

DLUHC Science Seminar Series

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# How to build standards of trust, accountability, and inclusion for sustainable places

**Dr Caitlin Hafferty and Dr Mark Hirons**  
Environmental Change Institute (ECI)  
Nature-based Solutions Initiative (NbSI)  
University of Oxford

✉ [caitlin.hafferty@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:caitlin.hafferty@ouce.ox.ac.uk)  [@CaitlinHafferty](https://twitter.com/CaitlinHafferty)

✉ [mark.hirons@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mark.hirons@ouce.ox.ac.uk)  [@MarkAHirons](https://twitter.com/MarkAHirons)



# Participation for more sustainable, equitable and resilient futures

Participatory governance processes are key for making better quality decisions for more sustainable and equitable outcomes.

When done well, engagement can work to empower marginalised voices, produce high quality knowledge and evidence, increase the legitimacy of decisions and enhance the credibility and trust of organisations. However, there are lots of risks which can cause unintended negative outcomes.

This session focuses on understanding '**what works**' for engaging members of the public and other stakeholder groups in environmental governance processes. This is particularly valuable when decisions involve conflicting priorities, trade-offs, or other risks and complexities.



### The Agile Initiative

The Agile Initiative at the Oxford Martin School aims to revolutionise how world-class, high-impact research supports environmental policymaking.

 The Agile Initiative



## AGILE Sprint 3

### Pathways to scaling-up successful and sustainable Nature-based Solutions in the UK



Bunloit Estate, Highlands Rewilding



Environmental Change Institute



Leverhulme Centre  
for Nature Recovery

**What does  
'engagement' or  
'participation' mean  
to you?**

**Introduce yourself  
& briefly tell us in  
the chat**

*E.g., I'm Caitlin, a researcher at Oxford Uni in  
participatory governance, and to me,  
engagement means empowerment and placing  
people at the heart of decision-making.*



# Today's session



1

## Stakeholder engagement

- What is 'engagement'?
- Why is it important for building trust, inclusion and integrity in decision-making?



2

## Digital engagement

- How do we engage in an increasingly digitised world?
- Technical and ethical debates



