

Managing change

2010, in response to a government consultation, the Society strongly supported the introduction of local fee setting to enable full cost recovery. The Society would urge the introduction of full cost recovery at the earliest practical opportunity, either through individual local planning authority fee setting or a resetting of national fees so they represent true average costs. PAS has all the necessary data to do this.

Planning is the key to meeting housing needs and delivering economic growth through the creation of sustainable development

The Planning Officers Society invites the new Government to work with us on our approach to building a more efficient and effective planning system which we believe will:

- Support the development of sustained economic prosperity;
- Designate at national level areas for major growth;
- Ensure all areas have appropriate and effective strategic planning arrangements in place;
- Provide for the growing needs for jobs, homes and leisure;
- Ensure that the infrastructure necessary to support development is funded;
- Create safe and secure communities;
- Deliver sustainable development; and
- Leave a positive legacy for future generations. ■

Contact details:

- Mike Kiely President 2013/14 and Director of Planning London Borough of Croydon:
president@planningofficers.org.uk
- Dave Evans Senior Vice-President 2013/14 and Director of Environment West Dorset DC and Weymouth & Portland BC:
svp@planningofficers.org.uk
- John Silvester Publicity Officer, Spokesperson and Communications Manager:
communications@planningofficers.org.uk

www.planningofficers.org.uk

Karen Smithson describes the opportunity to build a bridge between two worlds, aiming to channel some of the wealth and opportunity in Vauxhall into the local community

Vauxhall is part of the new London Quarter, Europe's largest regeneration area. Vauxhall's transformation is well underway, and by 2017 will look very different. Over ten large developments are being constructed with more going through planning.

I've recently finished working on a change programme in partnership with Vauxhall One, the organisation set up to manage the Business Improvement District (BID) and its 200-strong membership of local enterprises, businesses, charities and corporations. All are committed to seeing Vauxhall become an even greater place to work, they pay a levy each month to fund a change programme co-ordinated and managed by Vauxhall One under the governance of an elected committee. The programme runs for five years and is designed to benefit the local economy, public realm, employers and employees, local residents and visitors who come to Vauxhall to work, learn and enjoy their leisure time.

The Programme works across 4 key areas: Vauxhall Safe, Vauxhall Day & Night, Vauxhall Change and Vauxhall Together.

In this article, I will zoom into 'Vauxhall Together' and share with you the work that I was brought in to do in service of the strategy and planning for this work-stream. The aim was to facilitate a process of engagement with the local community to build a picture of what gaps and needs exist and to explore the possibilities for how the BID membership could work with community groups to meet local needs and fill the gaps.

This was an important process to get right – to be authentic in our wish to really get to the heart of what was needed in Vauxhall's communities and to develop relevant projects that delivered real value. Trust between the local community and the BID membership is slowly building; after what has been a difficult time for many local people feeling unheard and under-acknowledged in the flurry of developments that have set upon Vauxhall in recent years. Polarity is high in the area – it's the 14th most deprived borough in the UK and has the seventh highest level of child poverty in London.

At the same time, Vauxhall hosts MI6 and the exclusive George's Wharf development which has been met with mixed feelings in the community – concerns that the opportunity brought by these developments isn't being shared and that the divide is growing. This was an opportunity to build a bridge between two worlds, to channel some of the wealth in Vauxhall into the local community.

Vauxhall One and The Means teams were keen to try a new, more creative and innovative approach to help them engage with local community groups. I was invited to support them on the project. The visual, creative engagement approach that I employ has proven its weight in both community and business settings and in this case, was a snug fit



Karen Smithson heads Endless Possibilities
karen@endlesspossibilities.eu



Change in Vauxhall



LEFT: Visual minutes, one example

for Vauxhall One's goals for the project.

Process

Having worked with Vauxhall One to clarify desired outcomes for the process, the BID and the community, we created a four-step process for priority projects to be identified.

1 Interviews: We conducted interviews with community groups over the course of two days, each of them recorded in 'visual minutes' by our graphic recording practitioner. Drawing on our years of experience facilitating dialogue between business and community my colleague Davina Pilkington and I facilitated the interviews with representatives from eight local community groups, with Vauxhall One's Sophie Tyler and committee members.

2 Taking the visual notes and reflections from the team, Sophie and I extrapolated four key themes that were evident across all of the interviews. This would become the basis for further dialogue – with a view to shaping the priority projects for the programme.

3 To aid this, we set up a Vauxhall Conversations Café – an evening event held at a local community centre. Using the World Café as a facilitated process, we laid out each of the four key themes on a table, with colourful, illustrated table-

cloths and sets of pens for community members to write and draw their answers to four questions surrounding each theme – the intention being to draw out key project ideas across the themes. Participants were invited to vote on the projects, using a Facebook 'like' sticker. The event was deemed a success – we had 20 people from community groups and some local residents.

