



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

A case study review of community engagement in practice,  
in the North West, during a time of Covid and beyond



**RTPI North West**  
Royal Town Planning Institute

[rtpi.org.uk/northwest](https://rtpi.org.uk/northwest)

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# Introduction



For developers, planning officer communities and decision makers, one of the biggest challenges in taking forward a plan, a programme or an individual development

proposal is to ensure that public engagement is undertaken in a way which is meaningful, inclusive and brings benefits for all involved. Good engagement reduces conflict, results in better development and most importantly allows communities to have an influence over the future shape of the places where they live.



Both the local plan process, and the development control process, have long established procedures for community input, but many seek to go beyond these dry requirements to seek more dynamic and meaningful connections with affected community groups.

Over 2020/2021 the Covid-19 Pandemic forced many in the planning profession to change how they engaged with the general public, big meetings were out, and online consultation was in. In 2022, while the Covid restrictions have ended, there remains a need to look at new and innovative ways to engage which reflect the ‘new normal’ in terms of how people want to work and interact with each other.

This document provides some good practice guidance on how public and private organisations have successfully consulted with the public during 2020/2021 for projects of both strategic and local scope. It includes perspectives from both the local planners themselves and third parties most notably the work of Planning Aid here in the North West. It ends with an article from Homes England on their Toolkit for engagement across a diverse range of development projects.

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**Dr Christopher Wilson**

Promotion of Planning Task Group Leader

# Engagement in the Local Plan Process 1 - Lancaster City Council's Climate Emergency Local Plan Review

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**Responding to a Climate Emergency Declaration through Planning Policy, Lancaster City Council engaged in an immediate Climate Emergency Local Plan review following the Council's new plan's adoption in July 2020. The Covid-19 Pandemic led to innovation in how the team brought in community engagement.**

# Lancaster City Council's Climate Emergency Local Plan Review

## Background

Lancaster City Council declared a Climate Emergency in January 2019, at which point the Local Plan had been submitted and it was not possible to be significantly amended. The Local Plan was adopted in July 2020, and the Council immediately entered a Climate Emergency partial review to ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation policies within the plan become fundamental to placemaking in the district. Following a scoping consultation in 2020 and regulation 18 consultation in July 2021, 32 policies were highlighted for review, improvement, and strengthening. The policies encompass the themes of sustainable design, energy efficiency and renewable energy, sustainable transport, green and blue infrastructure, heritage, and water management. However, because of the Covid 19 Pandemic, the Council's usual consultation methods of engagement were not all possible so the Council had to take a new approach and innovate in how the community voice could be included in shaping the local plan.

## What did Lancaster City Council do?

Before the pandemic, community engagement that was done, was in person and face-to-face with residents and businesses in many venues across the district. With the pandemic, most of the engagement had to be moved online or into outdoor spaces when restrictions allowed. The council moved swiftly in digital engagement, embracing new digital engagement technologies such as Microsoft Teams, an Engagement HQ Platform, the use of Arc GIS Storyboards and the production of videos to explain the plan process, all made available on the council website, [www.lancaster.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/localplan) and social media. In addition, a Consultation Help Desk was set up, which allowed the community to access planning officers direct. Using this type of digital engagement has seen an increase in the amount of people signing up to the planning policy mailing list to be involved in the Local Plan process.



The ArcGIS Storyboards, which work on PCs, tablets and mobile devices, had interactive elements and slideshows that tell the story about the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review that people could engage with. For each topic area the planning policy team produced short videos whereby officers explained what each set of policies would do for climate adaptation and mitigation. Due to the sheer volume of consultation materials, positive feedback was received on this type of digital engagement methods, in particular the use of videos, many stating it allowed them to focus on relevant areas to them and know where to look.

The Council also did a range of outdoor events that were embedded into wider community events such as taking part in the Great Big Green Week and events around COP26. These events brought together a wider audience which might not have been interested in planning policy but who were at the widely publicised events. It provided a way to engage residents around the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review, what their local plan does for them and how they can stay involved in a friendly and approachable way where residents did not need to go to a designated event to have their say.



### Lessons Learned

The climate emergency necessitates immediate action and creative focus. Even though Lancaster City Council already had a newly adopted, sound Local Plan, this was not an excuse for inaction. While starting a review just a few months into the pandemic could be seen as unideal, it led to opportunity and for new ways of community engagement to grow and emerge.

The hybrid approach to community engagement has proved successful and will be carried forward as a way to bring engagement to as wide an audience as possible. It has taken just short of one year to get the review to consultation, demonstrating that it is achievable to make a significant impact in short time frame with a team dedicated to securing climate-positive placemaking and a community that is engaged in helping shape their District's future.

# Engagement in the Local Plan Process 2 - The Work of Planning Aid in the North West Since 2020

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This article looks at engagement in the Local Plan process from the third party perspective of North West Planning Aid, and its work to empower community groups to become more engaged since 2020.

