Draft Policy Statement of Community Engagement 2014- 17
Final Consultation Report 23rd May 2014

Introduction

Consultation on the Draft Policy Statement of Community Engagement 2014- 17 opened on 20th December 2013 and closed on 31st March 2014.

47 individuals submitted their feedback using the City Council's on-line consultation system (eConsult) and four group submissions were received by email. One of the email submissions was short enough to be entered into eConsult and is included in the data in Part 1 below.

Of the other three email submissions, two were very similar in content: one from David Newman and the other from Craig Simmons on behalf of the Oxfordshire Green Party. The more expansive version from David Newman has been included in this document, together with the email submission from Oxford Civic Society. They are presented in Part 2 below.

Comments have been reproduced verbatim i.e. spelling mistakes have not been corrected.

Invitations to participate

Over 1300 invitations to participate in the consultation were sent out on 9th January (avoiding the holiday season) to residents who have registered an interest in community consultations, as well as leaders of Residents' Groups and minority ethnic groups

Demographics of 47 individual respondents

58% of the respondents who provided gender information were female (26) compared the Oxford Census 2011 data of 15+ age group (51%). 100% of the respondents who provided ethnicity information were White (39) compared the Oxford Census 2011 data of 15+ age group (80%).

The breakdown of the respondents who provided their age information is presented below. The table shows that the age groups (19- 44) are under-represented and the age groups (45- 74) are over-represented, when compared to the demographic prolife of Oxford residents as a whole. There were no responses from people under 19 or over 74, although 24% and 5% respectively of Oxford residents fall into those age ranges.

age range	count	%	Oxford %
19-24	1	2.5%	14.9%
25-44	7	17.5%	31.9%
45-59	18	45.0%	14.2%
60-74	14	35.0%	9.4%

Part 1 results from the on-line consultation system.

Questions and responses

1

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the principles underpinning community engagement on pages 5 and 6? (The principles include Commitment, Inclusiveness, Accessibility, Transparency and Clarity, Accountability, Responsiveness, Willingness to Learn, Productivity and Quality Assurance)

Option	Results
Strongly agree	43% (20)
Agree	46% (21)
Neither agree or disagree	9% (4)
Disagree	0% (0)
Strongly disagree	2% (1)

2

Oxford City Council is committed to involving residents in its decision making process. Would you like to be involved in the way decisions that affect you or your neighbourhood are made?

Option	Results
Yes, definitely	81% (38)
Yes, I think so	19% (9)
No	0% (0)

3

In what ways would you like to get involved in making decisions about your neighbourhood?

Option	Results
Be part of a residents group or committee	55% (26)
Attend local meetings	62% (29)
Take part in online surveys/research	94% (44)
Take part in postal or face to face surveys/research	38% (18)
Through participating via social media e.g. twitter, facebook etc	15% (7)
Quick poll on our website	51% (24)
By talking to my local councillor	57% (27)
I don't want to be involved in decison making	0% (0)

Q3 Comments. Three additional ways of getting involved were suggested:

Comment
By being allowed access to planning applications
Direct contact from Council staff wherever specialist advice is required
Participatory budgeting; alternate reality games

4

Do you feel there are barriers to getting involved in the decision making process?

Option	Results
Yes	78% (35)
No	22% (10)

5

If yes, what are those barriers?

Option	Results
Lack of time	60% (21)
Language barrier	0% (0)
Lack of infomation to make an informed decison	54% (19)
Don't have access to a computer / the internet	0% (0)
Physical barrier (unable to get to organised events)	6% (2)

Q5 Comments. 15 additional barriers were noted:

Barrier
Unable to get actual replies to questions
timing of meetings: at dinnertime. Why not have a few late morning or afternoon meetings?
The East Area Parliament was so successful that the Labour Group got rid of it.
Resistance to expertise external to the Council and poor accountability.
residents comments are often a 'box ticking' exercise without being taken seriously.
Reluctance or inability to fully understand issues.
MENTAL HEALTH
Meetings not always well publicised and local opinion is often ignored even when given
Long reports, or too many not of particular interest, would tend to put me off.
Lack of information about what decisions are being made and how to best input into the process
Cynicism about being taken seriously; nothing changes so whats the point culture; not informed
Council will not allow access to planning documents
As part of the boating commnuity I see consultation going on with little representation sort.
A perception that our comments are not taken seriously.
Lack of serious response to citizen inputs.

