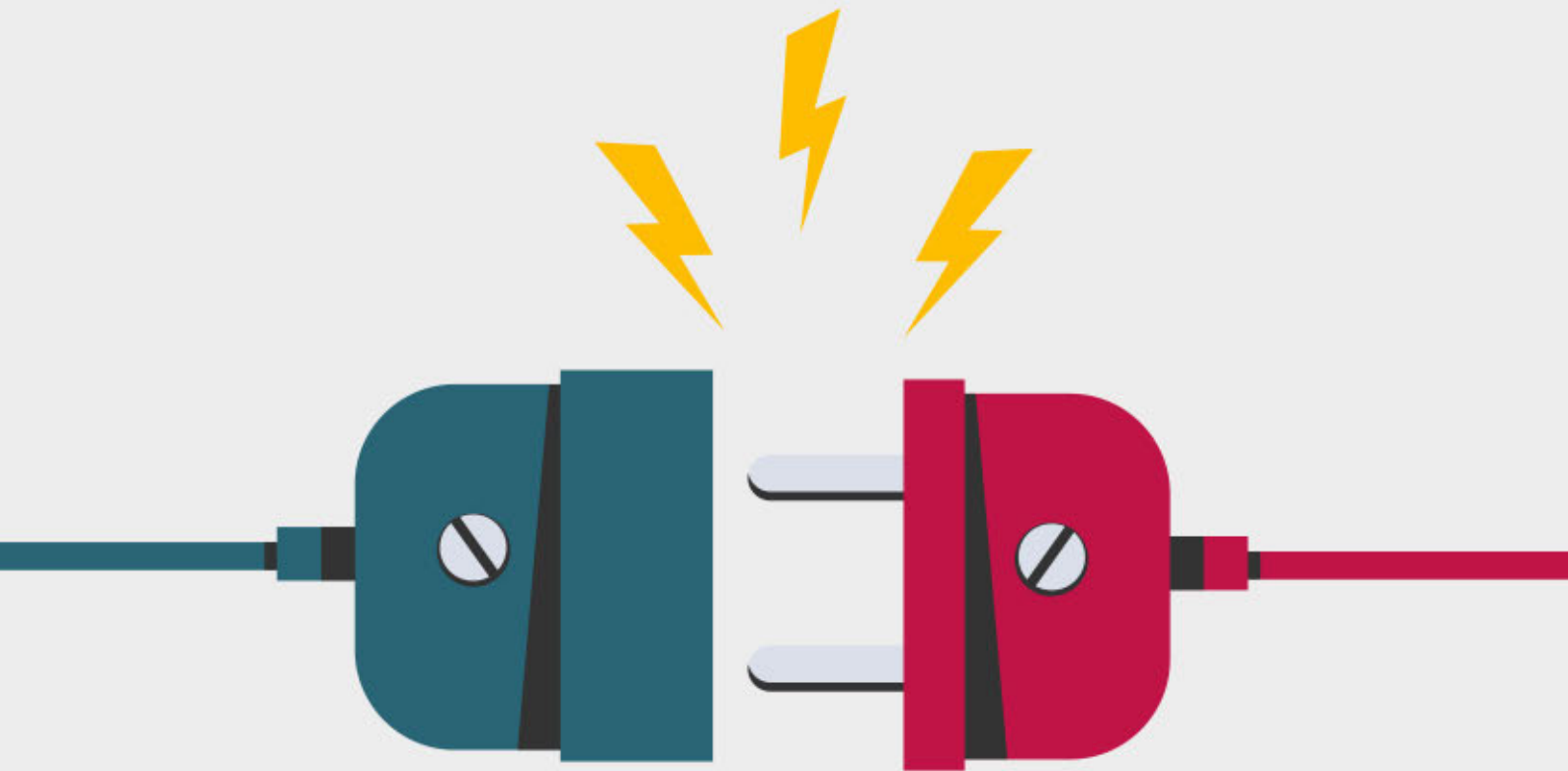


# *Healthy Engagement and Consultation in Practice*

A Bristol Housing Festival Roundtable  
14 October 2020



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## Roundtable Participants:

**Chair: Councillor Asher Craig**

Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Communities, Equalities and Public Health, Bristol City Council

**Alison Bromilow**

Network Administrator, Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network

**Geoff Fox**

Partnerships Director, Goram Homes

**Malcolm Hamilton**

Creative Director, Play Disrupt

**Dylan May**

Land and Planning Director, BoKlok UK

**Melissa Mean**

Director, We Can Make

**Lindy Morgan**

Bristol Community Land Trust and Community Led Homes West

**Elaine Olphert**

Head of Housing Delivery, Bristol City Council

**Angelique Retief**

Research and Policy Officer, Black South West Network

**Tom Selway**

Director, Cadence PR

**Helen Tilton**

Director, Cratus Communications

**Jessie Wilde**

Deputy Project Director, Bristol Housing Festival

## Participant Bios



### **TOM SELWAY**

Tom Selway runs Bristol based Cadence PR, a community consultation agency specialising in planning PR. Cadence has an excellent reputation for providing human, meaningful and considerate consultation programmes, helping facilitate constructive conversations with communities and as a result, better schemes for all. Current schemes in Bristol include Goram Homes and Hill's Baltic Wharf, Ashton Gate Sporting Quarter, Homes England's Brislington Meadows, and MEPC's St Mary le Port.



### **MELISSA MEAN**

For over fifteen years Melissa has worked across urbanism, the arts, and public participation. She is Director of We Can Make at Knowle West Media Centre in Bristol. We Can Make is a CIC that designs and delivers innovative approaches to citizen-led housing, including unlocking micro-sites for affordable homes and using digital design and fabrication technologies to empower communities. Melissa is also a Commissioner on the No Place Left Behind Commission and Co-Convenor of Redcliffe Residents Action Group & Neighbourhood Forum.



### **GEOFF FOX**

Geoff, a planner by trade, joined Goram Homes as Partnership Director in April 2020 having previously been a senior consultant at ARK Consultancy and a Director of Development for a London based housing association. Geoff brings over 35 years' experience of delivering complex development and regeneration projects including many successful schemes in Bristol. Having lived in Bristol and the surrounding area for over 30 years he is passionate about helping the city he loves.



### **ELAINE OLPHERT**

Elaine has recently joined Bristol City Council as Head of Housing Delivery, a Chartered Architect with over 20 years' within the construction industry: schools, community buildings, stadia and housing developments. For the last fifteen years Elaine has concentrated on housing developments across the South West for Registered Providers and National Housebuilders. This includes urban extensions, high density, mixed use developments as well as low density edge of settlement developments.

## Participant Bios



### JESSIE WILDE, DEPUTY PROJECT DIRECTOR

Jessie is passionate about social justice and equality. In her previous role with a leading anti-slavery organisation she managed office operations, developed key stakeholder relationships and delivered training. Jessie is a skilled event manager and speaker, and her work is motivated by her conviction of the value and dignity of every person. She is currently undertaking a MSt in Social Innovation at the University of Cambridge.



### ASHER CRAIG

Asher was elected as the Labour Councillor for St George West, Bristol in May 2016 and appointed to the Cabinet with the wide reaching portfolio of Neighbourhoods in August 2016.

In March 2017 Asher stepped into the new role of Deputy Mayor – Communities, bringing into & elevating Public Health within her new portfolio.

Asher is a community activist, leader and local politician, championing the needs of the voice-less, with a particular emphasis on social, economic & racial



### ANGELIQUE RETIEF

Angelique Retief works in research and policy at Black South West Network (BSWN) alongside her PhD at the University of Bristol. Her PhD research looks to understand the role of social enterprise in the provision of housing in townships in Cape Town. In her role at BSWN, Angelique has worked on a variety of research projects, the latest being an analysis of the housing needs and aspirations of BAME communities in Bristol.



