

A woman with dark, wavy hair is shown in profile, looking towards the left. She is wearing a dark, textured garment. The background is a blurred bokeh of lights in shades of blue and purple. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the image, framing the woman's face and the text.

influential

**Six steps to safer
and more inclusive places**

An Influential real estate
leaders' workshop



Executive summary

1 Establish gender balance:

Truly human-centric design requires a step change towards recognising women's needs.

2 More Insightful Engagement:

Truly human-centric design
Replace tick-box community engagement with more imaginative approaches that connect with underrepresented voices.

3 Develop Memory and Continuity:

Connect and collaborate with communities to foster ownership.

4 Curate parks and Understand Unmanaged Space:

Bring creativity and authority to space - and understand how to develop unmanaged space.

5 Keep the faith with civic pride:

Bring creativity, authority and respect and let ownership grow with upkeep and inclusive design; understand the role of maintenance.

6 Empower planners:

Remove the stigma and shift decision-making from rigid rules and politics to balanced, innovative approaches.





The best kinds of places not only allow for the fact that we're all different but are also attractive in the sense they feel safe and welcoming.

The streets, buildings, stations, arenas and public realms that pass this test recognise that communities are formed of individuals with a range of human needs. They draw people towards them and add value to the urban environment, allowing everyone to participate in everyday activities with confidence and independence.

If that's placemaking as it should be, the reality of the built environment in UK towns and cities is sometimes markedly different. Many people working in the sector want to see safety and inclusivity become a greater priority.

Influential, which delivers public engagement, consultation and strategic communications for regeneration projects around the country,

gathered a group of experienced real estate professionals who support the agenda for change. We asked them to consider the way forward for human-centric design.

Our delegates met at the site of LandsecU+I's Mayfield development in central Manchester. Here, a once disused site next to the city's Piccadilly railway station is being transformed into a spectacular new urban environment. The £1.4 billion project has already delivered the first new public park in Manchester city centre for over century and the wider scheme is based on proposals to bring 1,500 new homes, 1.6m sq. ft. of market-leading commercial space and 300,000 sq. ft of retail and leisure facilities to the city, along with a 2.5-acre extension to Mayfield Park.



Our panel of experts

Catherine Newton

Director of Housing,
Anderton Gables

Hannah Duffy

Marketing Manager,
Downing
+ volunteer Friends
of Coronation Park

Laura Percy

Senior Development
Director
LandsecU+I – Mayfield

Donna Barber

Managing Director,
Eden Planning

Leah Stuart

Director,
Civic Engineers

Sarah Gilmour

Senior
Account Director
Influential

Katie Wray

Director,
Deloitte Real Assets
Advisory

Katie Tonkinson

Partner,
Hawkins\Brown

Maggie Mullen

Founder,
MMA Design
and Project Management



Address the challenge

What feels safe to a 40-something white male can feel very unsafe to others.

Sarah Gilmour of Influential

Gender balance is one obvious factor shaping our urban spaces. A substantial portion of the urban landscape is designed by men, whether they are property developers, urban planners, civic engineers or architects. "What feels safe to a 40-something white male can feel very unsafe to others," said Sarah Gilmour of Influential. "There needs to be a more open discussion about what this might mean and how to enhance safety and inclusivity across the board. There's a wealth of research which shows that many women feel unsafe in public areas. One survey reported that 91% of women feel unsafe at train stations and 90% in parks. This can limit women's mobility and how they take part in city living."

A number of groups across the UK are campaigning for better safety measures in public areas, including CCTV and improved lighting. In Sheffield, for instance, Our Bodies Our Streets seeks to understand the level of sexual harassment and has worked to improve lighting in parks. The group points out that that women from economically marginalised communities are especially vulnerable as they may lack the means to, say, use a taxi to avoid a route home that feels unsafe.

"Our Bodies Our Streets will tell you that the fundamental problem is that conversations surrounding safety from harassment are so often focussed on the different ways in which the individual

ought to prevent and defend themselves against harassment, rather than what can be done to make these spaces less dangerous," said Sarah.

