

Community Consultation For Quality of Life in Wales



CCQOL



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Commonplace
<https://www.commonplace.is/>



Urban Symbiotics
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Executive Summary

Research summary: 'lean into discomfort'

Taking a 'hyper-local' approach, Community Voices Cardiff operated from the Grange Pavilion in Cardiff's Grangetown. This is one of Wales' most ethnically and faith diverse communities. The Community Voices Cardiff team had a co-investigator with ten years of partnership working experience in the area, a Community Partnership manager resident in the area with substantial experience in activism, and a Student Ambassador resident in the area with a leadership role of a local Youth Forum..

Their focus was on capacity-building and knowledge exchange between planning professionals and local residents. They did this through a Local Advisory Group. The team carried out various activities focusing on wellbeing, housing, greening, young voices, consultation language, and Place Plans

The team's approach aimed to bridge the gap between statutory consultation and meaningful engagement, while addressing the challenges of mistrust and negative impacts on mental wellbeing for both planning professionals and residents when statutory requirements fall short. The research was characterised by capacity building, collaboration and 'leaning into discomfort' through engagement, with the need to be particularly alert to buzz words.

Community Consultation For Quality of Life

Community Voices Cardiff was part of a UK-wide research project, *Community Consultation for Quality of Life* (CCQOL) funded by the Arts and Humanities and Research Council.

CCQOL was initiated by Professor Flora Samuel, based on the belief that creating maps of local assets - the places people value most in their communities - is a good way to involve local communities in co-creating local knowledge about their area.

Applying the Quality of Life Foundation's Framework themes of Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement and Belonging in a Commonplace online mapping platform, a map-based approach aimed to test how creating local knowledge through community consultation can help inform longer-term decisions about future development and improvements in our communities.

Research questions

How can community consultation be made more useful and effective across the diverse policy contexts of the UK?

How can community consultation be made more representative and inclusive?

How can community consultation be undertaken for areas that have not yet been developed, when 'future users' are not known?

What are the relative benefits of online and physical community consultation?

How can community consultation be made into a long-term project that fosters ongoing civic debate?

How can social value mapping inform the process of community consultation?

What format could community consultation take in a pandemic?

What terminology is needed to describe inclusive, empowering 21st century community consultation?



Project methodology

The project addressed these questions using several means. The team planned, delivered, and evaluated four physical ‘urban rooms’ in four UK cities: Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast. Urban rooms are defined by the Urban Rooms Network - <http://urbanroomsnetwork.org/> as spaces ‘where people can come together to help create a future for their local area’.

Alongside these urban rooms, the team used Commonplace - <https://communityvoicescardiff.commonplace.is/> online mapping platforms and surveys to engage with local communities. Each city had its own approach, and this approach was informed by a policy literature review specific to each nation. Additionally, we conducted interviews with local planning and community representatives and established Local Advisory Groups in each city.

Key statistics from the Cardiff urban room

61%

of respondents had never participated in a planning consultation

73%

noted they 'had never been asked' to take part in such a consultation before

Overall,

78%

identified the benefits of face-to-face consultation as being able to share information and opinions and connect with others

Preferences for methods of consultation were evenly split between:

Face-to-face:

27%

Online:

25%

Either:

46%

Half of respondents

50%

accessed the online survey self-assisted on their phone, with

10%

using tables in the urban room assisted by staff

Map pins clustered around Cardiff's green and blue spaces, with

154 pins

identifying connections to nature

Three quarters of pins placed on the map

230 pins

were identified as 'positive' and 'mostly positive', compared to

3%

(12 responses) identified as 'mostly negative' or 'negative'

Convenience & speed
39% & 26%

topped the reasons to do online consultation, as well as the ability to use Google translate

11.5%

and assistive technology

15%

Face-to-face consultation offered opportunities to 'hear about the opinions of other people'

26%

and to 'feel part of a community'

24%

with

18%

responding that 'it doesn't require access to a computer or internet'

Recommendations from the Cardiff project:

1.

Legislate for a two-phase process to include early engagement, or embed 'consultation' as a distinct event in longer-term involvement, to make community consultation more useful and effective across the diverse policy contexts of the UK

2.

Build capacity through two-way knowledge and skills exchange

3.

Collaborate with individuals and organisations who have lived experience and long-term knowledge of the needs and interests of projected or existing communities

4.

Offer a variety of methods and opportunities in both online and physical forums for people to access and exchange knowledge and to connect with other individuals and organisations

5.

'Lean into discomfort': reach beyond usual known contacts and be open to challenge

6.

Use consultation processes to contribute to a continuous, long-term, and openly accessible online database of social value mapping

7.

Collaborate with people who have lived knowledge of how different communities will interpret consultation language and be alert to buzz-words

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Introduction

Introduction

This report, on improving community consultation in planning in Wales, is one of a series of four reports based on the nations of the UK. It was developed as part of *Community Consultation for Quality of Life*, an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project led by the University of Reading in collaboration with the Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Ulster Universities (www.cccqol.org). This project seeks to influence the way in which community knowledge is operationalised through planning consultation, hence the use of the word 'consultation', as opposed to 'engagement' or 'participation' which are about more long-term relationships with communities.

The work was developed through a desktop literature review (Lawson et al, 2021), interviews with stakeholders, the development of experimental 'urban room' consultation spaces and the making of digital maps with communities in all four nations to develop and test inclusive best practice.

The last stage of this research project was to reflect on the views and engagement of those consulted in interviews and in the Urban room and to offer a series of recommendations on policy and engagement planning processes in Wales and the other UK nations.

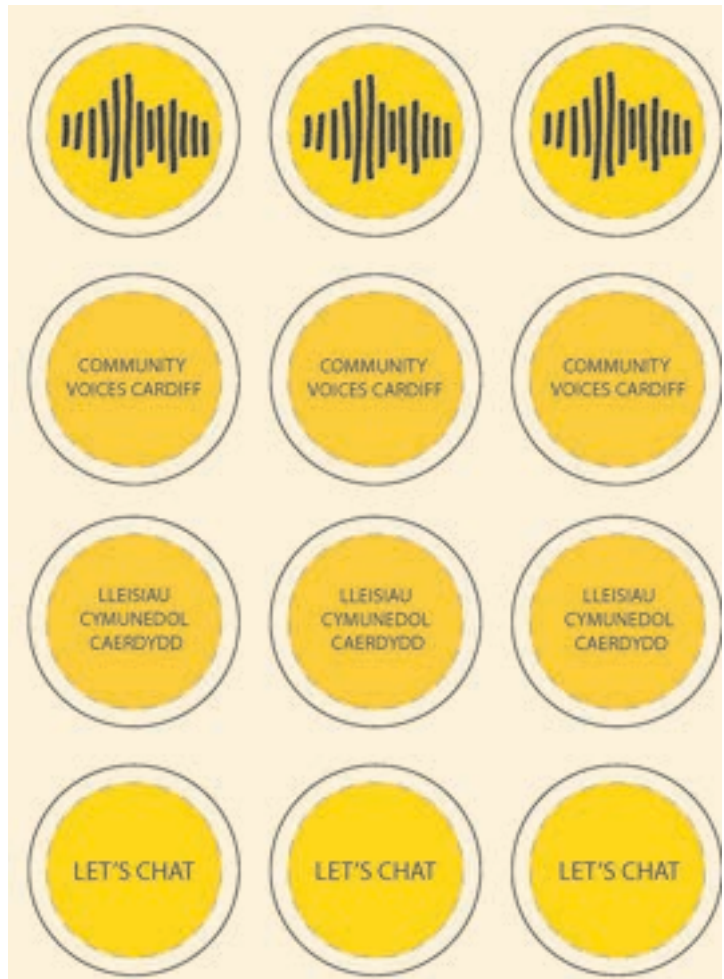


Figure 1: Community Voices Cardiff branding (Shoruk Nekeb)

Context

1.1 Historical context of community consultation in Wales

1.1.1 Introduction to community consultation in Wales 1947-2023

Community consultation in Welsh planning shares its origins with England through the initial publication of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1947*'s introduction of planning permission and requirement for the preparation of comprehensive development plans, the *Town and Country Planning Act 1968*'s introduction of the requirement to consult on structure and development plans and development of individual sites, and Skeffington's seminal, *People and Planning Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning (1969)*.

Defining participation as 'the act in sharing in the formulation of policies and proposals,' the Skeffington Report recommended early, phased, and long-term engagement, as well as resourcing, training and education, community development officers, community forums, varied methods, appropriate communications and language, feedback of impact, and opportunities for citizens to be actively and constructively engaged with local authorities in creating opportunities for others to engage. These principles are consistently repeated in policies and guidance on community consultation in planning to the present day.



Figure 2: Literature review of consultation in Wales 1947-2023 (Mhairi McVicar)

Participation is now referenced as involvement in Wales through the *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015's* (WBFGA) statutory duty that public bodies prioritise sustainable development through a culture change of five ways of working: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement. A review of the evolution and context of community consultation in Wales confirms that although involvement principles are increasingly recognised in planning, WBFGA's aim of culture change is largely still ambition rather than implementation. Statutory requirements for consultation by non-public bodies, such as developers, remaining minimal and too late and isolated in statutory processes to achieve meaningful community input, with non-statutory guidance describing the potential and evidenced benefits and value of consultation and expectations of alignment with WBFGA comprising the key mechanisms by which to advocate for all stakeholders, including non-public bodies, to commit to early and meaningful engagement in planning processes.

