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Developing potential

Lessons from community experiences of regeneration

Helen Nicol and Paul Raven

About this report

Developing potential: lessons from community experiences of regeneration, was researched by Helen Nicol and Paul Raven between June and December 2018, funded by Local Trust.

What began as a guide to regeneration for community groups has become a collection of resources based on the findings from our research, and led to the creation of three related documents: This report, offering lessons and recommendations from community experiences of regeneration, a guide to regeneration and development for community groups, and five case studies detailing Big Local experiences of regeneration and development.

We want to thank everyone who participated in this research, in particular the community groups and residents, councils and developers of the Big Local areas.
All of the resources relating to this report can be found at localtrust.org.uk/developing-potential

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Cover photo: SO18 Big Local; Southampton, Hampshire
Photo credit: Benjamin Nwaneampeh

Foreword: Chris Brown Executive Chairman Igloo Regeneration

This is a vitally important document for estate regeneration.

It helps communities by sharing the experiences of those who have already experienced regeneration.

It helps councils, housing associations and developers to understand what having regeneration done to you can feel like.

It explains the benefits that having a wise and supportive community can deliver for both the process and outcome of regeneration.

It signposts the path that everyone involved in estate regeneration is embarking on.

At the start of estate regeneration, communities rarely understand the pressures facing councils, housing associations or developers.

Similarly, while individuals in those organisations, particularly those at the coal face, might empathise with residents, the organisations themselves often struggle to understand what forcibly losing your home and community can mean, particularly for the most vulnerable people.

This paper illustrates some good practice, but the reality is that everyone is learning how to co-produce estate regeneration.

We are on a journey to achieve best practice, and this paper will help all of us by signposting the best way forward.

Contents

Executive summary

This report and the related guide to regeneration for communities, were commissioned by Local Trust to provide a resource for communities experiencing regeneration initiatives. It aims to bring together case studies and practical guidance to help ensure that communities are effectively involved in the regeneration process, to the benefit of both local residents and those designing and delivering future regeneration schemes.

What has become clear in the development of this paper, is the chasm which currently exists between the experiences of the local communities coping with regeneration on their doorsteps, and assumptions about, or the limited consideration of those experiences by the organisations implementing regeneration projects.

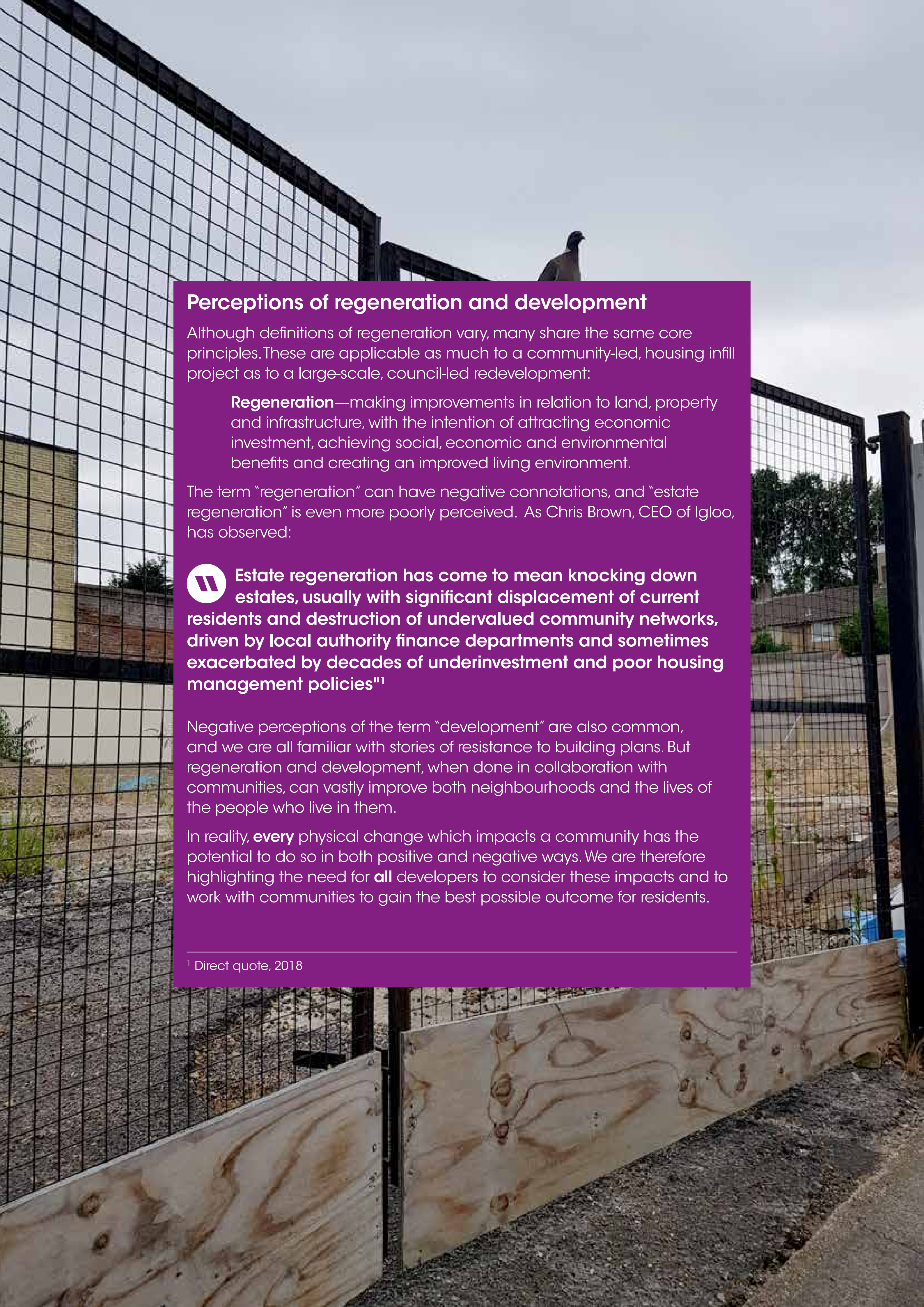
That lack of consideration, as John Boughton notes in his account of recent regeneration approaches (Municipal Dreams, 2018), often *"…catastrophically downplays the sheer, life-changing, sometimes life-threatening disruption"* caused to local residents by physical regeneration schemes.

The imbalance of power between those leading regeneration and the communities it affects has been a major theme emerging from the five case studies underpinning this research. It results in a failure to recognise not only the real value of communities where neighbourhood change is concerned, but also the value of community anchor institutions in helping bridge the gap between residents, planners and developers.

This report looks to establish principles and approaches through which that power imbalance can be addressed, and makes four recommendations to those with power:

- include residents as partners
- involve residents in governance
- provide social infrastructure
- be place-focused.

We believe the lessons from this research are widely relevant. Residents, service providers, housing associations, landlords and politicians will all find something of relevance to them. That said, we have focused our attention on those who have the greatest stake in regeneration, and those who have the greatest influence over it. This paper will therefore be of particular interest to community groups, local authorities and central government.



Perceptions of regeneration and development

Although definitions of regeneration vary, many share the same core principles. These are applicable as much to a community-led, housing infill project as to a large-scale, council-led redevelopment:

> **Regeneration**—making improvements in relation to land, property and infrastructure, with the intention of attracting economic investment, achieving social, economic and environmental benefits and creating an improved living environment.

