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As public momentum and political will to address the country’s housing needs grow, we present our latest report Housing Communities: What People Want. We have long advocated for community consultation to be a key element of any development; we believe that inclusive, intensive consultation is key to producing places that people value and cherish.

In March 2014, we launched Housing London: A Mid-rise Solution. Our report considered the current housing needs facing the UK’s capital city and called for the question of urban form and housing typology to be given more weight in the debate. The report reflected our long-standing concern that much of the housing and building stock currently being built around the country does not reflect the preferences and needs of the communities which it is meant to serve.

This report helps us understand how we can move from a NIMBY (Not-In-My-Backyard) to a BIMBY (Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard) attitude towards house-building in the UK; how to create the right processes which genuinely engage residents and build the type of housing that is actually welcomed by communities: appropriate, sustainable and beautiful. At present too much consultation is spurious and too much of what we are building is repeating the errors of the past. We have reached a point in the UK where people appreciate the need for more housing, especially in the face of unaffordable housing for younger generations, but we need quality designs and collaborative consultation to translate this understanding into support for new schemes around the country. We will only be able to build enough homes to ease the UK’s current housing needs once communities feel that their concerns will be heard and new developments are beneficial, not detrimental, to where they live.
This study lays out evidence from our work around the UK and seeks to answer two key questions:

1. **Which elements of the built environment have the communities and clients we’ve worked with most valued and desired?**

   Over the past seventeen years we’ve been involved with an array of public consultation processes. We have conducted well over 100 Enquiry by Design processes, including thirty-six neighbourhood planning workshops funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government that have engaged over 8,000 people alone.

   The research laid out in this report, carried out with Create Streets, considers sixteen of our community consultation processes in depth. We’ve been involved in the projects either as lead community consultation consultant or as a partner consultant. These projects reach across a range of sites in the UK, and reflect a variety of development projects, from estate regeneration, to urban extensions and town centre redevelopments. The projects have been analysed through a consideration of community consultation records, project proposals and client feedback, as well as through a series of interviews conducted over the past three months.

   **Housing Communities: What People Want** highlights the built environment preferences that have come up in our work across the country, and which consultation methods have been best received by the people we have worked with. The report seeks to present a body of evidence that contributes to understanding the built environment preferences across the UK and makes clear the benefit of meaningful community consultation in achieving quality place-making.

2. **Which elements of community consultation have the communities and clients we’ve worked with most valued, and how can consultation help to ensure successful built projects?**

   **What do people want?**

   **Key principles for new developments**

   - **Estate Regeneration**
     - Right to remain.
     - Well-defined quality green space.
     - Sense of place/Neighbourhood.
     - Integration/Transport links.
     - Dislike for big, high-rise development that does not fit context.

   - **City and Town Centre Regeneration**
     - Strong local identity retained.
     - Protect local landmarks.
     - Unique and varied retail offering.
     - Appropriate scale, no over-development.
     - Connectivity/pedestrian streets.

   - **Urban Extensions**
     - Economic opportunities.
     - Integration with existing communities.
     - ‘Real’ neighbourhoods/ ‘real’ community.
     - Traditional architecture to fit local precedent.
     - Sense of place, not ‘soulless’ or ‘mono-functional’ housing estates.

   *Create Streets is a social enterprise and independent research institute focusing on the built environment.*
This report finds immediate relevance in the current debate about house-building in the UK. As MORI’s issues index shows (fig. 1), housing has been rising in importance as a political issue for some years.\(^4\)

This past July, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) revealed that average UK house prices had risen by 10.5% over the past year. Bank of England governor Mark Carney once again warned of a UK property price bubble, cautioning that the ever-escalating prices threatened to exacerbate household debt and tip the UK back into recession.\(^3\) Bank (ONS) revealed that average UK house prices had risen by 10.5% over the past year.3 Bank (ONS) revealed that average UK house prices had risen by 10.5% over the past year. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term.

In London and the South East, this threat is even more acute, with the capital’s house prices rising by a record 20.1% over the past year, with average London house prices now topping £492,000. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term.\(^5\) Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term. Carney went on to identify rising property prices as the “biggest risk” to the country’s economic recovery over the medium term.

Given that the massive shortfall between supply and demand is most acutely felt in London and the South East, it is not surprising that the debate about housing has raged most sharply in the capital. The subsequent rise in house prices, coupled with the increase in luxury residential towers, has been subject to much debate and criticism. Recent headlines in The Evening Standard read, “Luxury tower blocks ‘squeeze out Londoners as prices boom’.” “London’s new towers ‘creating a Gotham City skyline’” and “Mayor urged to stop rise of ‘monster towers’ that threaten historic skyline.” These concerns are not restricted to heritage organisations or those already in social housing. Peter Rees, former chief planner for the City of London has complained about “this rambling rubbish of residential towers across London.” New London Architecture ran an exhibition on the subject in April 2014. In the same month The Observer and the Architects’ Journal launched the Skyline Campaign to campaign against the “untrammelled rash” of skyscrapers being built in London. The Observer architecture critic, Rowan Moore, who is one of the campaign’s leaders said: “Those with power and responsibility — the Communities Secretary and his ministers, the Mayor, and the boroughs — must wake up to the risk of irreversible harm that London is facing, and take effective action.” Recent YouGov polling showed that the public shares these concerns as well, with 43% of people opposing the building of more skyscrapers.\(^6\)

Although this debate is playing out loudly in London, we have experienced similar concerns over and over again working on new housing developments across the country. Communities around the UK are concerned about out-of-context, inappropriately scaled buildings, poor architectural design and have experienced the dire end-results of design processes that do not consult local people properly. The need to build beautiful homes and places in a manner that supports local communities is a country-wide concern and indeed should be encouraged with a view to supporting new residential communities which aid in relieving the current housing pressures faced in the capital.

Opinion polls and residents’ surveys, the behaviour of the housing market and the actions of local communities over decades all point to the same conclusion: with the partial exception of a very prosperous minority in city centres, most people, most of the time, prefer living in a house on a street or a flat in a low-rise building. What the existing data does not comprehensively set out, however, and what the rest of this report aims to explore in more detail, are the types of streets, buildings, connectivity and built environment local communities prefer.

This research seeks to make a contribution to this data gap, and to help overcome NIMBY opposition to new house-building through proving that people have strong opinions on their built environment and an equally strong desire to be properly consulted. We believe that if the preferences of communities are adopted in the design process in a more meaningful way, the UK will be able to produce more houses, and create more new places that are supported and cherished by local people. A shift from NIMBY to BIMBY.
Overview of Research

We teach and demonstrate sustainable development by placing community engagement at the heart of our work. It is our belief that the wisdom of local people should meaningfully inform the design process.

To put this belief into action we devised a community engagement framework called ‘Enquiry by Design’ (EbD). We have been conducting EbD consultation workshops for over fifteen years for a variety of partners, including housing partnerships, developers and local councils, as well as on behalf of communities through DCLG funding.

In other instances, our consultation processes have taken the form of workshops, drop in sessions or coordinating community feedback for existing development proposals.

RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Between April and July 2014, a review of twenty-six past projects was conducted, out of which sixteen key case studies were identified for in-depth study. This review included a consideration of all written material produced at consultation exercises, as well as interviews with key staff and project partners. We were also able to access some up to date recorded interviews with participants, either members of the public or stakeholders of one form or another.

It is important to note that the research considers a variety of project sites—ranging from small village extensions to larger urban infill projects. The preferences outlined in the following chapters should be understood and framed within their respective built environment contexts and the conclusions of each should be understood as primarily applicable to those types of projects (i.e. we cannot apply the specific preferences of a village extension to an urban infill project).

This research lays out the impressions and preferences uncovered during our consultation processes (usually near the beginning of a given project). The data does not represent feedback or impressions on the final outcome of the case studies researched. In some cases, we have had continued involvement with these projects, while in others we were involved primarily at the initial consultation/visioning phase of the project. The data outlined below reflects the outcomes of these initial consultations.
Three types of evidence were considered in our research:

1. Consultation Process
   - Contemporary Verbatim or Summary Notes of What Individuals Involved in Consultation Sessions Said They Wanted, Written Up During the Consultation Process Itself.

2. Consultation Outcomes
   - Published Conclusions, Typically an End Report, Detailing Design and Spatial Form Preferences That the Process Had Led To.

3. Participant Interviews
   - Interviews with Participants or Convenors of the Consultation Workshops of What Was Discussed and Agreed in Workshops and with the Wider Community.

Key Built Environment Findings

Four clear themes emerged from our participant interview open questions in terms of what people did not want:

1. They did not want their town or village to lose a strong sense of identity.
2. They did not want too many tall or large buildings to be developed.
3. They did not want green space to be unduly threatened from “urban sprawl”.
4. They did not want any change to be too rapid, gradual nor overwhelming.
5. They did not want their town or village to lose a strong sense of identity.
6. They did not want too many tall or large buildings to be developed.