3

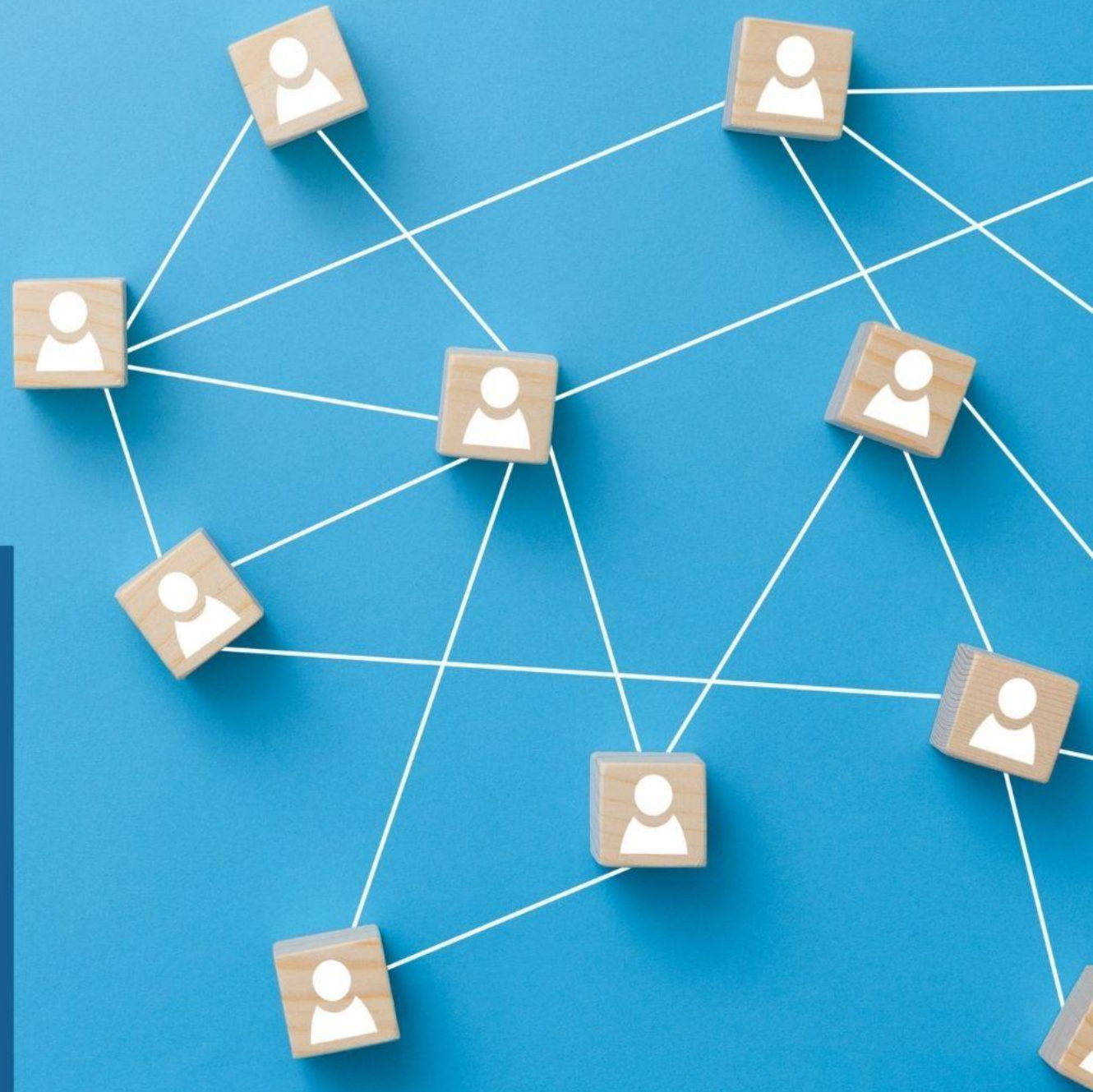
## Embed best practice

- Evidence-led strategies for embedding best practice engagement in DLUHC



Part 1:

# Effective engagement



# What is engagement?

**Participation:** ways of effectively and ethically involving people in processes, structures, spaces, and decisions that affect their lives, working with them to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes on their own terms (Kindon, 2009, p.518).

**Public and stakeholder engagement:** a process by which individuals, groups, and/or organisations choose to take an active role in decisions which affect them (e.g., Reed, 2008).

Rooted in **deliberative democracy** and  
**social justice** issues  
Recognition & critique of (in)**equity**,  
**trust** and **power** dynamics

- Kindon, S. (2009) 'Participation', in: Smith, S.J., Pain, R., Marston, S., and Jones, J.P. (eds.) SAGE Handbook of Social Geographies. SAGE publications.
- Pain, R., Kesby, M. and Askins, K. (2011) 'Geographies of impact: Power, participation and potential', *Area*, 43(2), pp. 183–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00978.x>
- Reed, M.S. (2008) 'Stakeholder participation for environmental management: A literature review', *Biological Conservation*, 141(10), pp. 2417–2431. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>.



# Case study

## Have your say on the future of Earls Court

In late 2021 we set out a bold and ambitious vision to 'bring the wonder back to Earls Court' alongside four priorities for how we will achieve that. Since then we have carried out over two years of engagement at community events, at our Conversation Corner, through site tours and more.

We are now presenting our draft proposals for the site, formerly home to the Exhibition Centres. This is London's largest and most exciting opportunity. It will be a place that **puts people first**, with nature brought back to the site and somewhere everyone will feel welcome.



### Websites in Action

We've launched over 1000 Commonplaces - check out the projects launched in your neighbourhood.

3. Culture



1. Parks, streets, squares and gardens



4. Economy and jobs





# Case study



Everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach



## Our mission

Birmingham Community Matters (BCM) aims to boost the development and sustainability of small voluntary and community groups in and around Birmingham.

Our peer support and learning network inspires people into action and gives them space to share their skills, knowledge and experience.