Susannah Walker, co-founder of the charity Make Space for Girls, which campaigns for better parks and public spaces for teenage girls, addressed the point from an age and gender perspective: "This sounds very narrow, but we argue that teenage girls are an indicator species in that, if you can get teenage girls to use a space, it's probably going to feel good to pretty much anybody."

Susannah was involved in producing the Safer Parks guidance, a freely available piece of industry insight. It was produced through a collaboration between the University of Leeds, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Make Space for Girls and the Green Flag Awards (Keep Britain Tidy) - a globally respected scheme that recognises well managed parks and green spaces. "It's key that one of the stakeholders was Green Flag," said Susannah. "How these places feel to women and girls is now part of the judging criteria for the Green Flag awards. It's about management and how you design spaces."

Her ambition now is focused on how gender mainstreaming, a policy-making approach that considers the needs of both men and women in order to create policies that benefit everyone equally, can make a positive impact in other parts of the built environment.



More insightful engagement

“If you just make one space like a pitch, like a skate park, it’s going to get taken over by one group. And the most dominant group is rarely girls. But if you break up spaces into smaller areas, suddenly you’ve got choices.”

Susannah Walker

Poor understanding about what safety and inclusivity means in the community suggests that thinking is all too often restricted to being DDA-compliant and obvious physical issues such as excluding dark corners and set-back spaces where somebody with ill intent could step out in front of an unsuspecting person. In fact, the panel agreed, the design process needs to start much earlier and by properly understanding the experiences of diverse communities.





Teenage girls were again held up as indicative of the weakness of some of the existing approaches to engagement and consultation. "The problems with teenage girls are so extreme it highlights issues you get across the board," said Susannah Walker. "Everyone says 'Oh yes, we've consulted with the users of the park'. That will be the mothers and small children, the dog walkers and the elderly people. It's really difficult to consult well with teenagers because they're not in the park, they're not in the public space, and more than that, they feel disenfranchised, as I think a lot of women do. They feel these spaces are not for them. So why should they talk to you? We developed a range of different ways of engaging with girls, to give them agency, and basically to persuade them that it's worth doing. You can get some really interesting ideas from them because the other problem is they don't know what they want. Why is that the case? Because they've never seen what good looks like – and I would argue this is true of women in general. How do we know what a good space for women looks like? Because we so rarely get to see it. So we do some work around this reality and ask different questions partly based on the emotional response - 'Well, how do you like to feel about a place?' along with, 'What would you like to do in this place?'"

Sarah Gilmour picked up the point in terms of how Influential approaches public engagement. "One of the fundamentals is making sure we are asking the right people the right questions at the outset – because we know perceptions vary and how people use any given space will be different. We also look for a breadth of views and seek out unheard voices. You occasionally see and hear phrases like 'family-friendly' being used in the process – but what does that mean? Families are complex and made up of different ages, genders, spiritually or otherwise and various degrees of physical ability and neurodiversity.

"If you look at the Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey, for instance, it reports that 16.1 million people in the UK have some form of disability. This represents 24% of the total population. That's a huge percentage and probably affects us all in some way, if not directly then through family and friends. If you want to be an inclusive place-maker, you have to commit to the right process to understand what good really means."

The Liverpool-based architect Maggie Mullen stressed the importance of "meeting people where they are" and highlighted the need to have informed conversations as "some of the language of building and planning is arcane and inaccessible." She liked the suggestion made by Susannah Walker that there's insight to be gained by seeking emotional responses: "Get people to talk about how they feel about spaces, then you've got something to work with."

In terms of informed discussion, Susannah Walker spoke of some work Make Space For Girls has done in schools with teenage girls studying Design Technology: "They learn about spaces and development so that they can actually respond in an informed way. Sometimes that really intense work with a small group could almost be more beneficial than talking to everybody on a superficial level."

The architectural practice Hawkins\Brown has just finished a piece of research on inclusive design, specifically in education buildings, and focused on attainment. "We surveyed over 1,000 students as to how the design of spaces affects their ability to socialise and we looked at less advantaged groups to compare the fairness across those spaces and the impact we think that has on the level of attainment," explained Katie Tonkinson.