1.1.2 Developing a Welsh approach to planning

The Welsh Office, established in 1965 with the strategic plan *Wales: The Way Ahead (1967)*, maintained Welsh Planning within the duties of *The Town and Country Planning Act 1947* but signposted to a future Welsh citizen-first agenda by calling for local initiatives and leadership to tackle challenges of improving the built environment in Wales. The devolved National Assembly for Wales under the *Government of Wales Act 1998* and *Planning Guidance (Wales) (1996)* equipped local planning authorities in Wales with greater discretionary powers according to core values of sustainable development, equality of opportunity, and social inclusion (ECOTEC 2007, Williams 2006). *Local Government Act 2000* requirements to consult and seek participation in the preparation of community strategies was reinforced by *Wales: A Better Country's (2003)* emphasis upon openness, partnership, working across boundaries, public sector diversity, and listening to ensure voices were 'heard and valued.'

A pending Wales Spatial Plan was proposed as:

“

a major change programme based upon partnership working with key stakeholders, to ensure we make significant improvements in the quality of the planning service, and that communities including business are involved in plan-making and decision-making.

”

(Wales: A Better Country 2003: 21)

Planning: Delivering for Wales (2003) advocated inclusive consultation to 'radically improve the ethos/culture of the planning system within Wales' (ECOTEC 2007). The duty set out in the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* to produce a spatial plan and local development plans was interpreted by the 2004 Wales Spatial Plan as an opportunity to create 'distinctly Welsh answers to distinctly Welsh questions' through co-operation across traditional boundaries to mainstream spatial planning into policy development (Williams 2006).

1.1.3 A citizen-first model for public services in Wales

Following the establishment of Welsh Assembly Government through the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, Beecham's *Beyond Boundaries* proposed a 'citizen model' as the central, unifying idea to lead public sector reform in Wales. An 'entirely new dynamic to which public services have to adjust' through a weakening of organisational boundaries to put citizens centre-stage would require public organisations to 'find much more effective ways of engaging the public' (Beecham 2006). Highlighting planning as amongst the lowest scoring services in terms of citizen satisfaction, Beecham recommended transformational change across government to position Wales as a benchmark for flexible, citizen-centred local services. *Making the Connections (2006)* confirmed a central agenda of effective engagement with citizens, envisioning voluntary and community sectors developing enhanced roles as citizens' advocates, particularly for those who tended to be excluded from traditional provision. *People, Plans and Partnerships* defined the envisioned development of community strategies under the Welsh citizen-first agenda:

“

Critically, they are meant to be founded upon constructive and real engagement with local people and communities, and prepared and delivered through an approach based on collaboration between agencies and organisations.

”

(Williams, 2006, p.10)

One Wales: A progressive agenda for the government of Wales (2007) addressed 'citizen-centred' services by committing to deepen engagement between the Wales Spatial Plan and Communities First, encouraging 'delivery agents' from community, voluntary and private sectors to actively engage with organisations representing the interests of marginalised groups, an approach piloted through Communities First's adoption of a multi-agency partnership structure through which community members constituted one-third membership in developing community-led action plans. (Adamson & Bromiley 2008).

1.1.4 Principles for public engagement in Wales

Guidance for delivering a citizens-first agenda included Participation Cymru's *Ten Principles for Public Engagement* (Participation Cymru 2012) and Welsh Assembly Government's *Collaborative Community Planning* as being:

“

Fundamentally about understanding, responding to and meeting the long-term needs of local citizens and communities and involving those citizens and communities in the development and design of the vision for better outcomes for the area and their delivery.

”

(Collaborative Community Planning Part 2 2010, p.9).

Encouraging ‘considerable flexibility’ to local partners in deciding how to undertake community planning, statutory community planning partners were tasked with encouraging local people and organisations to become involved in setting area visions, seeking local ownership of planning and development processes by tapping into the ‘ideas, knowledge, skills, experience, energy and enthusiasm’ amongst individuals, groups and communities to drive change (Collaborative Community Planning Part 2 2010, p.47).

1.1.5 Towards a Welsh Planning Act

Between 2007-14, research preparing for a Wales Planning Act including an *Evaluation of the Processes used to Develop National Planning Policy in Wales* (ECOTECT 2007), a *Study to Examine the Planning Application process in Wales* (Grimley 2010), and Welsh Government's *Towards a Welsh Planning Act: Ensuing the Planning Systems Delivers* (2012). Processes, attitudes, and cultures in Welsh planning were evaluated in *Public Attitudes Towards The Planning System In Wales* (2012), *A New Approach to Managing Development in Wales* (2012) *Realising The Potential Of Pre-Application Discussions* (2012), *Planning Permission Process For Housing* (2013), *Planning Enforcement System in Wales* (2013), *Design and Access Statements in Wales* (2013), *Operation of Planning Committees in Wales* (2013) and *Design in the Planning Process* (2014). These studies evaluated the structure of the existing planning system in Wales as essentially sound and effective (ECOTEC 2007, *Towards a Welsh Planning Act 2012*) but identified it as under significant stress with increasing responsibilities, diminishing resources, and few professional or public stakeholders happy with its operation or impact (Grimley 2010).

Common recommendations included collaborating with existing organisations for inclusive engagement, capacity building in the community and profession (ECOTEC 2007, Adamson 2008, Grimley 2010, *Towards a Welsh Planning Act 2012*), and consistent engagement processes for Supplementary Planning Guidance (*Towards a Welsh Planning Act 2012*) and pre-applications (*Practice Guide: pre-Application 2012, Towards a Welsh Planning Act 2012*).

The emphasis on involvement and collaboration represented a broader shift from expert-driven to multi-stakeholder planning, with the Wales Spatial Plan identified as a progressive planning strategy moving beyond the confines of land management (Heley 2013). Local authorities were challenged to reframe their roles by taking radical and innovative approaches to development management through a more pro-active approach to place-shaping (*A New Approach 2012*). With *The Localism Act 2011* applying almost exclusively to England, the divergence of Welsh planning offered a 'devolution dividend' of significant reform for 'meaningful engagement with all stakeholders at every level' (*A New Approach 2012*), with exemplars cited as Planning Aid Wales's early engagement and community capacity-building work with Carmarthenshire Council and Brecon Beacons National Park (Grimley 2010, *Towards a Welsh Planning Act 2012*).

1.1.6 The Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 and The Planning (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFGA) was groundbreaking in making Wales the first country in the world to legislate for the needs of future generations (*Future Generations Report 2020*). Defining five statutory ways of working, WBFGA defined involvement as ‘the importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves,’ assessing progress through National Well-being Indicators including feeling involved, satisfaction with access to facilities and services, people’s satisfaction with where they live, sense of community, and Social Value partnerships. (*How to measure a nation’s progress?* 2016).

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 defined duties for preparing a National Development Framework, *local development plans*, statutory consultation, and pre-application processes. Statutory consultation requirements for developers of ‘major developments’ were limited in scope, comprising public site notices, informing adjacent neighbours, and a 28-day consultation period of planning application documents at pre-application stage. Welsh Government non-statutory guidance for developers recommended - but could not enforce - meaningful early community involvement, instead emphasising the benefits and value of community involvement as improving the quality, efficiency, and certainty of planning outcomes (*Best Practice Guidance for Developers 2017*). Planning Aid Wales’s *Pre-application consultations: Guidance for Communities* (2018) subsequently offered guidance for communities in raising awareness and securing input into consultations, recommending ‘positive ‘listening’ relationships between developer and community.

1.1.7 The role of placemaking

The challenge of meeting WBFGA objectives was highlighted by Wales Audit Office's 2019 conclusion that planning authorities were not resilient enough to deliver long-term improvements due to limited capacity and system complexities. Reporting that the public perceived planning authorities as being not ambitious enough in a planning system viewed as disproportionately delivering greater benefits for developers than communities, Wales Audit Office reported that citizens wanted to see local planning authorities 'upping their game and becoming more innovative' in addressing citizens' concerns 'that they are not effectively engaged or involved in discussions on the priorities for development in their area, nor in decision making on local applications' (Wales Audit Office 2019, p.9). This observation supported WBFGA's assessment that 19% of people felt they were able to influence decisions affecting their local area (Hafferty 2020). Welsh Government's *Development Plans Manual* (2020) stated a key message of involvement rather than consultation in preparing Local Development Plans:

“

Compliance and integration with the well-being goals and ways of working will play an important part in demonstrating the LDP is sound. It should not be a tick box exercise or bolted on at the end of the process, but embedded throughout plan preparation.

”

(Development Plans Manual 2020, p.15)

The *Development Plans Manual* (2020) identified Placemaking as a national priority in providing opportunity for communities to engage in plan-making processes at local levels, delivering local outcomes through building consensus, and securing buy-in from communities. The role of Placemaking in enabling community involvement underpinned the 2020 launch of Placemaking Wales as a partnership of multi-sector organisations as signatories to co-designed placemaking principles (*Placemaking Guide* 2020) identifying involvement as the first step of placemaking.

Identifying learnings from different ways of thinking that had emerged through the Covid-19 pandemic, Welsh Government's *Builder Better Places* (2020) called for Welsh Government, planners, local authorities, and developers to commit to early, meaningful engagement, tasking National Development Frameworks with providing evidence for plan-based decision making, enabling time and effort in Local Development Plans and Place Plans to be directed to localised discussions with communities and developers.