## Our vision

Voluntary and community action is encouraged and celebrated in our city, with people empowered to make change happen – no matter how small. Ideas flourish and Birmingham communities grow stronger and more connected.



- Supporting people to **unlock potential in their community**
- Empowering people to create change **on their terms**
- Building **stronger communities** and **pride in place**
- Helping communities apply for **funding**
- Enhancing **communications** and **skills**
- Using a **hybrid, flexible and responsive** approach

# Why is engagement important and useful?

- Rooted in concepts of deliberative democracy.
- Potential to **build trust, integrity, and empower voices** which are often marginalised and excluded.
- Valuable when decision-making involves **conflicting interests and priorities, trade-offs, or other risks and complexities**.
- Numerous areas of work relevant to planning and place-making



# Why is engagement essential for achieving DLUHC's mission?

Essential for transforming places, in a way that is **inclusive and fair**, and boosting sustainable growth:

- Promoting responsible innovation
- Knowledge & skills development
- Restoring a sense of community
- Building pride in place, community cohesion and belonging
- Building trust and confidence in decisions and decision-making institutions





# Why is engagement essential for delivering DLUHC's mission?

## Levelling Up:

- **Placemaking, integration and community restoration** central to Levelling Up
- Building **trust, transparency, integrity and accountability** in decisions and decision-making institutions (research priority areas)

## PropTech Innovation Fund:

- Open & accessible planning process, boosting public engagement, gathering evidence on the **barriers to scaling up** adoption of digital tools & skills.
- **What does 'good' look like** for digital citizen engagement? How do you ensure that digital tools are more open, accessible & inclusive?

## Net Zero & Nature Recovery:

- Working with BEIS & Defra: participatory and collaborative decision-making, promoting joined-up thinking to tackle complex challenges



# We need to embed nature in the levelling up mission

- There is strong scientific evidence that natural green space plays a vital role in supporting human health and well-being while delivering many economic benefits.
- However, not everyone has access to nature-rich spaces and the UK's most deprived communities tend to have less green space.
- **We need to have more accessible nature-rich green spaces that benefit everyone, as a core part of the levelling-up mission.**

## We know that nature-rich spaces:

- ✓ Boost local economies & sustainable growth
- ✓ Improve human health and well-being
- ✓ Help tackle social inequality
- ✓ Contribute to community cohesion and pride of place
- ✓ Provide climate resilience



Firs Farm Wetlands, Enfield, were restored by de-culverting a hidden river. They now protect 100 houses from flooding, filter out pollution from surface water runoff, and provide beautiful natural spaces for local people.  
Photo: SUSDRAIN

**We must recognise & harness the value of natural green space to deliver lasting benefits for communities & the economy, contributing to wider government agendas on net zero, nature, placemaking, community restoration & sustainable growth**



**Numerous institutions have recognised the value of engagement for delivering on social, economic and environmental goals.**

**But how can we promote a more coordinated and integrated approach within and beyond the public sector?  
How can diverse groups and organisations work together to achieve shared goals?**

# Political polarisation and participation

Published Thursday, 29 April, 2021

Horizon scanning

Digital technologies

Education

Health and social care

Security and defence

COVID-19

## Key unknowns

- How will the increased inequalities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic affect people's political beliefs and voting habits in the long-term?
- Is it possible to identify when countries are reaching 'peak' polarisation or what effect different interventions have on reducing nationwide polarisation?
- How can individuals from under-represented backgrounds best be encouraged to engage with politics, and how can their views better be represented in the political landscape?