# The Work of Planning Aid in the North West Since 2020

Helping local residents and community groups to become better engaged in planning activity in all its guises is the key role of Planning Aid and it is particularly targeted at assisting those unable to afford to pay for planning advice. The RTPI in the North West through its Planning Aid Task Group has a well-established track record of enabling community engagement across the Region. Planning Aid volunteers have delivered support in various ways and in a variety of settings through changing social circumstances.

This article will focus on activities carried out over the past two years, but experience gained in 2017 laid the foundations for what has been successfully achieved more recently. During that year the Task Group, working under the auspices of Planning Aid England (a charity within the RTPI), organised and helped deliver a range of community engagement support. This ranged from assisting with a Neighbourhood Plan in Birkenhead/Tranmere and the Warrington Local Plan through face-to-face drop-in events to an in-person training workshop for community groups interested in the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF).

Many local people and even active community groups often have little prior experience or knowledge of planning, so part of the Planning Aid role is raising the capacity to be able to understand how to make relevant and effective consultation replies at the appropriate time. This can range from explaining the planning system and what stage has currently been reached with a development plan or project, to imparting an understanding of what impacts the proposals may have on the locality.

The key advantage of Planning Aid volunteers assisting with community engagement is that they can act as impartial intermediaries. Unfortunately, a sense of mistrust or at least wariness of the local planning authority commonly exists within many communities and being separate from the Council our volunteers can give confidence to potential respondents that they are being closely listened to and advised in a non-partisan way.





### Wirral Local Plan

During 2019 the Task Group became aware of widespread public concerns in the Borough about what the forthcoming Local Plan might contain. With the support and cooperation of the Council the Task Group was able to compile an extensive contacts list of interest groups in the local community. Using the same conveniently located and appointed venue as was used for the Birkenhead and Tranmere Neighbourhood Plan an in-person workshop was held with over 20 group representatives. The event comprised a presentation giving an overview of the planning system based on the previous Greater Manchester Spatial Framework workshop and this was followed by round-table discussions on the key issues and queries relevant to The Wirral. The event was well received by the participants with many words of thanks given at the end of the evening. A follow-up get together was promised when the Local Plan was more advanced, an offer that remains open.



### Changing Circumstances

Of course, the social restrictions introduced because of Covid stopped the ability to hold in-person meetings but also brought to the fore other means of organising, staffing, and presenting engagement events. Perhaps inevitably some local authorities and Neighbourhood Plan groups slowed their plan making activity and took stock of how they could advance their preparation and engagement work. What the Task Group did continue to do was to carry on monitoring the production status of Neighbourhood and Local Plan across the Region, so that at the appropriate time offers of support could be made.

In 2020 Planning Aid England (PAE) took a fresh look at their national support programme and how this could be delivered on-line in terms of community engagement assistance. The use of video conferencing software not only provided a safe way of Planning Aid volunteers meeting local people but also meant that specialist volunteers from across England could be drafted in to help those of us based in the North West.

### Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan

On the back of the Task Group's Plan monitoring work offers of Planning Aid support were sent to all local planning authorities in the North West at the end of 2020. Blackburn with Darwen Council responded with a request for assistance. The authority was embarking on the production of a new strategic level Local Plan and wanted help to involve local interest groups.

The request was discussed with PAE and staff there were keen to assist as the location coincided with their own thinking in terms of targeting more deprived areas. PAE became involved in the design of the workshops using their experience from major project on-line consultations. They also recruited volunteers from across the country and organised the community invitations. The workshops were to be run as a pilot for what could be rolled out across England.

The aim was to run three workshop sessions with local community groups all based around the main themes of the Plan – big picture principles that the local authority wanted to promote that were also in a strategic Policies Map form. The workshops would include an introduction by the head of strategic planning officer but after about 10 minutes the Planning Aid volunteers were left to engage with community participants alone.

In the event only two workshops were run, a third targeted at a very active group formed to campaign about a major housing site did not attract the representatives of that group's interest.

The other two workshops were each attended by 4 local people. Although a very good discussion took place at both on-line workshops the aim to engage with up to a dozen individuals was not achieved. However, comprehensive non-attributed notes were prepared that were sent to the Council who were very pleased with the engagement achieved.

This whole experience helped to establish a format that PAE intended to roll out in other places. At each workshop a different team of three Planning Aid volunteers were involved – two chartered members one of whom (a North West based member) chaired, plus a non-chartered notetaker. So, a range of volunteering opportunities were created, and experience developed. In terms of the low take-up, it was thought that some potential participants were still wary of the opportunity and/or probably daunted by it.



## Stockport Local Plan

On the back of the Blackburn with Darwen experience, PAE staff approached local authorities across England with areas of deprivation, including about dozen councils in the North West. The response in our Region was that some authorities expressed an interest in on-line community workshops, but none took up the offer. The North West Task Group was asked to follow-up PAE's initial approach, and our Plan monitoring work revealed a few authorities where imminent engagement appeared to be in prospect. These councils were contacted through their RTPI local authority champions.