6

In your view, are there particular areas and/or services where we should engage with you more often?

Yes, wherever the Council is attempting decisions where expertise in the community is better qualified e.g. specialist ecologists and naturalists.

working with like-minded residents and councillors to improve the community and environment for people living in Oxford City Central.
We want to ensure that Rose Hill and Iffley new-build houses and public buildings are well insulated and use their roof space for pv panels to the maximum extent. We can work with the Low Carbon Hub to put out share offers for pv panels on public buildings such as schools. We have already secured the agreement of the City Council to cover the new Community Centre for Rose Hill with pv panels.
Voluntary community group issues, anti-social behaviour. Changes or issues which impact on children, young people and young people with impairments
Views of older people who have difficulty with mobility.
Use of pavements, vide the debacle over locating cycle racks near St Andrews school in Headington. The use and abuse of pavements by cyclists. Designation of uses for shops.
Traffic and road use. Business rents and rates. Planning decisions.
There is no point in 'engaging' with communities unless the communities are listened to - something which the City council seem PROUD NOT to do. IE the huge opposition to the closure of Temple Cowley Pools, and the refusal of councillors and officers to listen.
The proposal mentions Oxford and its residents what it doesn't mention is that Oxford services Oxfordshire as the main destination and shopping destination. Oxfordshire residents should be consulted on things such as the redevelopment of the Westgate centre and the Botley road because the protestors who tend to be residents of the city do not represent the people from the surrounding are to travel into the city to access the facilities that are not available in the rural towns and villages of Oxfordshire.
The communication between the city council front line staff (for example the repairs team) and the contact admin staff (the call centre) seems to get very confused and often leads to the wrong worker being sent to the wrong job (electrician instead of plumber). this costs time and money. Direct contact between tenant and the repairs team is needed.
provision of pedestrian and bicycle paths.
pre school care, libraries
Practical, local stuff like work being done in our immediate area that misses a problem that locals could have identified to be sorted efficiently at the same time as other work. Good work being done with consultation / engagement at a more strategic level - now try using more local knowlege at the practical level
Planning..
Planning, Transport, HMO development
Planning decisions. Retention of green space.
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES NEED TO BE GIVEN MORE INFO SO THEY CAN ENGAGE
Oxford City could do more to counter Oxfordshire County's policies which continually prioritise commuters and tourists over local residents (e.g. Headington traffic 'improvements'). Local open meetings should be held as people are more likely to drop in to their local community centre / hall than take the time to fill in online consultations. Also, people ask more questions face to face and a more acceptable solution is often reached. It is very easy to ignore online / social media comments (offensive Tweeting being a good example) and people don't see Council business as 'social' until a policy has been implemented and individuals are adversely affected.
No
N/a
Matters regarding funding/finance, and its impact on reducing services.
Many.
local transport: bus and coach schedules, bus and coach stops. HMOs: poor external upkeep. While it is comforting to know that licensed HMOs are basically safe for their occupants and nearby residents, many of them look decidedly decrepit from the street, and the letting agents leave signs up long after new tenancy agreements have been signed.
local history
Litter collection/recycling.

