

# People-shaped places

How Lambeth  
let residents  
redesign the  
neighbourhood



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# Foreword

*Building places we want to live in is more than just an aesthetic challenge. We know that well-designed public spaces boost local economies, reduce crime, enhance community safety, improve public health and happiness, and increase community cohesion.*

But at a time of increasing and complex pressures upon our public services, is this a realistic aspiration? Local authorities across the country are already dealing with so much: severe financial pressures coupled with rising demand; meeting the needs of an ageing population; adapting to climate change and equipping young people with the skills and training they need for the future.

At LGiU, we think now is exactly the time to be talking about these issues and these aspirations. To meet these complex challenges, we need public services designed holistically around the needs of citizens. To achieve this we need to think creatively and collaboratively. Citizens, the state, the private and third sector must work together in a radically new way.

If we are to manage such substantial pressures upon our public services and the inevitable need to scale back the state's direct provision, we need a new model of local government, which reimagines the role of both the state and the citizen.

We need a model that creatively engages communities in the design and delivery of services. We need councils to think about how they can build and sustain capacity within communities to require less from the state whilst still supporting the vulnerable.

The Neighbourhood Enhancement Programme (NEP) and Lambeth's wider co-operative project speak to this important debate – about how we reorganise and rethink public service delivery and about how we forge a new relationship between the local resident and the local authority.

Most importantly, they start to show what this debate might mean in practice and this pamphlet highlights two further local projects, Van Gogh Walk and the Loughborough Junction Plan, which offer further insight into the varying ways we can model this collaborative relationship.

Such transformational change can of course not be achieved and completed through one sole project, nor one sole authority or community, but we hope that this pamphlet highlights some of the ways we can start to plot what this new relationship might look like.



**Jonathan Carr-West**  
Chief Executive, LGiU

*At the heart of our vision for a co-operative council is the absolute belief that sharing the design and delivery of services results in better outcomes for all. Our vision is one of citizens, businesses and council staff working together on an equal footing, allowing citizens more direct control and influence over the design and delivery of services that make a difference in their lives and communities.*

The neighbourhoods we live in, from the streets we walk to school or work, to the spaces we sit in to relax or share time with our friends and neighbours, are fundamental to our quality of life so it seemed natural that residents and businesses help design and shape them. You decide where the furniture in your front room goes or what colour to paint your bedroom, so why not do the same in your neighbourhood?

The Neighbourhood Enhancement Programme put local residents in the driving seat – a world away from residents being consulted on schemes already designed and scoped by professional officers. We also devolved decision-making to ward councillors, helping to coordinate community engagement in their areas, making decisions based on residents' feedback and being held accountable for those decisions. Officers played a new role as facilitators and enablers, allying their professional expertise with residents' unique knowledge and experience of their neighbourhoods.

In some areas, residents' associations have taken direct responsibility for engaging their neighbours, sending out and analysing their own surveys and arranging consultation exhibitions of photos sent in by residents. Over 500 face-to-face multilingual interviews were carried out by community advocates to ensure that we heard the voices of the borough's significant

communities from across Europe and Africa. We also made sure young people were heard loud and clear with 'How can my walk to school be better?' taking place with hundreds of children involved through local primary schools.

The NEP was not simply a matter of the council delivering improvements for people. We worked with local community-based organisations who put in some of the improvements themselves, providing employment and skills to local people. Local residents have also signed up to take responsibility for looking after new trees and planters in their street. And we've seen faith and trust in the council improve, as well as better connectivity between and amongst local groups.

This is an exciting time for local government. We hope this case study provides encouragement to others seeking to change the relationship between citizens, Councillors and Council officers and we welcome your help and advice as we tackle the remaining challenges here in Lambeth.



**Councillor Jack Hopkins**

Cabinet Member for Jobs and Growth  
(former Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Neighbourhoods)

# Introduction

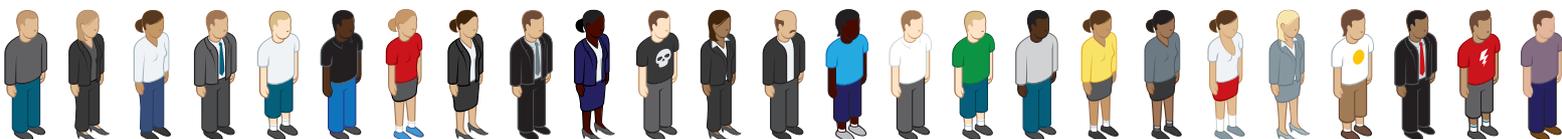
*The NEP represents not only Lambeth's biggest ever investment in streets and neighbourhoods, but also a transformation in terms of how it spends its money, serving as a pilot project to demonstrate how the key principles of the co-operative council can be put into practice. Rather than the council determining the nature of the investment, the council instead asked local residents how they would like to spend the money. Public engagement, consultation and co-design sit at the heart of the NEP strategy.*

Through an evaluation of the NEP, this case study aims to share the lessons learned according to both the successes and the challenges encountered. It also seeks to understand how a project such as the NEP changes not only residents' perceptions of the council, but also the council's perception of itself.

Of course, this is not the only project taking place in Lambeth which has sought to employ new models of community engagement. Our analysis also looks at the coproduction strategies employed on both the Loughborough Junction Plan and Van Gogh Walk. The Loughborough Junction Plan is large-scale community-led project, which aims to regenerate the local Loughborough Junction area. Van Gogh Walk is similarly a resident-led project, which has seen the transformation of a residential street into a new community space.



Building on the insights gained through considering each of these local projects, this pamphlet aims to draw out the key practical lessons both for Lambeth as it takes this approach forward and for other local authorities similarly interested in placing a public engagement programme at the heart of council strategy.