1.1.8 The Future Generations Report 2020

In 2020, the Future Generations Commissioner's five-year assessment concluded that things were changing under WBFGA but identified too much focus on process rather than achievement of the cultural change needed to shift from old to new ways of thinking. Despite broad support of WBFGA aims, challenges in achieving involvement were ascribed to complexities in communications, lack of trust between the public sector and the public, and barriers in resources and governance. The report emphasised the scale of culture change required, advocating for kindness, bravery, broad thinking, and passion for change as central to realising the Act's potential for innovation.

Land use and placemaking were identified as an area of focus, citing feedback that the public still viewed planning consultation as inadequate, tokenistic, or lacking in inclusivity and equality, with early engagement not yet common. Describing involvement as an important strategic tool rather than a burden of compliance, public bodies were directed to find new methods to engage people, and developers advised to understand new legislation and planning requirements as 'not optional' and to 'involve the communities affected by their proposal fully' (*Future Generations Report 2020*). Statutory duties for developers to consult, however, remained as per the limits of the *Planning (Wales) Act 2015*, with guidance on the value and benefits of involvement remaining a key mechanism through which developers could be encouraged to meaningfully consult.

1.1.9 Future Wales The National Plan 2040: collaboration, partnership, and inclusiveness

The National Development Framework, *Future Wales the National Plan 2040* (2021) described itself as ‘major milestone in the ongoing development of a distinctively Welsh planning system’, with areas of focus including placemaking through mixed-use development. The public sector was again tasked with a pro-active leadership role in delivering placemaking principles, and specifically with enabling local development through a foundational economy to secure public benefit and address housing and social, health and environmental inequalities, including unlocking land for SME developers and community-led initiatives.

The Planning Inspectorate: Strategic Plan 2020 to 2024 (2021) committed to partner with and support others to improve the planning system at national and local levels, and to address inequalities in planning, including developing an inclusive workforce representative of customers served. *Planning Policy Wales Edition 11* (2021) advocated moving away from isolated decision-making through a ‘spirit of partnership and inclusiveness’ between all stakeholders (PPW 2021, p.10) to achieve placemaking through involvement in order to understand the intrinsic value of places.

Planning Aid Wales's review of *The Value of Engagement in Planning in Wales* (2021), prioritised practical, actionable measures alongside reviews of longer term structural and political cultural change for all stages in the planning process. Defining meaningful engagement as adding value to planning and development processes by 'harvesting knowledge that cannot be otherwise accessed and fostering community cohesion through a conversation that is consistent and extends in time [...] and space', Planning Aid Wales defined 'consultation' as inviting comment when decisions have been made, 'involvement' as opportunity to discuss ideas regarding defined decisions, and 'engagement' as developing projects in partnership. Each approach was described as potentially appropriate for varied stages, with consultation thus representing a discrete activity taking place late in decision-making processes. Planning Aid Wales made recommendations under six themes: clarity and accessibility; engagement as a continuous process; engagement as both a technical and political moment; transparency in decision making and accountability of outcomes; certainty of process; and costs and equity. Recent publications evaluating place-based and co-design approaches to community engagement (*Baker 2022, A Government Fit for Future Generations 2022, Planning Aid Wales 2021 and Welsh Government 2021*) continue a current central message of engagement adding value to, rather than detracting from, planning and development.

1.2 Current planning legislation and policy guidance in Wales

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 is the first significant piece of primary legislation made on a Wales only basis (Henderson 2021), with UK legislation relating to land use in Wales set out in *the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and Planning Act 2008*. *Planning is now almost entirely devolved in Wales and aligned to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*.

As the defining legislation underpinning devolved activities in Wales, the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* (WBFGA) places a statutory duty on all public bodies in Wales to publish and assess progress on well-being objectives. A Future Generations Commissioner is appointed to encourage, assist, and advise public bodies, and evaluates the integration of the Act's five ways of working through expectations of culture change in planning processes.

Future Wales 2040 (2021), the National Development Framework, is the highest tier of development plans. A spatial plan defining a 20-year land use framework reviewed every five years, Future Wales has statutory development plan status and sets direction for Strategic and Local Development Plans. *Policy 3 – supporting urban growth and regeneration* calls for public sector leadership in unlocking the potential of land and taking an increased development role in applying placemaking principles to address the domination of the development industry by a small number of large developers, enabling a wider range of smaller and local developers to deliver growth and regeneration.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) sets out Welsh Government Planning Policies under which Local Planning Authorities prepare their Local Development Plans. PPW 10 (2018) was updated to reflect WBFGA objectives of well-being and sustainability, introducing placemaking as a mechanism to achieve these. PPW 11 (2021) aligns to *Future Wales 2040* and the *A More Equal Wales 2021*, encouraging a wider problem-solving outlook. (Future Wales 2020). PPW is accompanied by Technical Advice Notes (TANs) providing detailed planning advice guidance. Grimley (2010) referenced consultations on a draft but unpublished *Technical Advice Note TAN 17* (Consultation) Planning and Management Development as addressing statutory consultees and the involvement of public or community groups.

The *Development Plans Manual* (2020) gives planning procedural advice and advocates an ‘integrated and inclusive LDP preparation process’ through a key message of involvement rather than consultation. The DPM includes requirements for Community Involvement Schemes (CIS), recommending collaborations to achieve inclusive processes, early and continuous dialogue, resourcing, and outputs and feedback.

Planning Policy Wales 11 (2020) lists additional relevant legislation including *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*; *Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010*; *Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013*; *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*; *Environment (Wales) Act 2016*; *Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016*; *Public Health (Wales) Act 2017*; and *Welsh Language Measure 2011*. At local authority level, the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act (Part 3) places a duty on local authorities to promote and encourage participation in council decision-making, including the publication of a participation strategy.

Each Local Planning Authority (LPA) in Wales has a statutory duty to prepare a Local Development Plan in line with Planning Policy Wales, with preparation processes including a Delivery Agreement setting out the key stages and when people can get involved through Community Involvement Schemes (Wales Audit Office 2019, Cardiff Council 2023). *Towards a Planning System* (2012) confirmed agreement with Planning Aid Wales's representation that the preparation stage of Local Development Plans constituted the crucial time for community engagement. More recent guidance (*Building Better Places 2020, Development Plans Manual 2020*) emphasises the need for up-to-date LDPs to focus on local distinctiveness and practical and positive outcomes for local communities and businesses, and encourage Joint Local Development Plans, working across two or more LPA's for holistic and consistent policy across boundaries.

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG's) are non-statutory documents which expand upon policies and proposals in Local Development Plans. In 2012, Welsh Government identified the potential of SPGs for involving communities in setting out the detail of how allocated sites should be developed (*Towards a Planning System 2012*). In the last decade, the potential of community-led Place Plans as adopted SPGs has been identified as a means of linking national and strategic planning through local planning processes to the Placemaking agenda (Wales Audit Office 2019).

The Equality Act 2010 section 149 requires public bodies to have due regard to nine protected characteristics defined by the Act in terms of the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. *A more Equal Wales: The Socio-economic Duty Equality Act 2010* came into force in Wales in March 2021 as statutory guidance, summarising the Socio-Economic Duty as placing 'legal responsibility on bodies when they are taking strategic decisions to have due regard to the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage' (*A More Equal Wales, 2021*).

1.3 Consultation delivery in Wales

1.3.1 Consultation led by public and third sector bodies

Supporting the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's* statutory requirements for application of the five ways of working throughout all public bodies in Wales, the **Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales** staffing roles include an 'Involvement Artist' and 'Change-makers' tasked with changing public sector culture and supporting the planning and delivery of involvement activities. Mechanisms of involvement includes the *People's Platform, Simple Changes, Big Ideas, the Art of The Possible and Future Focus. A Journey to Involvement* (2019) and online *Journey to Involvement* checker gives guidance on applying involvement principles.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to consult with communities in the preparation of Local Development Plans, carrying out consultations with internal teams and/or in collaboration with external consultants. Current Local Development Plan consultation in Cardiff includes a virtual online room, city centre and neighbourhood workshops in collaboration with Planning Aid Wales, and on-request community-led conversation sessions with planning team members.

The *Design Commission for Wales* (DCFW) was established as an expert body by the National Assembly for Wales to promote good design, and conduct non-statutory pre-planning-application design review, and training for local authorities, professionals, and practitioners. DCFW involvement initiatives includes the toolkit *My Square Mile / Fy Milltir Sgwar* (2007), *Placemaking Wales* (2020) and the *Shape My Town* toolkit developed with Coombs Jones Architects, applied to *Shape My Brecon Beacons* (2016).

Planning Aid Wales (PAW)/Cymroth Cynllunio Cymru are a charity offering guidance, research, and training on planning, are cited as delivering exemplar approaches to community consultation (Grimley 2010), have been retained by Local Authorities to lead workshops on Local Development Plans, and advocate a Wales-wide training programme addressing engagement in plan-making and development projects (Planning Aid Wales, 2021).

The **Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Cymru** undertakes planning research, policy debates and best practice dissemination. RTPI Cymru responses to Welsh Government consultations related to planning includes recommendations to integrate the WBFGA's five ways of working into the Pre-Application Process to help planners /developers embrace being more collaborative and involve the community in shaping plans and schemes through an emphasis on placemaking.

Place Plans are under development across several local authorities in Wales. Ceredigion Place Plans adopt a regional approach with six towns tasked to engage a 'bottom-up' approach for the community to 'take ownership' of their place plans.