It is a great pity that so little was done to engage with local residents over the plans for the Castle Mill development. The general policy in favour of growth appears to have been decided upon without proper consultation.
in short the boating community is often overlooked as I've heard recently perceived in relation to the JLHT /OCCP canal project.
How to solve the housing crisis in Oxford!
Housing - location and number of multi occupations (high level of private rented in city and getting higher) Street furniture and layout - makes a direct impact on experience of being in a neighbourhood Leisure services - Temple Cowley Pool is still a thorn in the side of any kind of consultation and leaves a bad taste after all the petitions etc. that had so many respondents on them City Centre events to balance the positive and the negative
grants given to community groups, e.g. music services, pegasus theatre
General experience of the parts of Oxford which I frequently use, pass through, see, or value - i.e. not just the buildings immediately adjacent to or in sight from my own home. In my case, this would mean all the alternative N-S routes from Grandpont to the areas around St Giles Church and Jericho, Port Meadow and Univ Parks, and the railway and bus stations: not only via St Aldates, Cornmarket and St Giles, but also via the footbridge and New Inn Hall St, or by car via Oxpens; or via Turl St or Radcliffe Square and Parks Road and Keble Road,
Decisions that affect the living environment. At the moment, decisions are taken for the Community without resident consultation surveys.
Controversial planning decisions
Bus transport from north to south oxford, avoiding the walk along Cornmarket
At the moment it is unclear what are the areas where you are engaging people and how this happens. It would be great to have a more comprehensive approach or a way in which people could easily access information about the decisions that are being made and how to best input into them.
All topics
More engagement in Donington, and other small pockets of deprivation. More engagement with private tenants. More engagement with older people through elderly-led (and controlled) organisations, rather than younger people claiming to represent us. More continous local engagement, rather than separate consultations. More engagement through online community networks. More engagement with participation professionals, rather than assuming Oxford knows best.
Planning, housing development, traffic, parking
No

7

In your view, are there particular areas and/or services where you think we should engage with you less often?

Q7 Comments. 23 people answered "no" to this question and others had the following comments:

Politics
Loads, like the success of the East Area Parliament which threatened the Labour Group, so it was done away with. So it seems to me that the only consultation that this council wants is badly attended meetings with people going to them who have no views. And if the council have something to hide - like the Roger Dudman Way planning application - then the public are misled.
Less printed material posted
Crime - let TVP and the experts deal with this I dn't' feel as if I engage with services often at all as an owner occupier in East Oxford
Fewer council newsletters: instead fund hyperlocal independent newssheets and blogs.
Consultation should be relevant and meaningful at all times, i.e. don't ask everyone's opinion on everything or they will stop contributing. Also, local residents are just that. We are not 'stakeholders',

'customers' or any other such fatuous term of appeasement. The NHS is a Council stakeholder, I am not.

8

Is there anything else you like to see included in the Community Engagement Plan 2014-2017?

Q8 Comments. Seven people answered “no” and the following replies were submitted by others:

Yes. Mention is made of engaging those who may not be engaged due to barriers of language. Whilst this is right - this must be by ensuring that the people affected are given opportunities to learn the English language - otherwise we risk ghettoes.
Whoever is running this consultation should watch this TED talk, particularly point 1, from the beginning to minute 2 approx) http://www.ted.com/talks/dave_meslin_the_antidote_to_apathy.html
We hope that community renewable energy plans will be on the list.
Undertaking to publish results of surveys/opinion polls
THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE INFORMATION IN LOCAL NEWS LETTER'S AS A LOT OF OLDER PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE A COMPUTER'S LET ALONE INTERNET
There needs to be mention of how the City Council plans to engage with students. It is repeatedly mentioned that students make up a larger than average proportion of the city's population and yet the document makes no reference to how the Council plans to engage with this section of its population! From Oxford University Student Union Vice-President (Charities and Community)
Some ACTION to enable people to be listened to by councillors. Access to all planning applications in hard copy.
Report corrective action to resolve issues brought up by local residents... and how long it takes them to be resolved..
priory list. creating an agenda to create a top 5 or 10 list of things that people really would like.
Outline Response from Oxford Green Party Consulting over the Xmas/New Year period was unfortunate and is likely to lead to a poor response rate to this important consultation. Our views on consultation are well known. Using the terminology in the draft plan, our views are that the Council is extremely poor at consulting residents. On planning, it does the statutory minimum consultation in most cases. And even where there is a clear opposition to its plans (for example, St Clement's Car Park redevelopment and the demolition of Temple Cowley Pool), it ignores the views of the majority. The abolition of area committees is a case in point. Despite a majority vote by residents in favour of retaining local powers and budgets, the Council pressed ahead and abolished them anyway. They represented a means by which local residents could be 'Empowered'. The reliance of the creation of Neighbourhood Fora in the Plan is unfortunate. These would seem to have few advantages and many disadvantages. they are in no way a substitute for the powers that were previously delegated to the now abolished Area Committees. As acknowledged in the report, the Area Fora are now 'talking shops' with no clear reporting in to the Council's decision making processes. They have no support (for example, minutes are only taken if Councillors agree to write them). So, we believe that the Council needs to be enhancing its engagement with local residents not relying on existing structures. The Council should return to full Area Committees with delegated powers; and improve its consultation processes more generally. Oxford Green Party c/o 41 Magdalen Road OX4 1RB
No. This draft plan seems well thought out and it will come down to implementation details, on which I hope we will have an opportunity to comment in due course.
No. It looks sound.
no, I think its' well written and comprehensive
More inclusion of Oxfordshire residents as opposed to residents of the city of Oxford.

