

How the adoption of digital tools supported a more diverse audience to respond to planning consultations



**DIGITAL
PLANNING**

 Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

How the adoption of digital tools supported a more diverse audience to respond to planning consultations

THE CHALLENGE

In Round 2 of the Innovation Fund, Property Technology (PropTech) was used alongside a variety of methods to help increase the diversity of people responding to planning consultations. Historically, local planning authorities have reported that it's challenging to engage certain demographics, including young people and hard-to-reach communities. This leads to a lack of diversity and representation in consultations.

Research from [People Powered Planning](#) has shown that by engaging a wider audience in planning conversations it can open up broader, often more positive and supportive conversations. For example, a survey found 57% of 18-24 year olds support the development of new homes in their local area in comparison to 39% of over 55s. This is a clear demonstration that broader engagement can unlock untapped pockets of support for new housing and positive plan making.

Read on to find out the methods used by [Newham Council](#), the [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea](#) and [Lewes District Council](#) to increase the diversity of their engagement.



Newham Council

Local Planning Authority
Newham Council

Project type

Community engagement to engage a more diverse range of voices

Consultation dates

August – September 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£125,000

Link to project report

[Newham Council report](#)

THE PROJECT

This pilot project aimed to engage Newham residents as part of a community-led visioning process on the transformation of a local area, Beckton Riverside, receiving £125,000 in funding. This included co-creating a vision and principles for a future town centre, neighbourhood, and community in this area. With the potential to provide around 8,000 new homes and a new town centre as part of a sustainable new neighbourhood, Beckton Riverside has the potential to be unlocked through a DLR Extension to Thamesmead via Beckton Riverside and is one of the borough’s largest strategic sites and forms the most significant long-term regeneration opportunity in east London.

THEIR APPROACH

In this pilot, the project team aimed to engage a more representative range of diverse voices, including young people, hard-to-reach groups and particularly the digitally excluded. They used a variety of engagement methods to achieve this, including through targeted support, which aimed to build skills and confidence to support independent participation.

The consultation was open from 17 August 2022 to 11 September 2022 and used a hybrid engagement approach, collecting most of the feedback through the [Newham Co-Create platform](#) developed in partnership with [CitizenLab](#). This digital platform was supported by a range of communication and in-person events to improve access and involvement.

As part of a social value offer, they also hired two youth interns to work alongside engagement consultants. The team reported that:

“Working with interns who live in Newham as part of the project gave us a greater insight into the borough and made the team more approachable on the street. The interns were able to recommend times and places that would be busy, and to publicise the project across their own networks of young residents”.



Lessons learned:



GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

One of Newham Council's approaches was to visit busy high streets and festivals with pop-up stalls. This allowed them to engage people who have typically been harder to reach in planning consultations due to factors like digital access and lack of awareness, understanding of, or interest in why planning matters.



MAKE LOCAL AND YOUNG PEOPLE PART OF THE TEAM

Working with young local residents either as interns or through focus groups is recommended to help reach a wider range of the population and empower younger residents.



CONSIDER TARGETED TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Whether through in-person or online engagement, councils should consider how to cater for the broad range of languages in their local area. The team identified that there are more than 240 languages and dialects spoken in Newham. They suggest allocating a budget to producing translated versions of engagement materials and including bilingual members of staff at pop-up stalls to capture voices that could be otherwise missed.

RESULTS

Newham Council's primary objective for this pilot project was to improve the demographic representation of their residents in consultations. Across five pop-up events and a four week online engagement, the council received engagement from over 250 participants. Some of the key data they noted included:

- **Ethnicity:** 54% of respondents identified as being from ethnic minority backgrounds
- **Age:** 17% of respondents were under the age of 24, compared to 10% of under-24s who were previously involved in digital engagement in Newham
- **Disability:** 11% of respondents identified as having a disability
- **Religion:** 26% of respondents identified as Muslim which was more representative of the borough's diverse population and demographics compared with previous consultations.
- **Increased awareness:** 78% of participants had not previously used the Newham co-create engagement platform.



Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

Local Planning Authority

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Project type

Digital engagement to tackle engagement fatigue

Consultation dates

September 2022 – February 2023

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£118,000

Link to project report

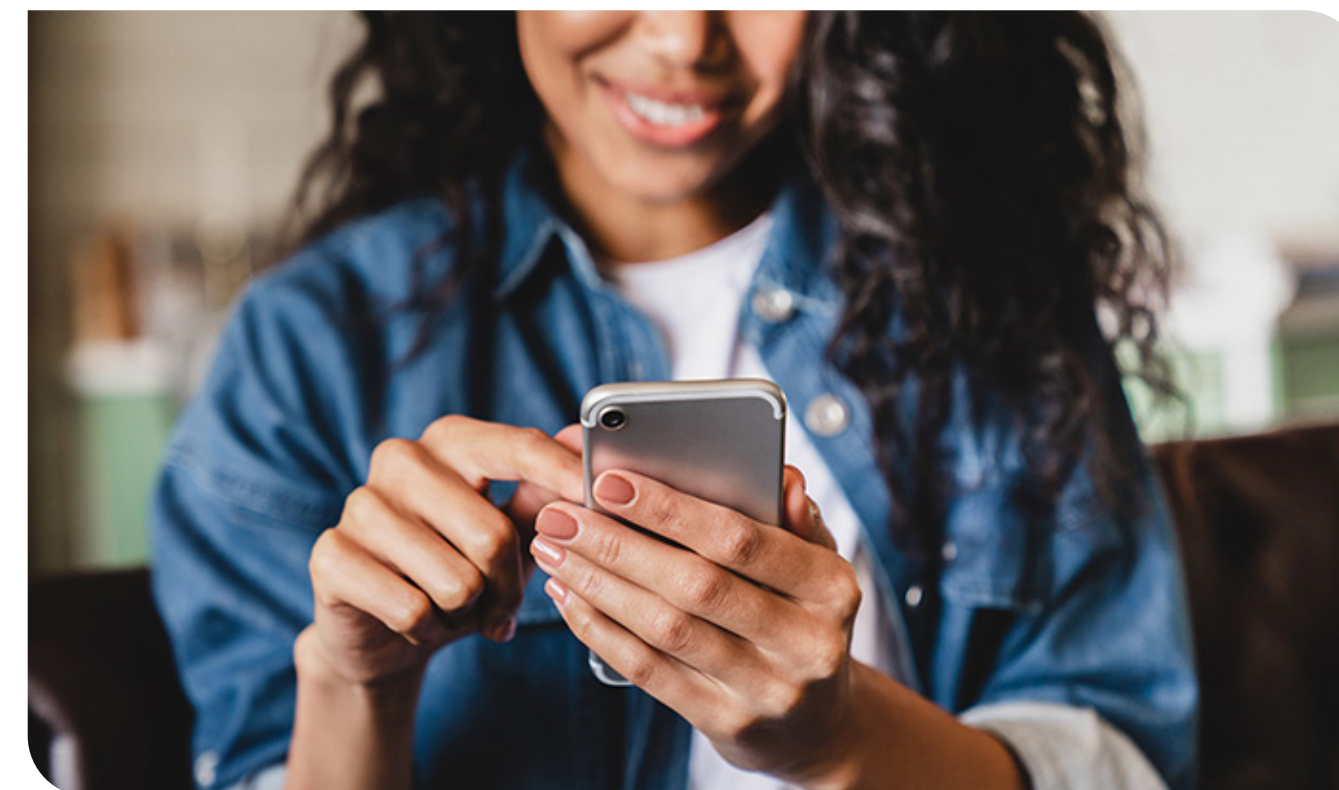
[Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea report](#)



THE PROJECT

In Round 2 of the fund, the [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea](#) (RBKC) focused on the Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team as part of an estate-wide energy efficient refurbishment and engagement programme, aiming to provide support to over 2,000 residents with their housing needs, improving health and wellbeing, and access to employment and training.