Civic Societies such as **Cardiff Civic Society** are voluntary organisations who lobby Welsh Government and Local Authorities and run public campaigns on issues related to the built environment. Cardiff Civic Society publications include a *Guide to Planning Objections* (undated) and are lobbying for changes to consultation processes.

1.3.2 Consultation led by participation and engagement practitioners

Planning Aid Wales note the role increasingly performed by PR agents in the planning field, which they describe as producing ‘very informative events and materials’ but note that ‘the meaningfulness of the engagement undertaken has yet to be independently evaluated’, recommending that further research be undertaken in respect to PR companies’ engagement activities and ‘their effect on building trust in planning in Wales.’ (Planning Aid Wales 2021).

1.3.3 Non-planning consultation examples in Wales

Applying for accreditation for Cardiff to be the UK’s first UNICEF-chartered ‘Child Friendly City’, **Child Friendly Cardiff** held ‘grand Council Events’ and Youth Summits co-designed with young people, train young people as interviewers to gather views on shaping the city and ran a Child Friendly Cardiff festival ‘pop-up’ for children and young people in 2022.

The **Co-production and Involvement Network for Wales Ltd (Co-production Network for Wales)** are a not-for-profit organisation offering consultancy, training, and a ‘knowledge base’ of resources, case studios, and toolkits, including a measuring what matters evaluation toolkit and a glossary of engagement terminology.

The **Building Communities Trust’s** mission is stated as enabling residents to take action to make their areas even better places to live, through provision of funding, support, opportunities for sharing and learning, and influencing decision-makers. Their 10 year Lottery funded ‘Invest Local’ programme advocates a community-led approach to identifying goals for their areas. Resources include a Welsh Community Asset Index measuring levels of active participation in community and civic life in Welsh communities, and an online map database of Community Asset Transfers in Wales.

The **Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)**, a national membership body for voluntary organisations in Wales, provide networking, training, grants, and lobbying, and have lobbied for collaboration with community organisations to identify local needs and joint working between local authorities and the voluntary sector.

Can Do Toolkits, sponsored by **Social Business Wales**, advise on how investment, commissioning and procurement of goods, services and works across the public sector can align to WBFGA and share power with communities in making decisions about the future of their homes and communities.

Transport for Wales launched a *Talking Transport* toolkit in 2022, aimed at starting conversations about transport in communities aiming for more inclusive engagement with communities. The toolkit offers training and upskilling for both Transport for Wales staff and members of the public to become facilitators and promote the toolkit to community groups and schools.

1.4 Consultation knowledge and research gaps in Wales

Planning Aid Wales (2021) observe that there is almost too much guidance on engagement, warning that 'guidance alone will not change practice.' This aligns to the Future Generations Commissioners' observation of an implementation gap between WBFGA policy aspirations of culture change and its delivery (Future Generations 2022). A literature review of legislation and policy related to community consultation in planning in Wales identified several repeating recommendations for further research into:

- an official comprehensive review of participation and engagement practices in the UK (Planning Aid Wales 2021).
- clarifying the terminology of consultation to support consistency in practice (Planning Aid Wales 2021, Williams 2006, Beecham 2006, Skeffington 1969).
- capacity building, training, and upskilling for built environment professionals and members of the public in engagement (Baker 2022, Planning Aid Wales 2021, Future Generations Report 2020, Wales Audit Office 2019, Williams 2006, Skeffington 1969).
- the impact of reporting, or not, reporting the impact, benefits, and value of engagement activity, including best-practice case studies (Planning Aid Wales 2021, Future Generations Report 2020, Williams 2006, Skeffington 1969); and
- the role of professional agencies in providing engagement (Planning Aid Wales 2021).

1.5 Summary of consultation in Wales 1947-2023

The 1969 Skeffington Report's recommendations for early and ongoing engagement, resources and skills development in engagement, and positioning of the public as actively and constructively engaged with local authorities remain, as Planning Aid Wales observed (2021), remarkably consistent with recommendations over the last half century. A 'distinctly Welsh' approach to planning under the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* places clear expectations on public bodies to be brave, innovative, and ambitious in adopting culture change, actively going beyond minimum statutory duties of consultation in line with the five ways of working. An envisioned planning and development process led by multi-stakeholder partnerships between public, private and voluntary sector with the public, defines community consultation as a discrete, late-stage activity within a longer-term joined-up process of involvement and engagement in local, regional, and national development frameworks.

Although statutory consultation requirements remain minimal for private developers, the WBFGA places a clear duty on public bodies to actively advocate and deliver meaningful community involvement in planning as an added value.



Figure 3: Community Voices Cardiff urban room in Grange Pavilion, Grangetown, Cardiff, Wales

Lessons from Community Voices Cardiff

2.1 The aim of the urban room

2.1.1 CCQoL research questions

Community Voices Cardiff was part of a UK-wide research project, *Community Consultation for Quality of Life* (CCQoL) funded by the Arts and Humanities and Research Council (AHRC). CCQoL was initiated by Professor Flora Samuel (the 'Principal Investigator') based on the belief that creating maps of local assets - the places people value most in their communities - is a good way to involve local communities in co-creating local knowledge about their area. Applying the Quality of Life Foundation's themes of Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement and Belonging in a Commonplace online mapping platform, a map-based approach aimed to test how creating local knowledge through community consultation can help inform longer-term decisions about future development and improvements in our communities.

CCQoL asked the following research questions:

How can community consultation be made more useful and effective across the diverse policy contexts of the UK?

How can community consultation be made more representative and inclusive?

How can community consultation be undertaken for areas that have not yet been developed, when 'future users' are not known?

What are the relative benefits of online and physical community consultation?

How can community consultation be made into a long-term project that fosters ongoing civic debate?

How can social value mapping inform the process of community consultation?

What format could community consultation take in a pandemic?

What terminology is needed to describe inclusive, empowering 21st century community consultation?

These questions were addressed through planning, delivering and evaluating four physical 'Urban Rooms', defined by the Urban Room Network as spaces 'where people can come together to help create a future for their local area', alongside Commonplace online mapping platforms and surveys in four UK cities - Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Northern Ireland - with each city's approach informed by a policy literature review specific to each nation, interviews with local planning and community representatives, and Local Advisory Groups in each city.

2.1.2 CCQOL Cardiff interviews

Ten interviews were carried out in Wales with Welsh Government, Local Authorities, professional and advisory bodies in planning (planning professionals) and residents who had participated in consultation on development in their area (residents). Coded through NVivo, the interviews raised common themes of good practice, barriers, and motivations for consultation.

The term 'consultation' was interpreted as 'telling' or 'informing' in comparison to 'involvement' or 'engagement', with a planning professional stating "I don't call it consultation, I call it conversation." Poor consultation processes were described as complex, technical, vague, inconsistent, difficult to explain or understand, and bureaucratic. "It's just such a long-winded process, and I think that really sucks up a lot of the time and resources", a planning professional noted, while residents noted the resource implications of trying to understand planning processes.

Negative impacts on mental well-being were highlighted, with planning professionals describing "intense debate, comments, social media abuse", "borderline kind of harassment and online bullying", online comments being "vitriolic and nasty" and "accusations of being in developers' pockets, which I find really offensive", with limited support for handling online abuse. Residents described objecting to development consultations as being "like a full-time job", leading to mental health issues.

“ ‘Consultation’ almost gives the impression of patronising and talking down to people and telling them what’s going to happen rather than the conversation, what is ‘here is what we’re planning to do, be involved, we’ve got flexibility in this design. We’ve got options here. We have fixed parameters’.

And I think this is a really important message. ”

(Planning professional)

“ ...you kind of feel like you’re out there on your own unless you have some money to hire in somebody who really knows the planning law, because it is complicated, and it is difficult to kind of manipulate your way around it. ”

(Resident)

“ I’ll tell you what it left me feeling, it left me feeling... it left me feeling totally demoralized. Totally like I’d wasted a massive part of my life fighting for something I believed in. And just what was the point in that, what was the absolute point? It made me feel “never again, never get involved in a community consultation.” Because, obviously, there is absolutely no point, we don’t get listened to. ”

(Resident)

Statutory pre-application consultation was described as inadequate, with WBFGA “referenced” rather than “implemented”, residents perceiving processes as “entirely weighted to the benefit of the developers”, and planning professionals commenting that speculative developers would do the minimum because “they will move on and then they won’t really have any legacy or commitment to our community” and suggesting “you can’t legislate for good community engagement, you can legislate for the bare minimum.”

The need for adequate resources and time was acknowledged with planning professionals highlighting budget deadlines which “don’t give me time to have that conversation with communities and businesses” as undermining trust. Best practice examples described processes in which developers and architects met at early design stages with residents to “remove people’s perceptions or anxiety about consulting”.

“ I’ll be honest - I’d say that the minimum statutory levels are woefully inadequate. Because irrespective of what approach a developer makes, they will always undertake that process just before they submit their planning application.

So you’re denying the community an opportunity to influence, then you’re almost making the developer try to contradict whatever the community say in that process. It’s too late in the process. ”

(Planning professional)

“ That’s resource hungry. It’s not a cheap thing. But from my perspective, it was worth it because you enable people to express themselves and enable them to realise their opinions of being listened to, which is very important: if they feel they’re being ignored then you lose the trust. You have to gain the trust and then hold that just in order to deliver. ”

(Planning professional)

Planning professionals described involving stakeholders with existing knowledge of the area as “listening to what the needs of the community are before you agree on the approach to consultation”, working with people who already have relationships in the area “to amplify the voices of the community in terms of shaping their place” rather than consultants “parachuting” in.