Just continue to consult,inform and communicate with the local community.
I might have missed it but didnt' see much by way of leisure service provision ? Not just facilities but activities generally - more emphasis on well being for everyone meaning a commitment to the arts and to sports (in the widest sense) provision. Lots of research from Joseph Rowntree Trust and others about benefits of active leisure in older age and during periods of economic stress, So possibly engagement via the arts generally like in the Rose Hill example for instance - connecting with people while they are engaged in other activity which is pleasing and purposeful. Also open spaces and engagement on the multi use of parks etc - dog owners versus sports etc.
I believe local opinion is not given the importance it deserves
How to provide good, affordable local housing.
Effective Area committees where residents can express views and have a valid vote.
a way to address the lack of consultation offered to the boating community when decisions are made that effect them.
A statutory consultation meeting of residents in a local hall upon sensitive issues.
A provision for all resident-based groups within Oxford to meet together, say twice a year, so that we can share our thoughts, observations, and concerns. I note the availability of social media, but this something not everyone has access to.
A key to effective consultation is outcomes. Local residents, myself included, often feel our participation was in vain as comments appear to be ignored, glossed over or paid lip service to, at best. I appreciate not all comments and suggestions can be accommodated, but evidence of some modification to plans / policies based on local opinion would be a big boost.
A dedicated group for people with disabilities
I will descibe this in more detail in a separate e-mail, as there is so much Oxford could do to catch up with Bristol, Bonn, Bremen, Porto Alegre, Milan, New England town meetings and other leading exponents of e-democracy, citizen participation and citizen control.

Part 2 Consultation responses received by email.

From Oxford Civic Society.

"January 2014

Response to the Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014-2017

Overall comments
Thank you for inviting the Oxford Civic Society to comment on the Draft Community Engagement Plan 2014-2017.

The overall message that we glean from this report is 'more of the same'. We presume, therefore, that there is no ambition to change or develop engagement processes, and it is considered there is limited need to improve them. Is this the unstated intent? We recognise that local authorities are under severe financial constraints, but nevertheless we would expect to see statements about the 'direction of travel'.

The draft plan is structured around the widely accepted 'ladder of participation' model; inform, research, consult, collaborate, empower. Picking up key points on some of these 'rungs':

- We are pleased to note that some weaknesses in **consultation** processes are recognised – specifically inclusiveness and accessibility to the consultation process and

a need to improve consultation feedback. It is not stated how this will be done (although the document states in Section 1 that this is a how rather than a what plan).

- **Collaboration**, in our opinion, is the 'rung' where greatest returns can be made. Indeed we suspect this is also the view of the authors of this plan, as most 'column inches' are devoted to the topic. We are very surprised not to see more information on the future of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Neighbourhood Planning. We develop this point below.
- We do suspect there are more opportunities for **empowerment** if there is the will. We recognise this is not easy, and often not appropriate for democratic and accountability reasons. But, there is clearly no (political) intent to devolve decision making below the City level. We agree that decisions must be made by properly representative bodies, but surely there is scope for some devolution to areas / wards. The old 'area committees' had certain strengths in this respect although we are not advocating a return to them as previously constituted because there were clearly weaknesses, especially in the way they handled planning applications.