The term "regeneration" can have negative connotations, and "estate regeneration" is even more poorly perceived. As Chris Brown, CEO of Igloo, has observed:

> **"Estate regeneration has come to mean knocking down estates, usually with significant displacement of current residents and destruction of undervalued community networks, driven by local authority finance departments and sometimes exacerbated by decades of underinvestment and poor housing management policies"[1]**

Negative perceptions of the term "development" are also common, and we are all familiar with stories of resistance to building plans. But regeneration and development, when done in collaboration with communities, can vastly improve both neighbourhoods and the lives of the people who live in them.

In reality, **every** physical change which impacts a community has the potential to do so in both positive and negative ways. We are therefore highlighting the need for **all** developers to consider these impacts and to work with communities to gain the best possible outcome for residents.

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[1] Direct quote, 2018

Introduction

In 2018 - six years into the Big Local programme - Local Trust recognised that some Big Local partnerships were sharing stories about the impact of regeneration and development. They were struggling to find any useful information on how they might gain from regeneration and development in their areas and reported a lack of guidance that reflected the perspective of community groups like themselves.

The scale of regeneration varied from case to case, but Local Trust felt the concerns being voiced warranted further exploration to identify ways that Big Local areas could achieve more for local residents. Local Trust was keen to provide resources that might be valuable both to communities experiencing regeneration, and also to those involved in designing and delivering area-based regeneration projects.

In 2016, David Cameron announced that central government would *"…build a list of post-war estates across the country that are ripe for re-development, and work with up to 100,000 residents to put together regeneration plans."*[2] With estate regeneration high on the government agenda, a flurry of guides and strategic approaches to estate regeneration were published, including:

- *Altered Estates: How to reconcile competing interests in estate regeneration*, Levitt Bernstein 2016[3]
- *The Create Streets community guide to creating happy, healthy places*, 2016[4]
- *Great Estates: Putting communities at the heart of regeneration*, Res Publica, 2016[5]
- *National Strategy for Estate Regeneration*, DCLG, 2016[6]
- *Better Homes for Local People, the Mayor's Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration*, GLA, 2018[7]

Almost all advocated the importance of community engagement, but most were advising the housing sector rather than communities themselves. Information on rights and obligations in the context of regeneration tended to focus on individual residents rather than wider communities.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-to-transform-sink-estates. Accessed 25th January 2019.
[3] https://www.levittbernstein.co.uk/site/assets/files/2444/altered_estates_2016.pdf. Accessed 19th January 2019.
[4] http://dev.createstreets.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Love-thy-Neighbourhood-2016.pdf. Accessed 19th January 2019.
[5] https://www.respublica.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Great-Estates-2016.pdf. Accessed 19th January 2019.
[6] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/estate-regeneration-national-strategy. Accessed 25th January 2019.
[7] https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/better-homes-for-local-people-the-mayors-good-practice-guide-to-estate-regeneration.pdf. Accessed 25th January 2019.

And despite the ubiquity of resident scrutiny approaches in social housing organisations, which give tenants a voice in the management of social housing, there was a dearth of information on how communities might find a voice in regeneration programme governance.

It became clear that information on how best to engage, influence and negotiate for the benefit of communities was very hard to find. In order to address this shortfall, Local Trust gave a number of Big Locals the opportunity to become involved in action research designed to build their capacity to engage more productively in regeneration programmes, whilst helping inform the development of wider resources of value to communities, developers, planners and others involved in the design of regeneration schemes in the future. These resources are designed to:

1. share the lessons learned in the five case study areas, to enable community groups and developers to gain a deeper understanding of the realities of regeneration;
2. recommend ways to fully realise the value of community contributions to regeneration and development; and
3. empower community groups to build confidence, capability and influence so they are better able to benefit from regeneration and development.

Above all, we hope these resources will provide the community-focused guidance which is largely absent from other regeneration guides.

Methodology and Big Local experience

Between 2018 and 2019, five Big Local partnerships volunteered to take part in research conducted by Blue Chula. Eight participating Big Local partnerships were self-selected on the basis of their experiences of regeneration and development, and the benefits they felt the offer of Local Trust support could provide. It was not possible to control the type of regeneration under consideration, and as a result, all of the regeneration cases we refer to are council-led, housing-focused developments.

Interviews, workshops and meetings with community groups residents, landlords, developers and other stakeholders have informed both the guide for communities and this paper. In-depth conversations were held to gain an understanding of each group's background, context, challenges and objectives.

Future-focused visioning workshops took place in Welsh House Farm and Northfleet. SO18, PEACH and Firs & Bromford groups felt a visioning format would not enable them to progress their work, and so bespoke workshops were co-designed to fit each of their circumstances. Information gathered at the workshops was used to inform the case studies and to propose next-steps recommendations which were provided to each of the groups after the events.

Full case studies from each of the areas can be found at **localtrust.org.uk/developing-potential**

[8] http://bluechula.co.uk


Welsh House Farm, Birmingham
Developing ideas and plans toward their objectives. Working to gain control of underutilised assets.
Firs and Bromford, Birmingham
Working separately from the council creating plans for a physical environment which supports their community development work.
PEACH, Custom House
Created their own plan for regeneration as an alternative to that of the council, using the council's own figures as the basis.
SO18, Southampton
Acting as a "critical friend" to the council and a conduit for resident concerns. Taking a place-focused approach.
Northfleet, Kent
Wanting more control over what happens in the area and to be involved in decision making. Working to maintain the area's identity.

What we discovered

Although there were obvious differences between these five cases, there were also some telling similarities. Six common issues were raised by more than one Big Local area:

- **Engagement approaches restricted participation: *four out of five areas*** described engagement approaches which were either non-participatory or tokenistic. The fifth group had achieved a more participatory level of engagement with their council, in the main due to their own persistence in ensuring they were treated as partners.
- **There was little or no involvement in the governance of projects: *four out of five areas*** we worked with had no involvement in the formal governance of the development projects taking place in their areas. Only one group had secured community representation on a programme board.
- **Regeneration focused on housing, not place: *four out of five areas*** informed us that housing appeared to have been the main or total focus for councils. In most cases there seemed to have been little or no consideration of the impact of developments on local services, transport infrastructure or employment opportunities.
- **There were different approaches within the council and/or no single point of contact: *three out of five areas*** described the difficulties they had identifying the right council officers to talk with about plans for their areas. Two groups fared better in connecting with the council. One group had an existing relationship with the relevant council officer, the other succeeded through persistent attempts to seek out those with the right level of autonomy or influence. Another frequently received conflicting information on council policy from two officers from different departments.

- **Social infrastructure was not properly considered:** ***three out of five*** **areas** indicated that social infrastructure, in particular, accessible community centres and leisure spaces such as gardens and parks, was not given the right level of attention by developers. Where these assets had been discussed, conversations tended to be around providing buildings required by planning rules rather than about the way new facilities might be run to meet the needs of the community. The importance to communities of places to meet, and of wider, hard and soft social infrastructure, is highlighted in Local Trust's recent work with Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OSCI).[9]

