



Co-creation through consultation: Technology that transforms citizens' behaviour

For organisations that engage with communities in active travel programmes.

1. Introduction

Across a breadth of industries, consulting potential customers or users is seen nowadays as the way of doing business. This has been adopted widely in the IT industry, as a way to develop industry specific software; in the charitable sector, as a mechanism for securing more members and agreeing forward strategy; in pharmaceuticals and for drug development. So why not in the built environment?

Currently within the built environment, the process of asking communities and residents their views on a development proposal is often seen as a box-ticking exercise on the way to achieving planning permission. Whether done in town halls and community centres, by on street canvassers, by post or even online, the nature of such consultations is that they tend to lack a key ingredient - transparency. Responses and comments can be kept "secret", and the outcome of the consultation is only known when planning is given, or not.

The objective of this paper is to explore the issues of consultation and to identify how the incorporation of digital engagement can improve the planning process for both the developer and the consultees as well as improve the built environment for mutual benefit.

2. The challenges

Let's start with the consultees. In general terms, the people who tend to respond to consultations are the time-rich, noisy minority, often late middle aged who have a common denominator; which is the word "no". The Nimby in modern terms. We can therefore expect the developer to have three main concerns about changing the way they currently work, and why they might choose not to adopt open online consultations.

Risk. There is often an perception that open online consultation creates unmanageable political or operational risk. However the opposite is now true: choosing not to use open online consultation creates an unmanageable risk of:

- Being accused of being deliberately opaque
- Losing control of a conversation happening elsewhere on social media – in an alternative open but potentially less constructive environment, e.g. Twitter
- Being challenged on effective consultation or engagement

Cost. There is also the perception that open, online consultation is expensive even though evidence suggests the opposite.

Need. Digital engagement is often seen as a nice to have. But think about any other type of communication you experience – a newsletter, a product advertising campaign, even an education programme. Would any of these consider not using digital as part of its campaign? Of course not! Why? Because they know that getting the reach they need will only happen if they incorporate digital into their strategy.

There is one other issue that both developers and consultees must come to terms with and that is trust, mutual trust. This quotation from Newcastle City Council is a great testimonial to open online consultations.



“
Commonplace is trusted by the public, officers and elected members to provide insight on which designs and decisions can be based [...]. The team are hugely supportive, professional, friendly and creative in the work they do.
Ali Lamb, Communities Facilitator, Newcastle City Council
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3. Why is open online consultation key to co-creation?

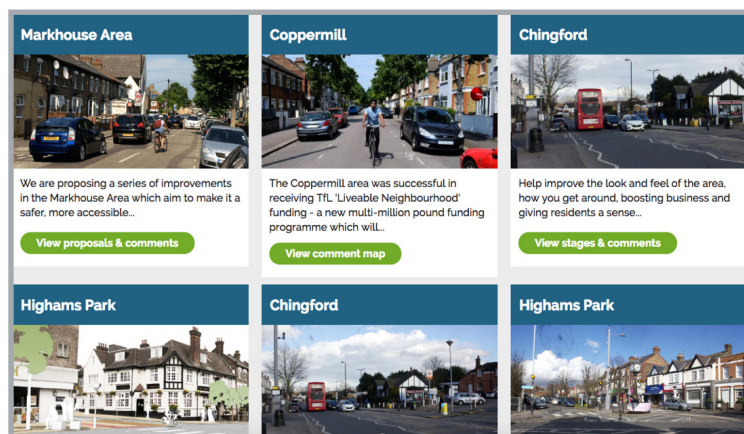
The first and most prominent reason is that digital consultation offers the opportunity to get many more comments and views. Openness and transparency encourages participation as people can see other peoples' views on a given scheme. There is no opacity, nothing is hidden. Through controlled use of social-media the silent majority is reached. People might not have time to go to the town hall, but have access to their internet enabled devices all the time. In a nutshell, the opportunity is to collaborate with the public as partners in change, rather than view them as barriers to it.