There is no evidence in the document about how good or poor community engagement currently is. Have any measures been made? With respect to **consultation**, for example**,** we suspect many residents would say this is poor – there is cynicism that consultations are window dressings.

We note and applaud the City's ambitions for strong active communities (*Corporate Plan 2013-2017: communities that are socially cohesive and safe, and citizens who are actively engaged in pursuing their own well-being and that of their communities*). We recognise that the Draft Engagement Plan is about engagement with decision making. It does not cover the important topics of community building and mutual support between citizens. But we think a linkage between decision making and community building should be recognised. Stronger communities will engage more with the City's decision making processes. Building stronger communities and supporting community engagement in decision making are mutually supportive.

We also note that planning consultations are not included in this paper, as the subject is covered elsewhere. We suggest the process for planning consultations should at the very least be recognised in the engagement plan as we suspect the public's poor regard to planning consultations reflects badly on all attempts by the City Council to consult, however well they are carried out.

Specific comments

Section 1 (Executive summary)

We note it is the intent of the Community Engagement Plan to set out how engagement will be done. We consider that the document will be strengthened if it incorporates more 'how' actions.

Section 4 (*Understanding our communities*)

We note that in areas of deprivation the capacity for community involvement is lower than in more affluent areas. This is clearly true. The document states that it contains a plan for how Oxford City Council will address this imbalance. We are not convinced this is adequately covered.

Section 5 (*Principles of community engagement*)

We note the nine 'principles underpinning community engagement'. Points 5 and 6 (accountability and responsiveness) are particularly important. We suspect residents have a poor view about the Council's performance here.

Section 7 (*Inform*)

We are puzzled about the statement 'informing residents is also achieved through Neighbourhood Forums'. We have seen no evidence of the City engaging with Neighbourhood

Forums to do this (assuming this is referring to Neighbourhood Forums as set up under the Localism Act).

Section 9 (*Consult*)
We are pleased to note that the City recognises the need to improve inclusiveness and accessibility (paragraph 6), and accountability and responsiveness (paragraph 7). There are no statements about how this will be achieved.

Section 10.1 (*Collaborate – Area Forums*)
Area Forums are not successful. There seems to be recognition that this is the case, but no stated intent to improve them. We understand a review of Area Forums was carried out about two years ago. Was a report published?

Section 10.2 and 10.6 (*Collaborate – Community Partnerships and Neighbourhood Plans*)
We applaud the City's work in developing Community Partnerships. They seem to be showing some successes.

In comparison, the section on Neighbourhood Planning is very bland. It gives no indication of how they might be embraced, or indeed any willingness to embrace them. And we are puzzled by the statement the 'Council's preference is to start with Community Planning'. What is meant by that? The phrase 'Community Planning' is not defined.

There is no mention of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). We suggest the document should contain statements about how CIL will support community engagement and community empowerment. Indeed, the relationship of CIL policy to both Community Partnerships and Neighbourhood Forums could helpfully be developed.

The impact of the Localism Act on community engagement structures and processes is omitted from the plan, although surely it is of relevance (and is likely to continue to be of relevance after the next general election, whichever colour of government is in power). An LGiU policy briefing (January 2014) is timely in this respect. See extract below.

Section 10.7 (*Collaborate – Oxford Strategic Partnership*)
We note there is recognition that there are weaknesses in the OSP process. But the document contains highly generalised statements about what will be done to address the weaknesses.

Section 11 (*Empower*)
As previously stated, we agree that empowering people at community level is not easy and is often not appropriate, but we would like to see an intent to devolve some powers to Councillor-led bodies at a local area level and a consideration of how more powers might be devolved to community groups and other agencies.

We note there is no mention of Parishes. We assume the Council does not support the concept of creating more city parishes, although they do provide an element of local area empowerment. We think this is a subject worth exploring.

We also note (and this surely is not contentious) that there is no mention of helping communities help themselves. Perhaps this is not seen as being of relevance to decision making.