The six most frequently recurring responses are outlined below. We have amalgamated identical or highly similar responses but used interviewees’ phraseology wherever possible. It is worth highlighting that these findings are internally consistent. Overall, people did not want change that, in its physical form, adversely altered the nature of where they lived.

Themes that Stood Out

A desire for development to support employment and the local economy; a desire for a place to remain unique/retain its local identity; and a desire for new development to be well integrated with the existing place.

It is key to note that the majority (though not all) of the interviews carried out for this research are with people who commissioned or carried out consultation exercises, chiefly project partners or Prince’s Foundation staff. While the consultation process and consultation outcomes datasets are directly reflective of the sentiments expressed by residents during the consultation processes, the interview data is more reflective of the impressions of those managing the projects.

These interviews are not representative of public opinion, but rather impressions of public opinion, and are intended to supplement the feedback directly documented during the consultation exercises.

Our interview research was further supplemented by existing contemporaneously recorded interviews conducted with residents during and following the completion of various projects.

Top 6 spontaneous dislikes in workshops: what did participants most dislike/not want?

1. “Too much height”, specific proposed tower blocks or new buildings (“overshadowing the church”), “large apartment blocks” with “inappropriate” or “high density”
2. Loss of “parkland” or green space via “urban sprawl” or “village to sprawl to neighbouring village”
3. “homogenisation”, “generic housing”
4. “too much change”, “too much development”
5. “gentrification”, “too many outsiders”
6. Flooding caused by new development

Spontaneous evidence on what people did want was a little less clear cut. There was also more of an internal contradiction in the data with responses showing a welcoming attitude to development if it led to employment and revitalisation but also a desire to prevent development.

Top 6 spontaneous likes in workshops: what did workshop participants most like/want?

1. “green space” and “open space”
2. Development to support “employment” and the “local economy” leading to “revitalised” district, town or village centre
3. “individualist” development with “sense of place”, “quirky shops” and “diversity of street character”
4. Increased integration, links and connectivity
5. Village feel
6. “traditional architecture” and “houses that look like houses”
Having asked interviewees open questions about what consultation participants did or did not want from development we then asked them to score a long list of possible desires and fears. In total we asked questions about seventy-three specific factors. Not all were relevant in all situations. For example, more modest exercises in town centre regeneration did not necessarily involve major issues of urban form. We have removed from our scoring answers that were “n/a” or “Don’t remember.” In our scoring, 0% represents no community support at all. 100% represents the strongest possible support. The top twenty responses below provide strong indicators of the elements of the built environment that people most value and appreciate; green space, pedestrian connectivity and local identity. These values are not intended to provide strict urban design parameters, but rather to highlight built environment elements that should be given key consideration in the design of new housing.

We used the same list of issues to interrogate summaries of workshop conclusions, typically outlined in our EbD reports. However this data set is less comprehensive as we were only able to rely on what had been deemed pertinent and worth writing down. Some underlying assumptions may often have been left unsaid. It was also more binary. An item was either present in the conclusions or it was not.

The same analysis also revealed what people least liked or wanted from developments.

The analysis of workshop conclusions offers what people want? (Participant Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?</th>
<th>LEVEL OF SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR MAXIMUM GREEN SPACE</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR INCREASED PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY AND PEDESTRIAN URBAN FORM</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE TO RESPECT HISTORIC FORM, STYLE AND MATERIALS</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISLIKE FOR HIGH BUILDINGS</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN FOOTBALL AND PATHS</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR GREEN SPACE TO FEEL PUBLIC NOT PRIVATE</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A VARIETY IN DWELLING TYPES AND PRICES FOR MIXED COMMUNITIES</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR NEW COMMUNITY FACILITIES</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIKING FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS AND BLOCKS</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENT RETAILERS</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC TRANSPORT</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE TO RETAIN HISTORIC BUILDINGS</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR HOUSES</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR LESS TRAFFIC OR SLOWER TRAFFIC</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR LOW ENVIRONMENT IMPACT</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR CHILDREN’S PLAY AREAS TO BE RETAINED OR ENHANCED</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT FOR CONVENTIONAL HIGH STREET</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR ACTIVE FRONTAGE</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same analysis also revealed what people least want? (Consultation Conclusions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?</th>
<th>LEVEL OF SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN FOOTBALL AND PATHS</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE TO RESPECT HISTORIC FORM, STYLE, MATERIALS</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR ACTIVE MEASURES TO HELP CYCLING</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR INCREASED PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY, PEDESTRIAN URBAN FORM</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A VARIETY OF DWELLING TYPES &amp; PRICES FOR MIXED COMMUNITY</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR MORE GREEN SPACE</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A MIXED USE WITHIN PARTICULAR SITES (AS AGAINST ZONING)</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT FOR CONVENTIONAL HIGH STREETS</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR ACTIVE STREET FRONTEGDIS</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR NEW COMMUNITY FACILITIES</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE / NEIGHBOURHOOD</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR MORE TRAFFIC ROUTES TO BE OPENED UP FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR WELL-CONNECTED SERIES OF STREETS</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENT RETAILERS / FARMERS’ MARKETS</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS AND BLOCKS</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR VARIETY IN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR OPEN SPACE TO BE WELL DEFINED BUT PERMEABLE</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR SQUARES</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR STREETS</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR LESS TRAFFIC OR SLOWER TRAFFIC</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR STREET TREES</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 For example, “in so far as you can recall, what elements of the built environment did members of the community most like and desire on the one hand? What did they most dislike and wish to avoid on the other hand?”

13 Early interviews the list was 60 specific factors however we lengthened it during this process in response to findings. Findings presented as percentages to account for non-uniform nature of responses.

14 Data slightly muddied by inclusion of desire to regenerate estates.

15 Only real ‘contradiction’ with evidence from interviews is in preferences for parking.
WHAT DO PEOPLE NOT WANT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIKING FOR LARGE BUILDINGS</th>
<th>83%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIKING FOR HIGH BUILDINGS</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISLIKE FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS &amp; BLOCKS</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISLIKE FOR MANSION BLOCK TYPOLOGY</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISLIKE FOR HOUSES</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISLIKE FOR RESPECTING HISTORIC FORM, STYLE, MATERIALS</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE TO REMOVE HISTORIC BUILDINGS</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR PARK ATTENDANTS</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO DESIRE FOR PARK ATTENDANTS</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO DESIRE FOR STREETS</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR PARKING NOT UNDERGROUND</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR SMALLER PAVEMENTS</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO DESIRE TO HELP CYCLING</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO DESIRE FOR IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN FOOTBALL AND PATHS</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?

| DISLIKE FOR HIGH BUILDINGS | 0% |
| LIKING FOR HIGH BUILDINGS | 0% |
| DISLIKE FOR LARGE BUILDINGS | 0% |
| LIKING FOR LARGE BUILDINGS | 0% |
| LIKING FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS AND BLOCKS | 0% |
| DISLIKE FOR MANSION BLOCK TYPOLOGY | 0% |
| DISLIKE FOR HOUSES | 0% |
| DISLIKE FOR RESPECTING HISTORIC FORM, STYLE, MATERIALS | 0% |
| DESIRE TO REMOVE HISTORIC BUILDINGS | 0% |
| DESIRE FOR PARK ATTENDANTS | 0% |
| NO DESIRE FOR PARK ATTENDANTS | 0% |
| NO DESIRE FOR STREETS | 0% |
| DESIRE FOR PARKING NOT UNDERGROUND | 0% |
| DESIRE FOR SMALLER PAVEMENTS | 0% |
| NO DESIRE TO HELP CYCLING | 0% |
| NO DESIRE FOR IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN FOOTBALL AND PATHS | 0% |

How can we create the type of green space people value?

Interestingly, there appears to be a contradiction between the desire to maximise green space and the preference for a conventional urban form that maintains a strong sense of place. Other than village greens, town squares and the odd Victorian park, conventional urban form does not appear to maximise green space. Certainly many recent developments cite the frequent desire for green space to justify their repetition of a 1960’s estate typology, albeit typically with rather less exterior concrete. Focus groups run by MORI for the Royal Institute of British Architects showed that when forced to make a trade off “private gardens were preferred to shared gardens” and that “those in urban London [were] most keen across all the groups to have some outside space in their new property.” Residents of apartment blocks interviewed “appreciated that the properties were set in a natural area [but] they felt that this space was difficult to use as a personal outdoor area as sharing the area with others did not tend to work well.”

Perhaps the best conclusion to draw from the evidence is that people do very strongly want some green space but they want it to be well defined (a park, a square, whatever is appropriate), leaving most of them free to live in a more conventional urban form which also addresses peoples’ dislike for sprawl. The desire for green space would appear to need to be aligned to all the other strong preferences (or dislikes) emerging from the evidence rather than contradicting them. Ultimately each community should be able to decide on how much, and in what form, green space should be incorporated into designs. The trade offs between green space and massing, for example, are best decided on by the community who will ultimately be affected by these built environment choices. By allowing these decisions to be led by community input, we more are likely to create popular, valued green spaces, rather than the neglected spaces that arise from understanding all green space as equal.