The Bury Interchange is a carbon neutral transport hub being redeveloped as the northern terminus of the Manchester Metrolink's Bury Line and features a bus station. The £81 million redevelopment is being funded by the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement fund.

Katie Tonkinson also spoke of the support provided by Disability Design Reference Group (DDRG). It was set up 2008 by Transport for Greater Manchester and is made up of disabled individuals from across the region who experience a wide range of disabling barriers: "Meeting with the DDRG at the concept stage worked very well for us on Bury Interchange. It brings together the transport sector and designers to make sure that services are considered in an accessible way. You spend quite a lot of time with people at the project site, and you actually immediately begin to understand the barriers and issues, even down to how we present our ideas to people by issuing the material in advance. We'll issue it in different versions. We'll get translators for the meetings. We'll get a space where the guide dogs can come. Everything is about curating the

actual engagement process and making sure it's as inclusive as it can be. Because I don't think you can just expect that to happen. You've got to work really hard at designing the engagement to get the best from it and to reach the broadest group of people that we can."

The question of whether developers should pay people for their time was raised by Leah Stuart of Civic Engineers: "Sometimes we ask quite a lot of people. If we want that meaningful consultation, involvement and ownership, you're actually demanding people's time, and often people who already have a lot on their plates. We've talked about setting up [advisory] boards on our projects. If you have a community that you really wanted to support and engage with, then maybe people do deserve to have their time recognised."



Developing memory and continuity



One of the biggest challenges is working with large regeneration sites that have been neglected for years and lost their way. Land that has been untenanted over a long period of time tends to be associated with dereliction, anti-social behaviour, crime or just ignored.

This was one of the challenges faced at Manchester's Mayfield district, where a large urban area had become an anonymous, forgotten part of the city.

Laura Percy of LandsecU+I spoke of the consultation and engagement conducted at Mayfield which sought to build bridges with the community around the area: "It was a brilliant bit of work. We got the schools involved in planting in the park and talking to them about design. Mayfield Park is a privately managed public space. So we've got to remember that it's well looked after but there was a real sense of ownership we built in there from the beginning of the development – many months before we submitted planning."

This process started in 2018. **Katie Wray of Deloitte** related the experience of the early days of the project: "One of the issues we had for the consultation for the Strategic Regeneration Framework was that nobody really knew where Mayfield was located. Practically the only reasons you would come down to this part of Manchester were if you were a visiting business here or soliciting sex work. From the beginning, one of the big groups that the team engaged with was

the support organisation for the sex workers in the area, as well as homeless charities."

The engagement team reached out to the local primary school, as Katie explained. "We had Influential approach the Head Teacher and ask if we could come into the school, something which had never been considered before. We attended at the times that the kids were being dropped off and picked up and so could talk to people as they went by. We also had an engagement exercise in Piccadilly Gardens in the city centre. There were so many other activities, creating opportunities for people to engage. At the school, for instance, we had some trees and little tags. We asked the children to write down their thoughts about how they use parks and playgrounds – and tied it onto the tree. We had some guys doing pottery so there were lots of different ways to interact with all the senses. There was something for everybody. What it left us with was probably the biggest consultation exercise I've ever summarised.

We had over a 1,000 individual comments.



It gave us such a good bedrock to build on, not only to finalise the SRF, but then thread into the park design and the first office buildings, and now the first phase of residential. When the park was finished and opened, we could invite those same children back to do some of the planting, which was brilliant. As Laura says, that's working with memory and introducing continuity, which is critical."

Susannah Walker agreed that the best place to start engaging with teenage girls is through schools. She also talked of developing a session for a Design and Technology class: "Teenage girls - there's a lot going on for them. Many of the difficulties are around things like sexual harassment which they don't really want to talk about. They certainly don't want to talk about it with boys who might be their friends. They will speak in a really different way in a single sex group. We always try to ensure that as much of the engagement process as possible is just with girls. We occasionally get told off with saying 'Aren't you creating gendered spaces?' and we say 'No - that's what we have now.' That's where we need to turn the dial."