“...you shouldn't promise what you can't deliver, but you should deliver what you promise.”
(Planning professional)

There was consistent agreement on the need to be clear about the purpose and scope of consultation. Evidencing how consultation informed decision making was framed as building trust with people “because they realise that for once their opinions mattered.” Setting a broad and open context led to “genuinely, really, really positive” responses from residents, with good practice including consultations which adapted and changed rather than being fixed. Planning professionals described case studies where early engagement had helped to “de-risk” planning application processes. A need for “broadening the skills base” by recognising consultation delivery as a specific skill and embedding consultation skills within planning and design teams was identified.

“What the better developer would do would be to introduce their own non-statutory process much earlier on before they necessarily have completely agreed what they want to do, and they've shuttered it down [...] They could be offering that up to the community to help facilitate a better relationship as they move forward into more formal consenting stages.”
(Planning professional)

Pending Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) were signposted as an opportunity to “provide the opportunity for local planning to be much more locally specific” and free up time for detailed planning at a local level, as well as focusing planning professionals minds “in terms of qualitative policy and adding value to neighbourhoods as what we're trying to do through planning policy”, with Place Plans identified as potential good practice in terms of early and long-term engagement, but currently lacking consistency in promotion and commitment to implementation.

“...there's not many consultants or organisations at the moment who specialise in really working with communities and spending that time with them. I think there's just a bit of a gap there, and it's the same in local authorities, you know, there's a gap there in terms of skills and resources to do meaningful engagement.”
(Planning professional)

2.1.3 Aims of the Cardiff urban room

“

Organisations emphasised an interest in ‘consultation done differently.’ Their experiences a lot of the time were: ‘we’ve been doing the same thing for a very long time’, ‘the same people have come to the consultations.’

They felt like they were probably doing the right thing, but they also were well aware that, even with a lot of funding to engage, they were struggling to get people to come to consultations, as in, ‘actually, we’ve tried all these different techniques, and we are putting it out there, but it still wasn’t working’. So, it’s just about widening this knowledge.

”

*Mymuna Soleman,
Community Partnerships Manager (CPM),
Community Voices Cardiff*

Establishing Community Voices Cardiff responded to the literature review and interviews in aiming to:

- Adopt a ‘hyper-local’ approach, building a research team with researchers who know the area well and locating the urban room in a neighbourhood community facility.
- Capacity build through knowledge and skills exchange between existing and new networks.
- Embed CCQoL consultation activities into longer-term involvement to support tangible, locally applicable outcomes.

2.2 The Cardiff urban room

2.2.1 A 'relationship and not an affair': building long-term partnerships

“

Civic engagement presents a challenge to universities to be of and not just in the community.

”

(Watson 2007)

The Cardiff urban room embedded into an existing long-term partnership project between Cardiff University's Community Gateway (Academic Lead and CCQoL Co-I Mhairi McVicar) and Grangetown, Cardiff, an electoral ward of 20,000 residents in the south of Cardiff, one of Wales's most ethnically and faith diverse wards, with strong existing community networks addressing challenges of income, health, education, physical environment and housing indicated in the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* (2019).

In 2014, Community Gateway made a long-term commitment to developing mutually beneficial partnership projects in Grangetown, with a resident challenging Cardiff University to commit to “a relationship and not an affair”. A subsequent Grange Pavilion CIO – Cardiff University partnership led to a £1.8 million redevelopment of the Grange Pavilion between 2014-2022 with a formal launch planned during the urban room in May 2022 (McVicar 2019, 2020).

2.2.2 The Community Voices Cardiff team

“ Socially motivated practices aim to transform the spaces and buildings people care about. Often, they have a strong commitment to equality, sustainability and social justice, and research in this field supports these aims, valuing lived experiences and non-professional forms of expertise. ”

(Udall 2015)

An aim in creating a Cardiff research team was to value local knowledge and varying forms of expertise in collaborating with a locally resident community activist and a locally resident undergraduate student for a 6-month period (January-July 2022) to plan and lead the Cardiff urban room, as well as a follow-up period in November-December 2022.

As academic lead of Cardiff University's Community Gateway, Community Voices Cardiff Co-Investigator (Co-I) **Mhairi McVicar** had collaborated with individuals and organisations in Grangetown since 2012, including the redevelopment of the Grange Pavilion.



Figure 4: Community Voices Cardiff – Cardiff based team (L-R) Shoruk Nekeb, Mymuna Soleman, Mhairi McVicar (Peter Evans)

Mymuna Soleman is founder of the Privilege Cafe, a safe, open forum discussing interactions of white privilege and race which had connected with over 5000 people through 50 online sessions. Welsh-born and of Somali origin, Mymuna advised Welsh Government in developing the Race Equality Action Plan. As Community Voices Cardiff Community Partnerships Manager (CPM), Mymuna challenged research process assumptions with a focus on adapting and individualising consultation approaches to include the voices of the most marginalised.

Shoruk Nekeb joined the Community Voices Cardiff team as a Student Ambassador, having completed a BSc in Architectural Studies at Cardiff University. A local resident with a Libyan background, Shoruk is a Co-Director of the Grange Pavilion Youth Forum, creating a shared, protected, safe space for young people in the area. Her emphasis in joining the team was to value consultation at all scales, including the casual, daily conversations which invited people to express their opinions in spaces and platforms where they feel they belong.

2.2.3 Community Voices Cardiff Local Advisory Group (LAG)

A Local Advisory Group composed of local area residents, urban planners, arts organisations, community organisers, educators, and local authority members met six times between January-December 2022 to advise and reflect on the preparation and running of the Urban Room, bringing varied forms of expertise and lived experience, including decades of being 'consulted upon.

The Local Advisory Group's recommendations included: careful consideration of language; avoiding triggering buzz-words; co-creation with communities from the start and throughout; use of translation; checking back with communities on the inclusiveness of the consultation design; being open to challenge and creating a safe space for others to challenge; avoiding homogenisation of communities but valuing individuals as individuals through continuous conversation; and to be open and transparent about shortcomings by allowing space for change.



Figure 5: Community Voices Cardiff – Local Advisory Group (Shoruk Nekeb)

2.2.4 Planning a Cardiff urban room

Preparations for the urban room took place over a 4-month period (Jan-May 2022) with a six-month full-time community partnerships manager, a five-month part time Undergraduate Student Research Assistant and part-time Co-Investigator, supported by the national CCQoL team.

Planning included developing an urban room timeline, a bi-lingual Commonplace web platform, branding, and social media, and contacting individuals and organisations to lead and participate in activities in the urban room. Conversations with existing and emerging networks and the research group's lived experience of area priorities identified four weekly themes to help structure the focus of activities, agreeing on Health and Wellbeing, Housing, Green Spaces, and Young Voices.

The research team undertook Cardiff University Research Integrity Training and Welsh School of Architecture full Ethics Committee review, including approval to conduct research with under-18s and vulnerable adults. Risk Assessment templates were developed for CCQoL-led activities and to share with other organisations leading activities in the Urban Room.

The national CCQoL team developed guidance for blogs, videos and photography, a social media summary for external organisations and media, templates for contacting organisations and individuals, and a database template for collating information on the aims, structure, target audience, reach, contacts, and social media details of participating organisations.

2.2.5 Connecting with individuals and organisations

Activities taking place in the Cardiff urban room were planned to meet the objectives of the Grange Pavilion CIO, of furthering and benefiting the residents of Grangetown and the neighbourhood 'without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, race or of political, religious, or other opinions' (Grange Pavilion CIO Constitution 2016). These objectives supported a place-based approach to contacting public, private and third sector organisations and individuals who could connect with communities of varied interests, faiths, ages, and ethnicities, with the aim of recruiting local, regional, and national individuals and organisations to be represented in each thematic week.

Cardiff Council representatives contacted included Councillors, Cabinet Members for Housing, Transport and Strategic Planning, Head of Planning, representatives of Regeneration and Development, Local Development Plan and Housing, and Child Friendly Cardiff. Welsh Government were contacted via the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner and the Minister for Social Justice. A total of 90 organisations were directly contacted, following an initial call out to 800+ contacts through the team's existing networks and social media.

A social media campaign was launched on 21 February 2022, introducing @VoicesCardiff on Twitter and Instagram. The first social media posts invited proposals for activities, bringing new contacts and expressions of interest for the urban room.