Section 12 (*Next Steps*)
This section of the plan could usefully be strengthened and clarified. For example, we are unclear what is meant by a 'system for evaluating community engagement activities'.

Recommendations
The following provides some ideas about how, in our view, the document might be developed. This is largely a distillation of the comments made above.

1. More detail would be helpful about how community engagement will be done.
2. There should be some recognition of the importance of planning consultations and the development of active communities.
3. Something should be said on how accountability and responsiveness (5.5 and 5.6) will be improved.
4. There should be recognition of the value of communities helping themselves, and how this will be encouraged.
5. Devolution of powers to area / ward level should be considered.
6. There should be a recognition of the relevance of CIL to community engagement.

7. There is scope for developing area structures across the city, building on the Community Partnerships and Neighbourhood Forums already in place. This might enable a greater degree of local collaboration and even empowerment. It would have implications on the workings of the area forums, perhaps replacing them, and the role of councillors as decision makers. (See LGiU paper)
8. The statement on 'next steps' should be clearer and measurable."

Richard Bradley (on behalf of the Oxford Civic Society)
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LGiU POLICY BRIEFING

Where next for neighbourhood planning and management – opportunities and challenges for local government

7 January 2014

Selected extracts:

What is our 'vision and values' for community and neighbourhood planning and management in our area? There are a number of 'models' that might be important in this process – for instance:-

- community and neighbourhood empowerment as democratic and governance- related processes – e.g. through encouraging town and parish councils; or area/local committees and assemblies with a democratic mandate/accountability;
- community and neighbourhood empowerment as a service model – either commissioning and/or providing some specific local services;
- community and neighbourhood empowerment as an influencing model – through advocacy, mobilisation, processes like neighbourhood planning, but with other bodies beyond the council;
- mixed models of the above plus other roles and functions

How do local solutions and initiatives fit in with wider council and partner structures and processes – and are there any knock-on consequences of adopting different solutions in different local areas (e.g. for neighbouring communities)?

Whilst it makes sense for the council to work through these issues/questions, systematically, they can anticipate that there will be bottom-up pressures locally, and some top-down pressures from government, that may determine how any council perspective plays out in practice.

Lessons from NCBs and neighbourhood planning to date have tended to confirm the questions above as relevant and reasonable. More generally, though, neighbourhood planning and management are long-run processes. These processes have been shown to deliver significant benefits in local involvement and ownership, and can often produce valuable ideas for local improvement. However, they require considerable upfront investment (e.g. in evidence gathering, consultation, capacity building, business case formulation, and negotiation).

However, were an integrated approach to be pursued (and if it could be resourced), at one extreme, this most local of devolution might provide a particularly 'close to home' mirror on fundamental issues raised by localism and centralism – postcode lotteries, exclusive and inclusive character of communities, 'NIMBY charters' etc. For instance, it is noteworthy for neighbourhood planning, that only six areas have been designated across the twenty most deprived LA areas, with 15 of the 20 having NO neighbourhood planning activity. For the twenty least deprived LAs, there have been 49 designations, and only six LAs with no activity.

In conclusion, all local authorities are likely to have to engage actively in major neighbourhood planning and management exercises over 2014/15 and beyond.

For full document see http://www.lgiu.org.uk/briefing/where-next-for-neighbourhood-planning-and-management-opportunities-and-challenges-for-local-government-2/

From the Green Party Group

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31 Mar. 2014

Draft Community Engagement plan

I am responding to your consultation on the Draft Community Engagement plan on behalf of the Oxfordshire Green Party. The Green Councillors group have asked me, as an expert on e-participation, to write this response.

Since moving to Oxford 2 years ago, I have been disappointed in the gap between the way public consultations are carried out here, and best national and international practice.