Again it is key to understand the preferences highlighted in the above data as indicators of what people want, not as inflexible urban design directives. In order to meet the pressing need for housing in the UK, and particularly in London and the South East, we need to carefully consider how we are using our existing urban spaces, density across sites, where land is being poorly utilised, while simultaneously striving to meet the preferences outlined above: street-based, pedestrian-friendly urban forms which provide well defined green spaces which enhance the quality of life of residents. We need safe, user-friendly green spaces which provide a community amenity that goes beyond large areas of neglected grass. It is the quality—not the merely quantity of green space—which should be carefully considered in the provision of housing.
Key Consultation Findings

Our research also intended to find evidence on how, when and to what degree communities want to be consulted on development. Our experience of consultation exercises has illustrated the difficulties in getting truly representative feedback on the built environment. Attendance across all ages, genders and socio-economic status is difficult to achieve, but should remain a priority of consultation exercises. Holding sessions at a variety of time slots and in an easily accessible venue is key in offering basic accessibility. Getting people to understand that they are welcome, that their opinions are valued and that their feedback will influence the final outcome is much harder to achieve.

Our EbD process has been refined and adapted over the years to fit a range of consultation contexts, but it remains challenging to gather a truly representative sample of feedback. Perhaps the poor image of consultation processes in the built environment is prohibitive here. In his interview, our senior architect commented that: “everyone does public consultation now … everyone is cynical about public consultation and thinks it’s a complete con.” Our EbD process tries to counter this cynicism through offering an engagement process, which is collaborative and responsive. “At least with how we do it here,” noted our senior architect, “there is involvement- it’s not me coming along to try to convince a whole load of people and make them feel included- no, because (in our method) they’re with me drawing it up.”

We asked interviewees to guide us as to how much they expected to influence what is going to be happening and whether their feedback will influence the final outcome. They want it to be somewhere distinct, somewhere that enhances their quality of life: a place. Creating places goes beyond merely creating spaces - it means designing buildings that cater to the needs of residents, supporting quality public spaces and providing opportunities for communities to thrive. Our research has shown that people do want parks and green spaces but they also want buildings that respect a traditional form and (often) style. People prefer streets, blocks and squares. Mixed use and mixed communities are valued by most. Perhaps above all, communities want to be genuinely involved in a real, not stage-managed, consultation process. All these themes were well summarised by an interview conducted during the EbD in Malmesbury in 2012:

“I think that we feel part of this consultation process. We think that we have been ‘done to’ in the past and the large-scale development that has taken place hasn’t had time to embed and hasn’t become integrated.

What I think everybody here is focused on is trying to develop the town in the future, in a much more holistic way, to make sure that the historic and the slightly quirky nature of this town is something that we retain, because I would like it to be here for my children.”

DEBORAH GREY
Malmesbury Resident

Conclusion

Research into our project case studies with the strongest datasets has revealed a reasonably clear picture: people want where they live to be more than just a building.

FIG. 7: STRENGTH OF DESIRE FOR CONSULTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF CONSULTATION WORKSHOP</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS PREFERENCES</th>
<th>LEVEL OF SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESIRE FOR A CONSENSUAL PLANNING APPROACH</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR CONSULTATION FROM FIRST STAGE OF PROJECT</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR OPEN CONSULTATION PROCESS (i.e. SELF-REPRESENTATION)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR REPEATED CONSULTATION</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR FACE-TO-FACE CONSULTATION</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR ONLINE / WRITTEN CONSULTATION</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE OF CLOSED CONSULTATION (i.e. REPRESENTATIVES INVITED ONLY)</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR NO REPEATED CONSULTATION</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR NO CONSULTATION FROM FIRST STAGE OF PROJECT</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFERENCE FOR NO CONSULTATION AT ALL</td>
<td>1%</td>
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24 Previously recorded interview for The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community, 2012
The history of housing estates is well documented, but in the context of current housing demand it is worthwhile drawing attention to the implications of many of these estates for density and urban form.

From the 1940s to the 1980s London’s inner city population declined steeply. This was associated with the mass creation of high-rise low-density housing estates. It is interesting that during the post-war rebuilding period the population density of Southwark actually decreased by two thirds.27 The old network of small terraced houses, streets, squares and alleys was ripped up to build slab-blocks such as the Aylesbury Estate and the Heygate Estate. For all their monolithic appearance these are not particularly high density - the Aylesbury Estate is around 115 units/hectare, for example, starkly less than the traditional forms of Pimlico or Notting Hill at around 175 units/hectare. As has been extensively researched, such low-density estates have not proven popular or correlated with good social outcomes for residents.

Driven in part by need, given the poor construction quality of some estate buildings, and in part by opportunity, many councils, Registered Social Landlords and developers are currently actively regenerating or considering regenerating estates across London and other major UK cities. The 2014 Budget allocated £150m in loans to kick-start stalled estate regeneration projects.

Although something approaching a more traditional street pattern is in some instances being reinstated, we are also often repeating the mistakes of what is being torn down: buildings that struggle to engage appropriately with surrounding urban fabric or to meet the preference and housing needs and desires of many residents. New blocks are often much bigger than their predecessors with an average increase in density of around 170% and an average increase of 227% in height in a recent sample. In order to ‘sell’ these enormous blocks to local planning officers, developers (be they private or not-for-profit) have made much of large areas of open space, despite vast tracks of ‘green space’ in existing estates suffering from well-documented underuse. It is not always the density itself that undermines the quality of these developments, but rather the architectural design, urban layout and public space design. As noted in Housing London, "it is crucial in the response of developers and policy-makers to the housing shortage, that density is not approached as solely the domain of high-rise towers. Nor should the quest for more housing result in spreading suburbs that make poor use of precious land". Various studies have proven that street-based mid-rise developments can achieve similar densities to the tower-in-the-park model of high-rises that define many housing estates.28

An absolutely crucial element of estate regeneration is the ‘right to remain’. Residents across our case studies, particularly those illustrated in this chapter, expressed a desire to remain in their neighbourhoods, connected to the social and economic networks. Crucially, estate regeneration projects must replace social housing one-for-one. A number of recent projects have failed to do so, fuelling critiques of regeneration projects as ‘land grabs’ and ‘whitewashing’ exercises. Unless we can embrace collaborative models of estate regeneration which ensure that the people currently living onsite can benefit, both in consultation and in end results, estate regeneration schemes will struggle to counter these claims and fail to generate the popular support they need to succeed as a nation-wide urban housing strategy.

This chapter details two estate regeneration projects that we have had close involvement with, delving further into the specific preferences revealed through our consultation work.
Ham Close

Last year, we were invited by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT) and Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) to work together with local residents and key stakeholders to consider the future of Ham Close, as part of the council’s ‘Uplift’ programme.

The consultation process we carried out sought to explore the existing strengths and needs of the built environment in Ham Close as well as to assess the priorities and needs of residents in the area. At present, research and consultation work is still ongoing and no decision has been taken as to any future redevelopment of Ham Close.

Ham Close is located on the edge of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. It was built post-war using then-popular pre-fabricated construction methods. It sits between low-rise terraced housing from the interwar period, some of which was built as council housing, and an area of 1960s & 70s built private market housing. On one side of the estate is a well-defined and popular ‘village green’ which is clearly much loved by local residents. The area also benefits from a number of nearby green spaces including Ham Lands and Ham Common. There is also generous open space surrounding the estate. There are no houses on the estate.

This is despite the nearby open space (shown to be so valued in our research). The remainder of the flats on the estate are social housing let at Target Rent levels. According to a local Borough official there is “a clear need for affordable homes” with 342 recent applications in the local ward for social tenancies.

A report commissioned by the council said; “Due to the high housing need within the Borough the homes are let quickly but are increasingly less attractive to potential tenants.

The main reason for their reduced popularity is a combination of the very small internal floor area for the studios, poor thermal insulation, poor access for family units on upper floors and tired appearance.”

During December 2013 and January 2014, we led a series of drop-in sessions as well as a three-day Enquiry by Design (EbD) process that invited local residents and interested parties to contribute to a future vision for Ham Close.

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT PREFERENCES**

From this work, and from an associated survey by the council, a clear picture emerges of community preferences. Above all residents value, and want to preserve, the village green next to the estate. They strongly like this village feel and the surrounding historic buildings. This gives it its sense of place, so valued in its multitude of different ways, by communities up and down the country. In contrast, residents dislike the poor retail offering and the style and construction methods of the estate buildings themselves.