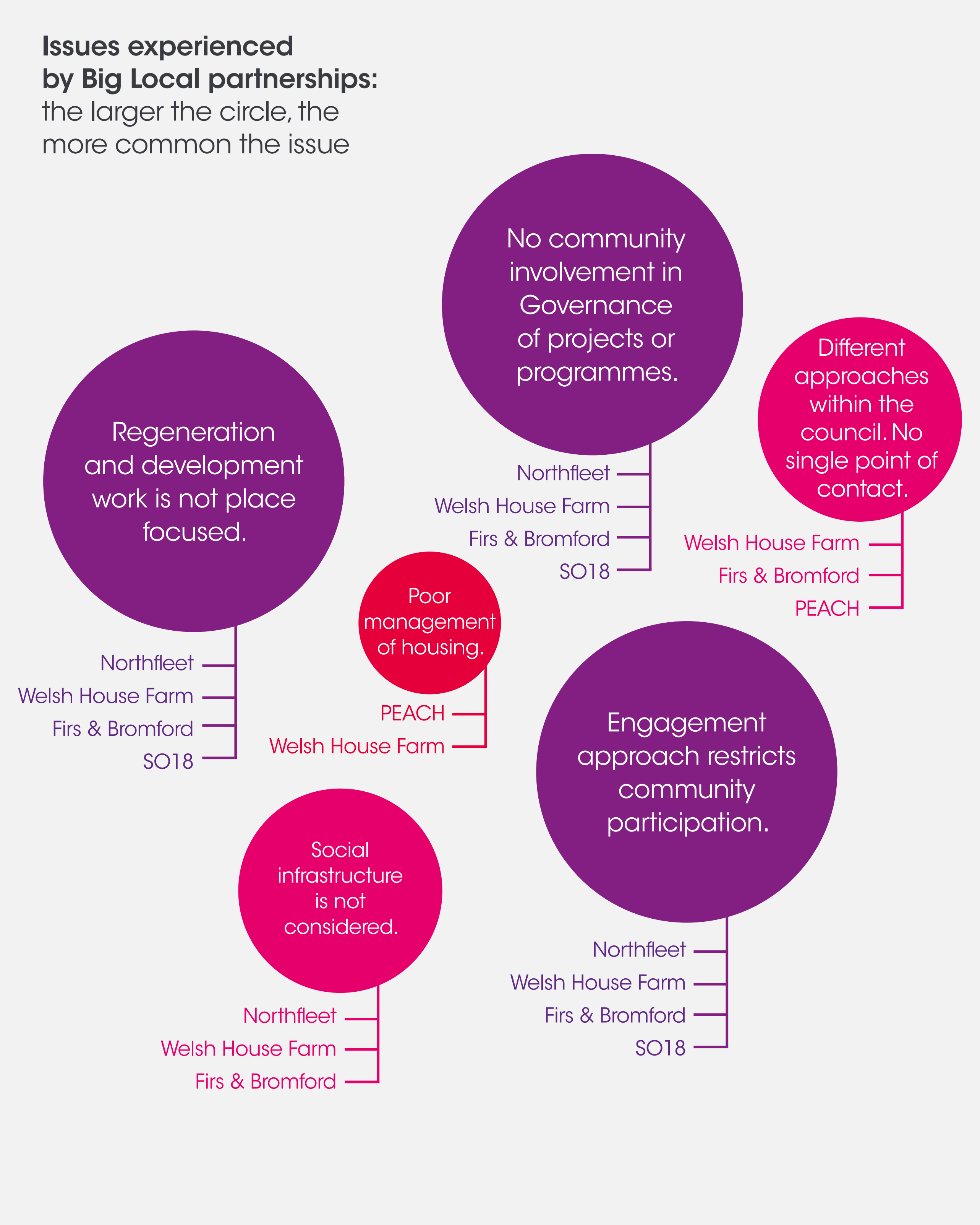
- **Poor management of housing:** ***two out of five*** **areas** residents told stories of "unliveable" housing conditions. In both cases, new developments appeared to be higher priority for council landlords than ensuring that satisfactory repairs to existing accommodation were made within a reasonable timescale.

Community groups felt they needed to better understand the potential impact of decisions made by developers so that they could effectively challenge those decisions if necessary. They also felt that developers needed to better understand the communities they work with, to value their knowledge and insight, and to treat them as collaborators and partners.

The lack of a place-based focus, in four out of five of our cases, may demonstrate the impact of funding cuts which limit the ability of councils to take a neighbourhood view of developments; it may also demonstrate a worrying tendency for councils to see regeneration and development as merely a way to address housing-supply shortfalls.

[9] https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/ Accessed 30th September 2019.

Fig. 1 below shows the main issues described by the five Big Local partnerships and where they occurred.



Changing community roles

The way in which the Big Local partnerships in our sample have engaged with councils or developers has been shaped by a number of factors:

- the stage at which they became involved in the regeneration process;
- their level of confidence in their knowledge of regeneration;
- their existing relationship with the council or developer; and
- their existing or planned Big Local work.

Context, ambition, maturity and history have all influenced the way each group has approached relationship-building. It is important to note that an approach to engaging with councils and developers may work in one context but may not be the most effective way to achieve aims or objectives when that context changes. Throughout our research, we observed that the working relationship between the community groups and lead regeneration organisations changed as the process continued.

- **SO18** approached the regeneration in their area as a critical friend, but became aware that they must take a more activist approach in order to protect their community and ensure they have the ability to contribute to and critically assess planned changes.
- **PEACH** initially focused on community organising and direct action, an approach which enabled them to make a considerable positive impact for their community. They now recognise the need to work more collaboratively so as to be viewed as an organisation capable of effectively sharing power with the council in relation to decisions on regeneration.
- **Welsh House Farm** have experienced different engagement approaches from their council. In one instance, they worked collaboratively with council officers to identify locations for infill housing, co-producing plans that were acceptable to both the community and the council. In another, they were only nominally engaged regarding plans to develop new housing. They are now taking a more activist role, working with the council to secure access to assets in their area.
- **Firs & Bromford** previously prioritised community development over physical infrastructure, but now recognise the need to engage with the council to realise their urban village aspirations. They are taking a more collaborative approach to ensure they have the power to take their plans forward with the support of the council.
- **Northfleet** have developed a working relationship with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) based around their desire to understand, as much as influence, the plans for their area. They are now building stronger connections with EDC, who in turn have recognised that their engagement approach to date, while well intentioned, has been perceived as tokenistic.

The table below (Fig. 2) indicates the relationship Big Local groups have had with the lead regeneration organisation, and their desired level of participation in the context of future regeneration and development.

Fig. 2: Current and future behaviours and desired level of participation

	Stance taken by partnerships	Desired level of participation	Intended future stance
SO18	Critical friend	Partnership	More activist
PEACH	Activist/ community organiser	Delegation/ control	More collaborative
Welsh House Farm	Receiver of information	Partnership	More activist
Firs & Bromford	Working in isolation	Delegation/ control	More collaborative
Northfleet	Receiver of information	Partnership	More activist

Analysis of findings

The six common issues described by Big Local partnerships can be framed in the context of two main themes:

- Community participation
- Place-based approaches

Community participation

Communities have connections, knowledge and skills which could help councils deliver their objectives and statutory responsibilities, but for the value of communities to be realised, trusting and mutually supportive relationships need to be built. Councils may perceive such relationship-building as prohibitively resource-intensive, and, with staff already overburdened, they may not fully consider the cost/benefit implications of engaging with communities. According to McKee[10], residents will often be best placed to identify the problems, priorities and necessary solutions in an area because they are intimately familiar with it. Time spent building trust and a good working relationship with community groups can provide councils with valuable insights into social and transport infrastructure, public realm and public services.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that engaged communities are more than capable of making decisions based on a systems view of their neighbourhood, going *"…beyond simply aggregating individual preferences, as representative democracy does."*[11] In one of the Big Local areas, residents rejected initial plans for new housing, arguing that what was needed was an improved bus service.

Success story: Leathermarket Community Benefit Society (CBS)

The Leathermarket Community Benefit Society (CBS) has built 27 new homes where garages stood previously. A truly community-led approach was taken, and residents have been involved at every stage of the design work.

Residents reported that they are much happier than with the traditional development approach, because they had an opportunity to shape the design – from the layout of the buildings to the interiors of flats.

As demonstrated by this development, empowering the community to tackle the pressing need for new council-rent homes for themselves has created a scheme of real benefit to the area and its residents.