Leah Stuart spoke of witnessing a positive engagement with a school at Morley in Leeds, where Civic Engineers is currently working on a public realm renewal scheme. The teenagers were taken to the property conference UKREiiF to share their ideas. "I was amazed by the breadth of what they thought through and the things that they presented. It was like everything we think of, and then some. They thought about spaces where people could talk to each other. They thought about things for older people. They thought about activation of the space through a coffee hut. They thought about how to get the utilities to it and what materials they'd use, and they costed it all."

Catherine Newton of Anderton Gables talked of her positive experiences:

"We've held consultation events in the daytime and evenings. We've had open events, a bit of fun, bring the kids along, that sort of thing. We've asked people to jot down thoughts and reactions on Post It notes - what they didn't like about where they lived. How they live their lives. What they want from the space around them. It's always invaluable."



Curate parks and understand unmanaged space

“Our team understands how these spaces should be used, and how to help people use them. They also engage people with storytelling. You’d be amazed at how quickly that works and changes their immediate behaviour.”

Laura Percy
LandsecU+I

Laura Percy spoke of the experience of creating and curating Manchester Mayfield: “The park’s been open for two years now. Before we opened, we were inundated with comments that this place would be a disaster full of antisocial behaviour, that people wouldn’t treat it well, and it wouldn’t be looked after. It’s absolutely incredible seeing how the opposite is true. There’s lots of reasons for that, one of which is the design of the park and the breakout spaces that we’ve incorporated. We really did engage locally, especially young people in the community just near us, Ardwick, through the schools there. Actually, one of the other reasons is the ongoing stewardship of the park. There’s a super active, open, friendly management of the space. For us, it’s not, ‘What are you doing there? Get off, get down.’ It’s more, ‘How can I help? What’s going on? And we have an incredible, award-winning security team here.

“They’re passionate about the park because we took them on a journey to help them understand the heritage. We talked about why we’ve created certain spaces and what particular areas are for. Our team understands how these spaces should be used, and how to help people use them. They also engage people with storytelling. And if you’d be amazed at how quickly that works and changes their immediate behaviour. They’re able to intervene gently and early and then engage them with our story. It might mean saying, ‘Did you know about this beam? It was found 200 years ago, and we bought it, we put it in the park, and we did this with it’. People go, ‘Oh, cool, all right.’ And it’s a different way of creating a space.”





The idea of semi-public spaces was applauded by Susannah Walker: "It can be enormously beneficial for women and girls, because it is monitored as safe. I've been doing work on safety and lighting in London's Olympic Park. They've got really good security. It works. And so you've got a space where women and girls do, in general, feel more able to use it. It comes back to the idea that if you create an unregulated space, it's going to get taken over by the most dominant group. The more regulated space, the more actually it can be accessible to wider groups."

The panel discussed the example of a large public space in Manchester city centre, Piccadilly Gardens, that has become a magnet for negative Trip Advisor reviews, derogatory social media comments, and media coverage related to drug dealing, public intoxication, and occasional violence. As one reviewer put it, "A great landmark of Manchester ruined. This used to be a beautiful garden (hence the name) back in the early 1980s when I was a regular visitor. It is now a soulless piece of space with no personality at all. A mish mash of Metro lines, and tacky shopfronts. Shameful really."

Piccadilly Gardens has also been the subject of controversial design choices. In the early 2000s, a concrete wall structure was added, which many felt disrupted the openness and beauty of the space. Critics found it visually unappealing, leading to calls for redesign or removal of the wall. Some parts of the Gardens were also redesigned with a minimalist, urban aesthetic that some Mancunians felt lacks the inviting, green atmosphere they expect from a city park.

Katie Wray pushed back on this view: "I get quite frustrated with Piccadilly Gardens. Everybody's saying it's a horrible space and that it's unsuccessful, but it is so busy and popular. I think a lot of British people grow up without culturally being used to gathering in public squares. The sort of space they would like is a nice park, with a meandering path and a very formal playground.