5. Principles of community engagement

Since the first question in your online questionnaire asks about the principles on p. 5-6, I will first respond to those. The list of principles is good, but could be extended. Categories reflecting sets of values on which professionals judge public consultations are listed at http://www.e-consultation.org/Theory and explained in Value Conflicts in e-Participation (Newman, 2006). The categories found were:

A) Honesty and transparency
B) Facilitation (of process)
C) Citizen participation in decision-making
D) Structure (of activities)
E) Impact
F) Stakeholders/participants involvement
G) Feedback
H) Relevance (to problem or people)
I) Preparation
J) Support for constitutional goals
K) Feasibility and sustainability
L) Fidelity
M) Security

Some of these evaluation categories concern the processes of consultation, that will form part of the forthcoming action plan. However, there are principles not listed in the Draft Community Engagement Plan.

- Honesty is joined with transparency, making sure that there is no manipulation of the process or outcome (e.g. when an apparently objective reason is given to justify a politically biased choice).

- The constitutional goals include democratic ones, aimed at reversing declining democratic participation. With turnouts of 30% in local elections, and small responses to consultations, this is an important goal. But increasing democracy does not appear to be an aim of Oxford City Council, at least in this document.

- Citizen participation in decision-making is a very important criterion for both consultees and researchers in public participation. Yet it is explicitly excluded in the context of these principles.

The argument that the Council operates within the context of a representative democracy is spurious. There is a long tradition of citizen involvement in local government through consultation and partnership processes, separate from the representative role of councillors. We do not have to choose just between representative and direct democracy. The literature on democratic theories and practice includes many other alternative ways of achieving democratic governance, such as deliberative democracy, and networked governance (where decisions emerge from interactions between stakeholders). (J. Morison & Newman, 2001; John Morison, 2004).

Citizen engagement requires the sharing of power. It is limited sharing, but it still means that neither councillors nor officials, let alone the Cabinet, can make all decisions on their own. If there is no way for citizens to at least influence or modify decisions, then there will be no participation. The best consultations as reported by our focus groups of consultees in the north and south of Ireland (Fagan, Newman, McCusker, & Murray, 2006),

> '… giving people a voice, better decision making, more informed decision making. More I suppose… a sense of participation and control over their own lives and things that are important for them, you know? That's the theory of why we need to do it…'

It is the control over your own lives that drives deep engagement, with good feedback as a minimum to get any engagement. From the perspective of the consulters, it is this deep engagement that reveals the experiential knowledge needed to make better-informed decisions. It is a common complaint of officials that they do not have enough relevant information to make decisions that avoid unanticipated consequences. Yet to transfer knowledge from of a mother taking her children to school to a Permanent Secretary requires the consulter to humble himself before her practical knowledge. In knowledge management terms, perceived status is a barrier to knowledge transfer.

Yet in Oxford, citizen and community input has often been ignored. Take for example the large numbers of people who have signed petitions to save Temple Cowley Pools. Each time, the petitions have been rejected by a whipped vote of councillors. There has not even been the reasoned justification that official bodies give when rejecting the recommendations of citizens' juries. Raw power has over-ridden reasoned argument. In the past there are many occasions when council leaders have not shown a willingness to learn (principle 7) or a commitment to make a genuine attempt to understand and incorporate other opinions even when they conflict with the existing point of view (principle 1).

We welcome the principles listed in this document, but not the context which can hinder their honest application in community engagement.

6. Methods of community engagement

The ladder of participation model is a shortened form of Arnstein's ladder.

8	**Citizen Control**	Degree of citizen power
7	**Delegated Power**	
6	**Partnership**	
5	**Placation**	Degree of tokenism
4	**Consultation**	
3	**Informing**	
2	**Therapy**	Non-participation
1	**Manipulation**	
0	**Coercion**	

Note that consultation is a degree of tokenism, not of citizen power. It is important that Oxford City does not limit itself to the lower levels of this ladder, but devolve power on local issues to local citizens, just as it would like central Government to devolve more power to the council.

We agree, as stated on p. 7, that effective engagement means identifying the kinds of participant (not audience) that need to be involved at each stage of the process on any given issue. However, the consult stage starts too late in the process. It is possible to consult people before any analyses, alternatives or decisions are made. In particular, it is possible to find out what people's needs are, and what problems they want the council to help them solve. In other words, public participation in agenda setting. See http://www.e-consultation.org/guide/index.php/Technology_matching_for_E-consultation. (J. Morison & Newman, 2001) and http://www.e-consultation.org/guide/index.php/Technology_classification (D. Newman et al., 2007). These show how far thinking on participation has advanced since David Wilcox's 1994 guide.