This emerges clearly from 272 comments collated in drop-in sessions and the initial open session of the EbD. (fig 8)
WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT FROM DEVELOPMENT?  LEVEL OF SUPPORT

**LIKE**  **RESPONSES**

- DESIRE FOR MAXIMUM GREEN SPACE  98%
- LIKING FOR HIGH BUILDINGS  85%
- DISLIKE FOR LARGE BUILDINGS  55%
- LIKING FOR LARGE BUILDINGS  13%
- LIKING FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS AND BLOCKS  75%
- DISLIKE FOR CONVENTIONAL STREETS AND BLOCKS  23%
- DESIRE FOR HOUSES  80%
- DESIRE FOR HOUSES  13%
- DISLIKE FOR RESPECTING HISTORIC FORM  80%
- DESIRE TO RESPECT HISTORIC FORM AND STYLE  30%

**DISLIKE**  **RESPONSES**

- “INCREASE” IN DENSITY TO “INAPPROPRIATE” LEVELS VIA “BIG DEVELOPMENT”  80%
- Green space to be reduced or altered  4%
- Imposing architecture  1%
- Lots of outsiders coming into the area  1%
- Library to be moved  1%

FIG. 10 CONTRASTING ANSWERS ON SPECIFIC CHOICES IN BUILT FORM (PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS, HAM CLOSE)

FIG. 11 SPONTANEOUS LIKES AND DISLIKES AS DISCUSSED IN WORKSHOPS (PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS, HAM CLOSE)

FIG. 12 ASPECT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  KEY FEEDBACK

**GREEN SPACE**
- 22% believe that Ham’s uniqueness is defined by its green spaces;
- 24% of participants regard Ham green as the centre of Ham;
- 38% overwhelmingly believe that green spaces make Ham a desirable place to live;
- 47% believe green spaces are the centre of Ham;
- 100% of participants list green spaces as being highly important to their quality of life;
- A third of responses claimed that these areas are often neglected and in need of better accessibility.

**VILLAGE SETTING**
- 20% of participants believe that it is the “village setting” that makes Ham a unique place to live, coupled with 13% that believe it is its “sense of community”;
- 22% believe that it is these services that make Ham desirable to others;
- 75% of participants believe that the services most in need of improvement are those that directly influence community and “village feel” i.e. sports clubs, eateries, shops, community groups;

**INTEGRATION OF HAM CLOSE**
- Connectivity frequently cited as being an issue for Ham residents;
- 16% call for public transport and road improvements;
- Calls for youth centre, service and shopping parade improvements that would attract others to Ham close;
- 35% call for an expanded and safer network of cycle paths;
- 45% say that current Ham close street layout is a hindrance to connectivity;
- 45% say current street lighting is inadequate;
- 47% believe that footpaths are in need of improvement;

**COMMUNITY AMENITIES**
- Community groups/clubs are frequently cited as being in need of improvement;
- 43% of people believe that community groups attract people to the area;
- 75% of people believe that community groups, sports clubs and essential services (health, education etc) are in need of improvement;
The priorities identified through this ‘spontaneous feedback’ correspond well with our preference data gathered through interviews. (fig.10 & 11)

Furthermore, the built environment preferences uncovered through our consultation process also align with the results of a recent online survey conducted by the council into the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Ham. The number of respondents to the fourteen questions (fig.12) asked varied between thirteen and forty-five. The five key themes below detail these:

The feedback received at our workshops led to the creation of five key principles on which to base any future vision of Ham.

These principles were agreed upon by residents and stakeholders during the consultation process:

1. **REMAINING IN THE COMMUNITY**
   ANY RESIDENT OF HAM CLOSE WISHING TO REMAIN IN THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO SO.

2. **RETAIN AND ENHANCE GREEN SPACE**
   GREEN SPACE IS A KEY ASSET TO THE AREA, IMPROVING OR ENHANCING ITS SETTING AND CHARACTER, AND REDUCING THE PERCEPTION OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, ARE DESIRABLE.

3. **CREATE A HEART TO HAM CLOSE AND HAM, RETAIN AND SUPPORT A VILLAGE FEEL**
   COMMUNITY MEMBERS VALUE THE VILLAGE SETTING OF HAM CLOSE, BUT MANY FEEL IT LACKS A CENTRE OR ‘HEART’. REDEVELOPMENT COULD PROVIDE A CENTRE FOR HAM CLOSE AND HAM AS WELL AS HELP RETAIN AND IMPROVE ITS VILLAGE FEEL.

4. **BETTER INTEGRATE HAM CLOSE**
   THE BUILDINGS IN HAM CLOSE ARE SEEN AS DISCONNECTED FROM HAM’S VILLAGE SETTING. AN IMPROVED LAYOUT COULD BETTER INTEGRATE THE ESTATE INTO THE WIDER COMMUNITY.

5. **IMPROVE COMMUNITY FACILITIES.**
   COMMUNITY FACILITIES COULD BE IMPROVED, FOR INSTANCE BY CO-LOCATING THE YOUTH CENTRE, CLINIC AND LIBRARY.

We believe that these five principles can serve a wider purpose as guiding principles for all estate regeneration schemes.

These schemes should: 1 allow residents to remain in their existing community, 2 design better green spaces, 3 provide for improved community facilities, 4 support better integration of estate sites into surrounding urban fabric and 5 design places which support conviviality and neighbourliness.

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PREFERENCES**

Our interviews with those involved in the community consultation at Ham Close reflected the degree to which the image of new housing developments in London can hamper regeneration efforts. As our Senior Architect noted, the community at Ham Close “expected the site to be overbuilt with the kind of development that you see everywhere in London, all along the Thames”. “When concepts showed retaining the green space and doing ‘normal housing’, he noted, “the fear goes slightly out the window.”

Showing that feedback is actively being incorporated into designs was also identified as a key element of a responsive design process. The spaces in which community consultation happens also often provide important opportunities for community gathering and an airing of grievances – even if unrelated to the specifics of the project. “Even if they’re sitting having a cup of tea complaining about their neighbour,” noted our Senior Architect, “they’re still going to feel included in the process.” Another one of our staff present at the EbD noted: “It certainly brings people together and is a much better way of doing things rather than getting people to go look at a whole lot of boards.”

Giving people sufficient time to consider their responses, setting meeting times at hours appropriate for the majority of residents, and actively seeking a wide range of participants at meetings are all key considerations highlighted by our interviews on this case study. We attempted to overcome these challenges by setting later meeting times which people could attend on their way home from work, and by supplementing our EbD feedback with council surveys carried out through different channels.

Feedback from the groups who commissioned us to carry out the consultation reflected on the benefits of such a process. Both representatives from RHP and LBR cited having an independent organisation carry out the consultation process at Ham Close as a positive strategy, with Ishbel Murray, Assistant Director of Environment, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, noting that having an independent organisation running the consultation process “is very helpful, especially when you have more than one agency requesting the consultation.”

Reflecting on community consultation processes more generally, participants interviewed emphasised the need for flexibility in order to avoid a restrictive one-size-fits-all consultation approach. Flexibility should be designed into consultation processes in order to allow for adaption to changing circumstances.
Camp Hill is a former mining community near Nuneaton, North Warwickshire. The existing settlement was built during the expansion of the area’s coal industry in the 1950s. Following the decline of coal mining in the 1980s, the majority of the miners lost their jobs or retired. Deteriorating physical conditions of the building stock, coupled with economic hardship led to severe financial and social degradation, with low employment and low education standards. Joanne Hughes, the Pride in Camp Hill Project Officer, noted that: “Camp Hill of the late 80s and 90s was an area that had high unemployment, very high crime rates and poverty, and all of that warranted the intervention of the Prince’s Foundation to come here and make changes.”

Over the past decade, driven initially by the West Midlands Regional Development Agency, the community regeneration initiative Pride in Camp Hill has provided physical, social and service improvements, with maximum community involvement. We were initially involved at a strategic level at Camp Hill- supporting the creation of the community regeneration partnership Pride in Camp Hill and overseeing the bids for the initial redevelopment phases. We were also involved at a later stage on the design side of the project, primarily through the creation of the design code for Camp Hill. The ongoing project intends to deliver a better balance of housing types and improved leisure, commercial and retail activity to contribute to the sustainable regeneration of Camp Hill, and has enjoyed considerable success thus far.

In 2010, Pride in Camp Hill won the Best Housing, Construction and Infrastructure award at the Community Network Awards. Reflecting on the changes at Camp Hill, Ann Corbett, a local resident said: “at one time, people said ‘oh, you don’t live in Camp Hill do you?’ and now it’s ‘oh yeah, Camp Hill!’

Further to this initial consultation, residents visited nearby housing regeneration schemes to identify the features of new housing that they most desired, as well as those they wished to avoid. Chris Egan, Programme Manager at Pride in Camp Hill, the community regeneration partnership created to manage the project, recalls that residents returned from these visits calling for houses that “looked like houses”, houses that “fitted the North Warwickshire precedent” and expressing a firm dislike for the contemporary architecture they had seen. “Residents also expressed a dislike for the ‘gash colours’ of the new housing developments they had toured nearby, which they saw as a way to delineate private from social housing. As Chris Egan noted, “this as a call for more integration by the community.”