Previously, like many other councils, RBKC relied on in-person methods to engage local residents in their consultations. However, they identified that not only was this approach time-consuming, but they heard from residents that they were fatigued from the number of engagement letters and had in fact requested new methods.



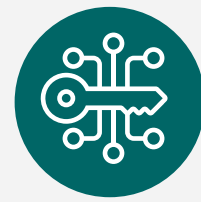
To address this, they launched their pilot consultation, “Your Neighbourhood, Your Voice”, which delivered a co-designed app and webpage to encourage Lancaster West residents to participate in the co-design of refurbishment, gardens on the estate, wider services, as well as a bespoke employment and training hub developing on the estate.

THEIR APPROACH

As part of RBKC’s goals to make their consultation process more inclusive, they transformed their existing [WeAreW11 app](#) by adding new accessibility and translation functions. As well as this, the team worked with [PingLocker](#) and [Built-ID](#) to incorporate a number of additional functions, including:

- [A calendar with all activities happening on the estate](#)
- [Accessible and gamified surveys](#) embedded into the existing app
- Automated translation functionality into multiple languages
- Integration of an accessibility menu – for example a dyslexia friendly function
- A bespoke online survey, using geographical targeting and marketing through social media platforms.

Lessons learned:



UNDERSTAND YOUR RESIDENTS' DIGITAL ACCESS

The RBKC team conducted a review of their residents' digital usage levels against the University of Liverpool's internet user classification system. This data was used to deliver dedicated digital inclusion initiatives, for example, providing residents with free data and devices to access the internet and further benefit from the services offered, including an employment and training hub, online booking systems and chat functions.



UNDERSTAND THE DEMOGRAPHIC OF YOUR AUDIENCE

The team were able to engage broader audiences in their consultation by reflecting on the council's existing demographic information. This helped them to identify the most common languages spoken by their community and develop a translation function on the app to improve accessibility. The app currently translates into six languages.



USE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK TO INFLUENCE DELIVERY

By working closely with residents from the Lancaster West Residents' Association and [Built-ID](#), the team were able to use their digital platform to inform emerging designs and considerations for regeneration plans. For example, through the app, residents were able to express interest in a range of green skills, employment and training initiatives, as well as sustainability learning options. That data was used to inform and validate the development of an employment and training hub, working with eight local partners, as well as their inhouse Green Skills Academy.

RESULTS

Through transforming the [WeAreW11 app](#) and adding new inclusive and accessible features, RBKC received 3,981 visits to the platform during the consultation period, and increased their online readership on Instagram from 829 to 6,716 reel views.

The digital employment and training survey received 75 completions, and further profiled their online presence and accessibility.

Through online promotion, they received over 200 attendees to their employment and training fair, 83 attendees to three in-person engagement events between September 2022 and February 2023, and were enabled to complete 207 co-design surveys across three projects.



Lewes District Council

Local Planning Authority
Lewes District Council

Project type
Piloting a central hub for the local community

Consultation dates
July – October 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund
£112,500

Link to project report
[Lewes District Council report](#)

