt out of contributing to them in certain respects. A national policy framework that requires gated developments above a certain size to make structured contributions to surrounding community infrastructure through development levies, mandatory social investment proportional to estate size, or requirements to host public amenities accessible to non-residents would begin to address the equity problem that the current laissez-faire approach perpetuates.

iv. To Real Estate Developers

The findings suggest that social cohesion is not an accidental feature of gated communities but something that emerges when governance structures, physical design, and community programming are aligned to support it. Developers designing new enclosed estates should take that lesson seriously: investing in communal spaces, governance frameworks, and social infrastructure from the outset is likely to produce more satisfied, more connected, and

ultimately more loyal resident communities than simply building walls and expecting cohesion to follow. Developers should also consider how the design of new estates can reduce the visual and physical barrier effect at their boundaries not by compromising security but by building in features that make the relationship between the estate and the surrounding neighbourhood less adversarial.

v. To Future Researchers

This study has broken new ground in documenting the resident-level experience of gated living in Harare, but it has also opened up questions that it cannot fully answer. Comparative studies that examine both gated and non-gated communities simultaneously using equivalent methods and comparable samples would allow for more rigorous analysis of whether and how gated living actually differs in its socioeconomic effects, rather than relying on cross-study comparisons that involve too many confounding variables. Longitudinal research that tracks the same community over time would also be valuable, given how rapidly urban conditions in Harare change. And research that centres the perspectives of residents outside the gates particularly those in adjacent neighbourhoods who live with the effects of large enclosed estates nearby would provide an important counterpoint to the resident-focused perspective of studies like this one.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has brought the study to its close by synthesising the findings into a coherent set of conclusions and translating those conclusions into actionable recommendations for five distinct audiences. The central conclusion is one that holds both the genuine benefits of gated living for its residents and the genuine costs it imposes on the wider city in honest tension. Aspindale Park residents are, by their own clear-eyed account, better off in measurable ways for living where they live. What the study also makes clear is that the city would be better off if the conditions that make gated living so necessary and so attractive were addressed at their

source, rather than accommodated indefinitely through private withdrawal. That is the challenge that urban planning, governance, and policy in Zimbabwe must ultimately rise to meet.

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APENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Title: Perceived Socio-Economic Benefits of Gated Communities on the Welfare of Urban Residents in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Aspindale Park, Harare.

Introduction: You are invited to participate in this academic research study aimed at understanding resident experiences in Aspindale Park. Your participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential. All information will be used solely for this research. Completing this questionnaire implies your informed consent. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Instructions: Please tick (✓) the appropriate box or write your answer in the space provided.

1. **Gender:** Male [ ] Female [ ] Prefer not to say [ ]
2. **Age Group:** 18-30 [ ] 31-45 [ ] 46-60 [ ] 61+ [ ]
3. **Highest Level of Education Completed:** Ordinary Level (O-Level) [ ] Advanced Level (A-Level) [ ] Tertiary (Diploma/Degree/Postgraduate) [ ] Other (Specify) _____
4. **Current Employment Status:** Formally Employed [ ] Self-Employed/Informal Sector [ ] Unemployed [ ] Retired [ ] Student [ ]
5. **Marital Status:** Single [ ] Married [ ] Divorced/Separated [ ] Widowed [ ]
6. **Length of Residence in Aspindale Park:** <1 year [ ] 1-3 years [ ] 4-6 years [ ] 7+ years [ ]

SECTION B: OBJECTIVE I – PERCEIVED ECONOMIC BENEFITS ON SECURITY & PROPERTY VALUE

7. Instructions: For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement by ticking (✓) one box per row.
   Key: ***Strongly Disagree (1)*** ***Disagree (2)*** ***Neutral (3)*** ***Agree (4)*** ***Strongly Agree (5)***

Statement	5	4	3	2	1
The security features of Aspindale Park (e.g., gates, guards, perimeter wall) are a primary reason for my choice to live here.					
I believe the security here has directly protected my property from crime or vandalism.					
I feel the security measures have significantly reduced my worry about burglary or theft.					
I perceive that property values in Aspindale Park appreciate faster than in comparable non-gated areas of Harare.					
The "gated" status of this community was a major factor in my property's investment value.					
I am confident that my property will retain its value better here than in a non-gated suburb.					