Of those approached, Stockport Council responded asking for help. Although parts of the Borough are affluent there are other areas that are quite deprived. With the Council's agreement it was decided to focus on on-line workshops with three communities around the town centre. PAE again helped with the workshop design and the arrangements but this time the Council used a non-planning staff member familiar to local community group representatives, to drum up interest.

This approach worked well, three area-specific workshops were held, and a total of 14 local people were involved, there would have been more, but the last workshop clashed with another event. The community-based Council officer was present at the start of each meet-up to help the participants be at ease and then left. Again, the workshops related to a Local Plan at an early stage of preparation, so the Council was keen to get views on big principles. Not surprisingly the community representatives had much to say about immediate on-the-ground issues, but the Planning Aid volunteers were also able to help them consider the wider picture as well.

The written-up outcomes of the Stockport workshops have provided the Council with a wealth of information aside from views on the scope of Local Plan such that various departments of the Authority are working through numerous service delivery suggestions. This latest experience has been the best so far in engaging with the most people however the numbers involved are still modest showing the challenges of involving ordinary folk in the planning process.



Want to become a Planning Aid volunteer?  
If you want to be involved in Planning Aid support opportunities, please register to be a volunteer on the RTPI website:

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-advice/volunteering/how-to-apply/>

# Engagement in a Major Project 1 - Eden Project North Community Engagement

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This Case Study considers how a private consultancy firm could bring in community groups to a strategic project where decision making and development would otherwise proceed well above the community level.

# Eden Project North Community Engagement

As part of the Eden Project North proposals in Morecambe <https://www.edenproject.com/new-edens/eden-project-north-uk> WSP was instructed to undertake and manage the community consultation process. Eden Project North represents a once in a generation opportunity for Morecambe, its local community and the North West region as a whole.

The proposed development will combine exhibits, performance, learning, play, immersive experiences, world-class horticulture, art, food, beverage and retail spaces to create an engaging space for the local community and wider public with a specific focus on educating visitors about regenerative sustainability and climate change.

From the inception of the project, the Eden Project International Team were clear that they'd like the Morecambe community to feel a sense of ownership and pride in Eden Project North. Engaging with the local community throughout all development phases and beyond and to ground the project within its place was considered fundamental to achieve this.

Communication throughout the entire planning and development process has centred on being a two-way, robust, creative and fun, not just a statutory box-ticking exercise.



Image credit: Grimshaw Architects

A variety of informal conversations with a wide variety of community groups and organisations in the area have been carried out. The early identification of local stakeholders and community groups was crucial to developing an understanding of key issues, concerns and opportunities in the local area which in turn have fed into the design process.

In October 2019 physical consultation events were hosted at 3 different venues across Morecambe to ensure as wide a geographical spread as possible. Free hot drinks and cake, along with activities for children including a comfy corner with a dressing-up box, bean bags, books and colouring, were made available to create an interactive and engaging space. In total, over 2,200 people attended the events across the four days. Posters and information boards were also designed to be concise, clear and focused on the most fundamental aspects of Eden Project North.

The team continued its community engagement drive with monthly, virtual 'Community Conversations', commencing in November 2020 and continuing monthly during 2021, covering a wide range of topics to gauge as broad a spectrum of feedback as possible to influence the proposals. Each event lasted one hour and was hosted on Zoom by EPIL Chief Executive David Harland, focusing on a specific topic.

EPIL invited speakers from partner and other connected organisations. A recording of each session was posted on-line to allow others to access and can be accessed here <https://www.edenproject.com/new-edens/eden-project-north-uk/eden-project-north-community-conversations>. WSP has presented on planning and transport matters on several of the Community Conversations.

Community engagement intensified further during Summer 2021 as the proposals evolved and were developed towards application submission.

Given Covid-19 regulations, the most recent public consultation undertaken was virtual and digital in nature. A comprehensive and interactive website/consultation room was created which allowed visitors to review the emerging designs and learn about the various aspects of the scheme. An interactive 'room' was designed to let people experience a taste of the Eden Project brand and the Rainforest Biome at Eden Cornwall. The room was designed as all Eden engagement is - to be robust, provide detailed information but also be creative and fun. The online platform was designed to be accessible by both computer and smartphone.