[10] McKee, K. (2008). Transforming Scotland's public-sector housing through community ownership: The reterritorialisation of housing governance? Space and Polity, 12(2), 183-196.

[11] Clapham, D. and Foye, C, 2019 How should we evaluate housing outcomes?, The UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

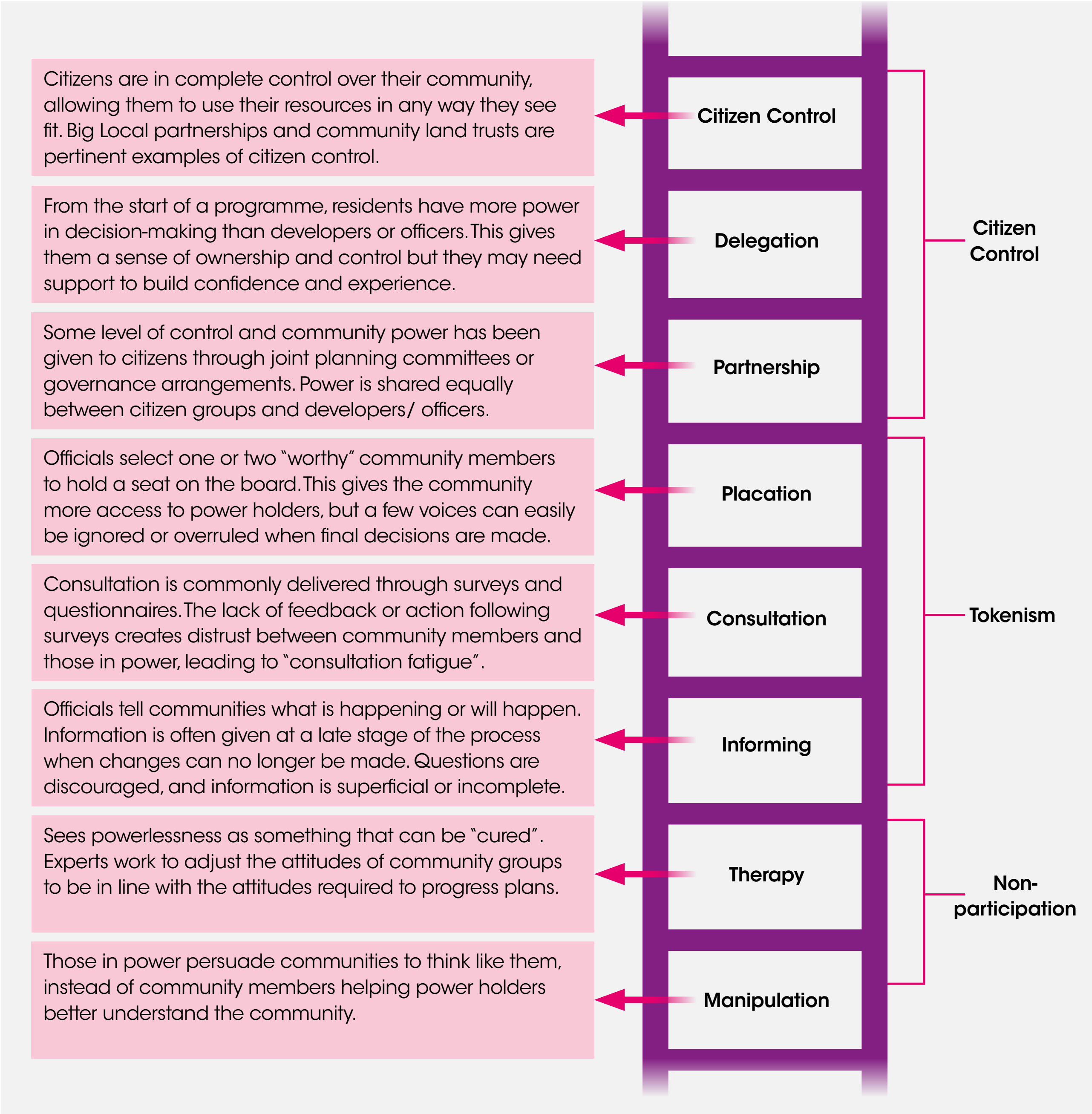


Fig. 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969)

The case was made that public transport improvements would only be financially viable if greater demand was created by increasing the number of residents in the area to use the service. After debating this explanation, residents voted for more housing. This more participatory approach recognises the effectiveness of collective decision-making and demonstrates the ability of individuals to debate, reason and find common ground, or find cogent reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with proposals.

Despite the benefits of adopting a more participatory approach, four out of five of the councils from our sample took a controlling stance, which informs rather than includes residents in developments. Using Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Fig. 3) to analyse the type of involvement with councils and developers that our sample reported, it appears that the majority of the councils engaged the community groups in a tokenistic way. Even those arrangements which appear to have some level of power sharing, as with the PEACH example, do not release any real decision-making power to citizens.

Nurture Development's model of participation (Fig. 4) categorises situations in a scale from limited collaboration through to those where the community acts for itself. Using this model to assess our groups' relationships shows that councils are acting on behalf of our sample groups. They are using what Cormac Russell describes as a charity model, which "…results in building dependency upon resources that can be lost at any point in the future." [12]

Fig. 4: Nurture Development's categories of dependence and independence

[12] https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/abcd-approach/bridging-the-gap-expert-to-alongsider/. Accessed 24th January 2019.

Fig. 5 shows the type of engagement experienced in each of our case-study areas, from the perspective of both the Nurture Development model and the Ladder of Participation framework.

Regulating engagement: resident ballots

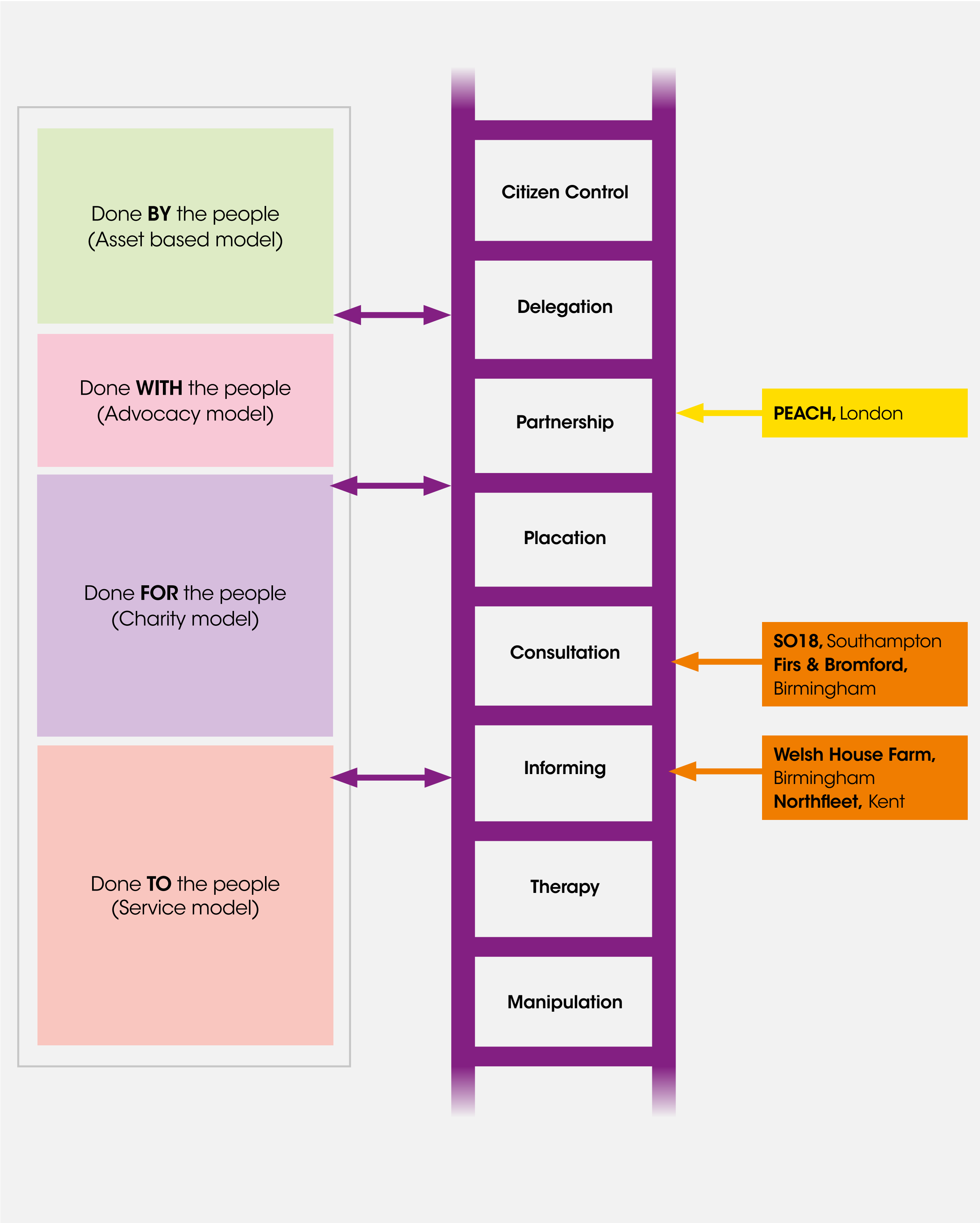
The case for engaging communities in regeneration has so far been made with incentives rather than regulation, but that will soon change for developers in London. In 2018, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced that he would make successful resident ballots a condition for estate-regeneration funding. This is the first time such a condition has been introduced anywhere in the country. Residents must now vote in favour of a plan, and must therefore be fully engaged in the regeneration process to make informed choices about whether or not to support proposed plans.