### MALCOM HAMILTON

Malcolm Hamilton is Creative Director of Play:Disrupt- an engagement consultancy that evolved from Mufti Games. Play:Disrupt seeks out barriers to participation and designs innovative ways to widen engagement, connecting with communities whom others may have overlooked. A former actor, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator and Leverhulme Scholar with a background in outdoor arts, Malcolm's playful interventions make complex issues accessible and engage audiences in unexpected ways. Clients include Arup, Great Places Lakes and Dales, University of Bristol.

## Participant Bios



**DYLAN MAY**

After over 20 years' experience in various Large and small housebuilders, Dylan has now been Land and Planning Director for Boklok for 12 months. BoKlok is a collaboration between IKEA and Skanska where we have built in excess of 13,000 low cost sustainable quality homes in the Nordics for over 20 years. Boklok was introduced in the UK in 2019, and our first project will be at Airport Road, Bristol starting within the next 4-6 weeks.



**ALISON BROMILOW**

Alison qualified as an architect and worked in private practice before becoming involved in how communities can shape planning projects in their area by working with local planning authorities and developers at pre-application stage to bring about mutually beneficial developments. NPN was set up in 2006 and helps to deliver best-practice community involvement in Bristol development, through volunteer residents planning groups.



**HELEN TILTON**

Helen leads Cratus' work in the South West, with a particular interest in research-led thinking, growing cross-sector partnerships, and the enablement of inclusive communities. Helen has 16 years' previous experience in planning practice and development communications, working across the full range of property sectors. She started her career in local government as a planner with Bristol City Council, before moving into private practice in 2007.



**LINDY MORGAN**

I am passionate about the fundamental right to access a decent home at a cost relative to a person's income as well as building communities not just houses. My career in affordable housing began as a tenant and community activist in my 20s (some, ahem....30 years ago) working to improve housing conditions and community facilities for council tenants and the wider neighbourhood. My housing experience has been based mainly around new homes development, regeneration and community led housing. I have worked for both local authorities and housing associations at executive and non-executive levels. I am currently Chair of Westworks Procurement and working as an independent consultant on a number of community and housing projects.

## Introduction

In October 2020 the Bristol Housing Festival hosted a roundtable discussion on the topic of “Healthy Consultation in Practice.” Central to the discussion was the belief that community consultation is an essential part of the conversation when building new homes, but how this should be done, when and who should be consulted is often debated.

The Bristol Housing Festival, with support from Goram Homes, brought together a variety of perspectives for this roundtable including developers, Bristol City Council, community advocates and others to discuss the purpose of consultation and re-imagine how it could be done to meet its objectives. This report summarises the key points of the debate and recommendations.

With thanks to BoKlok UK for sponsoring this event.

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*‘CONSIDERED, WELL-DESIGNED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT, NOT JUST FOR SOCIAL VALUE AND A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY BUT I THINK IT ALSO MAKES FAR BETTER ECONOMIC SENSE IN THE LONG RUN AS WELL.’*  
– MALCOLM HAMILTON

## Framing the Debate

Each participant spent three minutes introducing themselves and framing the key elements of the debate from their perspective. Malcolm Hamilton began by pointing out that building houses can be an easy area for conflict, and an easy jump to binary dialogue in which the developers are cast as aggressors and the local resident's victims. However, positive impact is possible if projects are codesigned with affected people, community consultation is started as early as possible and real work done to find out who the affected people are and how to reach them.

Elaine Olphert agreed that community consultation must be meaningful and said that local communities often have local information and aspirations that can be crucial information for developers. Melissa Mean added that for meaningful conversations to happen, democratic spaces must be created to facilitate them. Participants agreed that tick box exercises were a waste of time for everyone involved. Melissa added that it is necessary to acknowledge the power dynamics at play during consultation. Her recommendations for change were; be willing to share power, decision making and some of the risks and rewards of development and be in the conversation for the long haul – after the development has been completed.

Many of the participants raised trust-building as an essential part of consultation. Echoing Malcolm's point, Tom raised the importance of identifying key interested parties early. How to do this remained a key topic throughout the discussion. Lindy addressed the myth that early consultation and engagement with communities doesn't mean the process takes longer. In fact, early engagement often leads to more effective processes and decision-making. She also raised the point that communities should be empowered and enabled to be the peers and leaders within the engagement and consultation process, rather than the unequal power dynamic of it being 'done to them.' This often looks like one conversation at a time. Along with many other speakers, she stressed that trust is built through honest and open discussions. She also said that this kind of consultation requires resourcing, as well as the need to engage and enable young people to be part of the discussion, as it is their future communities that are being built.