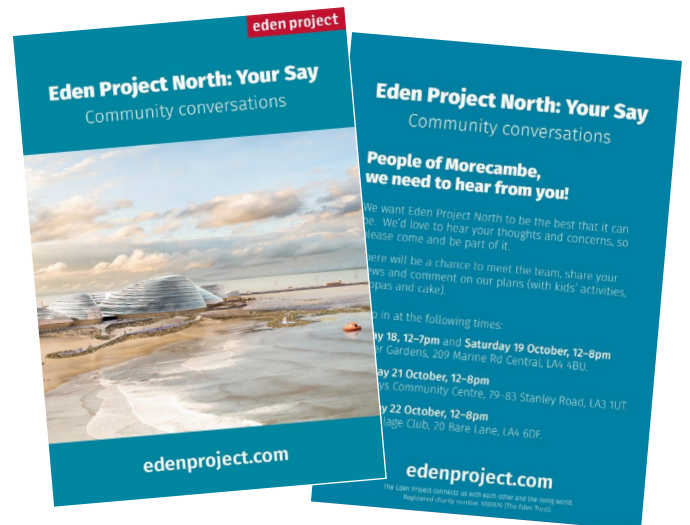
In addition to the series of interactive boards and features in the virtual consultation room, an online community feedback questionnaire was embedded in order for the community to provide feedback. Over 4,000 visits to the website were made with a significant level of feedback given. WSP managed the feedback to ensure it was being fully considered by Grimshaw Architects and the wider design team.

Whilst the application is yet to be determined, positive feedback has been received in relation to the consultation strategy, in particular efforts to maintain inclusivity through utilising new and innovative digital platforms in the absence of not being able to host physical events.

Whilst the most recent engagement was undertaken digitally, it is important these platforms are not seen as a replacement to traditional, physical, face to face events which foster and enable true debate and sharing of views and opinions.

Engagement does not simply stop once an application is submitted, feedback during the determination period and once a decision is made is equally important and can help ensure a development reaches its potential in terms of social, economic, environment and cultural impacts. Continued engagement with stakeholders will be key to the success of Eden Project North.

In order to maintain a physical presence within Morecambe, the Eden team are currently searching for a permanent base in Morecambe which will become their community engagement hub during the next phase of the development.



## Engagement in a Major Project 2 - HARP Virtual Public Exhibition

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Another major strategic project, this time where the priority was to consult as widely as possible rather than focus on individual communities.



# HARP Virtual Public Exhibition

## Background

The Haweswater Aqueduct is a major feat of engineering. The pipeline, built between 1933 and 1955, has successfully supplied water to 2.5 million people in Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester for sixty years.

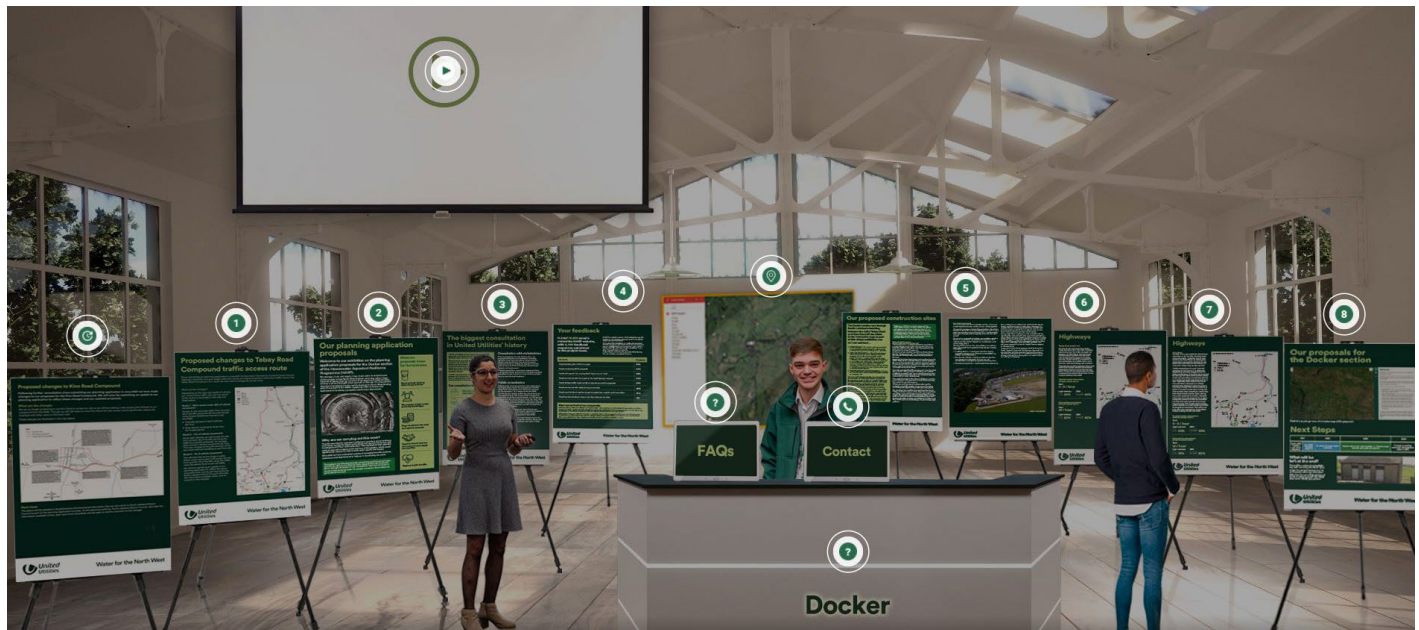
In 2005 United Utilities began preparations to carry out inspections of the 110km pipeline knowing it wouldn't be an easy task.