The perception of ‘new housing’ also played a key role in shaping the response of community members to the proposed regeneration. Residents spoke of wanting to avoid the “Barratt box” or “Wimpey hutch” – referring to the results of developments described as “garish colours” of the new housing developments ‘looked like houses’, houses that “fitted the North Warwickshire precedent” and expressed a firm dislike for the contemporary architecture they had seen. “Residents also expressed a dislike for the contemporary architecture they had seen.”

Feedback from residents also called for “innovation without experimentatation” – expressing fear that residents, especially those in social housing tenure, would be subject to new housing models which expressed the desires of architects and planners rather than the wishes of residents. A key concept of the regeneration of the built environment at Camp Hill was that of homogeneity in the built form. Residents expressed a dislike for the ‘sameness’ of their residential environment and a desire for more diversity of street character. Residents did not want the regeneration to result in a desire for more diversity of street character.

The ‘Planning for Real’ consultation demonstrated the following:

- A ‘deep desire’ from the local community for major changes to improve quality of life
- A large number of ideas for small improvements across the estate
- Strong interest in community safety improvements, environmental improvements, increasing the provision of leisure facilities (esp for young people)
- Concern that mixed tenure and ‘greater social mix’ aims would result in gentrification
- Support for new village centre
- Support for new access roads

Feedback on the consultation at Camp Hill drew attention to the notion of scale in redevelopment concerns. While those facilitating the consultation were concerned with macro issues of movement and integration of the estate, community members largely responded with micro concerns of “how much and when?” This response led to the creation of a Q&A booklet which detailed the answers to people’s more specific queries, helping to meet individual concerns and fears with concrete information and leading the community to feedback at such a demollition and re-orientation of the area.

Early consultation exercises involved an interactive tool - a model of the area onto which comments could be pinned - rather than a set of yes/no questions that limit the possibilities for feedback and are often leading.

The importance of flexibility, as outlined in the Ham Close case, was also evident in Camp Hill, with the engagement process evolving to become the Camp Hill Residents’ Forum - a loose-knit group which linked back into the community and is used to communicate development activity in the area and receive informal feedback from the community.

Again, this format reflects the will of the community, who decided against more formal structures of feedback in favour of enhancing existing networks of communication. Chris Egan’s advice ‘to spend more time trying to understand how the community’ communicate with each other and build your consultation around that, don’t ask the community to change their consultation routes to come to you” succinctly states this lesson.

There has also been a benefit to the planning process through the consultation process. When residents, particularly those new to the area, enquire about planning decisions they can be guided to the initial design code that was created with the community. The long-term community consultation process at Camp Hill took a comprehensive view of the area and engaged residents to reconsider the possibilities for the future. Anthony Biddle, a local resident reflected: “There’s a lot of hard times and uncertainties... without a vision we’d still be in the doldrums.”

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In the context of the UK’s current housing challenges, there are lessons from the UK’s housing market that need to be closely analysed and emphasised. Many urban areas are facing complex pressures of how to shape investment to meet the social and economic needs of their residents. The investment impetus behind so many of London’s recent housing regeneration projects has not produced the kind of housing that Londoners want and need. The study into housing preferences as detailed here is not set out to dictate an inflexible, ideal model of housing, but rather to illustrate how rarely local preference meets short term economic dictates in so many new housing developments. In Housing London, we outlined how densification is a key element of meeting the housing demand in the city and laid out alternative strategies for achieving this density without having to resort to bulky, expensive high-rise buildings in every instance.

There is a definite constituency for living in multi-storey housing from those, disproportionately young, prosperous and childless, who are prepared to make major housing type trade-offs in order to live near the city centre, particularly if in conventional streets and smaller buildings than all but the most prestige large multi-storey developments. It is no coincidence that most high-rise living, particularly for families, exists in large-scale social housing estates, where residents have less choice than the private sector. In a number of polls it is clear that almost all British people would much rather live in houses in streets than flats and would almost always avoid tower blocks. In the most recent national survey, in December 2013, eighty percent of respondents wanted to live in a house and six percent in a flat in a modest building with fewer than ten units in it. Only three percent wanted to live in a building with more than ten units in it.

In 2012 YouGov ran some focus groups on living in skyscrapers. They found that most people would not want to live in a skyscraper due to their desire to go to a walk, their desire to have a garden or their concerns of being trapped if the lift broke down. As one participant put it: “Too impersonal and large. They’re not a home really, they’re more for offices etc. Also they’re too high, I wouldn’t want to live that far off the ground - also there’d be no gardens or anything so not really child friendly.”

The evidence on what people say they like is backed up by the hard data on where they live and what they will pay for. In 2001 there were 21.6 million households in England and Wales. 4.2 million of these (nineteen percent) lived in the social rented sector. However, the social rented sector accounted for forty-eight percent of households living on or above the second floor of a building, fifty-six percent of those living on or above the third floor of a building, and seventy-one percent of those living on or above the fifth floor of a building.

Strikingly, 142,000 households living on or above the fifth floor of a building, 100,000 were social tenants. The higher the floor the more likely an inhabitant is to have been put there by the council or a housing association and the less likely to have chosen it in the private sector.

An even more dramatic disconnect between what people choose and what social tenants have to endure emerges from comparing households with children. Seventy-five percent of children living on or above the third floor, and a startling seventy-nine percent of those living on or above the fifth floor were social tenants despite the fact that social tenants only make up twenty-one percent of households with children. If you are a child in social housing you are sixteen times more likely to live on the fifth floor or above than a child in private housing. In Inner London thirty-one percent of children living in social housing live in a dwelling that has a minimum floor that is the second floor or above. For all children the comparable figure is two point one percent.

We need to consider how government loans and investment can be successfully channelled into alternative models which are both financially and socially profitable and which meet the housing needs of the capital. Such investments should also be locally supported. Our previous report outlined how the traditional London mid-rise housing form is well placed to provide such an alternative model. In a wider sense, estate regeneration has a key role to contribute to the creation of much needed housing throughout the country - whether a deficit of quality or quantity. We believe housing preferences also reveal the type of communities that people want to live in. Support for street-based housing, communal green spaces and local high streets reveals a desire for a sense of conviviality and neighbourliness that people desire in residential communities. New housing needs to be designed to support and encourage the creation of social networks that build enduring, harmonious communities. Key here is the provision of public amenities, support for local economies and planning for appropriate densities that provide spaces for shared experience. Camp Hill in particular emphasised this need, with residents asking for community development opportunities - not just for new houses.

The Camp Hill case study also illustrates how NIMBYs can be converted in BIMBYs, as evidenced by the number of residents who, despite earlier opposition, asked to take part in the regeneration scheme after the first stage was delivered. It would seem that too often regeneration consultation is notional. Our research shows that people want to be consulted, and want to be consulted properly.

As the impetus for estate regeneration gathers pace, we strongly recommend that when these schemes happen there is consultation up-front, and that a local vote in support (with a clear set of principles) is expected before schemes are given permission to go ahead. We call on local authorities, government and industry to adopt this approach.

We believe that no estate should be regenerated without real, up-front and continuous community engagement, in line with the principles of neighbourhood planning, which genuinely helps set the principles and physical form of the proposed regeneration. Nor should any estate be regenerated without clear democratic support from the local community, expressed through the type of referendum which neighbourhood planning also demands. If these principles are followed, estate regeneration could become a popular and important programme to improve living conditions and help solve the housing crisis, while simultaneously making our cities more integrated and beautiful.
The town and city centre regeneration projects that we have been involved with over the past fifteen years have revealed a number of key lessons. Across the case studies researched, people have taken every opportunity to express their appreciation for the unique, local identity of their towns and city centres. People want to support independent, local retail, rather than lose their streets to homogenous, chain store offerings. People want places rather than mere spaces in their local urban centres, and want pedestrian-focused connectivity to lead them safely and pleasantly between these places. People are against over-development, with overbearing buildings, which alienate visitors at street level and which threaten the delicate local, social and economic networks which people are attached to. The flexibility and variety of appropriate consultation methods is key, and different methods have the ability to produce a range of results, which can be tailored to the specific project. What does not differ, however, is people’s desire to have their say, and to do so in a forum that is not intimidating or overly prescriptive. While questions on specific aspects of sites and regeneration are important for community planning, space must always be given for general, uncompromised feedback if planners, local authorities and developers are to ascertain a true sense of a place.

**Key principles**

**Strong Local Identity Retained.**

**Protect Local Landmarks.**

**Unique and Varied Retail Offering.**

**Appropriate Scale with No Over-Development.**

**Connectivity/Pedestrian Streets.**

**To be Genuinely Consulted and Have Feedback Reflected in the Design Process and Ultimate Outcome.**

**CASE STUDIES:**

**Town and City Centre Regeneration**

The majority of our work has involved town and city centre regeneration projects. The scope of these projects is often defined by overlapping concerns: public realm, retail offering, housing, transport and economic revitalisation. As such, the preferences uncovered by the case studies cover a wide range of social, economic and built environment concerns. This complexity needs to be carefully considered and well understood if we are to tackle the challenges facing the nation’s high streets, city centres and local neighbourhood centres. These centres of activity play vital social and economic roles and provide crucial support to wider urban areas and as such deserve thoughtful, meaningful regeneration strategies.