But if you go to Piccadilly Gardens it's always busy. People hang out. There are spaces in which to gather in different groups. So, I feel that there's an element of racism going on with how people perceive that space as unsuccessful and/or not for them, because they don't see people that they choose to hang out with. There are a whole lot of cultural issues here about people just seeing that crowd of people, and going, they're all doing something antisocial. Yes, there can be some of that, but there'll be some of that in every single aspect and part of the city."

Donna Barber of Eden Planning acknowledged Piccadilly Gardens has "a degree of anonymity" and the reality of feeling quite transient, surrounded by tram lines and bus stops: "From a town planning perspective and all those elements contribute to a sense of lack of ownership. Understanding who uses that space and what they want from it is really important. The thing that drives me mad is the size. Either celebrate it as a big space or carve it down into a series of smaller spaces where it'll be more obvious what their purpose is."

Leah Stuart asked to what extent the design process is responsible for instilling ownership and adding value – and "Who is taking ownership of the curation? How do we work better with the public sector and the third and voluntary sectors? We need to think about how spaces will be used to benefit different people at different times, making somewhere really inclusive."

Katie Tonkinson picked up the question. "Curation has a lot to answer for, doesn't it: Because the space [Piccadilly Gardens] changes programme quite regularly throughout the year. But does anybody know what to expect? Who's actually managing it? We walk through that space daily to meetings. We don't walk around., it's busy in terms of all the kinds of transport movement, the buses and the trams.

Does that work successfully, or does it just turn its back on the next bit of programme?"

Catherine Newton suggested that we need to look no further than European food markets to find examples of spaces being successfully animated and made into destinations: "These spaces can be made to look lovely and create more of a day and night economy. There's a purpose for that space; it's made clear that it is for everybody. The problem with Piccadilly Gardens is the constant transport movement around the site and that the public space lacks a clear focus or hierarchy."

The Safer Parks guidance highlights numerous ways in which activation can happen inclusively. Susannah Walker referenced an example of some gender mainstreaming work in Vienna: "They've put some really interesting things into public spaces, like stages, which can be used for people to play on but also that can also for events." She felt what's required is "a coherent way of thinking about space as an attraction rather than a problem to be solved."

Donna Barber highlighted the value in talking to existing users. "If you've got people who are drawn to Piccadilly Gardens, for example, why not get under the skin of why they feel safe, why they're drawn there? There should also be an interface between any relevant organisations. Is it homeless charities? Is it adult social care? Is it that we create hubs so they can help people in our community, the vulnerable people who are drawn there? Where's the support network for them?"

If safety is a barrier for teenage girls and for women in daily life, it's also the case that women and girls feel the biggest factor in making a place feel safe is the presence of other women and girls. "So it's not just about design, it's about activation," said Susannah Walker.

"The answers are complex and local, because you must look at the wider area. You could build the most amazing space, but if the access is through a terrible underpass, nobody's going to use it. So safety is the number one thing and the corollary of this is a lot of places end up just being very dominated by men and boys."

She pointed out that a generic local park is likely to have sports pitches and a skate park: "All of those facilities are dominated by men and boys. In the worst example that I ever saw, the area of green space was also the ladies kick-about area. So you already created a male space that you know that girls and young women aren't going to go into before you even thought about what girls want. You must also ask, 'How does this feel? Is it even a place that women and girls would want to go into?' Then you actually realise what they want is something else. Teenage girls want social seating, they want swings, they want playful spaces. They don't want to do sport outdoors, even though everyone wants them to do sport outdoors, because basically they're going to get sexually harassed within an inch of their life. But it's not just about dumping the right facilities into parks. It's about a design ethos because one of the reasons the boys dominate these spaces is that if you just make one space like a pitch, like a skate park, it's going to get taken over by one group. And the most dominant group is rarely girls. But if you break up spaces into smaller areas, suddenly you've got choices. 'Oh the boys are there, I'll go there.' And because girls are a kind of an indicator species, it will work for those boys who don't want to use the skatepark. It will work for the LGBTQA+ teenagers. It will work for neurodiverse teenagers."

In terms of neurodiversity, Maggie Mullen then spoke approvingly of mind-friendly designs that break up activities into smaller and more sensorily aligned spaces: "This nurtures a greater sense of control and predictability, which is another aspect of the perception of safety and security."