# The Neighbourhood Enhancement Programme

*“The aim of the NEP is to deepen the involvement of all parts of the community and councillors in ensuring their streets are safe, clean, attractive and fit for purpose and to leave a positive legacy of stronger relationships, broader skills and lessons learnt on which to base future engagement.”*

*NEP Community Engagement Strategy, 2013*

The NEP is Lambeth's largest single investment (around £1.3 million) in improving streets and the wider public realm. The improvement project stretches from Clapham Town in the west to the Council's boundary with Southwark in the east, and from Kennington Lane in the north to Coldharbour Lane in the south covering 8 ward areas in total (6 whole wards and parts of two other wards). The project aims to bring together a number of funding streams, including funding from TfL and from Section 106 in order to allow this money to be spent coherently, holistically and in line with the public's aspirations.

The NEP, led by Cllr Jack Hopkins, whilst Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Neighbourhoods, marks not only one of the biggest investments in Lambeth's streets; it also marks an important shift in how Lambeth's Transport team, as well as the council more broadly, are seeking to engage with local residents. Rather than ask residents “do you support this proposal”, Lambeth wanted to ask residents “what would you like to see in this area?” Through targeted investment in very local improvements, the project seeks to bring together all parts of Lambeth to act as one vehicle to drive change. The NEP aimed to

empower local citizens, deliver better value for money and make Lambeth a better place to live.

There were 2 phases to the project with phase 1 (involving Brixton and Stockwell wards) occurring in 2012, and phase 2 (involving a further 6 wards) taking place in 2013/14. This investigation predominantly focusses on phase 2, on the grounds that lessons learned from phase 1 were already assessed and incorporated into the learning that informed the latter phase.

There were three key stages to the community engagement strategy:

**1. A postcard and outreach campaign,** seeking to establish the priority concerns of the community. A postcard and poster were developed, using the strapline ‘wish you were here?’ The postcard invited residents to consider what they liked and did not like about the streets they live on and how they could be improved. Residents were also able to respond via a short online survey. This postcard was sent to all 38,410 households within the NEP area in April 2013. Postcards and posters were also



displayed in council offices, libraries, advice centres, GP surgeries, children's centres and jobcentre plus/employment centres and street notices were fixed to lamp-posts across the NEP area during April and May 2013. Lambeth contacted residents' associations and community groups and encouraged them to take ownership of the campaign and generate their own publicity locally. Lambeth also contacted Lambeth Living, as well as a number of other housing associations, to help publicise the campaign with residents living on local estates and in social housing. Lambeth contacted schools, youth and sport clubs and worked with language interpreters to help raise awareness amongst those whose first language is not English. Lambeth analysed all of the comments received for each area. Those that fell within the scope of the NEP were fed into the design and decision processes.

**2. A co-design phase**, where Lambeth councillors and officers met and worked with residents to convert the set of proposals and concerns into practical solutions. Co-design workshops were hosted to discuss and deliberate over potential schemes and use of the money in order to come up with practical solutions to concerns. All residents who said they wished to be kept informed were invited, as well as residents who were most likely to be affected by the proposals.

**3. A public consultation phase** – after drawing up plans based on discussions with residents, all residents were formally consulted. The consultation document, sent to every household in the relevant ward area, asked residents to prioritise and comment upon a list of possible improvements emerging from the co-design phase, keeping in mind the budget. Residents could respond online if they preferred. Staffed exhibitions were also

held to help answer any residents' questions and further information was available online.

Councillors played a key role in driving involvement of local residents and community groups, ensuring that all local interests were represented throughout the process. Following the closure of the public consultation, councillors reviewed the results of the consultation and decided which improvements should go forward, taking into consideration officers' reports. Certain improvements would also require statutory consultation. All improvements were to be introduced by March 2014.

The scope of the NEP was to a certain extent open – open to being defined by the ideas of the local residents themselves. The chief focus was on speed limits and traffic calming; parking and loading arrangements; crossing points; cycling facilities; public realm improvements; seating; bins; greenery; signage and removal of street clutter. Any concerns that proved outside the scope of the NEP were grouped together and discussed with the relevant departments or relevant organisations. All TfL-related issues were grouped together and passed on to them.

To improve Lambeth's streets and make it a better place to live, a concerted effort across the council would be required in order to address the multi-dimensional nature of many residents' concerns. Whilst some of the relevant services are provided by the Transport team, other services and facilities are provided by different teams and agencies. For instance, street cleaning and graffiti removal is managed by the Environmental Crime Team whilst the Police and the Council's Safer Neighbourhoods Team lead on community safety. The NEP therefore would require an integrated council-wide approach in order to respond coherently to residents' suggestions and ideas.



# The co-operative philosophy

*“Citizens will participate directly in decisions which affect their lives, and will be equal partners with the Council in the design and the delivery of services. Communities are expected to work with the Council and each other to improve their neighbourhoods and foster self-reliance. Each department is expected to develop community-led commissioning of services.”*

*Lambeth Council*

The driving philosophy behind the NEP is that by involving local citizens in the decision-making process the council can find new and better ways to deliver services. This belief forms a key component of the co-operative council approach to which Lambeth Council is committed.

The co-operative council approach states that by reshaping relationships between citizens and the state, we can build more responsive and more sustainable public services. As we seek to manage increasing and competing pressures on our public services, careful thinking about how we arrange and prioritise these services will become ever more important.

The NEP represents a key way Lambeth Council is seeking to put co-operative principles into practice. Lambeth Council has adopted five key principles which aim to reshape the council’s relationship between local citizens and the state:

- 1. Partnership with the community** – the council as the local democratic leader ensures that public services continue to meet the needs of all Lambeth’s citizens, so recognising the wide range of community groups that form Lambeth’s vibrant and strong civil society. It provides vital services and a voice for citizens to express their point of view.
- 2. Co-production and building on what exists already** – public services are planned by staff, users and the community on an equal basis and delivered through a variety

of organisations that will improve outcomes, empower citizens and users, and strengthen civil society.