4 Visual Report: We chose to create a visual report as a means of capturing the process and representing the findings of the Vauxhall Conversations. The traditional text-dense reports for projects such as these often sit on people's desktops or desks, quickly scanned through and then lost in the mountain of daily information. This report stands out, is easily accessible, digestible and sharable – language is simple and comprehensible and the process is easily navigated. As the Vauxhall One team complete their project scoping process, the 'Next Steps' section will be replaced with 'Short List' and Delivery Plan.

Summary – a quote from Vauxhall One

"We chose a visual approach because we felt it would help all stakeholders involved in the Vauxhall One Conversation to be more actively engaged in this process and to have a visual reference for the priorities and ideas that were discussed

Karen Smithson is a multi-disciplinary practitioner with a 'creative, left-field approach to change', dedicated to engaging people to co-create great places to live, work and learn. Developed over 20 years working with corporate, SME, charity and community organisations, Karen has the benefit of engaging with all a wide range of different people, cultures and neighbourhoods. Her approach incorporates change, marketing, psychology and design principles and practices along with her intuition, empathy and talent for engaging people.

Karen works independently and where needed, curates bespoke teams of change-makers to deliver of her projects. In this instance, Karen brought practitioners Davina Pilkington, Sine Skovsen and Raquel Duran to support interviews and community café event.

>>>

throughout the process.

What Endless Possibilities brought was a combination of rigour, care about nuance and detail in the development and attainment of engagement outcomes and a creative flare for bringing together wide ranging inputs and ideas onto a single canvas.

The community groups felt acknowledged and cared for in our engagement with them. BID members have a clear picture of the challenges that Vauxhall's community is facing and can see how their employees can play a role in helping to bring about positive change in the area – contributing not only to the community, so too to employers and employees themselves – giving them an increased connection with their place of work and increasing engagement, wellbeing, attraction and retention of staff.

We now have an artefact that is being shared across our partners, stakeholders and community groups – acting as a vehicle for more dialogue and engagement around the changes happening in Vauxhall. And we have experienced the value of this approach – and are seeing more opportunities to add value to community engagement work within our own programmes and with local developers and planners on the New London Quarter. The Vauxhall One team and its governing committee has a report on the project that can be easily understood and shared – a welcomed departure from the text-heavy reports typically expected and seen for projects such as this” – Sophie Tyler, Vauxhall One

How can we use this in planning?

Community and Resident Consultations have been commonplace since the 1960s (The Skeffington Report). There is however a shift in thinking in planning and development circles, now having to engage local people in a different way, seeing them as partners rather than as obstacles.

Increasingly, planners, urban designers and architects are putting people at the centre of their built environment projects. Effective engagement is thus critical in the creation of successful spaces and places.

It is exciting to be involved in projects such as Vauxhall – and to see doors opening for more creative dialogue in other Boroughs. It delights me to hear of different projects, installations and experiences that we as practitioners are being asked to design, that engage the community in place-making and community activity.

Visual engagement is increasing in popularity – an acknowledgement of the growing majority of people who have a visual preference and a willingness to 'speak in their language' to build trust and deepen engagement. Within engagement in both organisational and community contexts, there is a growing appreciation of two-way dialogue as a vehicle for



change, as opposed to the old 'tell and sell' approach that has reached the end of its time.

Collaborative and co-operative participation and design is bubbling away, as the world of public realm and place-making itself goes through change – shifting from a top-down to bottom-up principles with people at the heart of their places. We see this shift evident too organisations and even schools and this where we all need to move to.

Over the years of my practice and research into engagement, it is evident that something rather remarkable happens when people are presented with simple, hand-drawn images – they are able to relate to themselves in the pictures, more than in photography or stylised illustrations. Perhaps with the simplicity, colour and honesty of the visuals, guards are lowered, and with that people become more receptive and open up to dialogue and new thinking. Arming people with pens and paper evokes an array of reactions and responses – and never fails to bring people together in something so simply human.

Dialogue through pictures goes back a long way – since our earliest years on earth, we've used them to illustrate and articulate ideas and thoughts, to make sense of the world around

ONE CONVERSATION 2013 visual report

by Karen @ Endless Possibilities on behalf of Vauxhall One



us, to find common ground and to navigate our way through life.

The visuals we create in and through our workshops, not only support dialogue, interaction, collaboration and problem solving – they create artefacts that can be shared afterwards, with people at home, in the community, at work or with other stakeholders. These artefacts play an important, age-old role in helping us share information and tell stories – and change after all, happens through dialogue.

There is I believe a common desire for communities to become more resilient, co-operative and self-managing – I see tools and approaches such as this as key to the development of the capability to effectively engage and organise around change. It's great to revisit some of the businesses I've worked with, to find them becoming more visual.

it seems that there is widespread acknowledgement that collaboration and democracy is key to the resilience and success of our city communities in the future. One day our roles as facilitators of dialogue and change in communities will no longer be needed, as they develop the skills, capabilities and resources to do it themselves. In the meantime, I look forward

to working with more community and business groups, to engage them in purposeful dialogue relating to the places that they live, work and learn. ■

BELOW: The community café at work