## Key questions for Parliament

- What does the electorate want politics in the UK to look like following the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can the political system within the UK best represent the diversity of its citizens?
- What is the likelihood of civil unrest resulting from COVID-19?
- What are the most effective strategies for maintaining and building public trust in public bodies and democracy?<sup>25</sup>



### Political polarisation and participation

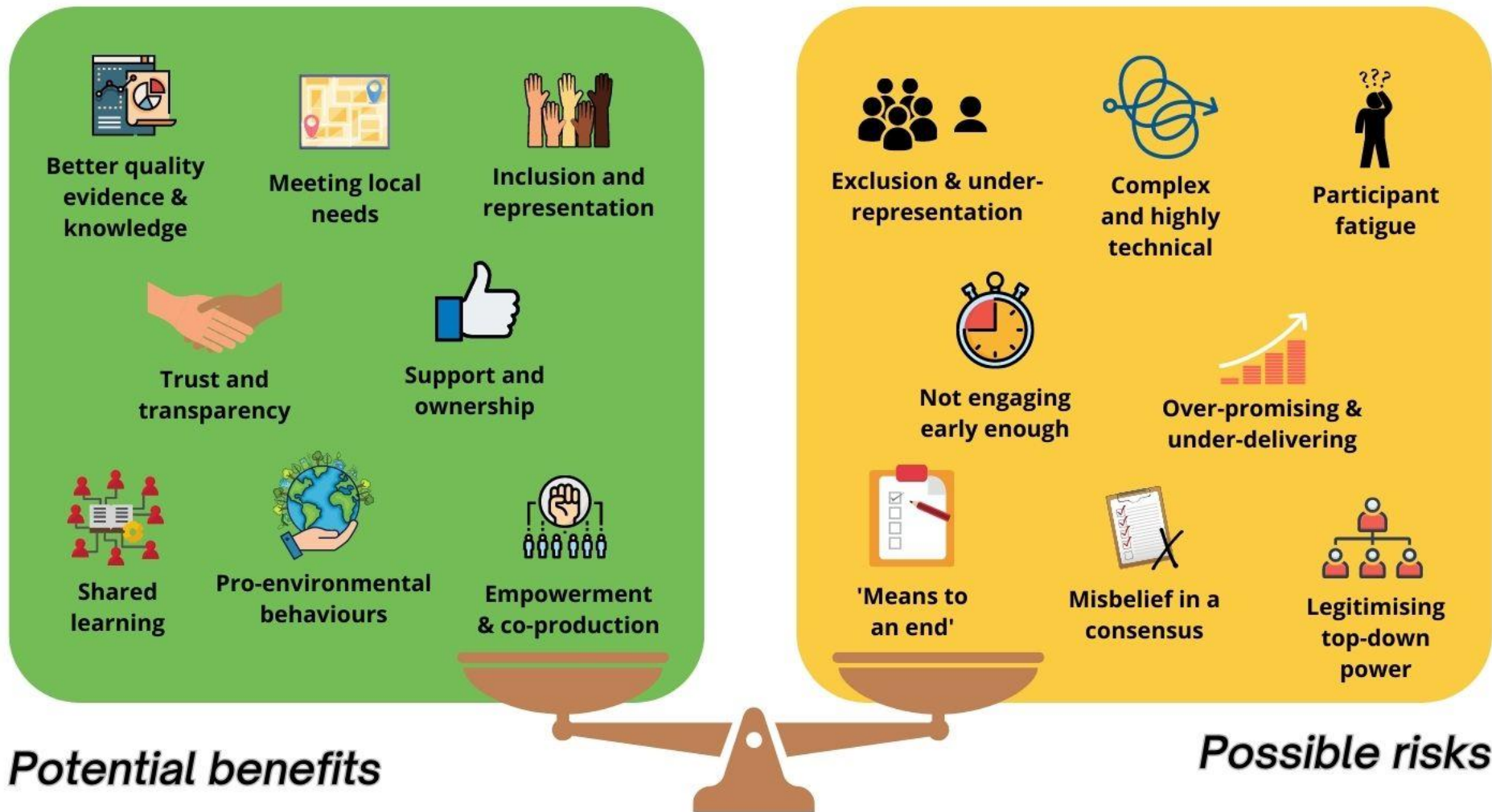
Political polarisation could affect political participation. How do inequality and socioeconomic factors intersect with extremism?

POST / Apr 29, 2021


## Likelihood and impact

Medium impact and medium likelihood over the next five years.

# How do we maximise the delivery of social, economic & environmental benefits through best practice engagement?





A large group of people is sitting on a grassy hill, looking out over a city at sunset. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of the setting sun. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, some with their hands on their heads, suggesting a moment of reflection or discussion. The city in the background is visible through the trees, with some buildings and a church spire visible on the horizon. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative.