**Walthamstow**

In 2007 we worked with the London Borough of Waltham Forest to set out a new vision for the town centre. At the time, the overall growth of London’s economy and population was creating pressures, both good and bad, in the area.

Investors were showing interest in various sites and the number of vacant retail units and market stalls was finally reducing. Perhaps crucially, housing stock was under real pressure and with the area’s predominantly two-storey Victorian homes being rapidly converted into flats. Local residents were concerned about the pace of change, the reduction in family accommodation, the prospect of new high-density high-rise flats and the quality of the retail offer. The council set out to create a new vision for the town centre in order to address these concerns.

The goal of the project was “to find a popular way to increase housing supply, improve the retail offer and offer employment opportunities in Walthamstow centre, while addressing community concerns and taking advantage of public transport accessibility to create a low carbon walkable eco-centre.”

The structured Enquiry by Design (EbD) process took place at a church hall, allowing for attendance from council staff and local business people. Members of the public were also consulted during evening meetings at the town hall.

“It was a sceptical audience”, remembers Sam Neal, Programme Manager for Physical Regeneration at the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

“People felt it was pie in the sky…they felt they had been over-consulted. There’d been lots of different master plans and consultations.”

Ms Neal also felt that those present “were not representative of the community”, reflecting a common consultation struggle to speak to a representative audience.

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Despite this consultation fatigue, ‘standard’ views applied. Residents wanted Walthamstow to be distinct and street-based.

“Everyone wanted […] quirky shops, attractive shop fronts, leafy streets, an attractive public realm.”

Residents worried about local landmarks and listed buildings; everyone was “keen to address the issue of what to do with the Grade II listed cinema.”

Nor were residents keen to see Walthamstow town centre built up into a high-rise hub like Croydon. Our planner involved in the project said that building height was at the forefront of most arguments during the ongoing consultation.

“Local people didn’t want tall buildings and proposals coming from developers were for very tall buildings, up to 20 storeys, and local people didn’t like that and the council officers didn’t really like that too much either,” he noted.

Residents were also keen to protect local heritage sites as well as open space in the area.

The first EbD workshop produced three different visions for Walthamstow. Regeneration consultancy Renais then undertook another round of consultation using these visions. This consultation was deliberately designed to reach out into communities who had not been as fully represented at the EbD. Over 800 responses were received in a six-week programme which fully endorsed the proposal.

The Local Authority would use compulsory purchase powers to develop large parts of the town centre through Joint Ventures with the private sector. Retaining and reinstating the historic built form would create a high-density and mid-rise town centre that could hold its own as a local service centre.

According to the report published by Waltham Forest, elements of OPTION @ that were most popular with the local community included:

- Location of community facilities
- Location and type of housing in both options B & C
- Low level buildings on a more human scale
- The option is more spread out
- Seems visionary without altering the skyline and having high buildings
- Drawing on existing strengths for Walthamstow
- Development and promotion of an evening economy
- Break up of Selborne Walk increasing permeability
- Extension of Queens Road station improving access
- Cinema will encourage an evening economy
- Good balance of size, uses and lower rise buildings
- Sympathetic to community
- Exciting
- Good walkability

The consultancy process succeeded in getting community members to consider their opinions on the future of the area and to make these known to the council. The exercise produced a set of alternative visions that set out different future paths for the area and allowed residents to rally around one of these paths. As noted in the EbD report: “The challenge is in knowing where you are heading, and having a strategy to get you there.”

The strategies of city centres and high streets are often exacerbated because there is no coherent, community-driven plan in place to deal with any future shocks and timely adaptation. Our work endeavoured to make sure that this did not happen in Walthamstow.
As with so many of our case studies, residents did not want development that was not in keeping with the local area, or that was too large or overbearing. However they were categorically not opposed to all development. By organising themselves into a steering group, residents were able to take advantage of the Localism Act to draw up a neighbourhood plan. What started as a reaction to the unpalatable proposals of developers has been allowed, by the neighbourhood planning process, to convert into a proactive response to these pressures. The aim of the plan is to provide guidelines for growth to contribute to the character of the area, its infrastructure and employment while preventing development that undermines this strong sense of place and ultimate economic prosperity.

We became involved to assist in the development of the neighbourhood plan, following the allocation of DCLG funding to the community, running workshops, that explored the issues and concerns of residents, to help create a vision for the area. The process opened up people’s eyes to the possibilities of sustainable development, rather than the implied threats. People who thought they knew their town appreciated “taking the time to look carefully” to give them a “new perspective”.

Over-development was clearly the standout issue. Participants such as Deborah Grey were fully aware of the implications of having to live with the consequences pointing out: “out-of-context and thoughtless planning decisions … large-scale development that hasn’t had time to embed and hasn’t become integrated.” The alternative to this type of development is one that “makes sure that the historic and quirky nature of this town is retained.”

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PREFERENCES

Reflecting on the consultation process, Roger Budgen, Parish Councillor and Malmesbury Neighbourhood Steering group member, noted that people should be able to “have a say in terms of where they want development, the timing of the development and the numbers of houses to be developed”.

This cannot be achieved by “superficial” consultation, but should be done in a forum with “expert guidance”, a point also emphasised by Deborah Grey when she suggested that neighbourhood planning required an “organisation who can come in and give you structure”.

Lesley Bennett, a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust trustee, found that the inclusive nature of the EbD process made for a non-confrontational approach, as “once you have a vision for the town you understand how development would contribute to that vision and make sure it doesn’t detract from it, that’s what we’re all trying to do.”

As in Walthamstow, community consultation allowed for residents to give meaningful consideration to the future of their area and to establish a roadmap for future action that expressed community desires.

Glenarm

Glenarm is one of Northern Ireland’s oldest villages. Once a thriving industrial coastal community, it has suffered from years of economic decline and neglect.

In February 2009, HRH The Prince of Wales visited Glenarm and met with locals to discuss the future of the village. As a result of the Prince’s visit, a collaborative workshop was conducted. The aim of this workshop was to talk to local stakeholders, understand local concerns and produce a strategy for the sustainable regeneration and growth of the village. Over 180 local residents contributed to the process. The concerns expressed by the community in this workshop yet again reveal the desire from a local community for a strong sense of place.

Key concerns identified by the community:

GLENARM ENTRANCE WORST PART OF VILLAGE
NOTHING LINKS THE VILLAGE TO THE HARBOUR
NO OBVIOUS REASON FOR TOURISTS TO WANT TO STOP IN THE VILLAGE
NO OBVIOUS PARKING FOR TOURISTS
SHOPS ON TOBERWINE STREET NOT ON THE MAIN ROUTE THROUGH THE VILLAGE
BUSINESSES ARE FAILING AND MOVING OUT
GROWING NUMBER OF DERELICT BUILDINGS
TEMPORARY PARKING NEEDED FOR COACHES AND CAMPER VANS
NOTHING TO DO IN THE VILLAGE PARTICULARLY NOWHERE TO HAVE AN EVENING MEAL
NOWHERE OBVIOUS TO MEET IN THE VILLAGE
PARKING AND TOURIST INFORMATION ALL HAPPEN ONCE ONE PASSED THE VILLAGE
LITTLE INFORMATION ON WALKS THROUGH THE VILLAGE AND THE FOREST
LACK OF AFFORDABLE AND FAMILY HOUSING
ALLEYWAYS ARE POORLY LIT
POOR PUBLIC REALM ON CASTLE ST / MARK ST

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PREFERENCES

The workshop demonstrated the possibility of reaching consensus and how best to decide on the necessary action required to contribute to the ongoing successful regeneration and sustainable growth. Our involvement in drawing up a future for Glenarm was able to heal a mistrust between the local authority and the community by providing “an outside influence that was unbiased towards anybody or anything.” Joy Hargie also noted that the participants appreciated the EbD process as it felt “completely tailored to them.” Hargie also noted “an attitude change from thinking that the council should be doing everything to one where there is a lot more active intervention by residents themselves”. Adrian Morrow, Glenarm Castle Estate Managing Director says: “It’s quite difficult for the man in the street to say what he wants. The majority had never really thought of it... The EbD did away with any fears’, adding that “EbD is the proper way to approach large development.”
The South Fulham Riverside area is one of the five key regeneration areas in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. It is characterised by a largely Victorian street pattern, with land being used for houses, flats, industry and retail.

We have worked alongside Hammersmith and Fulham Council to develop a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that will act as a guide for development around the riverside area. We held two consultation workshops in 2010, to ensure that future development of the South Fulham area took place in a way that complemented the rest of the area and reflected the views of local stakeholders.

**Built Environment Preferences**

Prince’s Foundation staff present at the event recall that the community “wanted to avoid what was happening on the south side of the river and at Chelsea Wharf…the developments on the other side of the river provided a useful counter-point, something to galvanise people - they could point to those developments as an example of what they didn’t want.”72 A recent note of comments made during the consultation workshops captures the participants’ desire for a conventional urban form. Most notably, fifty-nine percent of comments recorded (fig.13) included a dislike of high buildings while only seven percent revealed a liking for them.