While we were looking around our engineers' identified areas of concern that posed a potential future risk to both water quality and supply.

We took action straight away to carry out maintenance work to the worst affected areas, but it was clear that more work was needed.

Independently verified research has clearly indicated that the preferred solution for customers and stakeholders is the replacement of all six tunnel sections along the length of the aqueduct.

As part of the pre-planning process, we undertook one of the largest consultations in United Utilities' history, engaging with thousands of residents, businesses and stakeholders across Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester.



## The Consultation

We started the consultation process for our mammoth pipeline project by engaging with stakeholders including parish councils, ward councillors, MPs, statutory stakeholders such as local planning authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Highways England, local landowners, community representatives and special interest groups.

Following this initial consultation, we began preparing for a programme of engagements with the wider local communities that could be impacted by our proposals.

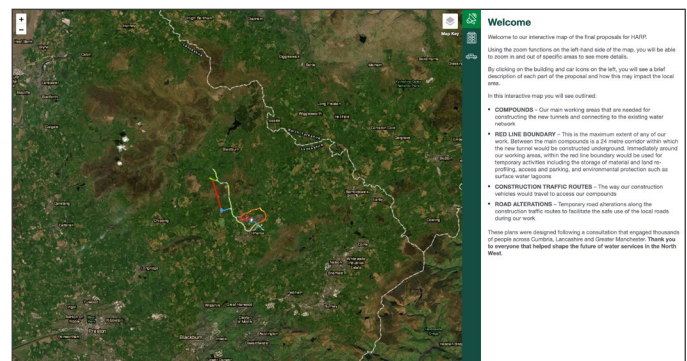
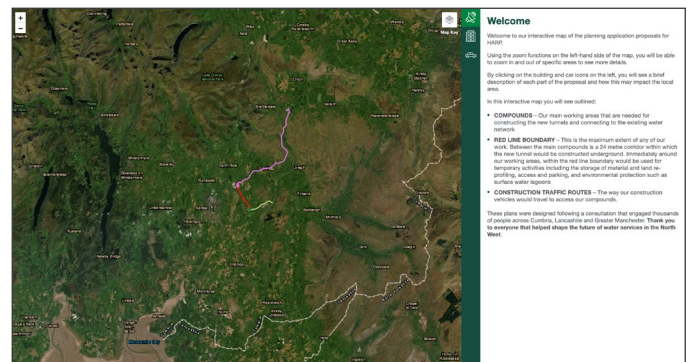
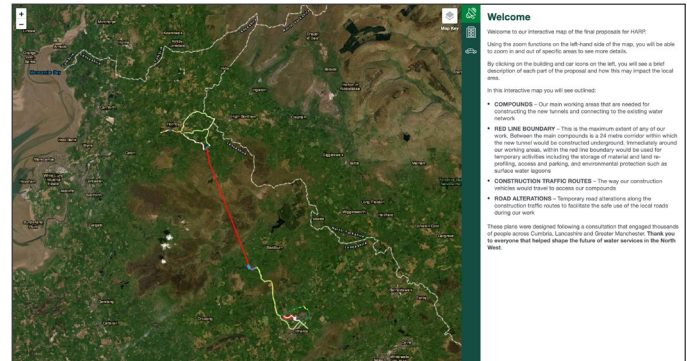
Beginning in March 2020, we organised 11 face-to-face public exhibitions at venues located along the pipeline route.

We successfully hosted six of the planned events, attracting more than 250 people, when, in March 2020, the country went into lock down due to Covid-19 forcing us to cancel our final five face-to-face public exhibitions.

To make sure our public engagement could continue we developed a ground-breaking fully-digital exhibition so that residents living along the route of the pipeline could view all the information about this mammoth engineering project from the safety of their own homes [www.harpcconsultation.co.uk](http://www.harpcconsultation.co.uk)

To encourage people to take part in our consultation we sent out more than 44,000 newsletters to people located in the impacted areas, advertised in the local press and reached 82,486 people with our social media campaign.

Our virtual exhibition, launched on Friday 31st July 2020, allowed viewers to see the planned route of the works and provided them with the opportunity to speak to the project team to share their views of our plans.



Despite Covid-19 restrictions, we wanted to continue to give as much information as possible to the public, offer opportunities for residents, stakeholders and property owners to submit feedback and speak to our project team. To facilitate that interaction, we hosted live chat sessions, webinars, set up a Freephone information line and a dedicated project email address.

We also set up an online feedback form so that visitors to the virtual exhibition could easily submit their opinions and views on the proposals and help shape our plans. For anyone without internet access, we provided hardcopy packs containing exactly the same information as the virtual exhibitions.