**5-10 minute discussion:  
pause to share questions,  
comments, insights,  
reflections**



Part 2:

# Digital engagement

# How do we engage in an increasingly digitised world?

- Digital transformation - providing more efficient, effective, and interoperable solutions?
- There are many unresolved questions about the effectiveness of technologies at addressing the goals of engagement.
- The COVID-19 pandemic added urgency to the question of whether inclusive and meaningful engagement can be carried out in online settings.



'innovation,  
innovation,  
innovation'

'digital first'

'digital by default'

'streamline'

Blind optimism in the 'limitless potential' of digital technologies?  
Lack of attention to the **wider societal implications of rapid and unregulated digital transformation**  
Digital technologies can pose significant ethical risks for society including **bias and the exacerbation of existing exclusions, injustices, prejudices.**

'rapid move towards digital first'

'accelerated digital transformation'

'world leader in digital adoption'

'digitally-enabled public services'

- <https://digileaders.com/innovation-conference/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-digital-strategy>

# Landscape of digital engagement



Participatory mapping  
Digital participatory platforms

e.g., public participatory GIS, participatory mapping, participatory budgeting, citizen science.



Mobile applications  
Social media & networks

e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Augmented Reality (AR), sensor & reporting apps.



Communications &  
collaborations software

e.g., Team collaboration & networking, websites, videos & podcasts, Decision Support Systems.



Gamification

e.g., virtual reality & immersive games, simulations, AR & VGI-based games, Minecraft & Block by Block.



Geo-visualisation and  
collaboration

e.g., Digital Twins, 2D and 3D Geocollaboration, Planning Support Systems.




Open data, information,  
and e-government


e.g., Big Data & AI, open databases & dashboards, E-Government services, websites and newsletters.

# Example: participatory mapping

**PROPOSED NEW WOODLAND LOCATIONS**

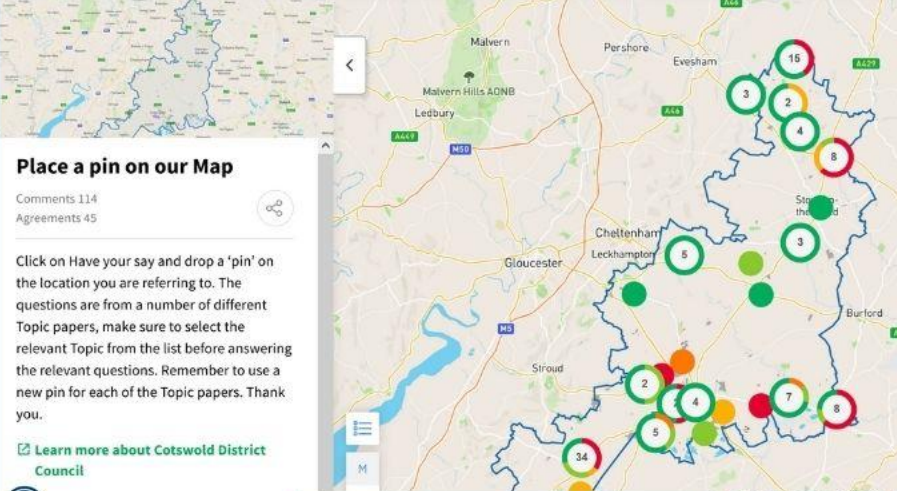


**Outer North East**  
Alwoodley, Harewood, Wetherby



**We welcome you to have your say on the Leeds Parks and Countryside Woodland...**

Leeds City Council Parks and Countryside Service are planting 5.8 million trees across Leeds over 25 years to combat the climate and biodiversity emergencies...



