

## **FEEDBACK FROM CARDS**

There was a broad yet detailed consensus amongst participants regarding the definition of good engagement, its objectives and barriers to it happening. The feedback we gathered is synthesized here.

### **What defines good engagement practice?**

A genuinely participatory process, good engagement is inclusive, accessible and transparent as a priority. It has a clear programme with clear objectives and goals, made feasible through sufficient resources and capacity. All involved in the process internally are on the same page – this ultimately contributes to mutually beneficial outcomes for both client and community.

Good engagement practice is open for the expression of diverse views from a representative, unbiased section of the audience. The process has real influence: people engaged feel their views have been listened to and that their involvement has made a difference. To ensure this, there is a sensitive understanding of timelines: good engagement happens early on.

As enablers instead of directors, consultants encourage and empower a genuine sense of community ownership and leadership in both the process and the legacy.

### **What are the objectives of good public engagement?**

Good public engagement helps improve places and decisions through holistic community involvement, influence and ownership. It entails understanding a place and its community better to ensure responsive, inclusive and successful change.

It must be remembered that the process is always contextual, but the positive objective of public engagement will be informed and improved outcomes for all.

### **What stops good engagement from happening?**

Consideration of this involves understanding that there are barriers in the commissioning approach, within the process of engagement and within the community itself.

Obstacles that emerge in commissioning include fear, lack of interest and lack of clarity. Fear of sharing information, disrupting or diluting a process, designing by committee, repeating difficult experiences, spending money and the unknown all form barriers that stop good engagement from being commissioned.

Lack of interest on the part of the client team stems from a lack of value of public engagement and leads to further barriers to the quality of the process (if it is done at all), such as commissioning engagement too late and not building in capacity for change and participation. This resulting agenda-based and closed engagement is often known as 'tick-box', reflecting the priority of client success.

Lack of clarity involves a failure to define parameters for change or influence in the brief, resulting in a confused and poorly executed process.

Key barriers within the process itself involve lack of communication (both internally and externally), inappropriate methods, lack of skills and resources, and a lack of honesty. Obstacles from the community may include a bias user group dominating the process, factions within the audience themselves and a general mistrust in engagement.

However, barriers within the process and the community are inherently linked to the effects of those created in the 'commissioning moment'.

### **FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOPS**

Many of the barriers identified and tackled in the workshop sessions overlapped. Below are two key barriers that emerged, as well as feedback on what the process of commissioning good engagement might look like.

#### **BARRIER 1**

Lack of understanding of value of engagement on the part of the client team (involves fear of cost, fear of the unknown and lack of motive)

#### **IDEA FOR SOLUTION**

Share best practice and positive experiences to increase awareness, raise sense of value and encourage a high standard of commissioning engagement. This education would come from peers (commissioners), practitioners and communities. This would hopefully embed a culture of valuing engagement and an understanding of its wide-ranging benefits.

#### **HOW TO DO THIS**

- Local authorities, as well as residents, need to demand/expect a high level of quality in engagement. Evidence of the value – including in monetary terms – would need to be assessed and shared
- Developer-only events could be held to share best practice and achieve this
- Formulate a charter of best practice to demonstrate value
- Engagement champions (professional bodies?)
- Expand planning requirements to judge on the quality of engagement
- Elevate and promote good clients that believe in commissioning good engagement – reward them and make it competitive so that good engagement becomes a hallmark of being a good developer

#### **BARRIER 2**

Lack of brief-writing skills

#### **IDEA FOR SOLUTION**

Develop practical training around good brief-writing

#### **HOW TO DO THIS**

Published guidance

### **What might a process of commissioning good engagement look like?**

- High quality brief-writing skills
- Getting the whole client and delivery team on the same page
- Start from an understanding of place and people – make the brief responsive and contextual
- Embed flexibility, openness and collaboration in the brief
- Schedule ongoing evaluation - build in capacity for adaptation
- Decide/anticipate exit strategy – including effective handover from consultant to client and sustainable legacy
- Be clear on the purpose and the limits of engagement – transparency
- Define parameters that can accommodate change and influence
- Commit to engaging a representative diversity of the community
- Ask for suggestions from consultants
- Secure sufficient resources and skills
- Manage negativity early on