There are three essential ingredients needed to make this approach work:

- smart use of technology to enable constructive dialogue, between the community and developers,
- an open discussion that builds trust over time
- starting early.

4. Some examples of co-creation

The main examples we are going to discuss are Waltham Forest Council, a London Borough who had a significant grant to improve active travel, and the City of Bristol, who needed to understand the issues facing pedestrians and cyclists across the city.



Markhouse Area  <p>We are proposing a series of improvements in the Markhouse Area which aim to make it a safer, more accessible...</p> View proposals & comments	Coppermill  <p>The Coppermill area was successful in receiving TfL 'Liveable Neighbourhood' funding - a new multi-million pound funding programme which will...</p> View comment map	Chingford  <p>Help improve the look and feel of the area, how you get around, boosting business and giving residents a sense...</p> View stages & comments
Highams Park 	Chingford 	Highams Park 

In the case of Waltham Forest, they first launched a perception study in each of the neighbourhoods so that they could understand what was good and what was bad for cyclists. Based upon the evidence presented they then went about designing improvements. These improvements were presented back for further comment from the consultees prior to any changes being made. To date, the borough's Mini-Holland scheme, has delivered 37 road filters to motor vehicles and two part-time road closures, the construction of 22km of segregated cycle lanes,



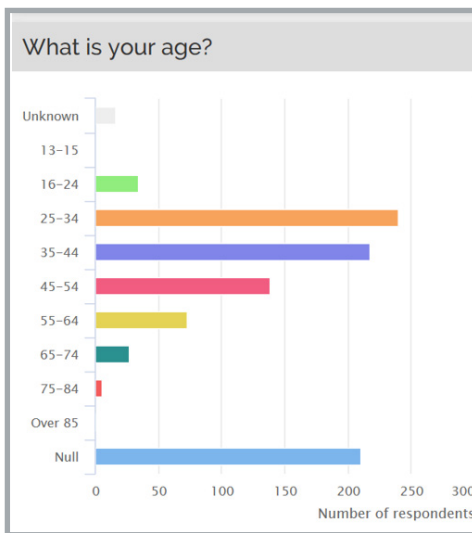
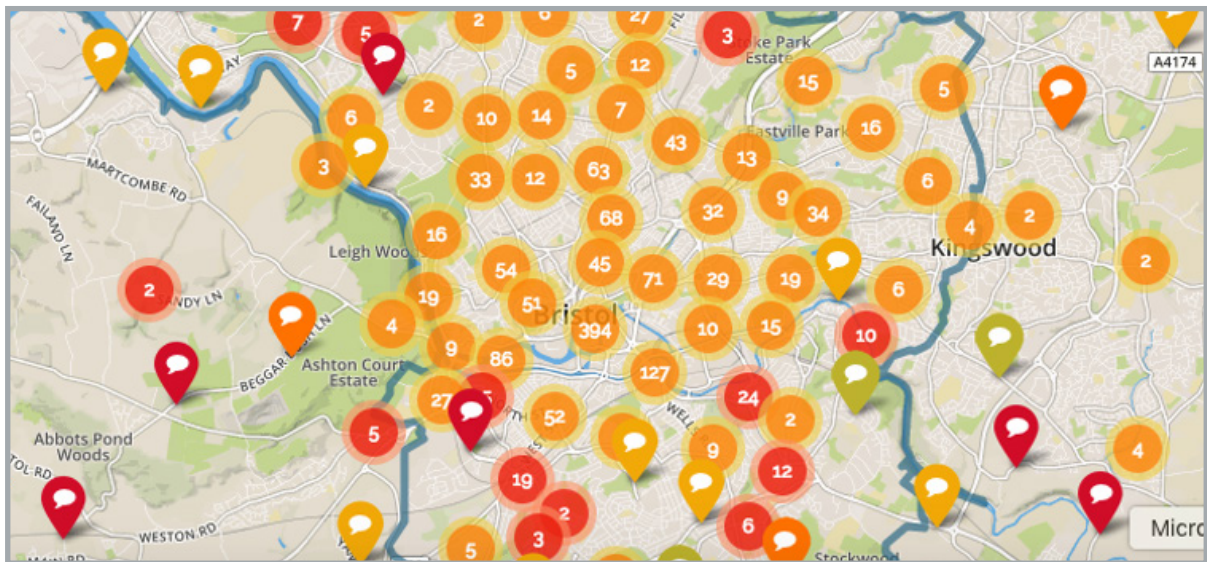
- **Children's life expectancy increases by six weeks thanks to Enjoy Waltham Forest's road improvements**
- **People are becoming more active by walking and cycling for longer after changes to local streets and neighbourhoods**
- **More than 51,000 households in Waltham Forest are no longer living in areas with dangerously high levels of air pollution compared to a decade ago**