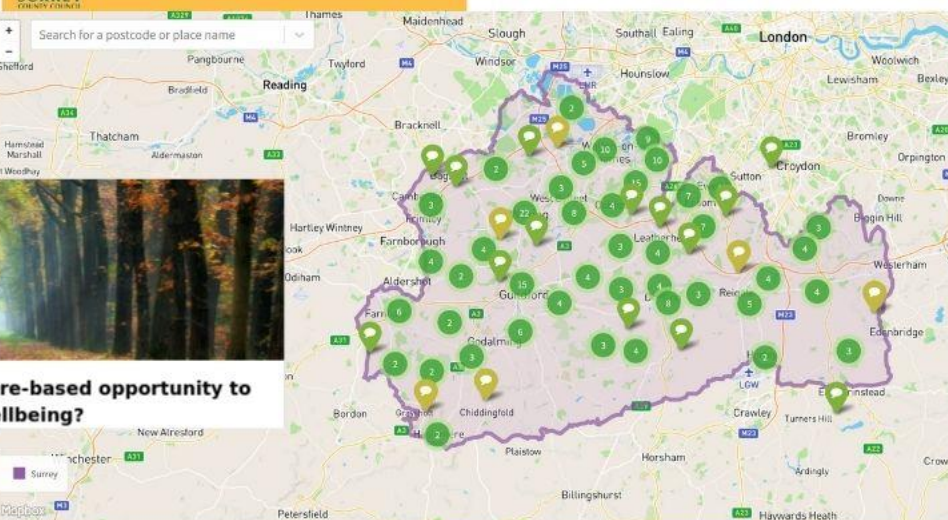
**Place a pin on our Map**

Comments 114  
Agreements 45


Click on Have your say and drop a 'pin' on the location you are referring to. The questions are from a number of different Topic papers, make sure to select the relevant Topic from the list before answering the relevant questions. Remember to use a new pin for each of the Topic papers. Thank you.

[Learn more about Cotswold District Council](#)

**Green Prescribing**



Search for a postcode or place name



**Do you know about a nature-based opportunity to improve your health or wellbeing?**



**Your Cotswold, Your Plan**

We need to take action to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies and ensure there are enough homes for local people now and in the future - creating a future that is gre...

[commonplace.is](#)

commonplace.is

# Example: gamified digital tools



## Innovative Minecraft competition for young people to influence Cardiff redesign

The School of Computer Science and Informatics is providing children and young people with an exciting opportunity to help shape the future of Cardiff by using a virtual game platform.

 Cardiff University

technocamps



Child  
Friendly  
CARDIFF  
CAERDYDD  
Sy'n Dda i  
Blant



## 'Craft Your City' using Minecraft

Making rights a reality in Cardiff

 Child Friendly Cardiff



**What does 'good' look like for digital citizen engagement?**

**How do you ensure that digital approaches are open, accessible, and inclusive?**

**What are the challenges and opportunities?**

*Diagram source: Hafferty (forthcoming, 2023). 'Stakeholder engagement in the digital age: practitioners' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for planning and environmental decision-making'. PhD thesis, Countryside and Community Research Institute.*





# Engagement in the digital age

Research brief (DRAFT)

By Dr Caitlin Hafferty (Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford). 15th May 2023.

## Summary of recommendations for effective digital engagement

The recommendations produced by this research take the form of **10 key thinking points for effective digital engagement** (see Fig. 1). These recommendations are aimed at practitioners, practice-enablers, and policy makers who aim to improve the strategy and/or delivery of public and stakeholder engagement in planning and other decision-making processes. They are relevant to organisations (e.g., Government departments, public agencies, and local authorities) that seek to embed a best practice culture of engagement, and/or practitioners who want to undertake more effective engagement and understand what works.

These thinking points can be used to complement and enhance existing practices, models, guidelines, toolkits, and frameworks for engagement. The purpose of the recommendations is to add depth and breadth to existing understandings of effective engagement by building on resources that are already developed and accessible, rather than to act as a replacement for existing practices and toolkits. The key thinking points outlined in this research brief can be used flexibly to understand what works (i.e., what 'success' looks like) in particular engagement situations.



Fig. 1 - 10 key thinking points for engagement in the digital age.

Page 1

## Summary

Despite attitudes in policy and practice of 'digital **there is strong scientific evidence that there is no digital engagement.** The research suggests that a flexible, adaptable and (where feasible and appropriate) hybrid approach - consisting of both digital and in-person methods - should be used to maximise the effectiveness of engagement, achieve its goals, and deliver benefits.