Helen raised the point that practical solutions are necessary. She said it's about engagement more than consultation and suggested the need for a workable framework or process for developers and investors, to reflect the positive narrative of the city around great placemaking and community-building, and the One City Plan. This would reduce the need to rely on developers and investors to individually prioritise meaningful engagement with communities.

Another key theme that emerged was the need for clear communication, regardless of the outcome of consultation.

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*'NOT EVERYONE WILL GET WHAT THEY WANT, BUT CLEAR, HONEST AND ONGOING CONVERSATION IS KEY' – ALISON BROMILOW.*

Jessie Wilde discussed the term ‘inclusive growth,’ and the importance of the whole process being inclusive. She noted that the time, location and advertising of consultations often don’t lend themselves to inclusivity. She also said there is a need for a broader approach and suggested engaging residents in the wider conversation long before a piece of land is allocated. She asked the question: how do we bring residents into the plans for Bristol and the wider region, and let them engage with that?

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*‘IF WE’RE DREAMING, WHY COULDN’T IT START WAY FURTHER BACK, BY ENGAGING PEOPLE IN THE PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR THE WHOLE REGION?’  
– JESSIE WILDE*

Bringing a developer’s perspective, Dylan added that while BoKlok does exhibitions and consultations, and resolves issues where they can, the question remains of how developers can help the community as a whole. He agreed with Jessie that there needs to be a broader approach, possibly with other developers. He noted that as a developer, BoKlok will be out of the community in a few years, but with collaboration with other developments the community benefits could continue, e.g. with work experience. In this way developers could be there for communities’ longer term.

Angelique pointed out how the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up opportunities to engage with communities in new ways through greater online connectivity (although acknowledged this could have inclusion issues too). She said the question is ‘In whose interest is community participation really driven?’ Continuing the theme of inclusivity and engaging stakeholders, she stressed the importance of asking whose voices are being left out of these discussions. She raised the idea of creating spaces for permanent engagement which creates space for permanent dialogue rather than one-off sessions, and therefore ensuring communities are active agents of change.

Alison added that it is important to educate communities on planning and development so that they’re empowered to respond when a specific development happens in their area but noted the need for resourcing this work. Along with the others, she agreed that community engagement must be a genuine attempt to understand where the community is coming from.

Finally, Geoff agreed that it is necessary to find new ways of doing community consultation and engagement. He made the point that in every situation there are multiple people, communities and organisations, each with their own opinions, and the idea that one community as a whole will agree with a solution doesn’t work in practice. He noted that in consultation often the well-informed stakeholders are heavily engaged, but the challenge is finding the residents that are less empowered to speak.



## Key Theme 1: Purpose of Consultation

As raised by almost all the participants, the most common criticism of public consultation is that it's a 'tick box' exercise. But what is the purpose of consultation?

Malcolm started by saying that public consultation has many purposes. One purpose is to give a voice to affected people on a particular project. It is also a public relations exercise for the developer, who want to have the community on board in order to build their development and make a profit. However, these purposes don't have to stand in opposition to each other and can work together.

Many of the attendees also stressed the importance of engagement rather than consultation, implying a more active role for the community, as early as possible. Melissa suggested that a good way to get to the heart of what engagement is to ask what changes as a result of it, as this gives an indication of what influence the community really has.

Dylan and Geoff responded that while many things can and have been changed as a result of previous public consultations, viability is a key factor for developers in this regard. For example, the height and density of buildings are always controversial issues, however the reality is that land value is a major factor for developers, and if they've paid for the land fewer units may not be viable. However, open conversations are still possible, and it's still possible to ask the question 'what can we do?' Other attendees agreed that transparency from developers on land value would lead to greater trust.