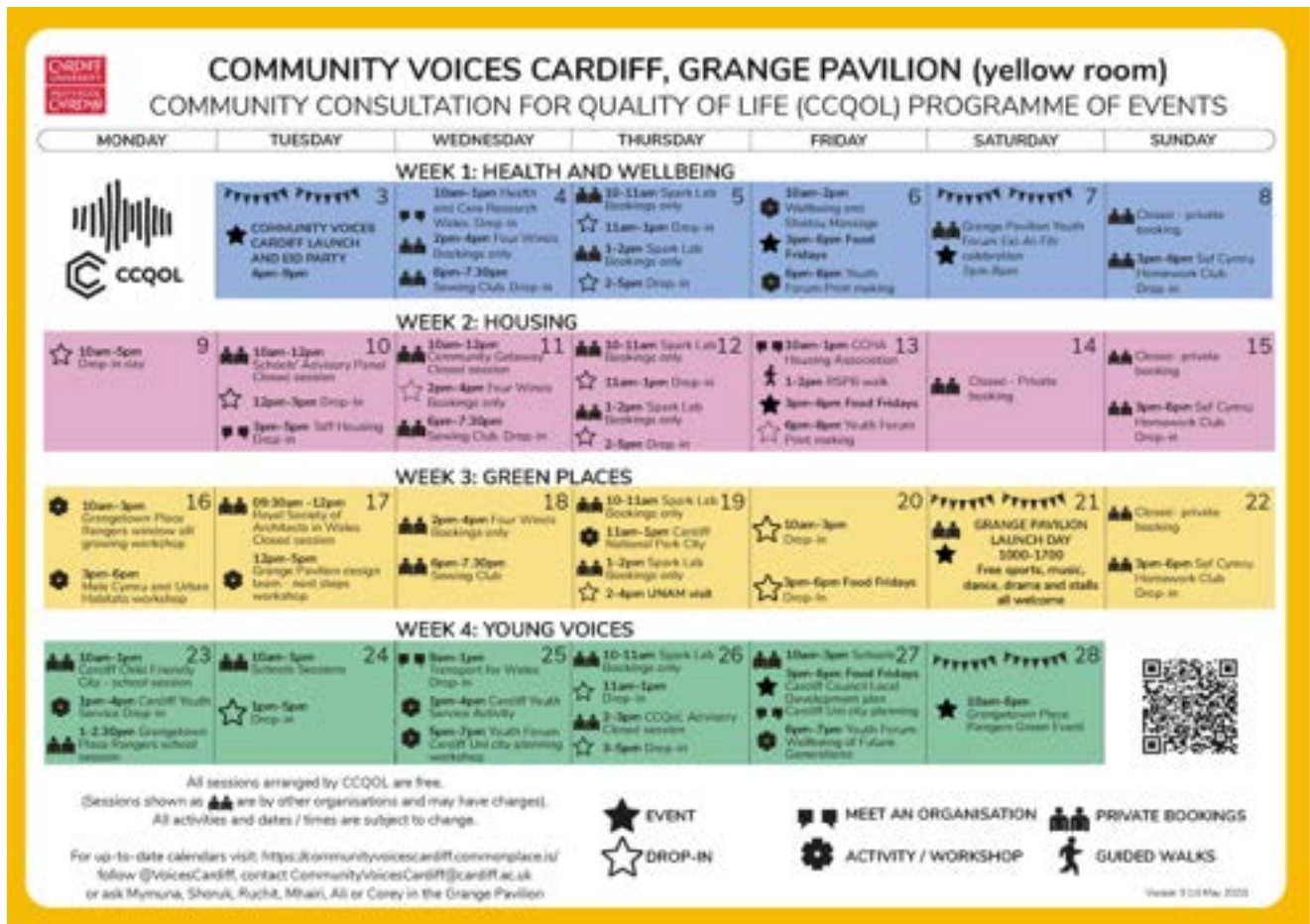


Figure 6: Community Voices Cardiff programme of events and activities



Figure 7: Community Voices Cardiff Eid launch

2.2.6 Cardiff urban room activities May 2022

“ If people have been consulted in the wrong way for a very long time, they are very disengaged. It’s about building that rapport with individual people, rather than just coming in with an agenda and a clipboard and a tablet, asking: ‘can you do this and that?’ My lived experience informed my approach, and that’s why it’s important that the right people are doing this from the start.

Just building that relationship on a personal level, knowing the people that you’re working with and their values, knowing what they stand for and what they enjoy doing, and really putting in time into your calendar to actually find out what food people like to eat - not just reading the room, but knowing the room. It’s not just to pull people in and to use them. It’s the opposite: it’s to make them feel valued.

Mymuna Soleman, CPM, Community Voices Cardiff

Community Voices Cardiff launched through an Eid Party in the Grange Pavilion on 3 May 2022 with food, outdoor and indoor games, music, and the urban room set up with calendar posters, flyers, personalised badge makers, postcards, survey QR-code loyalty cards offering free coffee at the Grange Pavilion’s Hideout coffee shop, and a Grangetown-centred Cardiff map wallpaper. The event, attracting approximately 300 people, launched a month of workshops, information drop-ins, and conversation sessions, totalling 19 CCQoL-led sessions and 42 total activities including partnership events bringing over 1000 people through the urban room.

Week one - wellbeing

Mymuna and Shoruk recommended that the urban room make people feel valued. Week 1 launched with Shiatsu Massage from a local practitioner who wanted to 'provide shiatsu to groups of people who have not enjoyed it before.'

Health and Care Research Wales ran a drop-in session aiming to learn how their approach could be more inclusive and to identify alternative approaches to involving people in health research. The week ended with a first weekly Food Friday conversation drop-in with food from local businesses and a Grange Pavilion Youth Forum printmaking session.

Week two - housing

Urban room activities embedded into regular Grange Pavilion timetabled events, including Community Gateway's Grangetown Schools Advisory Panel through which urban room children's sessions were planned with local nursery, primary and secondary schools, Child Friendly Cardiff, and Cardiff Council's Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children's Services). Taff Housing Association and Cardiff Community Housing Association ran tenant drop-ins and RSPB Cymru toured with residents on a 'homes for nature' local knowledge exchange walk.

Week three - greening

Urban Habitats and CDF Planning ran a child-friendly after-school drop-in park design workshop, and Cardiff National Park City ran a green walk mapping workshop. A workshop with the Royal Society of Architects in Wales brought together built environment professionals to challenge consultation language.

Grange Pavilion Launch

The Cardiff Urban Room was timed to coincide with the formal launch of the Grange Pavilion. A day of celebration brought over 1000 people to a market-stall room with Community Voices Cardiff, Cardiff Council Local Development Plan, Housing and Regeneration teams, Future Generations, the Royal Society of Architects in Wales, and Cardiff University researchers.

Week four - young voices

The final week held youth-focused activities with Cardiff Youth Service holding pop-up sessions about how young people preferred to be consulted. Matluba Khan, Tom Smith and Neil Harris (Cardiff University) collaborated with Shoruk and Child Friendly Cardiff on 'Growing Up in Grangetown' workshops with school classes and after-school drop-ins. Future Generations' Involvement Artist and Change-makers held a conversation session with the Grange Pavilion Youth Forum about young people's role in decision-making in Wales. Researcher Marianne Marchesi (Cardiff University) trialled a 'Circuplay' circular economy game, and Transport for Wales trialled a Talking Transport engagement toolkit. The week closed with participation in a Grangetown Green Rangers event connecting local greening initiatives.

Cardiff Council

Community Voices Cardiff ended with an open session between residents and community organisations with Cardiff Council's Head of Planning and Housing, Regeneration and Development and Local Development Plan teams to hear residents' views on inclusive community consultation, ending with a Cardiff Council commitment to join follow-up activities.



Figure 8: Community Voices Cardiff open conversation with Cardiff Council Planning, chaired by Mymuna Soleman

2.2.7 Follow up activities July-December 2022

'I am NOT hard to reach' Senedd Event 20 July 2022

Mymuna chaired a joint Community Voices Cardiff/Privilege Cafe session in the Senedd, sponsored by June Hutt MS Minister for Social Justice. The event, with panel speakers Lela Patterson, Matthew Gough, and Abubakr Madden Al Shabazz, was attended by 90 people. Continuing a theme of consultation language, the conversation emphasised that, far from being 'hard to reach', people actively choose to step away, mistrusting the motivations and accountability of consultations. Challenging assumptions of homogeneous communities, panel and audience members highlighted the intersectionality of diversity within diverse communities, and the tendency to engage with those perceived to be the 'acceptable' voice of the community, rather than sharing and developing the power and skills to lead consultation within communities. Advice was given that consultations should 'offer' as well as extract, that tangible outcomes should emerge from the gifts of time and knowledge; and that the buzzwords of consultation are known, mistrusted, remembered, and have lived consequences. The event was published as a [CCQoL blog](#) (McVicar, Soleman, Nekeb 2022).



Figure 9: Community Voices Cardiff 'I am NOT hard to reach' Senedd session, chaired by Mymuna Soleman

Royal Society of Architects in Wales conference 10 November 2022

A second follow-on workshop exploring consultation language was held at the Royal Society of Architects in Wales Annual Conference 2022 with representatives of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH).



Figure 10: Community Voices Cardiff language cards, postcards by Shoruk Nekeb

Follow-up workshops November 2022

A week of 'conversations about a Grangetown Place Plan' ran in November 2022 as a collaboration between Community Voices Cardiff, the Welsh School of Architecture 'Value' Masters Unit, Community Gateway, and the Grange Pavilion CIO. Running as open public sessions in the Grange Pavilion, in an online session using Zoom and Miro, and joining a Tramshed Tech business breakfast, a week of open public 'Conversations about a Grangetown Place Plan' workshops revisited the themes from the May urban room, inviting individuals and organisations who had joined the May urban room to reconvene and map how collective resources, skills, knowledge, and aims could support a community-led place plan.



Figure 11: Community Voices Cardiff Conversation about a Grangetown Place Plan follow up workshop (Peter Evans)



Figure 12: Community Voices Cardiff conversation about a Grangetown Place Plan follow up workshop

2.3 Findings from the Cardiff urban room

2.3.1 Community Voices Cardiff website results

The Community Voices Cardiff web platform launched with the urban room and remains live (as of October 2023). Analysis for the Community Voices Cardiff (2022) report referenced online engagement up to 11 December 2022, with 2434 visitors and 205 respondents making 435 map or survey contributions.