Keep the faith with civic pride

“If it’s maintained and it looks nice, people respect it more. We’ve done lots of work in student accommodation and seen similar results. You might see something and think, ‘Well that’s going to get wrecked in a year.’ But when we came back it wasn’t, because it was lovely.”

**Catherine Newton
Anderton Gables**

The panel debated the problem of antisocial behaviour and vandalism ruining the best designed and intentioned public spaces. Donna Barber referenced the fact that any new dry spaces where people can sit and spend time tend to become a magnet for issues such as drug and alcohol use. Susannah Walker acknowledged the challenge: “It’s a huge cultural problem and one you don’t necessarily see in other countries. Beyond that point, it’s worth saying that if you’ve only got one area, it will become a focus. If you’re providing lots of social spaces, then it becomes a lesser focus.”

Make Space for Girls believe that keeping places busy is key. “We did some really interesting work in Edgware [the district between central London and Watford], with a group of girls there,” said Susannah. “Because they had free bus passes, they were going to Watford in summer because there was a really good, safe park with public toilets and loads for them to do. There was stuff happening and a lot of oversight.”

That said, Susannah felt the answers are sometimes about straightforward design. “We were once sent a picture from Christchurch in New Zealand and told the area in the image was massively used by teenage girls. Why? Because it’s a tree, and under the tree there’s little offset cubes of seating and a picnic bench. That’s good social seating. So the solution doesn’t have to involve the most glorious array of equipment.”

Secured by Design (SBD) is the UK police initiative aimed at improving the security of buildings and public spaces to prevent crime. Founded in 1989, it provides a set of principles, guidelines, and certifications designed to make new and refurbished homes, commercial buildings, and their surroundings safer. Key aspects include design and layout. SBD evangelists talk of promoting architectural and urban planning strategies to enhance natural surveillance, restrict access, and make spaces feel safer. Developers can apply for SBD certification for buildings that meet specific security criteria.

Susannah Walker questioned SBD’s impact on young people: “We do need to think about what constitutes antisocial behaviour. Yes, drugs are antisocial behaviour, but a lot of antisocial behaviour is actually just teenagers hanging around. The SBD approach basically says we don’t want teenagers on the streets. Teenagers aren’t autonomous at home. They’re not autonomous at school. If we don’t give them places in the public realm, where do they go to learn how to be adults? It’s a complicated question, but we can’t just say, ‘Oh, what about antisocial behaviour and clear everyone off the streets.’”

Maggie Mullen talked about the importance of maintenance of public spaces and its impact on the sense of value: “I live in Liverpool, and when the city council started putting up glass bus shelters, people said they’re going to get smashed, and yes, that’s what happened to an extent. The council’s policy was to react quickly, replacing the glass - and keep replacing it until whoever’s doing the vandalism gets bored. And it worked. The sense of value, that it’s being looked after and maintained, is incredibly important. As architects and designers, we often get blamed for the failure of a space when it’s often to do with the fact that it’s just not been maintained. The lights aren’t fixed, bins aren’t being emptied, the benches aren’t being maintained. So that’s a key going forward.”

Susannah Walker picked up the point and spoke of a Sheffield company, Handspring Design, which builds wooden shelters for public spaces. “I asked them, ‘Don’t people just burn down these lovely wooden shelters?’ and they said ‘No, we’ve had one piece of vandalism in the last six years. It’s because they’ve been given something nice.’”

Catherine Newton concurred: “If it’s maintained and it looks nice, people respect it more. We’ve done lots of work in student accommodation and seen similar results. You might see something and think, ‘Well that’s going to get wrecked in a year.’ But when we came back it wasn’t, because it was lovely.”