These findings helped developers working on specific schemes in the area to better understand the desires of the community. The result of the whole process was a set of emerging design principles that helped to guide the SPD process for the area, which was formally adopted in January 2013.

**Community Consultation Preferences**

On the consultation process, it was noted, as in the Malmesbury case study, that “people involved wanted a say in what was going to happen in the area - they knew development was going to take place, and they didn’t like what was happening around them so they want some control over it.”73 The consultation at South Fulham Riverside sought to counter exactly this feeling of being powerlessness against unsophisticated development, and provide residents with a meaningful means of input into the design process.

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72 Joy Hargie, Interview, 18 June 2014 73 Adrian Morrow, Interview, 25 June 2014
Spanning the two boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, Waterloo in South West London has a rich history and a diverse business and resident community.

The area includes the UK’s busiest station and some of London’s most important tourist attractions. Yet in 2010 the area faced a number of challenges: cut-off from the South Bank by a wall of railway arches and criss-crossed by major arterial roads, an outdated station and a struggling market on Lower Marsh, empty buildings and spaces that can make the area feel unsafe.

The possible future re-development of the station, and the potential of a number of sites within the wider area, presented an opportunity to consider the future of the Waterloo area. We worked alongside the Waterloo Quarter Business Improvement District (BID) to develop a strategy for intervention and regeneration within the Waterloo district boundary.

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT PREFERENCES**

Helen Santer, Chief Executive of the Waterloo Quarter BID, recalls that at the time of the consultation the community valued the “individuality of Waterloo, the contents of the buildings, the independent shops…the spirit of the area and the sense of place and independence.” Against this, the community expressed concerns about “people homogenisation, gentrification… they wanted local businesses to do well. They did not want to become a secondary site to service tourists. They wanted to stay for local residents and local workers. The main concern was not strictly physical. It was the feel of the space”.

In the summer of 2010, we worked in partnership with the Waterloo Quarter BID to develop a website that provided the community with an opportunity to help shape Waterloo’s future. The website was targeted at the local business community primarily and asked people to help the BID team to agree a ‘vision’ for the area and identify the key priorities that would help the BID team to achieve this vision.

The consultation website also provided the community with an understanding of the various development proposals being made in the area. The site put forward ideas on regeneration from developers and the local authority, as well as a series of schemes proposed by us to gauge community opinion on future improvements. The consultation website attracted over 600 unique users and 100 local people commented on the BID team’s vision for the area. Over twenty different site based proposals were rated alongside three area wide ideas for environmental improvements.

The figures (fig.14) reveal that the community valued the idea of “places to inspire and surprise” most highly, alongside variety in the building and commercial stock of the area. The sustainability of the area was a third key concern.

In order to geographically locate the emphasis of these priorities, the website allocated six pins to respondents – three green (for favourite places) and three blue (for places with potential). A map was produced, providing the BID with a useful, site-specific indication of where the community felt the area was succeeding, and where it could be better served.

Yet again, the strong theme emerged that residents wanted their neighbourhood to be a real place. These sites generated discussions about how Waterloo can grow whilst retaining its unique character. People were able to identify areas that they liked and those they felt could be improved, they were told about physical projects that could help the area fulfill its potential and asked their opinions on them. This feedback informed a report to help steer the BID team over the next five years and provided ideas for key sites that would help refocus and regenerate the area.

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PREFERENCES**

Although the consultation process produced a variety of specific, useful feedback, the online format does not stand without its own challenges. Reflecting on the method of consultation employed at Waterloo, Helen Santer concluded: “Consulting by a website was in theory an excellent idea. Quite egalitarian. In fact we had to do just as much face-to-face work to encourage people just to do it. As a time-saving device, it was not useful. It was good for engaging people who don’t usually go to meetings, who’d be worried about being stuck in a room till 10pm with a lot of shouty people. But quite a few people said that a big and complex issue is hard to fit into text boxes. We had quite a lot of work to do to justify the online survey as a real survey which we’d really pay attention to. Most people seemed to have a preference for having someone talk through the options in a group setting.”
in summary

Our experience of urban extension projects has revealed strong preferences for traditional urban forms which provide opportunities for integration with existing communities. This integration should be both spatial, through well-planned transit links, as well as economic, through long-term strategies for job creation.

Our consultation work in this type of project has also identified wariness for stale residential development that lacks character, with respondents calling for ‘real’ neighbourhoods and communities to be supported. With renewed political appetite for the creation of ‘garden cities’, the experiences of our urban extension work are of particular relevance.

Larger development projects on greenfield sites present opportunities for well-planned new communities which can help ease the country’s housing supply problems. Our research has shown that in order for these new developments to be embraced by communities, designs should speak to local architectural precedents and more traditional urban forms, as well as seeking to create a sense of place which supports the creation of thriving new communities.

Key principles:

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING.
INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING COMMUNITIES.
‘REAL’ NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ‘REAL’ COMMUNITY.
TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE TO FIT LOCAL PRECEDENT.
SENSE OF PLACE, NOT ‘SOULLESS’ OR ‘MONO-FUNCTIONAL’ HOUSING ESTATE.
TO BE GENUINELY CONSULTED AND HAVE FEEDBACK REFLECTED IN THE DESIGN PROCESS AND ULTIMATE OUTCOME.

Knockroon

In July 2007 HRH The Prince of Wales put together a rescue package in conjunction with the Scottish Government, Historic Scotland and the Prince’s Charities to save Dumfries House and its contents from being sold at auction.

Knockroon Farm formed part of the estate and the opportunity arose to develop the land to strengthen links between the Dumfries House Estate and the nearby towns of Cumnock and Auchinleck.

The project faced a difficult climate: a very weak national property market, compounded by a lack of consumer confidence and limited mortgage availability. The Cumnock area in particular faced high unemployment levels and low sales values.

Tom Perry, one of our representatives working on the project, recalls that the community “was so focused on the economic struggles of the town, [they were] glad something was being done…they did not oppose new housing.”\(^76\)

Built Environment Preferences

The EbD held in Cumnock Town Hall, involved hundreds of residents and stakeholders and sought to develop a master plan for a new neighbourhood on the edge of Cumnock, and to set aspirations for its character, its design and its built folk. Those present at the EbD hoped that the new development, to be named Knockroon after the farm on the site, would help to regenerate the nearby towns and reflect their character. They asked that Knockroon provide both homes and jobs, and that it included local shops, but otherwise support Cumnock Town centre.

Key desires identified by the EbD:

A VIBRANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE INTERESTED IN A MORE SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE
HOMES WITH A MIX OF TYPES AND SIZES
SHOPS TO SERVE LOCAL AND DAILY NEEDS
WORKPLACES FOR PEOPLE WISHING TO START SMALL BUSINESSES
BUILT AS A RESOURCE EFFICIENT ‘WALKABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD’

The design for Knockroon was drawn from a number of sources, but especially from the knowledge gleaned from local people, who willingly shared with our team what they liked and disliked about their community. (fig.15) The design team was inspired by the rich architectural and town-making tradition of Ayrshire, and developed a palette of street, building and landscape types to draw from during the process. As resident Robert Wallace noted: “It’s different from the usual housing projects, you don’t really get two houses the same. You usually get a street with the same...”
Residents were keen that Knockroon should have a clear edge, and that a separation be maintained between Cumnock and Auchinleck. There was some debate as to the ownership and identity of the new development given that it sat between two existing villages. People wanted to exert a sense of ownership over the new development, especially given their involvement in the conceptualisation of the development.

One of our leads on the project, recalls that the design was supported because “it’s not a mono-functional housing estate but a real neighbourhood.” Anne Hope also noted that once objectors realised that the development being discussed meant a “real neighbourhood” which might enhance values nearly all opposition melted away. Knockroon was designed to accommodate local businesses, education facilities and mixed-tenure housing. The neighbourhood was designed around the principle of the five-minute walk to local services, public transport and daily shopping. Situated on the main road linking Cumnock to Auchinleck and further linked to Cumnock, Auchinleck and Dumfries House by green routes for walking and cycling, the new neighbourhood provides a key role in linking up the area. Speaking of her recent contact with prospective residents, Anne Hope notes:

“Many thousands of people are desperate to belong to something that is not a typical soulless housing estate. People really do like the traditional architecture…it’s traditional Ayrshire architecture. They want a sense of place…”

Following on from the community’s desire for economic opportunities, an apprenticeship programme and skills development scheme was set up to accompany the physical changes in Knockroon (much like in the Camp Hill case). A partnership between Hope Homes and East Ayrshire Council led to a hands-on training programme for young people to develop skills to prepare them for work. “They’re bringing boys from Cumnock and Auchinleck academies to work on the place,” noted resident Robert Wallace, “to give them job experience, which I think is a great thing…you don’t seem to get that now.”

