

# Implementing a Long Term Community Engagement Strategy to Rebuild Public Confidence in Local Government

Reflections from Kensington & Chelsea

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KENSINGTON  
AND CHELSEA

## ***The context for our work***

- **One unique factor: the legacy of the Grenfell tragedy on 14 June 2017**
  - This affects some specific sites, as well as our relationship with our community
- **Several other factors now relatively common in places like RBKC**
  - Desperate need for new homes, especially social rented homes, with thousands of households in temporary accommodation
  - Shortage of available or affordable land for development, especially if estate renewal is not an option
  - Almost all existing sites are close to existing homes, and likely providing some amenity to local people at the moment
  - Complex development finance, with scepticism about ‘viability’ and the need for private and intermediate homes to subsidise social rented homes
  - Wider declining public confidence in institutions
- **The council has a flagship commitment to deliver 600 new homes, of which at least 300 will be at social rent**
  - Must be done in line with our Charter for Public Participation

## ***The key principles underpinning our approach***

- **Build in time to engage properly**
  - If you do this right, things take longer. Plan for that.
  - Be imaginative about who your stakeholders are, and reach beyond the loudest voices
  - Use a range of channels and techniques (e.g. online and face to face): learn where and how your stakeholders are comfortable, and meet them there, don't wait for people to come to you
- **Prioritise adult-to-adult conversations**
  - Take time to understand your stakeholders' perspective, and to explain your own
  - Ask about the positives of what's already there, and how this can be preserved or augmented
  - Acknowledge negative impacts: don't tell people everything will be fine, and acknowledge that all decisions are on-balance decisions
  - Show your working, including on finances
- **Engage directly**
  - Avoid using consultants as the face of the engagement work
- **You have no automatic right to people's trust. You have to earn it.**
  - Don't tell people they can trust you, *show* them they can. Look for quick wins.

## *Lessons we have learned*

- **Be honest about what the public can and can't influence**
  - For example, is this a conversation about *whether* we build, or *how* we build
  - Different stakeholders have particular authority and legitimacy in different fields – lived experience of residents is as important as your architects' expertise or your grip of the finances
- **Engagement must be 'cradle to grave'**
  - The more work it appears you've already done before you start, the lower the chance of buy-in
  - Ask yourself if local people can e.g. be involved in appointing architects
  - Don't stop once you've got planning permission – keep talking all the way through to completion
- **Difficult decisions mean trade-offs**
  - Local concerns often can't be reconciled with the needs of homeless households
  - Voices on each side will not be equally easy to hear
- **Sometimes you need to take a step back**
  - Sometimes the bold decision is to carry on. Other times, it's to pause.