

Re:Place



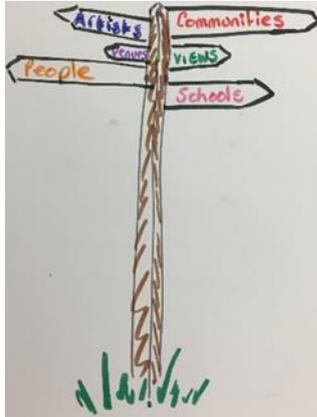
3rd September 2019, Durham Town Hall

More than seventy people attended the launch of *Re:Place* including artists and arts organisations, people from communities in the north of England, architects, planners, landscape architects, councillors and academics. Seventy five people opted to be part of *Re:Place* and to help create the network. Participants on the day discussed creativity, community representation and planning for places. Delegates also talked about what goals *Re:Place* should have and how a network could support them. The rest of this document is based on the discussions and ideas of the participants.

We are very grateful for the support of Durham County Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England in making this event happen.

Discussion 1: Does creativity matter in planning?

“Let’s make creativity part of planning”



Planning has become narrow and technical, leaving out many of the things that really matter to people. Creativity needs to ‘hijack’ planning, talking about planning in much broader terms and widening the idea of what it’s for. This also means supporting a wider range of voices to talk about this subject and including everyone. Creative voices (even if this doesn’t mean ‘an artist’) should be involved early on in planning, not as an afterthought or as ‘artwashing’, and the same goes for community views. Why

aren’t community activities – led by artists, historians, designers, landscape architects – part of neighbourhood planning? Why aren’t stories and social histories being collected and fed into plans? What about using facilitated workshops or commissioned plays to provoke discussion? Finally, there is an urgent need for evidence to support the value and importance of creative people and organisations for the economy and wellbeing of places, so that planning includes dedicated and long term infrastructure for arts and artists.

“Help dreaming communities”

Creative practitioners and artists can act as ‘enablers’ or facilitators for communities, helping people to imagine different futures and build shared dreams for where they live. Creative practice can break down barriers between groups, such as those within a community, but also the barriers between communities, planners, developers and council decision-makers. Skilled practitioners are able to reframe problems, help people see things differently and challenge people to say what they think. This has the

“Too often, approaches to the idea of planning and creativity are based on narratives of lack or loss - destruction, decay, decline - so discussions can be retrospective and insular. It would be great if the network could encourage an acknowledgement of heritage, and of the past, while looking positively to the future – the northern coalfield villages are great examples of where this is badly needed!”

potential to build trust between those who live in places and those who make decisions about them, although there is no guarantee of this.

This type of creative practice uses techniques that originate with artists and which may (or may not) be transferable. It is not a universal skillset that all artists have (or want), and practitioners also need resources and support. To be done well, this practice requires skill and experience, which should be recognised and valued as part of *Re:Place*. Many artists and creative practitioners already struggle to make a living; they don't want to be used or expected to donate their expertise.

“Find me an uncreative person!”

Re:Place needs to be clear (or unclear) about what we mean by ‘creative’. Talking about ‘artists’ is narrowing because everyone has creativity within them, both in their work and outside it. If we talk about creativity instead, this will include people, rather than excluding those who don't think of themselves as ‘artists’, and this is particularly important in planning because it is highly technical and already excludes people, so we don't want to add another way of keeping people out. *“Most of the people we work with are creative in some way.”*

The point was made that in the past, for example with new towns, a more holistic approach to planning prevailed and artists were employed as part of the process. The current planning system has moved so far away from this that it doesn't even allow space or time for creativity by planners themselves. This can be depressing for those working within the system, many of whom went into the profession to *create* better places. *“When I was a student in the 1970s, planning was creative; it was about design. Now planners are expected to be economists.”*



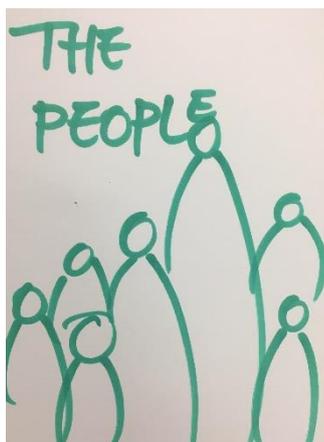
“We need to be in at the start”

Artists and creative practitioners need to be around the table from the start, not just used as a ‘finishing touch’ at the end of a project. This is partly about providing opportunities for creative practitioners to be involved, but they also need to be proactive and engage in the process of planning early on to



ensure that there is a long-term plan to sustain the arts in a place. Otherwise artists can end up being used to improve buildings and neighbourhoods, then forced to move on as prices rise. *“Creative challenge and vision should be embedded and incorporated at the start of any plan-making/regeneration programme.”*

Community involvement also needs to happen at the beginning, not the end, of any planning process. Local people – for example through Parish Councils - should be part of the pre-planning process, rather than being consulted when everything has been largely decided. Neighbourhood plans may also provide options and opportunities for creativity, and several people suggested that neighbourhood planning should be ‘hi-jacked’ so that it really is creative and involves people in thinking about the future of where they live.