Anyone drawing up plans for estate regeneration must involve local people and must consider what impact their plans will have on people who live there now."[13]

This is far from being a watertight protection for communities. The mandated ballot can be held at any time, which means there is a danger that residents may be asked to vote on plans which could conceivably change later on. Nonetheless, this condition does increase the likelihood that residents will have more control over regeneration, at least in London.

[13] https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/requirement-for-estate-regeneration-ballots. Accessed 25th January 2019.

Fig. 5: Level of dependence/independence and level of engagement using Nurture development categories and ladder of participation



Involving communities in governance

Community involvement in governance can expedite conflict resolution, build effective partnerships and help to develop shared objectives which change community mindsets from "why don't they" (make it better for us) to "how can we" (make a change together).[14] However, the involvement of community representatives or residents in the governance of the regeneration schemes occurred in only one of our five cases. Even in this instance, the council did not invite community representatives to participate. It was PEACH who insisted the community have a more formal governance role. And, having been questioned on the extent to which the group represented the community, PEACH was forced to fight to ensure that community representatives elected by their peers in a democratic process be given a place on the programme board.

In fact, research into community involvement in the governance of local strategic partnerships by the JRF indicated that, *"Effective community activists are frequently considered unrepresentative by reason of their effectiveness..."* The RSA identified a series of myths (Fig. 6) which could be used to explain the reluctance of councils to enter into more participatory relationships with community groups.

The lack of a formal mandate for community involvement in regeneration-programme governance in the guides to regeneration published by government, by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and by various think-tanks and housing networks, is more than an oversight—it is a serious omission. Without a perception of participatory engagement as good practice in relation to regeneration and development, councils may fail to gain the benefits of working closely with residents. But worse than that, they may experience the political and reputational ramifications of not working effectively with community groups, as with projects such as the Haringey Development Vehicle[15], the Carpenters Estate in Newham[16], and the West Kensington and Gibbs Green development in Hammersmith and Fulham.[17]

Success story: PEACH, Custom House

Rather than fighting against regeneration proposals for their area, PEACH adopted the Council's figures for demolition and new build as their own. They developed a community-led "alternative regeneration plan" which was used to procure support to develop the council's masterplan.

PEACH have successfully negotiated an equal presence for elected community representatives on the Custom House regeneration steering group. If problems around the ability of the council to delegate decision-making power can be resolved, the residents of Custom House will be empowered to act as a defining partner in the process, rather than merely the recipients of planned change.

[14] JRF, 2006, The value added by community involvement in governance. https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/value-added-community-involvement-governance. Accessed 24th January 2019.

[15] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/01/haringey-council-claire-kober-momentum-residents. Accessed 24th January 2019.

[16] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/27/london-placemaking-social-housing-communities-tenants Accessed 24th January 2019.

[17] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/mar/09/battle-earls-court-council-estates. Accessed 23rd January 2019.

Fig. 6: Community engagement myths (table from New Conversations, LGA, 2017[18])

The myth	The reality
It's too expensive	The costs of engagement are usually tiny compared to the overall cost of the service, and this small expense can play a vital risk- management role, often ensuring that the service provided is of a high quality.
Citizens aren't up to it	Citizens have expertise that professionals often do not, including knowledge about the impact of services and decisions on service users. Who knows more about local needs and conditions than local people themselves?
It only works for easy issues	There are numerous examples where people have successfully engaged citizens in some of the most complicated and contentious issues of our time. In fact, as risks mount, we will need engagement more.
Citizen power is a "floodgate"	We prefer to look at citizen engagement as a pan boiling over if left covered. While a gut instinct might be to slam the lid down tight, this tends to make matters worse, rather than giving citizens the chance to air grievances and let the steam dissipate.
People don't want to be involved (they just want good services)	Not everyone will want to run their local library or set up a community-action forum. However, three-quarters of people routinely say they would like to be more involved in their communities if the opportunity could be integrated within their busy lives.