The theme of open, honest communication was further developed by Alison, who noted the importance of ensuring communities feel heard by acknowledging their responses and explaining outcomes, even when they haven't been able to adjust. Communities should therefore be involved in post-consultation as well as during the consultation period.

Helen added that it would be good if a set of requirements for consultation best practice could be designed, adding that when consultation is done well, often everybody benefits from development. She highlighted the value of measuring social value alongside financial benefit in a way that shows a clear benefit for all parties, adding that communities are often not told what development will give back to the community, and developers are often not made aware of how they can meaningfully contribute in a way that has the greatest positive local impact. Aside from local residents' planning groups, there is currently no agreed formal mechanism for this.

Tom added that it could be helpful to include communities in earlier conversations about the need for development in the midst of the housing crisis. He gave an example in Bristol, where an attempt was made to include the people who actually needed the housing into the conversation. He posed the central question as: which

voices need to be listened to, and how do we find them? Alison agreed that if there are many different groups in the room, everybody learns something. Melissa highlighted the need for non-hierarchical spaces to do this. Malcolm added that its necessary to find the people who are actually impacted, and work out what barriers are stopping them being part of the conversation so we can learn how to bring them in.

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*'WHICH VOICES NEED TO BE LISTENED TO, AND HOW DO WE FIND THEM?'*  
– TOM SELWAY

It was discussed that communities shouldn't be blamed for being 'hard to reach.' Angelique said that access and information dissemination is key. Building on Jessie's earlier point, she pointed out that times, locations, childcare requirements and language can all be barriers to participation, and often events are not well-advertised. The weight of responsibility for engagement therefore rests on the community themselves.

## Key Theme 2: What works and what doesn't

The participants discussed what works and what doesn't and were asked to think about key examples.

Jessie reflected that often the engagement/consultation process is set up to enable people that want to input negatively, but doesn't necessarily provide space or positive input, and perhaps this would be better enabled if residents were invited into the process earlier, for example in pre-app. That way residents could contribute more meaningfully.

Alison added that this could work as pre-app information is not confidential in Bristol and is shared with councillors and some planning groups. Asher confirmed that this is particularly helpful in ironing out some details before the full application is in place. She used the example of the Hope Rise development, for which she facilitated local meetings in the pre-app stage and was grateful for the issues that were raised, and the wisdom and advice provided by the community.

Angelique advocated for community-led housing, co-design, co-creation, co-production and the idea of active participation that brings together different stakeholders to encourage mutual understanding and permanent engagement. Melissa highlighted the need to get beyond just consultation and aim for genuine partnership. Communities have high level of knowhow and assets and they could contribute far more if this was recognised by developers. Genuine partnerships could match community assets, skills and vision with developer technical knowhow.

Alison raised Western Harbour as an example of consultation done badly. Two years earlier, residents could see plans that no longer featured their houses, and were concerned that they were going to lose their homes, which meant there was already pent up animosity. She stressed the need for transparency and early consultation.

Tom offered the example of Southmead for consultation done well, as proven by cheering in the gallery when the planning was approved. Asher added the community had been very much part of the whole design and planning process, so even though they were giving up public space to high density building, they were invested and positive.

On a practical note, Geoff pointed out that alongside private development, the council is a major landowner and will already have bookmarked sites for development in coming years, therefore there is no excuse not to have early engagement.

Helen agreed that transparency is key, however incredibly complex. She raised the point that motivated local groups are often the first to access new information on a city-wide level and disseminate it widely on social media, turning the narrative away from a single development into a question of the trustworthiness of the city as a whole. Misinformation, or getting communication wrong can therefore be damaging.

She admitted there are no easy answers to this, but that transparency of communication and engagement starts in advance of, and looks beyond, individual development projects.

Melissa posed the question 'what would make developers value consultation more?' In response, Tom said that there is a fear among developers of consulting. They're worried about managing expectations well and being railroaded down an unviable path. However, he added that part of the solution is helping developers understand that by not engaging they're increasing their community political risk, and which can come at a cost. He gave the example of Bedminster Green, which has been in a holding pattern for years, and other schemes that have engaged well have gone through much more quickly.