- 3. Reciprocity** – citizens are incentivised to take part in the provision of public services through benefits such as services that better meet local needs, or through financial or non-financial incentives.
- 4. Local employment and skills development** – by engaging in civil society, residents are able to develop new skills and enhance their employment opportunities.
- 5. Maximum accessibility and equalities** – public services should be accessible from a variety of locations, including electronically, and they should be joined up across organisations. Everyone should have the opportunity to be involved and have their voice heard in the design and delivery of public services.

These principles underline the co-operative ethos driving the NEP. However, the NEP is not the only project which demonstrates how the council is seeking to empower local citizens in the design of their neighbourhood and snapshots of other local projects which highlight this new way of thinking and delivering are included throughout the evaluation.

These projects show a few of the ways we can start to appreciate what the co-operative council approach can mean in practice.

## CASE STUDY 1

### Van Gogh Walk

*“This project has transformed a little-used backstreet where some had been scared to walk at night. Now it’s a fantastic community street for all neighbours to share. The campaigning, consultation, planning and hard work have been worth it and working in partnership with Lambeth Council enabled us to realise our vision. We are proud to be making our streets greener, safer and more pleasant for everyone. The new name for this inspiring new space puts our area on the map for positive reasons”.*

*Elaine Kramer, Chair of Residents Group Streets Ahead*

Van Gogh Walk is a resident-led project in Stockwell that has transformed a traditional London street into a new, award-winning community space. The project evolved when a planning approval resulted in £120,000 of Section 106 funding being provided for improvements to neighbouring streets, prompting the formation of the residents group, Streets Ahead.

An initial consultation showed there was local demand for a public space, with the nearest park being some distance away. Isabel Street emerged as a focal point because of its quiet traffic and because children already played football on the street.

Lambeth Council established a project steering group in 2010 made up of local residents and councillors and chaired by a member of Streets Ahead. Initial consultation revealed strong support for turning Isabel Street into a community space.

The steering group worked alongside Lambeth Council’s Transport team to develop designs. The experience was challenging for all, but

slow and steady progress was made. It became clear, however, that Section 106 funding alone would by no means prove sufficient. Additional council funding was secured, including from the NEP.

A second round of consultation took place in summer 2011. Half of the street would be fully pedestrianised and the new shared space would have a community play space and ball games area. Once again, local support for the proposals was high and feedback “overwhelmingly positive”.

Finally, the steering group suggested that Isabel Street be re-named Van Gogh Walk. Whilst re-naming a London street is usually close to impossible as people living on the street are valid objectors, in this case it was possible as the street had no postal addresses on it. A formal re-naming application was submitted and Isabel Street became Van Gogh Walk.

In many ways, the Van Gogh Walk is quite different to the NEP – operating on a larger budget, a smaller geographical scale and a longer time scale. However, the project also



shares some common synergies and helps us further our understanding of placing a public engagement programme at the centre of council strategy.

Speaking to George Wright, the project lead at Lambeth Council, he explained: “key to this project was that it was community-led and there was lots of momentum already”. The community already had a good idea as to their aspiration. Certainly, in some areas of the NEP, this marks an important contrast and may explain why the project idea was bolder.

Despite this foundation, the project was not without its challenges. Whilst the Van Gogh Walk project was broadly very popular, some of the more affluent neighbours were concerned about the idea of creating a new public space, uncomfortable that it could attract vandalism or misuse of the space.

In this instance, George explained, working with local councillors proved very important. Local councillors offered a democratic legitimacy to the steering group and were prepared to behave robustly in local meetings in order to defend the project and decisions made by the

steering group. Similar to the NEP, political leadership proved really important.

George also emphasised the importance of “Lambeth’s radical and open-minded leadership” in contrast to a risk-averse tendency found in some councils, which can serve as a barrier to new ideas or different ways of doing things. Some Lambeth colleagues were actually concerned about the idea of having no kerbs on Isabel Street, allowing the space to be of mixed use. They worried that traffic would represent a danger. But the Council went ahead and, instead, this approach has allowed pedestrians to enjoy priority across all the space.

George pointed out the value of what can be achieved through taking these risks, highlighting the sense of community pride that Van Gogh Walk has created – evidenced by the fact there has been no vandalism. “People treat it better because they feel better”.

The project has strengthened ties not only between local neighbours, but the community group at the centre of the initiative has subsequently made connections with partners in Holland and elsewhere in Europe.

# Understanding the impact of the NEP

*Empowering local citizens to design better streets and neighbourhoods is an important aspiration. We know that actively engaging local citizens in determining local priorities and local decision-making will be increasingly critical as we seek to manage rising demand and reduced resources.*

But we also know that public engagement strategies can prove challenging and a number of significant obstacles present themselves. To engage rather than simply consult, the council must actively involve residents in an ongoing dialogue. But in doing this, how do we overcome inclusion issues, raise awareness, challenge apathy and tackle scepticism amongst some elected members and council officers?

Lambeth's NEP marks an important step towards understanding more deeply some of the issues we encounter when placing community engagement at the centre of council delivery. The LGiU's evaluation aims to provide insight into the lessons learned from both the successes and the challenges faced during the project.

Through our analysis, we want to understand what worked and what didn't work. We want to learn about the opportunities and challenges of council delivery for an area being shaped and determined by its residents.

We also went to get early insights into its legacy. We want to understand whether and how the NEP has changed residents' understanding of their own role within the community and their attitude towards the council. We also want to understand whether it has changed attitudes within the council about delivery in a local context.