“People know most about their own community and place but no-one has the time or inclination to listen to them, not least because public engagement delays development.”

There are some fantastic examples of creative practitioners being involved in planning by local authorities – Gateshead and Tees Valley have done this. When creative people are involved, these projects can end up being used as examples of very successful community



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Planning should support creative people and businesses, just like any other part of the local economy.

Re:Place should look at examples of best practice from the UK and other countries.

TIME – of meetings and consultation periods affects whether people can participate and contribute

ACCESSIBILITY – format of documentation, planning language, even format of documents (electronic or paper, visual versus written) can make or remove barriers

POWER - who is missing? Teens, younger people, parents with young children. Everyone needs to be able to contribute.

SPACE – every community needs a hub/space in which to imagine, gather etc

ACTIVITY – real world meetings & events are needed to provoke discussion

LONG TERM - what happens when funding or roles stop after three years?



Discussion 2: What are the challenges to increasing creativity in the planning system?

“Planning isn’t static, but can we change it for the better?”



Re:place should be realistic about the current situation in planning - many things need to change to make it more effective, inclusive and representative. Regulation and severe cuts to planning departments have affected the processes, making them more restrictive. The staff who are left struggle to cope with workloads, let alone innovate. Affluent communities are most able to take part in neighbourhood planning, adding another layer of unfairness.

Will bringing creativity into planning work if this context remains the same – is it realistic or possible under those circumstances? In addition, are there ethical questions around trying to move power away from democratically elected people to artists and communities, who may be less accountable. *Re:Place* should work with existing democratic structures, especially local councillors, as they are accountable to their communities and responsible for the planning process.

Neighbourhood plans could be used to bring in creativity, but many local authorities lack the resources and expertise to make this happen. Creative approaches require the community to be involved but people may not have much free time, especially working families. Taking part in planning processes is both hard to do and hard work. Are we suggesting more work for local people?

“Placemaking has become a planning cliché.”

Artists and creative practitioners move into participatory practice because they want to help communities bring about change, and the best way for a community to do this isn’t always through planning. Should *Re:Place* focus very strictly on planning or does this ignore the

other ways communities can work for change, such as social and community enterprise, asset transfer, community development trusts or working with non-commercial developers? *“How do you plan for communities rather than places?”*



The distinctness and differences of places means that there isn't a standard approach to creative practice in planning. How can *Re:Place* act nationally, while also providing support that is specific and relevant to each place? *“Communities know their places – we have the understanding but support is needed to connect that into a meaningful process.”*

Much 'community' discussion operates at a local level: are there regional or national challenges that could be worked on in collaboration? There are very different issues for rural and urban planning, and a lot of attention, funding and collaboration has already gone on cities, so should *Re:Place* focus on town and country and the regions?

Key Points

***Re:place* should be realistic about the current situation in planning, including staff cuts – more than just creativity is needed to make it fair and effective.**

***Re:Place* should work with existing democratic structures, especially local councils.**

Neighbourhood plans could be used to bring in creativity, but many local authorities lack the resources and skills to do this.

Creative approaches require the community to be more involved, but many people don't have much free time.

Should *Re:Place* focus very strictly on planning or does this ignore the other ways communities can work for change?

How can *Re:Place* act nationally, while also providing support that is specific and relevant to each place?



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Should *Re:Place* focus on town and country and the regions, rather than urban planning which is already a crowded field?



Discussion 3. What goals should *Re:Place* have?

Not just a talking shop

- Make 'Real World' changes (Change the world!). Inspire a big shift in perceptions and how things are done.
- Be a network that isn't just an email list but acts as an agency and best practice exchange.
- Take practical action (following the example of Planning Aid, which still exists but has lost its funding)
- Support the grassroots but also change thinking at the strategic level.
- Revitalise the idea and concept of planning

Know what it's doing and why

- Be clear on scope, aims & objectives. Have goals that can be evidenced and build accountability into the organisation.
- Have a plan and be clear about what is going to happen next: where, who and when.
- Define the target audience for each goal.
- Link urban and rural experience OR focus on town and country rather than cities (where this is already a crowded area).

Bring the Creatives in

- Give artists a voice. Ensure that arts/creativity is included at the early stages of planning, not as a decorative piece at the end of the process.
- Make space for artists at the table – on planning committees and regeneration boards.
- Facilitation could be the key to change. 'Enablers' provide a new skill set, which can originate with creative practitioners but isn't automatically transferable.
- Share experience on how to navigate the fine line between 'art-washing' and genuine participation. Provide support so people can avoid pit falls.