Examples of innovation in this area were Oakfield in Swindon, led by Nationwide and Igloo, who hired a community organiser, and considered an endowment fund to support community activity and stewardship after the development was built, therefore demonstrating long term interest.

### Key Theme 3: Accessibility for all

Participants discussed how COVID-19 has made consultation more accessible, and what the barriers still are. The obvious point was that greater connectivity and meetings hosted online has led to greater engagement and higher numbers of participants, which is positive. It was also noted that there are inclusion issues as well (for those who don't have access to technology).

Asher observed that in her meetings, being online has opened the forum up to a much wider group of individuals, and not just the 'usual suspects.' Lindy agreed that she has noticed an increase in attendees in online meetings, and both said being online means meetings are shorter and more concise. Angelique added that her research shows more engagement from women in online forums which suggests it is potentially a more democratic space.

Malcolm provided some examples of innovative online platforms that have found ways to bring people into conversations in new, playful ways, which also attracts people who may not usually be part of the conversation. Some of the participants were unsure how to access younger participants, pointing out that it's their future we're building, and this may be a key. Malcolm did however point out that while you may be getting more people in an online room, we still need to focus on who is missing. After the pandemic we will be able to combine online and in-person meetings which will further improve accessibility.

Speaking of digital engagement tools, Melissa said that most tools still require a lot of in-person effort to facilitate real engagement. The priority must be a clear ask and user friendliness. Asher said she has managed to reach six and a half thousand people online as part of the deliberative democracy process, a top-down meets bottom-up approach that will give citizens a say in the post COVID-19 recovery of the city.

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*'I ALWAYS SAY, IGNORE THE PEOPLE AT YOUR PERIL! LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE VERY INTERESTING IDEAS TO BRING TO THE TABLE.'* – COUNCILLOR ASHER CRAIG

As the conversation moved towards co-creation, Alison talked about the possibility of bringing residents into problems rather than solutions and allowing them to bring solutions forward. With this, she recognised that people come with different agendas and a system would be needed to establish criteria that would determine which solutions carry weight. This could allow for very early engagement.

Angelique agreed that conventional forms of public consultation are too limited and superficial to keep people on board, let alone build any sense of ownership of

difficult choices. She suggested that if we're to build multi-stakeholder initiatives and long-lasting collaboration, conventional methods and techniques are often inadequate and must be reimagined.

Providing a possible example of co-creation, Asher explained that since the COVID-19 pandemic, she's been meeting with the events and hospitality sector around the new guidance to include them in the process, with positive results. The feedback has been that they have never truly felt part of the process before and have valued participating in the process rather than it being 'done to them.' Asher has been grateful for their wisdom, local knowledge and ideas.

## Recommendations

1. Consultation and engagement should happen as early as possible.
2. Communication with residents should be accessible, clear and continue into the post-consultation stage.
3. Resource and funding for consultation engagement must be addressed early in any project.
4. Models of innovative consultation should be considered, particularly those that emphasise long-term investment in communities.
5. Transparency wherever possible is recommended for future projects.
6. Inclusivity should remain a priority, in order to give a voice to affected parties, future residents and marginalised groups and developers should make every effort to reach these groups, moving towards co-creation and permanent engagement.
7. Democratic spaces for conversation should be facilitated and funded, and post COVID-19, these should combine digital platforms and in-person meetings.
8. A framework/guidance to be developed to outline best practice for consultation, in order to align developers with the wider goals of the city.
9. New ways to involve communities in the broader discussion around regional and city goals should be considered.

## Examples:

Case study

<https://cratus.co.uk/casestudies/arborfield-green>

An example of artist engagement

<https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/art-and-regeneration/empowerment-for-surrender-peoples-bureau-engaged-art-the-elephant/>

Arup's virtual engage tool

<https://www.arup.com/expertise/services/digital/virtual-engage>

Example from Citizen Lab

<https://newhamco-create.co.uk/en/projects/affordable-workspace-3-1/process>

A new land contract article

<https://medium.com/@AlastairParvin/a-new-land-contract-684c3ba1f1b3>