Community consultation preferences

Reflecting on the consultation process at Knockroon, Anne Hope noted that the positive impact of the EbD has proved durable: “There is no doubt that the EbD process has helped. There is only one objector left…everyone else thinks the development is a great idea and great for the area. Everyone seems to feel that the EbD helped and means that there is nothing to complain about. It did make it easier to get planning consent. It also makes it easier to manage the building process and the inconveniences it generates.” One of our staff working on the project commented that the consultation process at Knockroon “was a case of making the site sing for the locals…most people liked the contextual design approach.” He advised that consultation processes should “be as inclusive as possible…take advantage of new forms of communication. These tend to attract those who have the time and the knowledge.”

“Turning up with a blank paper and with nothing more than a set of principles is critical. There needs to be a sense that the issues are genuinely there to be discussed, not necessarily all agreed. Illustrations and translating ideas into images which lay people can understand is hugely important.

Lots of community groups have been through this process. We can show them with illustrations that when we say we are listening to them we really mean it. It can be a huge transformational moment. They feel like you’ve really listened to them and what they think is good design.”

In May 2009 the Scottish Government identified Knockroon as one of eleven projects in Scotland best capable of demonstrating how sustainable communities can be created. Detailed planning permission was granted in January 2011 and construction commenced in March 2011. Mr Wallace, reflecting on the future of his new neighbourhood, noted:

“This is a long-term project, this…it will be quite a wee town. Various places had industry there for hundreds of years, and suddenly they fold and there’s nothing else for it…but I think this is going to help, will bring in industry hopefully, not necessarily what was here before, but the world keeps changing. Now here’s hoping, gives us a wee start for the future.”

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Housing Communities

What People Want

77 Previously conducted interview for The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community, 2012
79 Mark Greaves. Interview: 10 June 2014. "Ayrshire: Hope Homes: Knockroon: East Ayrshire Council led to a hands-on training programme for young people to develop skills to prepare them for work. "They’re bringing boys from Cumnock and Auchinleck academies to work on the place,” noted resident Robert Wallace, “to give them job experience, which I think is a great thing…you don’t seem to get that now.”

84 Previously conducted interview for The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community, 2012
84 Anne Hope. Interview: 9 June 2014. ibid
In 2004, we were commissioned to carry out an EBD workshop in South Devon. The district of South Hams had been identified in the Devon Structure Plan as needing to accommodate a new community as a strategic requirement for the Plymouth sub-region.

South Hams District Council was required to bring forward in detail in its Local Development Framework a proposal for this new community, to be located in western South Hams. A site at Sherford was identified for the development of over 4,000 houses, employment space, as well as other uses. The District Council, in partnership with Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and the landowners of the identified site, set out to deliver a new community which was sustainable, high quality, locally distinctive and which delivered affordable homes for local people.

Following the initial EBD, we were appointed as the masterplanners for a new neighbourhood by property developer Red Tree LLP, along with urban design consultant Paul Murrain. The Sherford development sought to create a new community to the immediately to the east of Plymouth, with up to 5,500 new homes, a high street, four schools, shops, jobs and community facilities.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT PREFERENCES

Each of the principal stakeholders: Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council, the Sherford Consortium and the Plymouth and Southwest Cooperative Society were asked to provide written statements comprising of their aims and aspirations that would help create a sustainable community.

The Town Plan for the new community of Sherford was generated during a lengthy EBD process which brought together residents of adjacent communities, developers and their consultants, county and local authority officers, health, education, police and other service providers, wildlife groups and environmental agencies.

Everyone’s concerns, responsibilities and design ideas were shared, and the town plan reflects this consensus at the overall town-wide scale.

Ben Bolgar, our Senior Director and one of the masterplanners of the Sherford project, recalls the process of stimulating ideas for the new development: “We created a draft pattern book from driving round the South Hams area. People liked the images they saw of nice houses that were fairly dense… they got positive responses.” He noted that members of the community liked the idea of a local high street, “being able to go to the shops and coffee bars within walking distance”. Members of the public also “liked the idea of a country park and green spaces and play areas for children.”

Members of the community expressed dislike for fast-moving traffic, “the fear of heavy traffic is often the number one issue… on the high street we had to prove it would be slow-moving and give examples of great places where this was the case.” People were also keen to avoid a sprawling development, a key issue that the final masterplan for Sherford sought to address. As the final masterplan document for Sherford notes:

“Sherford is different from the type of growth that has taken place in the region for more than sixty years. It is different because it is traditional, applying principles we have forgotten and whose absence is costing us dear. It is traditional not only to the region but to the timeless principles of towns, wherever they are. The legacy of house building over the past fifty years has meant the perception of new development is extremely negative. No one can be blamed for wishing it away.”

Sherford is structured as a series of walkable neighbourhoods where residents are within a five-minute walk from daily shopping needs. The open space strategy includes 207 hectares of green spaces among the neighbourhoods and a public park on the south of the site. Low-impact Sustainable Drainage Systems were designed to take advantage of this green network, creating a series of lakes in the Sherford Valley.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PREFERENCES

Mark Harris, Urban Designer and Planning Officer from the South Hams District Council recalled that, “many residents became satisfied with the outline design proposals for Sherford, but some critical comments were received from CABE” (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment). Members of the public were given digital cameras and asked to photograph elements of the built environment that they liked. Mark recalled that people “photographed historic centres, historically-based parts of towns… [the photographs] tended to be these, not the suburban hinterlands.”

This type of local knowledge and preference provides valuable insight into how a development can successfully meet the needs of the local community, and should be incorporated in various stages of the design consultation processes.

Reflecting on the consultation process at Sherford, Ian Sosnowski, Planning Officer from the council noted that: “During the process, objectors became more accepting that building was going to happen and that it was better to participate in order to help shape and improve the development rather than to object to it on a point of principle and not engage. When the Structure Plan proposals first came out about ten years ago we were in the world of complaints, and demonstrations outside the Council Chamber. But when it came to the formal planning application finally being submitted following all the consultation, you could count the objections on your fingers and toes.”

The community consultation process at Sherford was successful in meaningfully addressing people’s concerns and in dispelling fears driven by the perception of new housing. Ben Bolgar recalls: “Initially they were completely against any form of development. In the end we had hardly any objections to the final plan.” A key factor in swinging this was the nature of the engagement of the public: “showing people that their suggestions either get incorporated or that there is a good reason why it can’t [is important]. Most people initially thought ‘consultation’ was a PR fake. If you take their points, point by point and either take them on or really show why you can’t, then you convince them.”

The proposal for Sherford was submitted to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and awarded an “exemplar” rating on their GreenPrint sustainability assessment scale. The ongoing masterplan sets new standards for sustainability in terms of resource efficiency, use of renewables, public transport provision and sustainable urban form. The proposal follows a Town Code, which is designed to ensure the delivery of quality urban design and architecture grounded in local tradition. It also follows ecological principles which reflect the key desires and concerns of an engaged public who wanted to be actively involved in shaping a sustainable future for the South Hams area.
Conclusion

Our research has identified the qualities that people cherish in the places they want to live: walkability, street-based housing, well-defined public and private green spaces and a sense of local identity. These factors produce neighbourhoods that are desirable, supported and sustainable and cultivate a sense of place.

People do not want rapid urban development that is exclusive, overbearing and which compromises the character of their local areas. Policy-makers, developers, local representatives, designers and architects need to give these public preferences the consideration they are due if we are to support a successful, thriving built environment in the UK.

BIMBY (beauty-in-my-backyard) developments are needed to overcome NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) attitudes if we are to convince communities that new housing can successfully improve our built environment and to unlock the level of house building that is needed to meet the country’s urgent housing demand.

Estate regeneration, in particular, must properly address people’s preferences if it is to be publicly supported, and crucially must base any action on the right to remain. Too many estate regeneration schemes have seen residents alienated in the process of redevelopment. Strategies of change must ensure, first and foremost, that existing residents can remain in their neighbourhoods. This entails not only the provision of affordable housing and local facilities, but also the formation of well-designed public spaces and streets and the clever re-use of green space which nurtures a feeling of belonging and strong sense of community.

The skill of community consultation needs to be reclaimed in many ways, to overcome the cynicism it often attracts and to re-affirm the true value of collaboration where redevelopment is being considered. Meaningful consultation, which by design feeds community preferences into the process of urban change, is needed in order to overcome public concerns about new development and to effectively confront NIMBY attitudes. Consulting with an open mind and supporting a process that is genuinely free from preconceived ideas is key to establishing an inclusive consultation process, which people feel they can engage with openly.

We present Housing Communities: What People Want in the hope that this report shows how meaningful consultation and better informed residential development can actually result in more popular housing. The evidence base presented on preferences for built form and community consultation provide a useful insight into the needs and desires of many communities across the UK and should help to inform future developments. By considering what people want, first and foremost, we hope we can build the type of communities that people cherish: beautiful, harmonious and enduring.
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