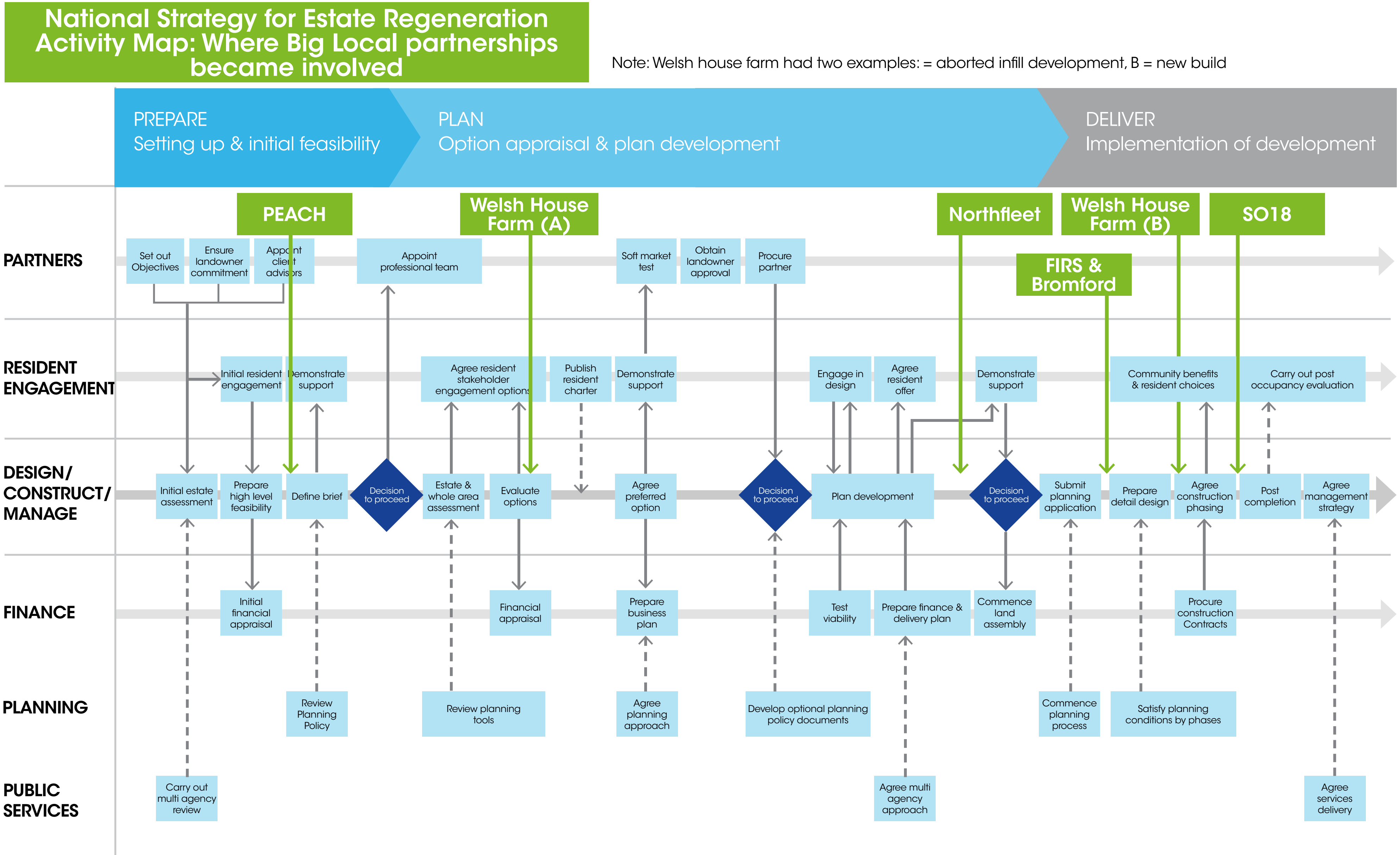
[18] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%209-2_0.pdf. Accessed 24th January 2019.

Engaging early and throughout

The National Strategy for Estate Regeneration activity map (see Fig. 7) suggests that communities should be engaged early on in the process of regeneration, at around the same time as the development of a high-level feasibility study. Our case studies show that community groups are being engaged at much later stages on the regeneration timeline, by which point plans are often already finalised. As Fig. 7 (an annotated version of the National Strategy for Estate Regeneration activity map) shows, PEACH were able to connect with their council relatively early in the regeneration process—not because they were invited to do so, but because they became aware of the intention to regenerate and took action almost immediately to create their own masterplan. The other four areas began their dialogue with developers much later. In one case, this was only possible because of a chance meeting with a council officer who mentioned the plans in passing. This tendency to connect with communities late on in the process of regeneration means that opportunities for residents to influence schemes are often limited. This can generate frustration and distrust, ultimately resulting in cynicism and a lack of engagement with the project. However, it is important to note that, even if the opportunity to engage communities at the start of the process has been missed, it is better to begin conversations late than to avoid having them at all.

As the National Strategy action map demonstrates, regeneration can be described as a linear process: a series of actions that starts with the identification of need and ends with the delivery of improvements or new structures. In reality, the process is rarely so straightforward, and each stage can go through a number of iterations. Fig. 8 shows how the process worked in reality for one of the areas we worked with. Our guide to estate regeneration for communities acknowledges this more systems-based understanding of regeneration by providing a set of principles to consider, rather than a programme of actions to work through in order.

Fig. 7: Annotated National Strategy for Estate Regeneration Activity Map



Effective working between communities and councils

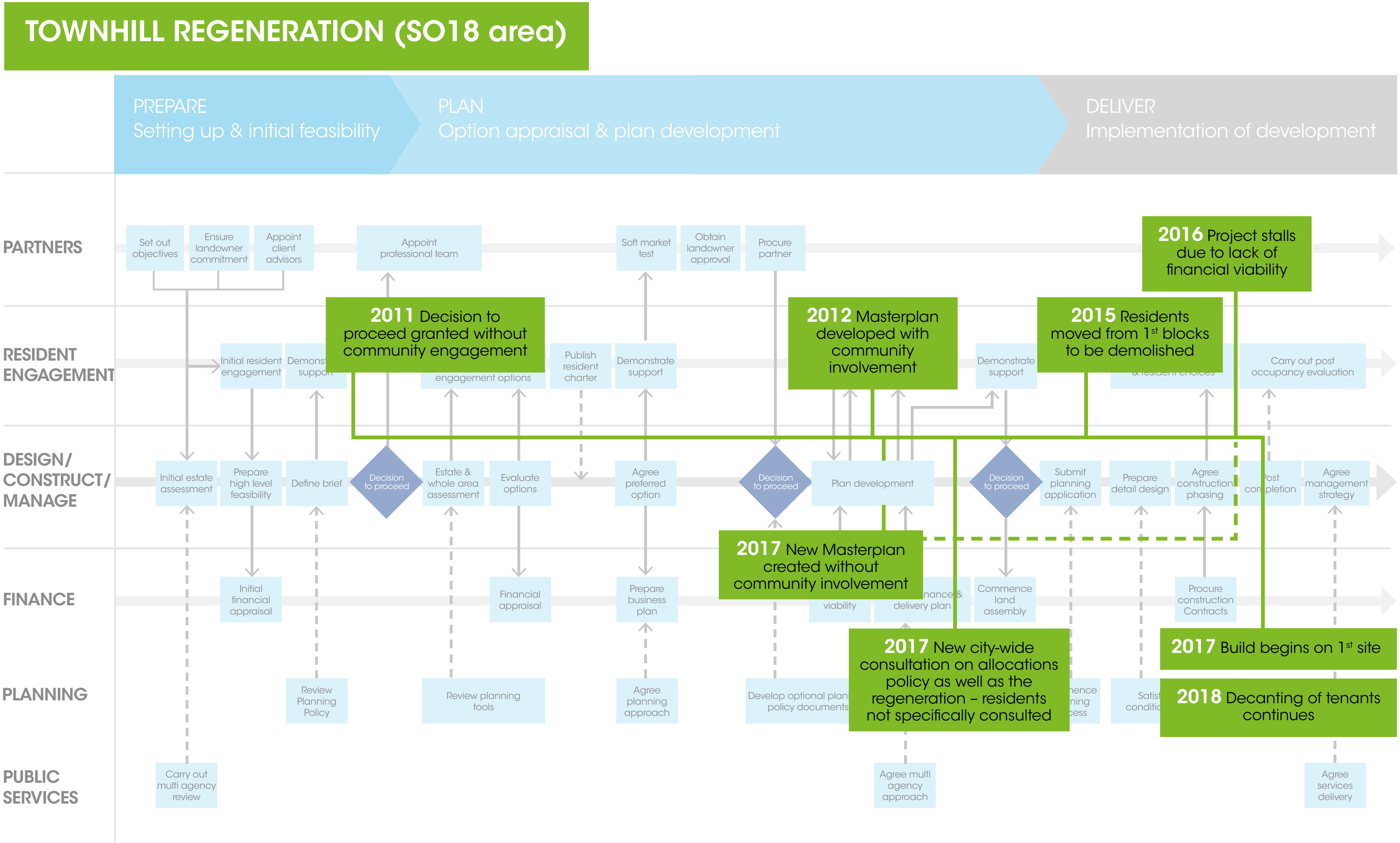
In three of our five cases, groups reported considerable difficulties in working with councils. The main areas of challenges are explored below:

Multiple contacts: finding the right person from the council to engage with is one of the greatest challenges experienced by the groups in our study. The organisational structure of councils is designed to facilitate effective performance and demonstrate value for money in different areas such as education, public health and housing. But from the perspective of a community-focused group, these structures are arbitrary. For instance, the differentiation in housing departments between new build and housing management is largely irrelevant to a community group looking at the totality of housing in their area. The situation becomes more complex where community groups are working across council areas, for example, in Firs & Bromford, where plans to develop an urban village cut across housing, parks, environment, planning, transport, business and public health. Without the ability to connect with an individual from the council who has a remit for a place or neighbourhood, community groups may have to engage with upwards of five different council officers. Considering an average salary of £25,000 per person, an hour of the time of a neighbourhood-focused officer would cost around £17, compared with £87 for an hour each with five different individuals.