From this analysis, we can draw out the broad practical lessons for other local authorities interested in placing a public engagement programme at the centre of council delivery.

To structure our evaluation of the NEP, we will use the overall project aims, outlined in the NEP Community Engagement Strategy, as a measure against which to conduct our analysis. The aims were:

- To raise awareness of the NEP among local residents
- To understand the concerns and suggestions of all sections of the community for improving their areas
- To develop street improvement measures which have strong community support
- To ensure councillors champion community engagement in their wards
- To develop and strengthen relationships within and between the community and the Council
- To understand how the NEP can be used to extend the skills and experience of residents and staff

Our evaluation will consider each of these aims and offer insight into both the successes and challenges Lambeth faced in order to share the lessons learned and examples of best practice.



## Awareness

Achieving awareness of the NEP amongst local residents was critical to the community engagement strategy. Without sufficient awareness, the NEP would struggle to ensure active resident engagement.

Publicity therefore was crucial and Lambeth Council employed a number of tools and initiatives in order to highlight awareness amongst the community, with some proving more successful than others.

The central strategy in driving the awareness was through the distribution of postcards to all 38,410 households within the NEP area. The postcard included the strapline, “wish you were here?”, and sought to provide residents with a simple and open-ended opportunity to set the agenda by asking residents what they liked and did not like about their streets.

Lambeth Council also communicated with 116 community groups, evenly spread across the 6 wards. A number of residents’ associations and community groups agreed to distribute the postcards to their residents. Posters were also put up in every street, attached to lamp-posts. Civic newspapers were used to spread the word and to some extent social media. Finally, a number of events were held including a launch event on Milbrook Road, events in partnership with schools and youth clubs, and a Made in Lambeth event amongst others.

Where possible, working in partnership typically proved the most effective way of raising awareness. The events held in partnership with schools, for instance, proved very successful in highlighting the events to large audiences including both school children and parents. Likewise, community groups proved useful in creating local interest around the project and a number of groups helped deliver postcards:

*“I was a member of the Neighbourhood Watch. I got to hear about the NEP through this ... I don't think I would have got involved without the NW – working with groups is really important – 50/60 people got involved from our street because of this”*

(Resident)

Nevertheless, few community groups expressed interest in leading the community engagement strategy. Their role therefore was better understood as complementary to the council’s role rather than a replacement.

Working in partnership also includes internal partnerships and close integration across the council proved important when seeking to raise awareness of the NEP. The posters, for instance, had a powerful potential when coupled with the postcards to reinforce awareness of the NEP. However, contractors working for other departments were unhelpful in their actions. Despite contacting other departments and their contractors in advance, the message failed to get through to contract staff, actually working on the streets, who removed some of the posters from lampposts. This demonstrates the importance of effective internal communications and ensuring joined up working across the council.

From a branding perspective, the name of the project could have been made more resident-friendly and this highlights a wider point about the importance of the language used to communicate to residents about the project. Being careful not to use council jargon is crucial to engaging with citizens effectively. Greater use of photographs in communications could also have helped to inspire residents.

Measuring awareness is notoriously difficult. Door-knocking on an estate revealed that 25% of residents recalled receiving it. A face-to-face survey of minority ethnic residents contacted on behalf of Lambeth Council a few days after the council wrote notifying them of councillors’ decisions on the NEP revealed that just over half (54%) remembered receiving the letter, although only half of them had read through it – perhaps

unsurprising, given that some faced language barriers.

These statistics represent an achievement. Given the geographical spread of the project, in contrast to a specific street scheme, it would be difficult to expect significantly higher levels of awareness. It is important also to recognise the difference between the NEP, which was broadly non-controversial, in comparison to schemes, such as controlled parking zones, which can generate lots of attention.

## Inclusion

Understanding the concerns and suggestions of all members of the community is critical to inclusion and ensuring that neighbourhood improvements are truly representative of community priorities.

Lambeth is hugely diverse and complex – with 140 different languages spoken across the borough and areas of affluence alongside areas of poverty. Lambeth is also a young borough, with almost half of the residents under 30 years old. Some of these groups prove harder to reach.

To some extent, the duty of ensuring inclusion of all local interests fell upon the local councillor for the NEP area. It was their job to spot gaps, where groups were not represented or not having their say, and to seek their engagement. Communities also played a key role in engaging their neighbours within the NEP, such as in Oval, where several residents' groups undertook a number of local outreach projects. However, the council also undertook a range of initiatives to help consult those harder-to-reach groups. By working with Stockwell Partnership, a local charity, and their multi-lingual advocates and community outreach channels (such as mosques, restaurants, hairdressers and after-school clubs), over 500 face-to-face interviews were conducted and transcribed on to postcards in English, representing almost half of all of the postcards received. The collaboration proved very successful and the

partnership offers an important model that the council should employ in future community engagement programmes. Multi-lingual workshops could potentially be considered, although the dispersed nature of linguistic minorities, combined with the NEP's focus on specific streets, suggests this approach may be more suitable when more generic feedback is being sought.

Engaging with youth is a well-known challenge. Almost half of residents in the NEP areas are aged under 30 (including, of course, many children), but typically just under a fifth of respondents were aged 18-34, with between 40% and 50% of respondents aged 35-54. However, several strategies were employed to reach out to the younger generation. The most successful proved to be an engagement programme with nine of the area's primary schools. The schools agreed to host local councillors in order to hear them speak about the project and hold competitions and 'walk to school' projects amongst others. By speaking to school assemblies (sometimes to as many as 250 children at a time), councillors gained huge insight into how streets can be made better for children. As Cllr Hopkins said, "they see a completely different world", for instance, favouring barriers between the road and the pavement; a traffic measure which is typically being phased out rather than in. One event at a primary school resulted in over a hundred consultation responses. Engaging with these primary schools not only enabled the NEP to better understand the perspective of younger residents, but allowed the council to strengthen relations more broadly with local schools and parents.