**There is no single digital, in-person, or hybrid approach which guarantees successful engagement outcomes in all situations.** Engagement processes are highly complex and context dependent: in almost every situation where digital tools deliver beneficial outcomes (e.g., increased efficiency or wider reach), there will be another situation where digital engagement can cause unintended negative outcomes (e.g., excluding and marginalising people). This research brief presents a range of **technical and ethical debates** around digital engagement and accessibility, inclusion, trust, transparency, power relations, privacy and security, digital well-being, among other issues.

**There are opportunities to strengthen current guidelines, toolkits, and frameworks for delivering best practice in engagement processes.** The research provides some **evidence-led recommendations** that can help enhance current approaches for understanding how we measure success in digital engagement processes by understanding what works.

These recommendations are particularly important to consider in an **increasingly digitised world**, where digital and physical worlds are becoming increasingly entwined. This is significant as rapid advances are made in virtual reality, augmented reality, and other immersive digital experiences with pressing new questions for digital planning practitioners and decision-makers.




Page 2



## Key thinking points for effective digital engagement: research brief

Dr Caitlin Hafferty



A large group of people is sitting on a grassy hill, looking out over a city at sunset. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of the setting sun. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, some with their hands on their heads, suggesting a moment of reflection or discussion. The city below is visible in the distance, with buildings and a prominent tower. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative.

**5-10 minute discussion:  
pause to share questions,  
comments, insights,  
reflections**

A corkboard is shown, densely packed with numerous colorful sticky notes and papers. The colors include shades of pink, light blue, yellow, green, orange, and white. Some notes are pinned with pushpins in various colors like red, white, green, and blue. The notes are arranged in an overlapping, somewhat chaotic manner, suggesting a brainstorming or organizational process. A dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the bottom left portion of the image, containing white text.

Part 3:

# Embedding best practice

# Institutionalising engagement

- To be successful in the long term, **best practice engagement processes must be institutionalised**.
- The goals and criteria of participatory processes can conflict with organisational structures.
- Many of the challenges and limitations of stakeholder engagement processes are rooted within organisational and wider political cultures.
- Engagement needs to be embedded as part of a long-term **organisational culture change process**.
- Any work to embed such a shift requires an understanding of the existing rationales for engagement, along with current **practices, assumptions, capacity and capability (time, resources, funding, staff, skills, guidance)**, etc.

*Institutionalisation = embedding principles and practices of best practice into decision-making structures, until they become the norm. This can require an organisational culture change (i.e., a change in the 'normal' accepted understandings/behaviours in the organisation, including common values and principles).*





## Evidence-led tips for best practice engagement

1. Clear objectives for engagement need to be agreed at the outset.
2. Treat engagement as an ongoing process, not a 'one-off' or 'add-on' activity or method.
3. Understanding the local context for engagement is crucial.
4. Engagement should begin as early as possible, and continue through the decision-making process in an open and transparent way.
5. Integrating local and scientific knowledge, alongside other evidence types used in decision-making, for more robust results.
6. Power dynamics need to be recognised and managed effectively, building trust and encouraging two-way dialogue.
7. Engagement needs to be adapted to the time and spatial scale of the project.
8. Different methods should be used for engagement, including a flexible mix of in-person, digital, and hybrid approaches.
9. Information needs to be shared in accessible and relevant ways to maximise engagement.
10. Engagement needs to be institutionalised, building organisational capacity through increased resources and skills development. **Best practice engagement is essential for embedding inclusion, trust, and accountability at the heart of institutions.**

# Take-home messages



1

Stakeholder engagement

Why is engagement important and useful for building trust, inclusion and integrity in decision-making?



2

Digital engagement

What are the challenges and opportunities for engaging using digital tools?



3

**Embed best practice**

How can DLUHC (further) initiate and embed a culture of best practice engagement, aligned with its vision, mission and priority areas?



Opportunities for collaboration, providing evidence and advice?

# Discussion & Q&A