7. Inform

There are ways community groups can make use of council data to answer their own questions, so it is

important to make as much council data openly available for manipulation by computer programs (using RDF on the semantic web, not PDFs).

8. Research

It is important to make good use of research in decision-making. So we agree wholeheartedly with the importance of the two kinds of research mentioned here. Add to that the usefulness of community involvement in this research, by supporting research collaborations with community groups, and school and university students.

9. Consult

As mentioned above, consultation can start much earlier, in agenda setting, not just as a final rubber stamp to approve or reject fully formed plans. Indeed, some of the most interesting forms of consultation involve community design, as happens in participatory mapping sessions in developing countries, or some neighbourhood planning forums, where people gather to make maps showing current usage of land, and possible new uses.

Although Oxford City Council has a well-established consultation process, it is rather traditional, and falls short of the state of the art of Bristol City Council, Bonn and Bremen in Germany, participative budgeting in Porto Alegre, the use of online discussion forums to bring people from neighbouring municipalities together around Milan, or many of the practices discussed in the annual e-democracy conferences in Austria or even Prescott's Local E-Democracy project.

When Bristol City consults on parks, it gives people the chance to be a park warden for a day. Councillor Sam Hollick ran a participatory budgeting exercise, asking Holywell residents to decide on how to distribute his allocated small project budget. New York

10. Collaborate

Since the analysis of problems, the development of alternative options, and the ranking of solutions are part of any decision-making process, or indeed, of all learning processes (David R Newman, Johnson, Webb, & Cochrane, 1997)□), it is disingenuous to say these are not decision-making forums. The point is to make the most effective use of collaborations and partnerships in different stages of decision-making processes: and then to not ignore all this work when the final formal decision is made. We need decisions based on data, information and knowledge, not raw power.

The Area Forums could be a great opportunity for citizen design of locally appropriate solutions, rather than sticking to one size fits all models across the city. But they will not deeply engage citizen participation (both in number and time), until they have devolved powers to make and implement decisions on local issues. And it is notable that many Area Forums hardly ever meet, despite the claim that the council provides an area support officer to organise and publicise meetings.

There was a local model that worked, that of Area Committees, with devolved power to make decisions on local issues. A serious commitment to community engagement requires and equally serious commitment to community decision-making power over the issues that affect them locally.

A community partnership could do more than an area forum, but here there are two problems to overcome:

1. To involve a diverse range of groups within the area, rather just those friendliest to the council. The lists of groups represented look rather like “the usual suspects”.

2. Areas of greatest need may be large, like the ones identified, or pockets of deprivation inside areas that on average are in less need. Community partnerships need to be set up to deal with these pockets of deprivation.

There is not much resident involvement so far. When tenants representatives criticised the council, they were replaced by people who never criticise the council. Community Associations are in dispute with the Council, as they have been offered tenancy agreements with so many conditions they could easily loose their premises. There is a pattern of the Council acting as the master of Oxford, dictating terms, not humbly serving their masters, the people of Oxford. Collaboration needs to be as equals with the powerless, not just with the powerful in the Oxford Strategic Partnership.

11. Empower

This part of the document has too many limitations, as if the Council wants to avoid any empowerment of citizens. Contrast that to New York City, who invited in America Speaks to organise a meeting of 6000 New Yorkers to decide on what to do with the Twin Towers site. There were 600 tables of 10 people, all having facilitated conversations, with their points fed by computer to a team of who picked out common ideas and positions, which all the tables then voted on. By the end, they knew that the people of New York wanted new tall skyscrapers, so they changed the city plans for the site.

There are lots of benefits for localising power. This plan should not try to prevent that, but instead take risks, do trials, and evaluate the results.

12. Next steps

One important next step is for Oxford City Council to become a corporate member of the Consultation Institute, and then send the top officers, and the Executive on courses to learn about the benefits of effective participation.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. David Newman

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23rd May 2014