In total, we received over 70,000 hits to the HARP website which provided 2,355 pieces of feedback for the project team.

Following the public consultation, our team of planners, engineers, environmental specialists and other project members analysed all the feedback received and developed the proposed plans for the planning applications.

Throughout the feedback received, a number of consistent themes emerged with local residents and business owners highlighting key issues or concerns which, where possible, we fed into our final planning application proposals.

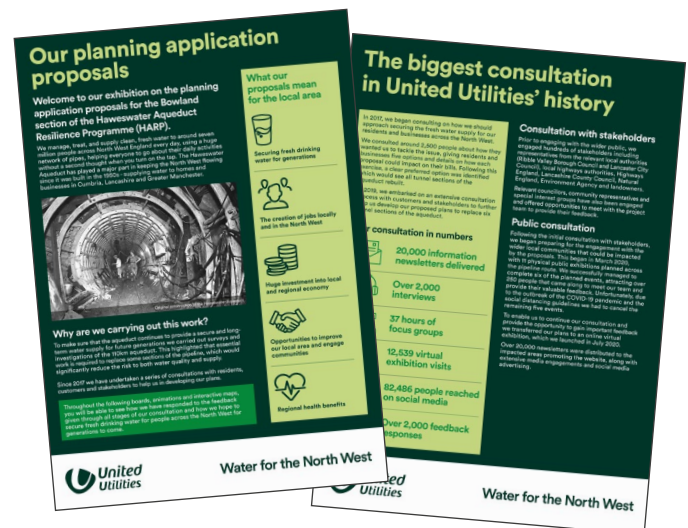
A Statement of Community involvement, outlining the consultation and feedback received, was also submitted as part of the final planning applications.

As the final stage of the most comprehensive consultation process, we have ever undertaken as a company, we shared our plans with the public via our virtual exhibition platform so that customers could see the final proposals in advance of us submitting them to the relevant authorities.

This final online exhibition, split into each of the five tunnel sections: Docker, Swarther, Bowland, Marl Hill, and Haslingden & Walmersley, included exhibition boards, an interactive map and video as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document.

Copies of both the exhibition boards and the FAQs were made available to view online, download and were posted to people that requested hard copies.

In spring 2021, we successfully submitted nine planning applications to seven different local planning authorities.



# Homes England - Engagement Toolkit

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Finally, Homes England have provided an updated version of its toolkit for when, and how, to engage with local communities in the development and planning process.

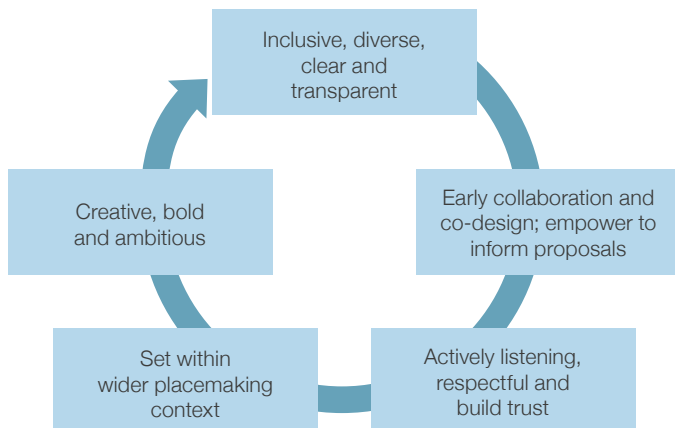
# Homes England - Engagement Toolkit

## Why community engagement matters

High quality, early, and honest engagement helps to support and improve wider place-making and social value impacts and legacy by focusing on places, not sites. Early engagement with all communities helps build trust and usefully informs master planning and end-to-end processes from informing intervention and investment decisions through to development and disposal of sites and beyond, including starting to build resilient places and communities with a sense of ownership. Community engagement is rooted in locally informed place-making opportunities, it compliments and supports the formal consultation process. It drives and informs sustainable development

## Some Guiding Principles

We see engagement as a creative two way form of exchange relying on local communities to identify the opportunities and issues to be addressed that are locally important. We see engagement as a key element of place-making, complementing and informing the development of planning policies and planning applications.



## Inclusive, Diverse, Clear and Transparent

**Involve as many as possible.** This must respect and reach the diverse range of communities including those with particular or specialist needs or interests.

- Make every effort to ensure all voices can be heard; children, BAME, families, older people and other 'seldom heard' groups to ensure that all, not just the loud minority have their say.
- Be clear, honest, accurate and jargon-free.
- Be timely and appropriate when reaching out to communities and stakeholders.
- Be honest about the scope and boundaries of participants' input – what can be changed, and importantly what cannot.
- Enable one single point of contact to channel any queries.
- Follow up with information, data and updates during the whole engagement process and inform the public about the next steps.