Other events were held in youth and sports clubs, with secondary schools proving "unsurprisingly a harder nut to crack", as Mike Bartram, Lead Community Engagement Consultant at Lambeth Council, commented. Council officers also presented the NEP project at a 'Made in Lambeth' event but most participants were from outside the NEP area, while the timetable for delivering improvements ruled out some of the ideas.

Lambeth also sought to engage with residents with disabilities, providing key documents in alternative formats and gaining the support of two local organisations to circulate postcards. Over 20% of residents responding to the public consultation in some areas (for example, Vassall and Coldharbour) said they had a disability. In the future, it would be valuable to gain greater insight into what type of disabilities respondents have in order to check that particular groups of people are not being overlooked.

Online communication channels are also vitally important to ensuring inclusion. Not all can attend the meeting in person because of work, childcare or carer commitments, whilst others simply lack the confidence or prefer not to:

*"I was able to give my views over the internet, by phone, email – these were my preferred ways to be involved, I did not wish to attend meetings. I really don't do meetings"*

(Resident)

In the future, Lambeth may wish to broaden the online offer to residents in order to widen the scope of engagement. Online engagement strategies, in this instance, were somewhat stalled by the delay of the launch of the new Lambeth website. Early ambitions to host an online forum to allow debate and dialogue around various proposals should be considered again during future projects. Social media could similarly be used more proactively to facilitate debate.

The biggest challenge, however, was reaching out to poorer residents. This concern was reinforced by the fact that the middle classes typically dominated many of the participating community groups. Estate residents proved particularly challenging to engage with. Barriers included language, mobility and other commitments. Furthermore, their concerns frequently tended to be on a micro scale – such as groups hanging out in their stairwell, or a troublesome neighbour next door – or reflected higher priorities, such as cuts to benefits. Whilst a door-knocking exercise revealed that 3% said they had returned the postcard (the borough-

wide average), few of those who had said they were planning to attend a drop-in session a few days later actually came. It proved a challenge to involve estate residents in the later stages of design, although two successful co-design workshops were held on estates. The scale of the NEP perhaps seemed in part irrelevant and the goal of the NEP, one from which they felt somewhat disengaged. Nevertheless, the successful co-design workshops offer a way forward in the future and highlight the importance of working with community leaders on estates and holding events on the estates.

The need to work with Lambeth Living and other social landlords created an added dimension to overcome when engaging with residents on estates. Lambeth's working relationships with social landlords were limited at the start, although over the course of the NEP some personal working relationships did develop. Nevertheless, overcoming organisational barriers represents a challenge and looking ahead, forging stronger relationships will be important to ensuring sufficient representation of estate residents' views.

However, Cllr Jack Hopkins explained that the most important task for the council, when seeking to promote future inclusion, will be "learning how to tap into the much more informal networks and ties shared by members of the working-class community". These networks do not necessarily map onto the formal structures and hierarchies within the council. He emphasised the importance of engaging with backstreet business to access these networks, as well as gain insight into their own local perspectives. He also suggested the potential to further involve community development officers in order to access their knowledge about the local community infrastructure.

## Local democratic support

Developing street improvements with strong community support is important. It helps foster not only a sense of civic pride and a sense of ownership, but also creates a mandate for the designs and changes implemented.

Co-design workshops were held with residents in order to turn proposals into practical solutions. In phase 1 (with Stockwell and Brixton areas) these were held fortnightly. In phase 2, Lambeth held 12 events over a three week period (typically 2 per area) with the support of an independent community organisation. This proved a more manageable commitment.

The better-marketed workshops received high attendance rates, including 60 people attending the Coldharbour event, chaired by the Loughborough Junction Action Group, and 123 attending one of the Oval drop-in events. However, the more modestly attended events were no less effective in helping establish the priorities and interests of the community. For instance, the Larkhall workshop produced the most popular set of recommendations when put to public consultation, whereas some of the output from the much better-attended Oval events split residents' opinions when put to public consultation. This suggests that at deliberative stages, it may not be necessary to secure large attendances; rather it will be more important to ensure a broad and representative sample of the local community.

A number of challenges, of course, presented themselves. With any workshop, there runs the risk of one particular individual or one particular community group attempting to dominate the process. Likewise, a councillor commented on the issue of certain officers sometimes allowing their own personal preferences to steer their management of a discussion.

In some instances, officers could feel unsure as to when it was appropriate for them to step in to offer technical and professional advice. Officers were sometimes reluctant to intervene,

even when a particular project being consulted on was not feasible or would disproportionately impact upon a particular group. To some extent this is a question of confidence and experience. Phase 1 of the NEP in Brixton and Stockwell offered important opportunities for officers to become more experienced working in this new partnership with residents, enabling them to act with greater assurance in their role in phase 2. It does, however, also highlight the tension of balancing populist ideas alongside technical, practical needs.

Another possible challenge that emerged during the workshops was residents' tendency to focus on their own streets, not always being aware of all the other streets being discussed within their NEP area. However, as Cllr Jack Hopkins pointed out – the very nature of the project seeks to challenge this. Before, residents were only consulted if changes were being made to their street, whereas in the NEP, residents were encouraged to think about the wider area and hear from different community groups. This enabled residents to question their own preferences, build compromises and reflect.