Maggie Mullen spoke of leading the £55 million redevelopment of Liverpool Central Library, a project which drew overwhelmingly positive response from locals, visitors, and architectural critics: “It started off as a really small interior design scheme. Part of the brief was to address how we can make people more likely to come in. That means making sure they’re not immediately met with barriers and the sense that because your books are three weeks overdue, we don’t want you here. The project’s big achievement was its equality of access to a very good space, and to literature. There was a debate about whether staff actually wanted children in the Children’s Library, because they wreck the books. But the lead we were working with said, ‘I don’t care if they rip out every page, I just want them across the door.’ That goes back to what do you actually value? I’ve done similar projects with communal university libraries, where if you’ve got to instill ownership and value, you will get a little bit of nuisance damage. But you’re more likely to get a sense of co-dependency about the success of that space. It’s a bit of a trite term, but it is about the ownership of it.”

The problem was, she added, that maintenance is usually the first element of a programme to be cut: “You put up a maintenance plan and in five years, someone goes, ‘I haven’t got any money, so we’ll just sweep up the leaves every month.’ Maintenance has to be as intrinsic to the success of the park or the building.”



Empower consultations and planning officers

Planning is relentlessly criticised and held up as the bane of regeneration. Donna Barber said it's time for a different conversation. Planning is all about balancing different perspectives – and we need to decide where the value resides.

"At the moment, we've got fairly disillusioned officers who have been stigmatised, blamed for the problems. It's not just about lack of resources. It's about lack of enthusiasm and lack of leadership in those departments. So the approach becomes a tick box one. If there's any one policy that the scheme doesn't comply with, it immediately falls into that 'I'm just not going to get that through or past members', and there's no balance. Yes, we have Statements of Community Involvement. Yes, there are reasons why we have to do engagement. But I think if everyone's really honest a lot of it is just tokenism because our clients, respectfully, don't see the value because then insufficient weight is attached to that consultation in relation to the planning decision. For me, it's about trying to re-address that seesaw. Until we give more weight in that process to the outcomes of consultation very little may change."

She gave the hypothetical example of an area zoned for six story residential buildings: "But when you've spoken to the people, they don't want six story residential. What they actually want is medium density family homes and a hub where they can grab hold of a bicycle and hop into city

centre and come back. If the policy says 'no' how can an innovative developer wanting to respond to the consultation and deliver something that is wanted by the community move forward? How do you deal with that mismatch? It takes 10 years to rewrite policy. These policies are out of date by the time the plans get adopted. There is said to be a shift going on from NIMBY to YIMBY. But it's not the development management process or during the planning application where those conversations need to take place. These decisions should be left to planning officers. [Political] members should have scrutiny, but they shouldn't have the final say in the committee decision. The developer can't carry that risk all the way through. You need empowered, enlightened, inspired planning officers who can take it all into the melting pot, and go, "Actually, on balance, this is a great scheme for this community and therefore I'm recommending it for approval.' I'm all for scrutiny, but I don't believe councillors should be decision makers. It should be high days and holidays that things go through to committee. As it stands, the process makes people think - I can do consultation, but if what comes back is not in line with the plan, it's just going to be a No anyway. So why should I bother?"





Case studies:
1) Husby Sweden
2) Coronation Park,
Crosby

Husby, Sweden

Husby, a suburb in north-west Stockholm in Sweden, has attracted plaudits for its approach to inclusive place making. The district is mostly second-generation Swedes of Eritrean, Somali, Iraqi and Afghan heritage.

Local women saw public spaces as unsafe for women and started a campaign for change. The city council's housing arm held workshops with female residents to discuss where and how they felt unsafe. Through these conversations, it became clear that women felt uncomfortable walking through the square and around the metro station there. A local housing company, Svenska Bostäder, responded by developing a central area from an inclusive perspective. Changes included

improved street lighting, upgrades to the station entrance, and the transformation of a cafe in the main square that tended to attract mostly male customers into a more female-friendly meeting place. The revitalised public spaces and new measures have been a huge success and included social activities for women, better lighting, easier access to the metro, a playground and a market.





Coronation Park, Crosby

Most able-bodied people can recall outside play spaces from childhood. Places where they could make a friend, have fun, learn skills and spend time outdoors. The knowledge that these experiences are often denied to young children has helped inspire one campaign in Crosby, Merseyside, which seeks to become an exemplar of how local parks can and should be inclusive.