No or little autonomy for council officers: even if it is possible for community groups to identify and engage an officer with the right knowledge and remit to take actions forward, the ability for those officers to make decisions about potential ways of working is often limited. For instance, PEACH engaged with a number of different officers before connecting with individuals who they felt had the authority to make relevant decisions, or who could persuade the council that a co-production approach would be the most effective way forward. It has been necessary for them to gain the support of the mayor so that officers could have a persuasive and politically endorsed argument for working differently with the community.

Different approaches taken by different areas of the council: even where community groups have managed to identify officers with the autonomy to make decisions, collaboration has been complicated because of different areas of the council taking very different approaches to engagement. In the case of Welsh House Farm, the regeneration-focused officers have worked in collaboration with the Big Local group, enabling open debate which has led to agreement and consensus on some challenging issues. In contrast, officers responsible for new-build housing did not engage the community and instead announced a new development in a letter to residents. This lack of consistency is understandably confusing for residents and, in some cases, one approach can negate the positive effects of another.

Fig. 8: The Townhill Park regeneration process compared with a linear activity plan



Place-based approaches

Despite explicit recommendations in the National Planning Policy Framework that a place-based approach be taken, four of the councils did not frame their activities in the context of place at all.

"Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings."[20]

The impact of funding cuts may limit the ability of councils to take a place-based view of developments, but considering regeneration and development as merely a solution to housing-supply shortfalls not only reduces opportunities for residents to influence plans for their areas, it diminishes the opportunities to reduce public-service spend that a place-based approach can provide. The repercussions of failing to consider the impact additional housing can have on public services and infrastructure—such as overloaded doctors' surgeries, limited school places and traffic congestion—are potentially damaging to the wellbeing of residents.

In Southampton, it was the members of SO18 who lobbied for a place-focused, multi-stakeholder group to be created, which finally brought to light the difficulties the already full local schools would face if demand for places were to increase still further. Had the council considered the area as a system rather than addressing housing provision in isolation, new residents of the Townhill Estate may have avoided the disruption caused by having to send their children to school in another location entirely.

Success story: Granby Four Streets

While the Granby Residents Association (GRA) lobbied the council to save four streets of houses from demolition, residents started to green the area, planting ivy so it could grow up the empty buildings, painting the tinned-up windows and starting what became a hugely successful street market.

As the residents made progress, they began to take a more collaborative approach, working with the council to not only regenerate the area, but to provide employment and training opportunities for local people through the establishment of the Granby Workshop. The workshop went on to win the 2015 Turner Prize.

[20] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740441/National_Planning_Policy_Framework_web_accessible_version.pdf. Accessed 25h January 2019.

Essential social infrastructure

Social infrastructure encompasses the buildings, facilities and activities that make a place what it is. It promotes the formation and development of social relationships, enabling people to get together, form friendships, learn skills and enjoy where they live. It is vital for the wellbeing of residents, and, as Dan Gregory says in his essay, Skittled Out?:

"Social action, social enterprise and social innovation cannot flow of their own accord: they rely upon social infrastructure. This is the long-term asset that supports social action, volunteering, co-operation and social enterprise."[21]

In three of our cases, social infrastructure has been a major area of concern for the Big Local partnerships:

- **Northfleet:** conversations about the need for community spaces have been dominated by the response of the developers to the requirements of Section 106,[22] commonly used to secure financial contributions to provide infrastructure or affordable housing. Some residents felt the planned provision of community centres was a tokenistic gesture which lacked a proper consideration of how such assets should or could be managed and which failed to recognise social infrastructure as a vital element of a successful scheme.
- **Welsh House Farm:** residents explained how difficult it had been to engage the council in a conversation about increasing the use of an underutilised community space. Recently, the council has agreed to explore possible approaches to maximising the use of council-run assets, with the Welsh House Farm Big Local taking over the evening and weekend running of a community centre in their neighbourhood.
- **Firs & Bromford:** residents have developed plans for an urban village, with a strong focus on the improvement of social infrastructure in the area. Their main challenge has been to persuade stakeholders and landowners of the feasibility, sustainability and viability of their plan. With the council's attention on the supply of housing rather than the infrastructure in which that housing sits, the residents know they need to increase their influence if their plans are to become a reality. They are now considering the formation of a community land trust which will enable them to take some control over the area and so provide badly needed social infrastructure.

[21] Gregory, Dan (2019) Skittled Out? Local Trust and Locality.
[22] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/106. Accessed 25th January 2019.

Recommendations

We have created a series of recommendations which aim to address the challenges faced by the five community groups that took part in our research. They focus on the limited value placed on the knowledge, experiences and insights of residents; the lack of recognition of the importance of social infrastructure; and the problems raised by providing housing rather than creating liveable places.

1 Include residents as partners: organisations responsible for the regeneration or development of existing neighbourhoods should recognise the value of residents and engage them as partners from the start and throughout the process. Where residents have no real voice, a community-development approach could be used to ensure they are able to participate in projects as partners.

Our research indicates that community groups are not always valued, and in some cases are barely engaged, in regeneration programmes. Community groups often have a deep knowledge of their neighbourhood and how it works, strong connections with residents, a drive to improve their area and often a desire to work collaboratively with other bodies to make positive changes. However, the majority of our cases demonstrate a reluctance or inability of councils to relinquish any decision-making power to the community. Some local authorities have recognised the benefits that working with community groups can bring and are working in collaboration with residents to realise those benefits. But if this is not done respectfully, residents can sometimes view such efforts to build relationships with community groups as exploitative or patronising.

Examples from the case studies:

- **PEACH Big Local** have had to be fairly militant in their attempts to draw attention to issues in and around Custom House, particularly issues raised by regeneration proposals, requiring difficult conversations with Newham Council representatives and councillors. If the council had viewed PEACH as an equal partner, or at least as experts on their area, a more effective working relationship may have been built much earlier in the process, saving time, energy and money and expediting the communities' support for the proposed regeneration.

- **Firs & Bromford** developed their own regeneration plans without any significant attempt to engage with Birmingham City Council. They now recognise that the council could be the greatest obstacle to their aspirations for the area, and that moving towards a co-production approach with the council is necessary for them to achieve their objectives. Better communications and a willingness to recognise the potential in proposals from the group would enable the council to develop a place-focused approach to meeting its housing objectives, as well as accessing the energy of this lively community.
- **SO18 and Southampton City Council** have developed a trusting and mutually respectful arrangement where the community is effectively acting as a critical friend. However, SO18 feel that, despite this strong relationship, their concerns about the impact of the regeneration of Townhill Park on its residents are not being heard. They are now debating whether to take a more activist role in the regeneration. The council would be well advised to develop a mutually supportive, power-sharing relationship between themselves and SO18 in order to gain from the passion, skills and knowledge of the group.