Finally, residents tended to propose and prefer traditional area improvements to some of the more creative solutions. This is despite a wide number of best practice examples being available online and discussed through the Made in Lambeth event. To some extent, this may be down to timescale and due to residents' lack of confidence about their role:

*“There may be a balance between the NEP which delivers a lot of improvements on time and on budget and a slower and more creative process, such as we saw on Van Gogh Walk, which can be more expensive and time-consuming, but deliver exciting results.”*

Mike Bartram, Lambeth Council

On the other hand, it may also be a learning point for the council. Award-winning, creative designs may not always be the public's preferred use of space and sometimes the more traditional options are the most popular.

Looking ahead, this will remain an important question for politicians contemplating the future of the NEP. Is it better to concentrate investment in a single, popular flagship project or diversify funding by investing small amounts in a number of side streets?

Following the co-design workshop, a six-page public consultation document was produced for phase 2. Its brevity proved favourable compared to the 13 page document distributed in phase 1. Residents were provided with a costed set of options and asked to prioritise and comment upon each of the proposals, with further information provided online. The response rate was 8% (only slightly lower than is typical for controversial parking schemes) and the council received a number of strong compliments from residents about the process.

Looking to the future, developing a platform for digital engagement could further enhance the deliberative process. Lambeth's new website was not yet ready, but this could provide a powerful way of enhancing the chance for local citizens to engage and reflect on design proposals.

## Political leadership

Ensuring councillors champion community engagement within their wards is vital. Having at least one councillor per ward area adopt a central role proved crucial.

The project team succeeded in meeting with 2/3 of councillors, heard back from a further 3 councillors, failing to engage with only 2 of the 24 councillors.

Councillors played a vital role for four key reasons, with their role evolving throughout the process:

1. providing insight and intelligence into the local context and networks
2. ensuring accountability by checking that all community interests are represented in the process
3. managing controversial issues; chairing meetings where necessary and facilitating discussion and compromise between residents
4. offering oversight and decision-making at the end of the process – this involves determining which recommendations endorsed by the public consultation should go through

The process was demanding on councillors. As Cllr Hopkins explained, there was a “democratic obligation” for them to reach out to all groups within their community, manage their competing interests and show leadership.

Councillors fulfilled this role to varying degrees, with some members excelling and others participating in a more limited sense.

For those who played a leading role, however, there were a number of benefits – enabling councillors to strengthen relationships within their community and engage more fully with casework.

The nature of the process meant that much of the partisanship was removed from the situation. Councillors were acting as conduits for the public's views, where their own views or party position were of little relevance. Two wards in the NEP area are split and demanded cross-party collaboration.

The key lesson learned was the importance of positively motivating backbench councillors so they can act as local champions. The experience also highlighted the importance and fairness of being clear with councillors about their shifting role throughout the process and the expectations of them.



## Reshaping the relationship between the council and the community

*“They made the effort to come down in the evening to meet people. They had no agenda of ideas which was refreshing. They were proactive in contacting community groups”*

(Resident)

*“It helps change things from a passive relationship with residents (you tell me your problem I’ll try to go out to sort it) to ... an empowering relationship (let’s discuss what your concerns are, this is an opportunity for you yourself to get a resolution to this)”*

Lambeth councillor

Developing and strengthening relationships between the council and the community was integral not only to the success of the NEP, but also to the wider co-operative mission.

The project was perceived by most residents as a genuine opportunity to express their views, with many welcoming the dialogue, especially at a time of cuts to public services:

*“It is good for the Council to consult with residents on improvements, and give the opportunity to shape things – especially at a time of cuts”*

(Resident)

*“I just wanted to say how impressed I am with the letter I received asking for my opinion on which improvements I would prefer in my area. The information was very succinct but comprehensive - even including the local area map - and I was pleased to be able to fill the survey out online. All very professional. Most importantly, it feels good to live somewhere where the opinion of the locals is asked for and stands for something”*

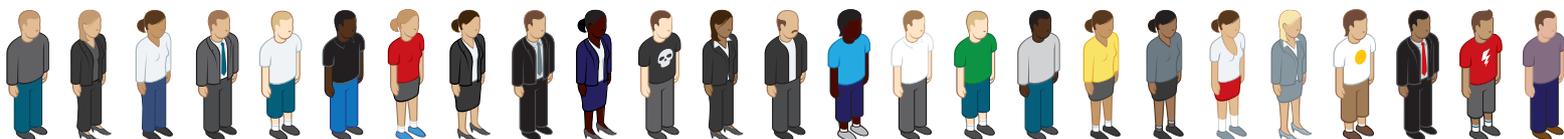
(Resident)

Likewise, the NEP offered important opportunities for officers to engage directly with the local community. They were asked to address school assemblies, participate in design workshops and meet with local community groups. This experience added significant value to council officers’ understanding of the principles of collaborative working and enabled officers to strengthen relations with the local community.

A number of useful lessons were learned. One was the importance of appropriate expectation management. In the future, more work should be done around feedback to those whose recommendations are not progressed with.

*“While the overall programme was probably good, this was not a good experience for my street. Only a handful of us got involved but we put a lot of energy in. Our expectations were raised, we got involved, but then just received a bland email response that our proposals were not to be progressed. It needed a more personal response in terms of feedback. We didn’t feel empowered. It was very frustrating.”*

(Resident)



Strong internal relationships proved important in enabling the council to engage coherently with the public. Early engagement proved an effective way of securing buy-in from several departments and proved very important when asking them to respond to the large numbers of comments received from residents. Cooperation was particularly strong from a couple of departments, with other departments proving harder to engage with. Not all council officers were persuaded by the ethos driving this new approach to community engagement and more work could be done to help explain its motivations and to challenge the more conservative elements of council culture.