61% of respondents had never participated in planning consultation, with 73% noting they “had never been asked.” Over half (54%) had heard about Community Voices Cardiff through personal connections - 33% by word of mouth, and 21% through the urban room, with 20% hearing about it through social media.

Preferences for methods of consultation were evenly split between face-to-face (27%), online (25%) and either (46%). Half of respondents (50%) accessed the online survey self-assisted on their phone, with 10% using tablets in the urban room assisted by staff. Convenience (39%) and speed (26%) topped the reasons to do online consultation, as well as the ability to use Google translate (11.5%) and assistive technology (15%).

Face-to-face consultation offered opportunities to ‘hear about the opinions of other people’ (26%) and to ‘feel part of a community’ (24%) with 18% responding that ‘it doesn’t require access to a computer or internet.’ Overall, 78% identified the benefits of face-to-face consultation as being able to share information and opinions and connect with others. The people running the room (25%), events and activities (18%) and atmosphere in the urban room (18%) topped the reasons to visit.

Community Voices Cardiff, as a hyper-local approach, aimed to include people who lived and worked in the local area, including children and young people. 45% of survey responses were from Grangetown and neighbouring wards, and 57% of respondents said they lived in the area they were commenting on, with 20% working in the area.

In comparison to the 2011 census, under 24-year-olds were underrepresented (23% under 24) compared to Cardiff (35.8%), although 20% of respondents were aged between 16-24 compared to Cardiff's 18.2% for 14-24 years old. 29% of respondents were Asian, Black and Mixed Ethnicity compared to Cardiff's 15%.

Three quarters of pins placed on the map (230 pins) were identified as 'positive' and 'mostly positive', compared to 3% (12 responses) identified as 'mostly negative' or 'negative'. Map pins clustered around Cardiff's green and blue spaces, with 154 pins identifying connections to nature. Comments described the benefits of accessing nature for mental and physical health, connecting with family and friends, a feeling of getting away from the city in a quiet and wild space, meeting others to feel part of a community, and seeing other people.

All map pins and comments can be viewed at <https://communityvoicescardiff.commonplace.is/>

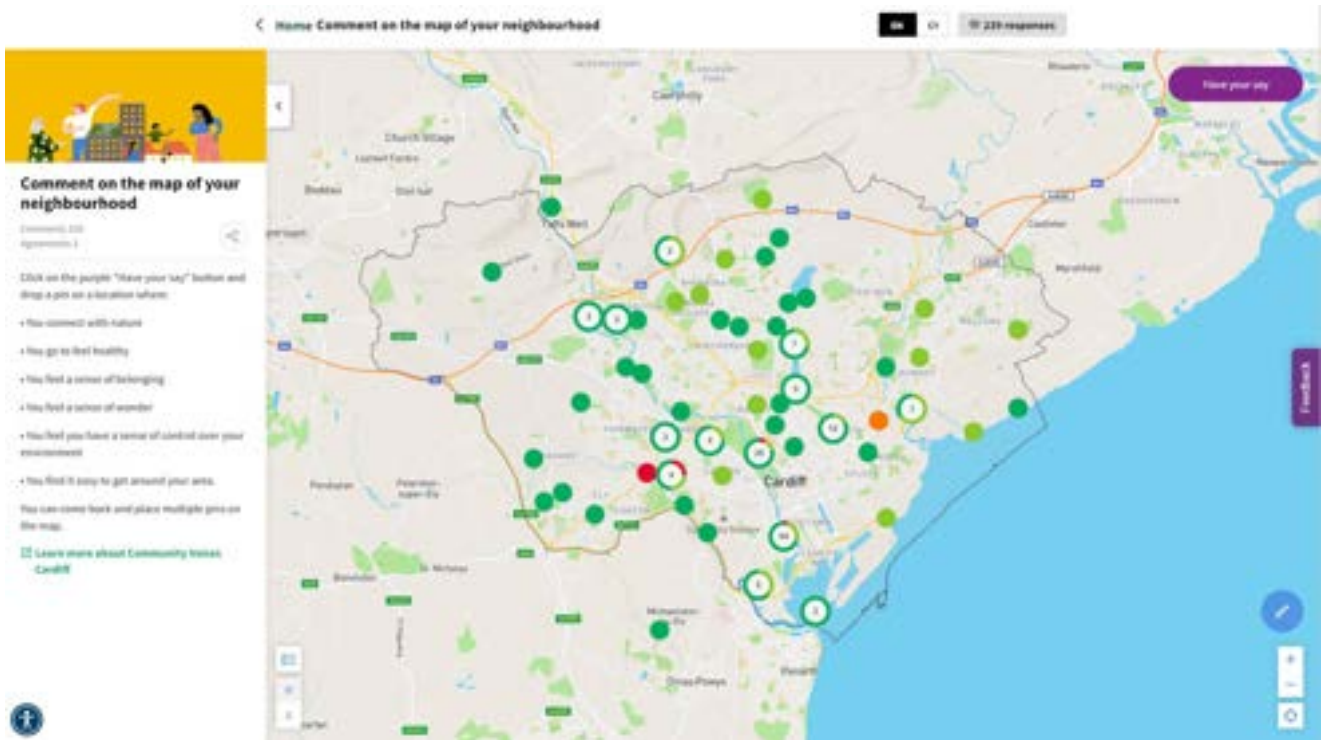


Figure 13: Community Voices Cardiff Commonplace map

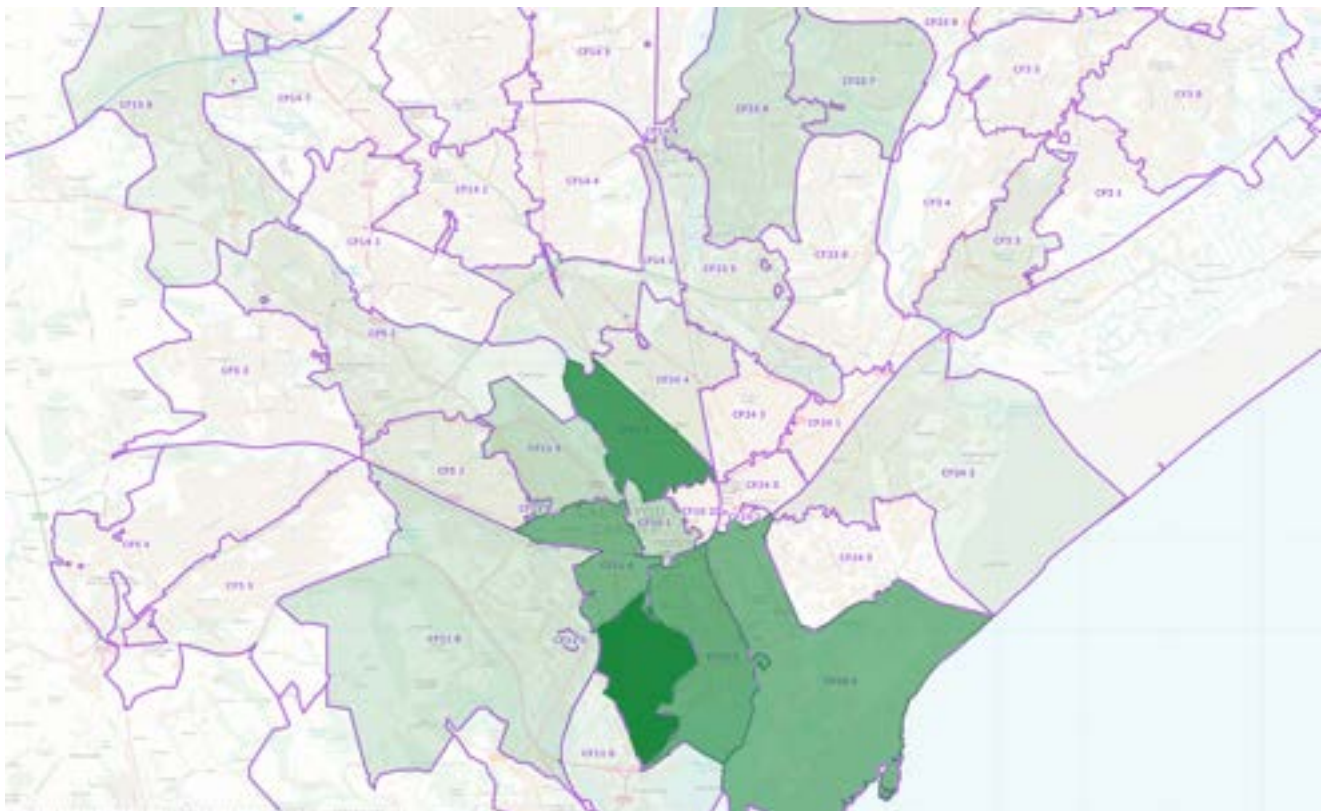


Figure 14: Community Voices Cardiff Commonplace postcodes of respondents

2.3.2 Feedback from people leading activities in the urban room

Organisations leading activities reported that the urban room supported direct engagement at the grassroots level, helping organisations to explain the intentions of their consultation, to hear directly from people in face-to-face sessions, and to make connections with a range of people from the local community and wider interests.

One planning professional noted CCQoL had “changed how I discuss consultations with wider groups of people, questioning more their approaches to consultation”. Feedback recommended that the urban room ‘should not be a one-off thing and should be repeated in regular intervals as a way of feeding back to the community as well’.