## Early Collaboration and Co-Design Empower to Inform

**Actively collaborate with local partners** to make their places better.

- Consider and act upon locally relevant guidance and previous engagement activities.
- Look for opportunities to co-design and co-commission engagement.
- Focus engagement on what matters locally and at key stages.
- Look to empower from the outset and for future stewardship possibilities.

### Actively Listening, Respectful and Build Trust

**Individuals matter.** Treat people and stakeholders how we would expect to be treated, knowing that they have the knowledge, skills and ideas to enhance our projects.

- Upskill and raise the bar of skills, knowledge, expertise and confidence of those groups being engaged – be aware of their existing levels of knowledge and understanding of drawings and technical information and evidence and use plain English – avoid the use of jargon without definitions.
- Ask open questions via open engagement to hear and learn; recognise communities know their neighbourhoods in ways we don't.
- Use subjective and objective tools and techniques to inform and support proposals.
- Be respectful to all ideas, suggestions and opinions.
- Be open to innovative ideas, lessons and best practice.
- Be clear and honest about constraints, timescales and project objectives.

### Set Within the Wider Context of Placemaking

**Powerful principles of asset based community development (ABCD)** underpin our approach – The greatest asset in any place are its people. Local solutions to local needs are best known and met by empowered local people and groups.

- Use community engagement to inform unlocking of wider place-based impacts: if there are existing community deficits (poor health / access to jobs and training and social facilities) can development address these by providing layouts that encourage walking and use of open space? Can development provide opportunities for new jobs and skills development through apprentices and collaborating with local schools and colleges? Can development afford to provide new social services in areas best located to serve existing needs.
- Follow the principles of asset based community development and look to build social capital.
- Build trust and reputation using existing data sets and compliment these with resident informed community feedback to develop place-based impact frameworks.

- Work with local partners collectively to inform design and sustainability proposals.
- Support other public sector bodies with advice and guidance (where relevant).
- Enhance our reputation based on impact and legacy.

### Creative, Bold and Ambitious

**Leave an impactful legacy;** a place where people are proud to live and take an active involvement in building communities.

- Embrace and champion new ways and technologies to effectively engage.
- Be relevant in external settings.
- Empower and upskill communities to inform and take control of the places that are being created.
- Challenge assumptions and be open to innovative ideas/ways of working.
- Enthuse and compel colleagues and partners.
- Monitor and evaluate impact and success.

### How to engage

Looking at the How to Engage, we always recommend beginning at the earliest stages before key decisions are made, including at pre-planning stages and then at key stages to inform scheme design and then throughout the planning process, informing ideas and building trust.

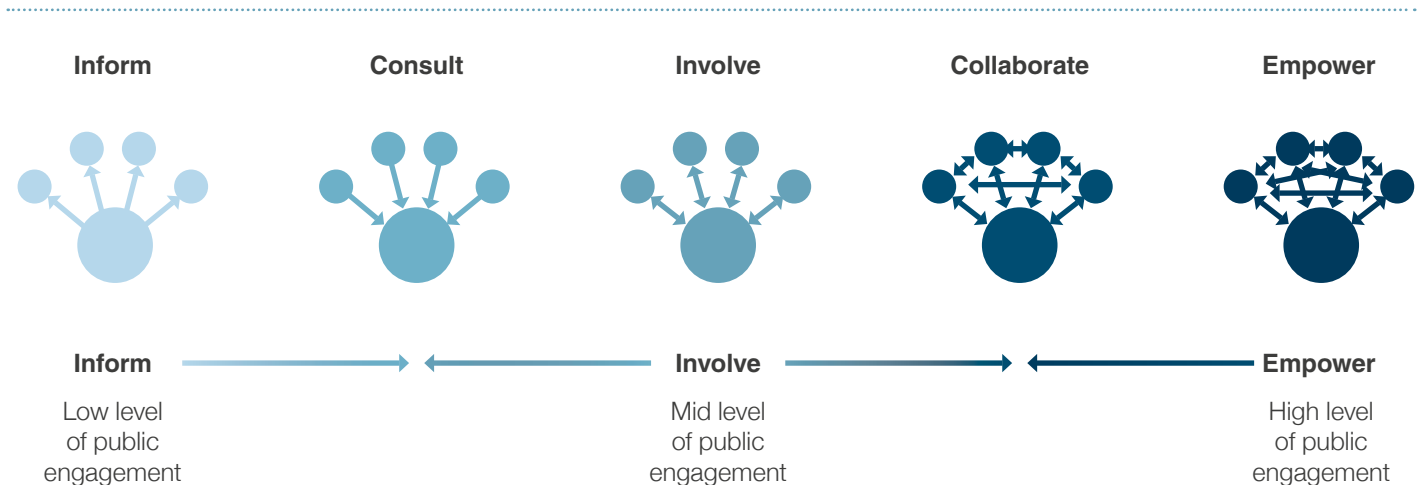
We see community engagement as a continuous process of which consultation is a part. Community engagement should inform wider place-making interventions and investment decisions to address locally identified issues and opportunities.