Aspirations to create a network of area-based council staff proved too ambitious, in part because of the limited timescale of the NEP, but also because the majority of council staff were not area-specific. Furthermore, council colleagues were unwilling to have their personal contact details widely advertised, preferring to direct residents to established corporate channels.

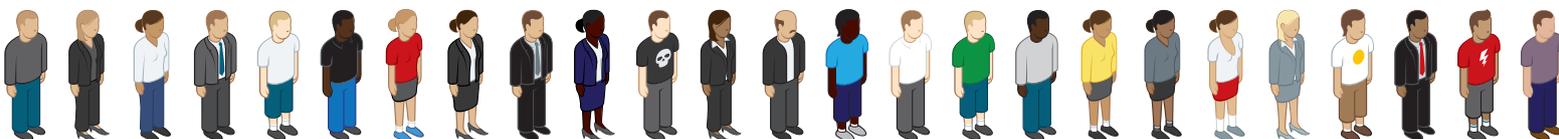
Looking beyond the NEP, it will be vital for Lambeth to consider ways of both capturing and maintaining these new relationships across the community, through communications and highlighting future opportunities to become involved with council projects.

Whilst it would be too early to assess the long-term impact of the NEP, the project can be understood as an important stepping-stone towards building a more equal relationship between the citizen and the state.

## Investing for the future

The final aim of the NEP was to expand the skills of residents and council staff. Whilst improving the streets and neighbourhood was the tangible goal of the NEP, the wider legacy of the project, such as the new relationships forged and the skills learned, is perhaps ultimately the more important outcome.

Although early days, there is evidence that a wider legacy has been formed. New relationships between different community members have been created. For instance, a number of new tenant and resident associations (TRAs) formed as a result of the NEP project: TRAs formed in Russell Grove (Vassall), Irving Grove (Ferndale), Rita Road (Oval) and a TRA on Clapham Manor Estate (Clapham Town) reformed. In addition, a number of the TRAs were revitalised by the process. By involving the community groups actively in the NEP consultation process, these community groups not only strengthened their ties within the group, but also met many new members of the community through design workshops or simply by knocking on their door. Community groups were given an opportunity to lead on engagement. Lambeth also facilitated a forum for residents' associations to come together in Oval and chaired a number of meetings, with officers providing appropriate support. Representatives were very positive about the way these meetings enabled stronger links to be built between them.



Council officers similarly gained the chance to broaden and consolidate their skillset through engaging with residents in a way some had not done before, or only done to a limited extent. From addressing school assemblies to running design workshops, many of the roles they were required to take on demanded a different skillset to the ones traditionally asked of their role. Council officers found an opportunity to reconceive their role: as a local enabler, a facilitator, and active promoter of community interests.

Councillors were also challenged by the NEP. They needed to put aside any political angles and instead take seriously their democratic obligation to ensure all interests were represented within the NEP. Rather than align with a particular community group, they needed to balance fairly competing community interests.

Finally, a further important legacy is the new ties the council forged with local organisations and businesses. Whilst aspirations to involve community artists, the media, photographers and hire apprentices proved too ambitious given the time-frame, the council succeeded in building new relationships with local organisations from both the third and private sector, working successfully with organisations such as Stockwell Partnership.

The council also cooperated closely with local social enterprises in order to deliver the changes requested by the community. For example, they asked the organisation Father Nature to make and install planters across the NEP area, providing employment and skills to young, unemployed dads. Where possible, Father Nature aim to recruit people on a street-by-street basis, providing local employment and enabling estate residents to actively engage in delivering their own improvements. Consistent with the principles of the co-operative council, residents have agreed to take on responsibility for watering plants on their street and looking after planters.

Importantly, the legacy of the NEP therefore is not just physical enhancement of the area, but a more cohesive, more engaged community. For public spaces to thrive, we need active and engaged citizen networks. By encouraging and fostering such social networks, the NEP helps not only physically, but socially reinvigorate community spaces.



## CASE STUDY 2

### The Loughborough Junction Plan

*The Loughborough Junction Plan is a community-led project, which aims to regenerate the Loughborough Junction area. The plan has been coproduced by the Loughborough Junction Action Group (LJAG), a local residents group, and Lambeth Council.*

The project aims to improve the realm in a way that reflects the vibrancy of the area, creates local business opportunities and engages the widest possible section of the community.

The project is led by Steering Group, which comprises representatives of the LJAG, Lambeth Council and other local community groups, tenants, residents' associations and representatives of the business community.

The Loughborough Junction Action Plan will guide public realm improvements, which Lambeth Council has undertaken to provide. Some £500,000 of funding has been allocated for the 2014-15 financial year.

To form the project aims, extensive public consultation took place, including a Cambria Road launch event, door-knocking, a Masterplan Consultation event and an 'Open Mic' event. Lambeth departments were also consulted, as well as key local partners including Network Rail, King's College Hospital and Jessop Primary School.



Whilst the project is ongoing, the process already offers a number of insights into a coproduction strategy. Speaking to Richard Ambler, the project lead at Lambeth council, he commented that key to the initiative was that regeneration of the public realm was a community-led aspiration, explaining, "it's crucial it doesn't seem like the council's idea". The role of the council is to act as a community facilitator.

He described the process as "a completely different way of doing things", commenting that it was not only a learning experience for officers but for LJAG and the residents themselves. They learned about the challenges of engaging the broader public, of managing conflicting interests and finally "just how long everything takes!"

The redevelopment of the Cambria Road railway bridge through the mounting of mosaics by local community artists served as a useful "quick win", demonstrating what could be achieved through the process and helping to create momentum.

From a resourcing perspective, Richard Ambler described LJAG's involvement as of "great help to the council" because they have, for instance, carried out much of the public consultation themselves.

He warned, however, that working with community groups may not always prove so easy. LJAG, he explained, are a "very realistic group" that understand the constraints of the council.