104 improved pedestrian crossings, 15 new pocket parks and the planting of more than 660 new trees. Speed limits have also been reduced to 20mph in most residential roads and some main routes. In addition, the programme has delivered more secure cycle parking infrastructure including 250 Bike hangars, free cycle skills training, and bike hire to encourage more people to get on a bike regularly. These are just the physical changes.

The outcomes of the scheme are more dramatic.

Research by the world-renowned Environmental Research Group at King's College London, commissioned by Waltham Forest Council, has shown that measures to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists such as segregated cycle lanes, increased pocket parks and timed road closures have helped to improve the life expectancy of the borough's children. King's concluded that the combination of improvements in air quality since 2013 and the introduction of road changes will have a beneficial effect on residents' exposure to poor air quality by 2020. (Across the borough NO₂ exposure will be reduced by up to 25% and up to 13% for particulate matter). And as a side issue they used the robust evidence they had collected to defend a judicial review.

In Bristol, the requirement was to identify areas which were perceived to be problem areas for cyclists and walkers so that investment could be funnelled into the priority areas. Like Waltham Forest, they ran a perception study to identify the areas most in need of change. Consultees had the option of identifying areas on a map of the city depending on the severity of the problem they perceived from "Urgent" to "Nice to have". They then selected the type of issue (e.g., cycle stands; potholes) and indicated action required: "Add", "Remove" or "Fix". Simple, intuitive and highly informative.



This consultation also identifies a change in the demographics, from the classical consultation attendees to a much younger and involved group.

In terms of results, the Bristol project attracted a very large number of comments and agreements from the consultees, it also identified areas in need of change and allowed the city council to do more changes than they originally thought possible. The council benefited because their assumption of a few major changes turned out to be incorrect: there were many smaller ones which could deliver greater benefit to the community.

Both Bristol and Waltham Forest used Commonplace, as their digital consultation tool of choice. Commonplace is being used for many Active Travel projects cross the UK including major cities like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, and in several London boroughs.

5. Commonplace – the open, online engagement tool that changes behaviour

Commonplace was specifically designed for consultation in the built environment. Not only does it transform consultation within the industry, it also transforms the people who use it, be they consultees or developers. The platform reaches a broader demographic, increasingly the likelihood of a more balanced opinion being expressed. Its openness and transparency engenders trust which encourages engagement, participation and commitment, but most importantly citizens or taxpayers become active contributors to, and participants in the community.

For developers, what was once risk is now opportunity. Cost is transformed to value. Finally, what was perceived as "nice to have" is now an imperative, a real necessity.

6. Other Active Travel applications of Commonplace

Apart from cycling and walking Commonplace has been used in autonomous vehicle trials, public transport improvement projects, shared vehicle initiatives and clean air projects, and these are some of our customers and partners.



“...the consultation through Connecting Leeds was regarded as a leading approach...
it was the finest example of engaging people in the UK.
Chair of Leeds Transport Expert Advisory Panel, Nigel Foster”