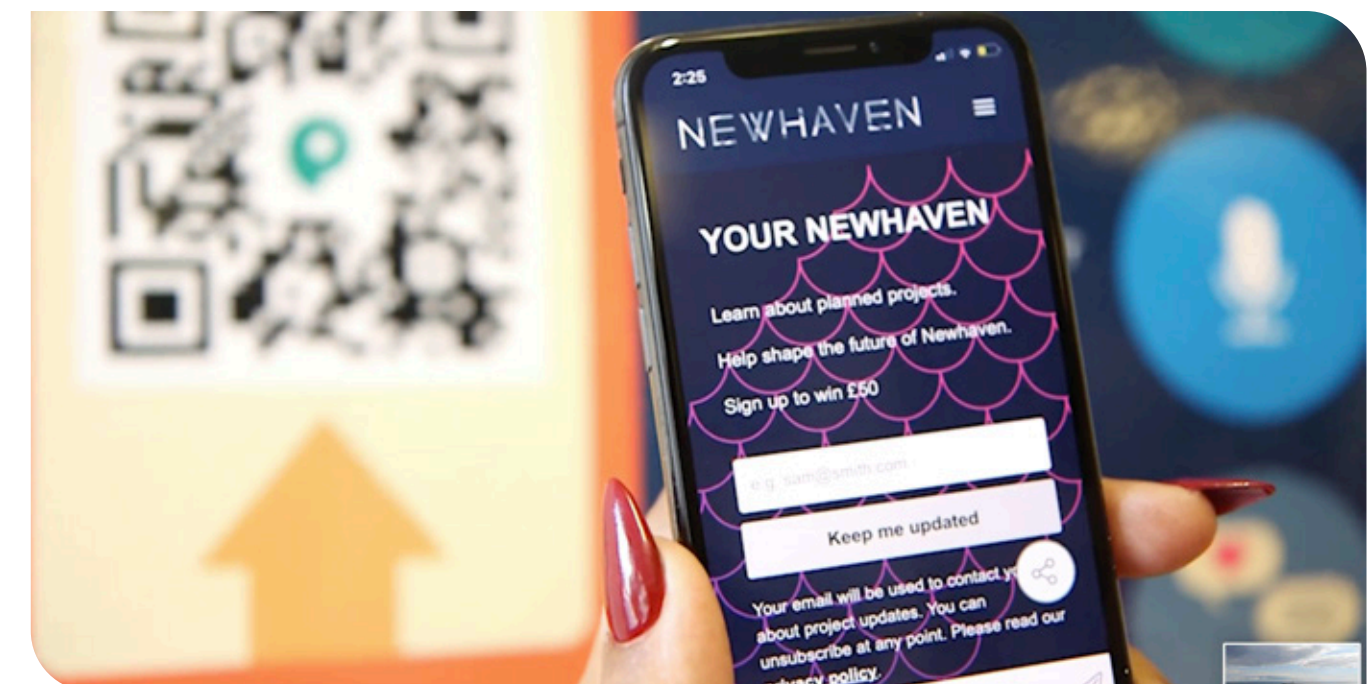
THE PROJECT

Lewes District Council aimed to address feedback from residents that they do not feel listened to or involved in change, by piloting a blended, place-based central hub for the community. The project sought to increase access information, facilitate meaningful civic engagement and build trust with the local community in relation to Newhaven’s regeneration and planning programme.

THEIR APPROACH

The council recognised the opportunity to procure a comprehensive **digital platform** that would combat the current limitations of their existing website for publishing information and gathering ongoing data. To do so, the council partnered with **Commonplace** utilising their platform to gather residents’ insights through a blended hybrid approach.

The council engaged in partner discussions and conducted user-testing with local students and resident groups to develop the digital platform which included multiple surveys and an **introductory animated video**. To maximise reach, the pilot employed an incentivisation scheme in addition to a social media push, reaching over 20,000 people and generating 382,505 impressions. In tandem to this, drop-in sessions and community events sparked conversations and provided valuable feedback.



RESULTS

One of the primary aims of this pilot was to reach a younger demographic given that previous consultations have seen over 90% of respondents being 35 and over. To do so, the project team conducted a youth survey which received a large number of responses (399) primarily from the target age groups: 38% under 15, 8% aged 16-24, 8% aged 25 and above, and 28% with unknown ages.



CONCLUSION

This case study highlights how hybrid engagement utilising innovative digital tools have proven to successfully increase diversity and inclusivity in planning consultations. The varying digital tools adopted by each of the three pilot projects highlights the value of digital tools and tailored approaches to foster diversity, accessibility and representation in planning consultations.

You can find out more about the work of the Digital Planning Programme as we work to use digital to modernise England's planning system by reading our [programme overview document](#). A [plain text version of our programme overview is available](#). If you require another format please [email the team](#).

You can visit our [Digital Planning Case studies page](#) to read more about other funded projects and find out more about [Digital Planning funding offers](#). We also share regular updates about our work on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter/X](#) and you can [subscribe to our LinkedIn newsletter 'Doing Planning Differently'](#).