### Tools for INFORMING – sharing knowledge

Providing facts and statements in plain English and images to inform people, partners and stakeholders of what is happening.

In simple terms this is an ‘awareness raising’ exercise. The tools we use include:

- Mailshots/press adverts.
- Early use of digital tools such as web-pages or Facebook – to establish a presence and control the narrative.
- Visually interesting and easily understood presentations – mindful of the needs and requirements of different audiences who may not understand drawings and technical information.



### **Tools for CONSULTING - where communities can inform decisions but don't have the final say**

Outside the statutory requirements we look to consult to gain feedback to inform our interventions. Tools we typically use include all those used at the Informing stage but also provide an opportunity for feedback to begin to shape proposals. The tools include:

- 'Drop-in events', market stalls and pop-up displays, going to schools, local community fayres and events reaching out to communities in accessible places – we go to the communities, rather than relying on them to come to us.
- Using mailshots, newspaper adverts.
- Use of digital tools including specialist consultation and engagement tools such as 'fly throughs'/digital mapping/mobile phone apps'.

### **Tools for INVOLVING and COLLABORATING – building awareness and trust.**

We want to draw people together to understand the processes we are working and help them to shape the best quality places and communities as part of the designing process but also the future management of places.

This is a truly two-way form of exchange to help us understand the communities, and respectfully listen and respond to their suggestions, ideas and comments. We seek to empower people to take control of the places we are creating together and in which they will live and work.

At this stage development proposals will become firmer and key 'players' in the design and decision making process will become apparent. Those key decision makers and influencers are the representatives of the existing and future communities, the applicant / landowner, the local planning authorities and other key stakeholders: businesses / investors/ future users and we look to help them work together to balance competing asks, confirm key requirements and ensure proposals are workable, viable and deliverable. The tools we use include, for example

- Vision setting workshops to share evidence and clarify needs, issues, aspirations;
- Structured/themed meetings with key representatives to balance competing demands and work towards agreed, mutually acceptable solutions;
- Charettes etc;
- Led site walk overs where possible; and

- Web-based presentations allowing for real time partnership working.

We also look for opportunities to look towards empowering the local communities to take 'ownership' of proposals and shape them to meet their needs and consider how the new place will be managed over the long term.

### **Tools for EMPOWERING - enabling communities to increase control over their lives**

Here we are looking to help what will become the occupiers and stewards of the new communities build capacity and knowledge to help them take responsibility for their communities so that they become places where people want to and are proud to live in. We look to help communities take control to lead, develop and own change in their places. Tools can include co-designing stewardship models such as parish councils and community trusts with confirmed responsibilities for long term stewardship including managing key parts of it such as open space, community facilities and so on.

- Use a range of tools and different settings to gather local views, knowledge, insight; and
- Bring groups, anchor institutions and interest parties together to build new social capital.



## Using the '4 Ds' Approach

A good approach to developing a community engagement strategy is to adopt a four stage approach (the 4Ds):

- **Discovery**
- **Definition**
- **Development, and**
- **Delivery**

**Discovery** - undertake a review of local communities: stakeholders, interested parties, anchor institutions, existing groups and community networks, highlighting which are relevant and important to engage with and why. This should be captured in a Community Engagement Audit that will in turn inform a bespoke Community Engagement Strategy. This stage includes identifying if there have been previous engagement activities relevant to the proposal so as not to waste a lot of time for no reason and instead follow on from those activities where appropriate. This is useful to show we've listened to any previous consultation / engagement activities results and techniques and understand and establish wider local place-based needs / opportunities.

The aim of this is to establish locally informed place-based indicators to provide a broader context, showing how the intended investment will contribute towards wider place-based needs and opportunities and how these can inform our emerging project/proposal?

**Definition** - explain how and where community engagement will be undertaken, the mix between digital and traditional techniques, who it will involve and why, and over what timeframe. This should establish a specific approach to community engagement for the project based on the outcomes of their Discovery stage. This should lead to a (draft) Engagement Plan for the project which ideally should be co-designed with identified communities and stakeholders so that the strategy is fit for purpose and agreed with by the community, prior to too much activity taking place. The outcome of this phase should be the creation of an agreed Engagement Plan for the project.

**Development** - The agreed Community Engagement Plan explains how activities are to be focussed, collaborative, transparent and inclusive in their activities throughout. And how the results from engagement are captured, recorded, fed back to the project team, and fed back to the community at each stage in the plan so that trust is maintained, and places are co-designed to best meet the needs of the local communities.

**Deliver** - how results from engagement will be managed and issues raised addressed to inform proposals so empowering communities to shape and manage their new communities over time so building trust and developing new social capital and capacity.



**RTPI** North West  
Royal Town Planning Institute

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

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