# Working together: lessons learned

*Building on the experiences and insights gained from analysing each of these case studies, we can draw together some broad lessons for both Lambeth moving forward and for local authorities similarly interested in using a coproduction strategy. This might be to improve the local street and neighbourhood, but these tips should prove useful for projects with a quite different purpose as well.*

**The vital role of the councillor** – it might seem plausible that by handing more power to the citizen, seeking to engage them more actively in the design of their public services, then the role of the councillor might be negated. But instead, what these projects highlight is the vital role that the councillor plays, acting as a local champion. Ensuring local councillors are energised, supported and encouraged to be dynamic is crucial because councillors offer local insight, provide accountability, help manage disputes and ultimately are prepared to help make the final decision.

**Understand your civic infrastructure** – there is no point reinventing the wheel. Make sure you understand and engage with the existing social and cultural networks in your community. These networks can act as a powerful way of reaching out to the broader community and can serve as a catalyst for the project in a far more effective way than any council communication. Working with local groups and community leaders also provides a vital way of overcoming inclusion issues, enabling the council to engage with traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as those living on estates.

**Get the language right** – to engage with residents effectively, it is really important to think about your communications effectively and avoid using council jargon. In this instance, the NEP could have been named in a way that was more helpful to residents. Thinking about the branding and whether it makes the scope and purpose of the project clear is crucial to effective participation.

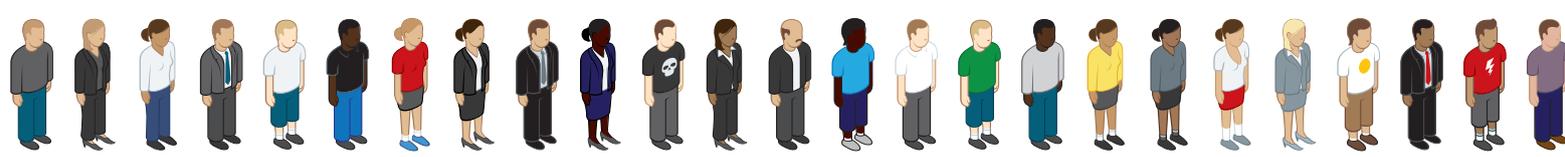
**Be prepared to take risks** – taking risks and dealing with controversy is inherent in a coproduction strategy. Handing over the decision-making process to the public will result in ideas you may not necessarily have even considered. Some of the ideas will be controversial. But controversy already exists around many council decisions. The benefit of the coproduction strategy is that deliberation and reflection are built into the process and can allow for risks and debate to be accommodated.

**Access to technical advice** – access to advice and technical information will be crucial to taking these risks and trying new things. Enabling residents to understand the implications of their ideas and suggestions fully is important to their deliberations and decisions. These interventions should not be seen as undermining to local democracy, but rather as empowering citizens in their choices. However, it is also worth being wary of personal preferences presiding over what is just sound, practical advice.

**Challenging council culture** – a coproduction strategy involves the council fundamentally reconceiving its role. Rather than doing things to or for the community, the council instead acts as a facilitator – enabling the community to choose and do things for themselves. Not everyone will necessarily believe in this idea as workable and the silos between different departments will need to be overcome in order to provide a coherent response to council residents. To promote greater integration and to encourage council officers to look at their role differently, be prepared to challenge the council culture and campaign for this new way of thinking.

**Involving local stakeholders** – To get the best outcomes we all need to work together. This means bringing together the different sectors and organisations from across the community – local schools, local charities, local businesses and local faith groups. By engaging with these different organisations and stakeholders, we gain new perspectives, we access new networks, we share different skillsets and we produce welcome solutions not impositions. In this case, Lambeth worked successfully with a number of key stakeholders, but this evaluation highlights the importance of working more closely with local businesses in the future.

**Be clear about the budget and the timeline** – this is important not only from your own perspective for planning capacity and funds, but also to ensure conversations progress and recommendations are reasonable. That said, not everything needs to be precisely in place from the start, and the plan can and should prove iterative – making adaptations to the process when necessary along the way.



# Conclusions

*We need a new model of local government. To balance rising demand with reduced resources, care for our ageing population, equip younger people with the skills they need for the future and become more energy efficient, we know that radical public service transformation is required.*

But how do we avoid mass public dissatisfaction with the inevitable scale back of the services provided by the state? In an era of difficult choices, councils need to ensure that people are involved in the decisions affecting them whilst also harnessing their local knowledge and insight to innovate.

You might think that a project looking at area improvements is rather marginal in comparison to this debate. But the NEP, the Loughborough Junction Plan and the Van Gogh Walk initiative importantly start to show what the council's evolving role might look like: a role where the council moves away from doing things, to making things happen; a role where the council moves away from taking local decisions to one where the council acts as a catalyst for the community making its own decisions. More practically, these projects also show that people care – people will get involved and they will take ownership of local projects.

Of course, the process will not be complete at first - in future NEPs, we would hope to see increased levels of participation and inclusion, with community groups and residents empowered by the successes of the first NEP.

But what the NEP, as well as Van Gogh Walk and the Loughborough Junction Plan, do show us is some of the vital questions we must ask ourselves when designing a community engagement strategy: on what scale can we hope to run a public engagement programme? How can we ensure a local neighbourhood's priorities are coherent with the wider community's interests? Should we only seek to run a codesign project where the existing civic infrastructure is already in place? How can we ensure the interests of hard-to-reach groups are represented?

What these projects also show us is the power and potential of tapping into local networks; of aligning public services around what the community wants and of creating a more equal relationship between citizen and state.

It's a big rethink but we hope that this case study from Lambeth shows some of the practical ways we might just do it.





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