“ It has opened a network which would not otherwise have been possible, enabling a better understanding of working with different people and has encouraged better ways of understanding different types of people. I do feel that I know more about people, cultures, and environments through our work at the Grange Pavilion. ”

2.4 Reflections on the Cardiff urban room

Community Voices Cardiff's structure as a collaboration with local area individuals and organisations brought lived experience and long-term knowledge, and a responsibility to 'lean into discomfort' to adapt the approach to be appropriate and meaningful for all involved.

Pre-planned national CCQoL objectives for use of the urban room as a place to encourage people to complete online surveys brought significant discomfort, conflicting with the Cardiff research team's ways of working with people, a point highlighted by the Local Advisory Group in reflections.

Leaning into the discomfort of what felt like 'extractive' ways of working was to an agreement that the Community Partnerships Manager would step away from the urban room and conduct conversations with people in spaces of their choice. A key learning was that of trusting to lived experience, being 'open and transparent about shortcomings', as the Local Advisory Group had advised, and of being willing to adapt, even within the middle of a process.

“ You're putting the trust you've built with communities in a vulnerable position as a member of that 'community' yourself, but it's also raising awareness of such issues at the same time and I feel like, if I'm working with an organisation, I'm planting those seeds that would be to say, 'give me some power to make decisions because I know what's going to work and what's not going to work'.”

(Mymuna Soleman, Cardiff Community Partnerships Manager)

“ At the outset it seemed that there was a gap between some of the proposed methods (surveys / online tools) and both i) the position toward community knowledge in terms of values of Community Voices Cardiff (which very much supported community ownership of knowledge) and ii) some of the expertise and knowledge locally including within the Community Voices Cardiff team - i.e., very skilled in more open, inductive approaches to engagement & knowledge creation.

To me this was clear from the outset and potentially led to some challenges during the project - hopefully valuable learning can come from this.”

(Cardiff Local Advisory Group Member)

Locating the urban room in a busy community-managed facility brought challenges in timetabling between existing activities and risked consultation fatigue with regular users, with survey responses peaking quickly in the first week. A hyper-local urban room instead encouraged sustained conversations, working at its best when not focusing on numbers of surveys collected, which could feel extractive or intrusive. A hyper-local room carried the responsibility of maintaining long-term relationships. Those who had given their time and knowledge would still be connected to the research team following the project, requiring that project should lead to tangible change as a result of gifted time and knowledge.

“ I would want those opinions to become real actions. For example, what’s going to come out of this in terms of people saying, ‘This is the way I want to be consulted’? How are decision making institutions and organisations going to take that on? How are all the organisations we’ve spoken to really going to put that into practice? ”

(Mymuna Soleman, Cardiff Community Partnerships Manager)

The knowledge exchanged through Community Voices Cardiff has been acknowledged as influencing current Cardiff Council Replacement Local Development Plan’s approach to preferred strategy consultations. In a post-urban room interview, Head of Planning Simon Gilbert, describing the open room conversations in the Community Voices Cardiff urban room as innovative and ‘just absolutely best practice, defined the Council’s Local Development Plan consultation strategy.”

“ What the urban rooms taught me was that there’s no better place to talk to a community than in their own backyard. And that really, really resonated with me because I was blown away by the intelligence and the depth of the discussion in those meetings that I attended. It was wonderful. And I think if I was doing the same thing in City Hall, it wouldn’t have been the same output at all. ”

(Simon Gilbert, Head of Planning, Local Authority)

Simon noted a ‘radical but landmark’ change in the Council’s approach as not trying to prove that everyone had been consulted as a numerical exercise, but instead offering open invitations encouraging community groups, who otherwise may not have engaged, to meet the planning team face-to-face in locations and times of their preference. The ways of working explored through leaning into discomfort in Community Voices Cardiff are ongoing as conversations regarding community involvement and leadership in place-planning continue through the relationships established by the urban room.



Figure 15: Community Voices Cardiff summary

Conclusion and Recommendations

Planning Aid Wales (2020) observed an abundance of existing guidance in Wales on consultation, engagement, participation, and involvement, and emphasised, in agreement with the Commissioner of Future Generations Wales's 2020 report, the need for recommendations and policy to move into implementation. The scale of culture change required to realise this ambition was emphasised by the *Future Generations Report 2020*, with the focus on land use and placemaking applied to adopt braver, broader thinking and passion for change in finding new ways to engage with people, and in enabling developers to understand new legislation and planning requirements as 'not optional' in involving communities affected by development proposals, despite statutory consultation requirements remaining minimal for non-public bodies.

The literature review, interviews and urban room conversations and survey feedback in Wales identified a commonly shared belief in the principles of early, long-term involvement, leading to mutually beneficial capacity building developed through skills and knowledge exchange between communities and planning professionals. Best practice was identified through place-planning initiatives across Wales, examples of Local Authorities leading their own longitudinal engagement in multi-stakeholder developers, innovations in engagement with children and young people, and developers committing to engagement at the early stages of design in processes which helped to de-risk planning application processes. Deep frustrations, mistrust, and adverse mental health outcomes were linked to the limited requirements of statutory consultation, especially when related to speculative development which lacked ongoing relationships between developers and communities.

The Cardiff urban room itself, in adopting a 'hyper-local' approach, learned by leaning into the discomfort that pre-defined research methods were not always aligned to the expertise and ways of working brought to the project by research team members who knew the area well, identifying a conflict between what could be viewed as 'extractive' and the need to achieve rigorous and transferable research methods with continuity of outcomes across four national urban rooms. This required a shifting of researcher roles, and trusting to the community partnerships manager to steer the approach to what they knew to be most appropriate for different people's preferences. This shifting of roles aligned to recommendations in policy literature and from local advisory groups: to value lived experience, be willing to adapt and change, to avoid generalisations and homogenisations of 'community' and avoid a 'one size fits all' approach, and to focus on locally-based conversations rather than quantitative approaches to consultation, an approach now being adopted by Cardiff Council in Replacement Local Development Plans.

Combining a neighbourhood urban room led in collaboration with existing networks, together with a city-wide online mapping platform, suggested a role for neighbourhood urban rooms as places to connect, exchange knowledge, and strengthen/create place-based networks between planning professionals and community individuals and organisations, and a role for online mapping platforms as an ongoing depository of community knowledge about the places people live and work in. The framing of the Commonplace platform as asset-based according to Quality of Life Foundation principles demonstrated the way in which online engagement can be pro-active, open and positive in identifying the distinct values of places before planning decisions are made, aligning to *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*'s current emphasis on placemaking as a mechanism for applying the five ways of working (long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement) to planning and development.

Recommendations responding to CCQoL research questions are:

1. How can community consultation be made more useful and effective across the diverse policy contexts of the UK?

Recommendation 1:

Legislate for a two-phase process to include early engagement before key decisions have been made. Alternatively, embed ‘consultation’ on site-specific developments as a distinct ‘information-sharing’ late-stage event aligned to longer-term place-based community involvement in decision making for National, Strategic, Local and Place-Plan development stages.

2. How can community consultation be made more representative and inclusive?

Recommendation 2:

Capacity build through two-way knowledge and skills exchange between planning professionals and community representatives who are contracted from the start of and throughout the engagement process. Include pathway opportunities for increasing diversity in the planning profession itself.

3. How can community consultation be undertaken for areas that have not yet been developed, when ‘future users’ are not known?

Recommendation 3:

Define anticipated demographics and adopt the same recommendations as for existing communities by collaborating with individuals and organisations who have lived experience and long-term knowledge of the needs and interests of the projected community.

4. What are the relative benefits of online and physical community consultation? What format could community consultation take in a pandemic

Recommendation 4

Offer a variety of methods and opportunities in both online and physical forums for people to access and exchange knowledge and to connect with other individuals and organisations from the start of and throughout a consultation process

5. How can community consultation be made into a long-term project that fosters ongoing civic debate?

Recommendation 5:

‘Lean into discomfort’: reach beyond usual known contacts and be willing to be challenged on preconceptions regarding business as usual, continuously going upstream to address structural challenges by being open to cultural change.

6. How can social value mapping inform the process of community consultation?

Recommendation 6:

Use consultation processes to contribute to a continuous, long-term, and openly accessible online database of social value mapping capturing what is already valued about a place, and directly reference this in decision-making about development in the area, from earliest stages through to evaluation and future planning.

7. What terminology is needed to describe inclusive, empowering 21st century community consultation?

Recommendation 7:

Collaborate with people who have lived knowledge of how different communities will interpret words, being alert to changing interpretations and uses of words as they become co-opted and devalued as buzzwords, and taking care to use terminology which is open and honest about the aims and scope of the consultation.

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Abbreviations

PPW Planning Policy Wales

WBFGA The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Links to referenced organisations

Building Communities Trust <https://www.bct.wales/policy>

Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) <https://dcfw.org>

Can Do Toolkits <https://www.candotoolkits.com/partner-with-the-community>

Cardiff Civic Society <https://www.cardiffcivicsociety.org/>

Ceredigion Place Plans <https://www.cynnalycardi.org.uk/activities/theme-3-projects/ceredigion-place-plans-ceredigion-county-council/>

Child Friendly Cardiff <https://www.childfriendlycardiff.co.uk/>

Co-production and Involvement Network for Wales Ltd (Co-production Network for Wales) <https://copronet.wales/>

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/>

Planning Aid Wales <https://planningaidwales.org.uk/>

Royal Town Planning Institute <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy-and-research/>

Transport for Wales <https://tfw.wales/talking-transport>

Urban Room Network <http://urbanroomsnetwork.org/>

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) <https://wcva.cymru/>

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