Community participation and collaborative working between councils or housing associations and residents is becoming the norm in the case of resident-led scrutiny panels. But this is not yet the case for regeneration and development. We believe there are important lessons from scrutiny approaches which could be transferred from the realm of housing management to regeneration programmes.

[23] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing. Accessed 12th February 2019.

2 Involve residents in governance: local community organisations with the ability to legitimately represent residents should be involved directly in their governance. This would help provide residents with the ability to influence decisions about the future of their neighbourhoods and aid developers in progressing projects which are truly supported by the community.

Despite government policy aspirations around citizen participation, as with the 2018 social housing green paper[23], it is surprising that none of the many recent guides to estate regeneration includes a mandate for community representation in regeneration projects. Clear guidelines and requirements for acceptable representation, whether directly elected or otherwise structured, would ensure a fair hearing for tenants, leaseholders and owners alike.

Example from the case studies:

- **PEACH** have experienced difficulties not only with evidencing the legitimacy of their community representation, but also with the ability of community members to effectively co-produce development plans. Their desire to demonstrate the potential for a motivated community group to bring skills as well as passion to a regeneration project was met with questions about the extent to which they truly represented the views of residents within the boundary of the scheme. With considerable support from residents, and the backing of the local mayor, elections were held for community representatives who would take their places on the regeneration programme board.

Although PEACH successfully facilitated the introduction of democratically elected representatives into the masterplanning process, challenges from the legal department of the council around the scheme of delegation have so far prevented the council from delegating decision-making powers to the group.

3 **Provide social infrastructure:** local authorities should actively evaluate the need for social infrastructure wherever housing redevelopment or regeneration is planned, and co-produce an approach to providing that social infrastructure with local residents. Central government funding policy should enable the creation of social infrastructure in all forms as a key aspect of any development, whether it is a new development or one focused on the refurbishment of existing homes.

Housing without social infrastructure creates places without a heart. Many of the frustrations associated with regeneration projects, felt by landlords and developers as well as by residents, emerge from the lack of funding for social infrastructure. Social infrastructure includes community facilities, shared leisure assets and spaces for social interaction. It also includes health and education facilities, which are perceived as having greater value and are therefore prioritised over community facilities.

The lack of value ascribed to social infrastructure in policy is analogous to the fate of social care provision in the original vision of the welfare state. Social care was undervalued in relation to healthcare as social infrastructure is undervalued in relation to housing. It appears that social infrastructure has been pushed aside by the mandated necessities of housing provision as budgets have tightened.

While there is a demonstrable willingness from communities to run a wide variety of initiatives and projects, they need suitable buildings and facilities but also funding and resources to manage them. Section 106 funding is a useful tool to address this need, but the implementation of required facilities seems to be viewed as an onerous obligation on the part of some developers, while others assume that building a community centre without thoughtful consideration as to how it might be staffed and run is sufficient to meet the requirements of legislation.

There is clearly a potential a role for community land trusts here. Having land in community ownership can facilitate a stronger link between housing and community amenities, workspaces and enterprises which may facilitate local growth.

Examples from the case studies:

- **Welsh House Farm and Firs & Bromford** have struggled with little success to gain any control over unused or underused community assets. They believe that having the ability to collaborate with the council in the running of these assets would enable them to deliver much-needed activities, increase the social value of the assets and create more viable, sustainable community spaces for existing and future residents.
- **Northfleet** successfully manage a previously underused facility in their area, which is now the hub of their projects and activities. However, communications from the development corporation have given the impression that the planned provision of new community facilities from Section 106 funds do not take the hub or its impact into consideration. The group is concerned both about the impact new facilities may have on its existing work, but also that the management of the proposed community centres have not been properly thought through.

- **SO18** and the residents of Townhill Park have successfully demonstrated their ability to manage community assets by promoting the use of a cherished local green space, effectively protecting it from development. But they have struggled to secure the "meanwhile use" of an empty pub at the heart of the estate as a base for operations and somewhere for residents to gain support. The council, while understanding the value of this use of the pub, says it is unable to provide an unincorporated group with a lease, and SO18 must incorporate for a meanwhile use agreement to be developed

4 Be place-focused: central government should explicitly promote the co-production of a place-based, whole-life approach to planning and service delivery, where residents work alongside developers to shape their area. Local communities bring deep knowledge and a critical understanding of the complexities of the area where they live and work, and are best placed to suggest what is needed to enable them to have healthier, happier lives.

The call for place-focused planning is a call for councils, housing providers and developers to fully understand and engage with the complex, connected nature of all aspects of the thing we call "place".

Residents do not think of where they live in terms of departments or services; they experience a place, a location, in terms of services, shops and facilities. Local authorities, however, function along departmental lines, where, for instance, public health provision is developed in isolation from transport infrastructure or education services. Food deserts, a lack of available school places, congestion and rat runs, physical isolation and pressures on health services can all result from a failure to view housing in relation to place. A person-centred, service-design approach to regeneration and development, where the liveability of an area is the first consideration, would help to create better places and, in many cases, make fewer demands on the public purse.

Local plans and masterplans go some way to facilitate a geographically focused view of an area, but despite many local authorities having departments of Place or Neighbourhood, the planning of facilities and services is rarely carried out using a cross-department approach. In the cases we have explored, examples of place-based planning and provision have been severely limited.

Examples from the case studies:

- **Northfleet** is a prime example of how failing to consider a sense of place and identity in a community can cause significant hurt and resentment amongst residents. While the process may have begun with the slow reorientation of the locality around newer facilities at Ebbsfleet, plans which have seemingly overlooked existing facilities at Northfleet symbolise to local residents that their identity is not valued by their local authority or their chosen developers.
- Having focused their plans on their neighbourhood, the **Firs & Bromford** Big Local is now very much aware of the difficulties of engaging with a council which works in policy silos. With limited resources, the group is required to engage separately with housing, parks and other departments, in order to build relationships and gain support for its proposals.
- In Townhill Park, Southampton, the place-focused forum of organisations which **SO18** successfully lobbied to create are only beginning to realise the interdependencies of plans for the area. There is now a growing awareness of the impact of new development on the demand for school places, on the transport infrastructure and on the NHS services in the area.

Conclusion

We have developed these recommendations to promote an awareness of the real value of co-producing change with, rather than for, communities. We believe their adoption by government and developers will improve the experience of regeneration and development for the residents they affect.

Our aim has not been to dismiss the efforts of the councils in our cases to improve the lives of residents through housing, but to highlight the changes that should be made to help residents and developers co-produce better schemes and better neighbourhoods.

How can community experiences of regeneration and development help to improve policy and practice?

Developing potential: lessons from community experiences of regeneration and development, brings together case studies and practical guidance to help ensure that communities are effectively involved in the regeneration process, to the benefit of both local residents and those designing and delivering future regeneration schemes. The report looks to establish principles and approaches to address the power imbalance and makes recommendations to decision makers.

About Blue Chula

Blue Chula is a consultancy specialising in community development & engagement, collaboration & partnership working, research, and change & programme management. Working across all sectors and at all levels they aim to build on what is working, to bring out skills and abilities and to share stories that help people build strong and trusting relationships. They are passionate about empowering communities to make their lives better, whether that means making better places, better organisations or better partnerships.

bluechula.co.uk

About Local Trust

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a unique programme that puts residents across the country in control of decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods. Funded by a £200m endowment from the Big Lottery Fund - the largest ever single commitment of lottery funds – Big Local provides in excess of £1m of long-term funding over 10-15 years to each of 150 local communities, many of which face major social and economic challenges but have missed out on statutory and lottery funding in the past.

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Local Trust

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