8. In your own words, what, if any, are the main economic or financial benefits you associate with living in a secured community like Aspindale Park?

   ……

   ……

   ……

   ……..

SECTION C: OBJECTIVE II – LEVEL OF SOCIAL COHESION

9. *Instructions: Please tick (✓) the most appropriate response for you.*

Key: Very Low (1) Low (2) Moderate (3) High (4) Very High (5)

Question	5	4	3	2	1
How would you rate your sense of belonging to the Aspindale Park community?					
How often do you interact socially with your neighbours (e.g., visits, chats, events)?					
To what extent do you trust your neighbours to, for example, keep an eye on your property?					
How strong is the sense of solidarity or mutual support among residents?					

10. Are you aware of or part of any formal or informal resident groups (e.g., WhatsApp group, neighbourhood watch, social club)? Yes [ ] No [ ] If Yes, please briefly describe its purpose: _____

11. What, in your view, are the biggest strengths and challenges of social life within Aspindale Park?
    i. Strengths:

    _____

    ii. Challenges:

    _____

SECTION D: OBJECTIVE III – PERCEIVED QUALITY OF PRIVATIZED UTILITIES VS. PUBLIC SERVICES

12. **Instructions:** Please rate the quality and reliability of the following services WITHIN ASPINDALE PARK compared to your perception of PUBLIC SERVICES in general areas of Harare.

    Key: Much Worse (1) Worse (2) About the Same (3) Better (4) Much Better (5)

Service	5	4	3	2	1
Water Supply & Reliability					
Electricity Supply & Reliability					
Road Maintenance & Internal Streets					
Waste (Refuse) Collection & Management					
Security & Crime Prevention					

13. In your opinion, what is the most significant advantage of having privatized/managed services within the estate?

……
……..

14. Are there any disadvantages or concerns related to these privatized services (e.g., cost, management)? Please explain.

    ……
    ……

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you very much for your valuable time and contribution to this research.

APPENDIX B: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Title: Perceived Socio-Economic Benefits of Gated Communities on the Welfare of Urban Residents in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Aspindale Park, Harare.

Introduction & Context

1. To begin, could you describe your role and how your work or position connects you to planned urban developments or gated communities like Aspindale Park?
2. From your professional standpoint, what would you identify as the primary drivers behind the growth and demand for gated communities in Harare over the past decade?

Theme 1: Economic Dimensions & Property Market

3. In your experience, how do security features and the "gated" label tangibly impact property values and marketability within estates like Aspindale Park, compared to similar non-gated suburbs?

4. What, if any, have been the observed economic effects (positive or negative) of Aspindale Park on the surrounding local economy, e.g., for local businesses, employment, or service provision?

Theme 2: Social Dynamics & Community Management

5. How would you characterize the social cohesion and community life within enclosed estates? What mechanisms (formal or informal) exist to foster or manage resident relations within Aspindale Park?
6. From an institutional perspective, what are the key advantages and challenges of managing privatized utilities (water, security, waste) within a gated community, as opposed to relying on municipal services?
7. How is the governance model (e.g., homeowner's association, private management) of Aspindale Park perceived in terms of its effectiveness and accountability by residents and by your office/organization?

Theme 3: Planning, Policy and Externalities

8. How do developments like Aspindale Park align with or challenge the Harare City Council's master planning goals for inclusive and integrated urban development?
9. What is your observation or understanding of the socio-economic perceptions between residents inside Aspindale Park and those in the immediately adjacent neighbourhoods? Are there notable tensions or synergies?

10. A critical concern is that gated communities might divert private investment and attention from public infrastructure. What is your view on this in the context of Aspindale Park and Harare at large?

Conclusion and Synthesis

11. Balancing all factors, what would you say is the most significant net benefit and the most significant net cost of gated communities like Aspindale Park for the city of Harare's development?
12. Looking ahead, what policy or regulatory changes, if any, do you think are necessary to better integrate such private developments into the broader urban fabric to maximize public welfare?