The volunteer behind the effort is Hannah Duffy, a marketing manager at the real estate group Downing. She presented her story to our group as a case study of practical inclusivity issues. The campaign seeks to raise £250,000 to buy and install specialist equipment to ensure all children, regardless of ability, can enjoy Coronation Park in Crosby.

The inspiration for the project came partly from raising two young children of her own and noticing that the park had little in terms of play facilities for children. But when looked at it from the perspective of children with disabilities, there was nothing at all.





Her friend Anna has a profoundly disabled seven-year-old daughter and talked of passing through Coronation Park as a difficult experience: "Her daughter would become excited seeing other children sliding and swinging and hearing their squeals. It broke her heart that that's what she thought parks were for - to enjoy watching others play, and not to join in herself. She gave me a completely different perspective. It was quite upsetting hearing her talk about how she's basically isolated at home because there aren't spaces that her daughter can access. She talked about how her daughter should have the same experience of feeling of play, that movement, whether it's bouncing, swinging, feeling the air in your hair, even if she doesn't like those, she should get to experience them, to either discount them or to enjoy them. Until recently, there wasn't a single piece of play equipment that she could use locally which meant often long days were spent mainly at home, isolated from others."

Aware of a national 'Let's Play Fair' campaign, Hannah joined a group, Friends of Coronation Park, and worked with them to get support from the local council for ideas to make the park safer and more inclusive. Having consulted four different playground companies with a view to refurbishing the park and addressing the lack of inclusivity, the group came up with a scheme. They consulted 1,000 local residents via social media and by simply standing in the street and talking to local people. "We also raised the issue with local businesses as it became clear updating the park would produce benefits," said Hannah. "Some 97% of people said that if we improved the play area, they would use local businesses more."

To date Hannah and other volunteers have already delivered one phase of improvements totalling £50,000 thanks to support from a number of local businesses and a donation from Blundellsands Councillors, which was match funded by Green Sefton, part of Sefton Council. This saw a wheelchair-friendly roundabout, a climbing frame, an inclusive swing seat, two spinners and safe, bright flooring being added to the park.

Phase Two of the fundraising is directed towards more inclusive play equipment including a wheelchair friendly trampoline, further safe flooring, and more equipment for older children and teenagers.

Hannah, who has lived in Crosby all her life, and played in the same park as a child, remarks on her push for change: "We could continue to complain that not enough was being done or we could have a sense of community ownership and try and do something about it ourselves. More inclusive playgrounds benefit everyone. They also give more able children daily opportunities to learn tolerance and understanding. Seeing disabled children in play spaces teaches children early on that there are different people in the world, and that they're valuable members of our society. The more inclusive the equipment we can see, the better for everyone."

For more information on the Coronation Park Playground Project, contact Hannah Duffy at coronationplayarea@gmail.com.





Hearts and minds for real estate

Our team delivers impactful, strategic communications campaigns for the property developers, investors, contractors, and consultants that are shaping the future of Britain's towns and cities.

Our track record includes:



Influential delivered a comprehensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation campaign for The People's Project – its plans for a new stadium on Liverpool's waterfront and to regenerate Goodison Park.



As referenced in the discussion paper, Influential has worked with regeneration specialist LandsecU+I – and the public-private Mayfield Partnership – on the Mayfield project since 2016, helping to take the plans from public consultation through to construction.



We are supporting plans to restore Bolton's historic Hulton Park Estate into an international golf destination and potential Ryder Cup venue. A potential game-changer for Greater Manchester, delivering around £250m of direct investment, creating over 1,000 jobs, promoting health and well-being, and putting Bolton on the international sporting map by attracting The Ryder Cup to the town.



The developer MEPC has created NOMA as a forward-thinking, mixed-use city centre neighbourhood in Manchester. Our brief blends achieving positive engagement from all stakeholders along with PR activity that drives occupier interest in the commercial buildings at NOMA. Our work with NOMA is closely aligned with Manchester's strategic objectives around low carbon development and make it part of the city's future-facing narrative as one of the best cities in the UK.

If you'd like to find out more about how Influential can support your community engagement/consultation or if you have a strategic communications challenge you'd like to discuss, please contact:



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