- Talk about “Creative People” – this is a helpfully inclusive term. Doesn’t exclude people who don’t identify as artists/writers etc. Prevents creation of an additional or new exclusivity
- TCPA should bring creatives in!
- Reframe Section 106 payments to support creativity and community

Help dreaming communities

- Reframe ‘community engagement’ as a creative, imaginative starting point to guide and inform plan-making.
- Dynamize the Neighbourhood Planning process (hijack it), embedding creative process and meaningful engagement.
- Give communities a viable voice and presence in the wider world. Community steering groups eg St Albans.
- Look at public/planning conflicts and help understand the reasons for results.
- Community involvement in Re:Place.
- Highlight the importance of building that considers community life – shared spaces, community space, shops, schools etc. Look at social aspects and lifestyle choices that may create issues regarding mental health/social isolation for the future.
- Involve schools & libraries.

Help dreaming planners

- Find ways to create time, space and support for hard pressed planners to be involved.
- A rep from local Re:Place to attend planning meetings
- provide a resource of expertise and skills that councils/developers could draw upon – not just toolkits but people.
- Be a brokerage/access point for finding creative people
- Catalyse a sense of positivity in planners.
- Transform the public perception and understanding of the planning profession (and their own perceptions). Overcome barriers and misconceptions about both the planning and the creative professions.

- Help planners demystify the technical side of planning.

Share ideas & make links

- Galvanise new partnerships and collaborations
- Knowledge exchange workshops (eg dancers and transport planners working together on movement).
- Include big organisations in the network. Collaborate with the Arts Council. Work with councils and commercial partners instead of blaming them for everything
- Link with George Clark – building better social housing.
- Meetings, skill shares and get togethers
- Create a bigger social media presence and get tv coverage.
- Research and provide a bank of examples eg Gateshead Council.

Help us understand each other

- Help planners and creative people understand what the other needs, and how they can do better together
- Improve understanding in both directions – community to decision-maker and vice versa.
- Explore the mismatch between what's happening on the ground and what planners are able to do/relate to.
- Bring councillors into Re:Place.

Support at the grassroots, advocate at the top

- Lobby and advocate, building awareness and understanding amongst those who aren't in the network (not just talking to ourselves).
- Create a network that is about self-help, leading from the bottom up and rotating responsibilities. But it will need some central coordination.
- Influence policy and practice. Have champions & ambassadors.
- Engage with planning system but also present, share & advocate for other models eg crowd funded development, coops.

- Influence planning restrictions, frameworks and vision, combined with a strategy to secure the necessary resources and buy-in to do that.

QUESTIONS RAISED

What is the balance between focussing on one thing, which could provide immediate impact, and having broader goals/involvement, which would be more woolly but also more inclusive?

How much focus should be on planners? Shouldn't this be a wider understanding of planning and what it's for?

Is there already too much focus on urban placemaking and planning? Should *Re:Place* be for towns, villages and rural places?



Discussion 4. What support could a network provide to you?



Opportunity

Promotion for artists – make sure they get something out of this and aren't just used.

Involve all forms of the arts and types of creative practitioner.

Help artists and creative people to be involved early in the planning process. Connecting artists to development trusts and planning boards.

Support and training.

Funding opportunities.

A matchmaking service – linking those who need a creative person or activity with those who can provide that. Time forum.

Resources/information/mentors

Ways to capture community voices. Supporting growth of community voices and capacity.

Shared virtual space to showcase existing and completed projects – what has worked elsewhere - and provide tips and mentoring for new projects.

Provide a vision of what's possible, using case studies.

Act as or provide a 'critical friend' for projects

Provide a network of expertise to draw upon

Building a community

Building a community of interested people and a combined voice.

Inclusion and understanding.

Demonstration to the wider world and making people more aware of this (is it just awareness that's needed?).

WhatsApp groups.

Shared and sharing experience.

Capacity building in communities. Encourage dreaming and making a space.

Networking & Linking up

A network to learn from each other and support each other's projects.

Events and opportunities to meet others interested in this.

A network for sharing knowledge, stories and examples of what's possible. Online/virtual spaces.

Create a specific Durham place-based network.

Sharing links with interested parties.

Working with communities, partners and planning authorities.

Forum to link planners with communities to co-design planning related projects

A living real-time forum to connect all the things that are going on

An exchange of needs and offers – a clearing house or matchmaking service.

Cut across disciplines – networking with people you may not otherwise meet



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Best practice

A source of best practice and guidance. Examples of good practice internationally as well as nationally, regionally and locally.

Capture and share lessons learned.

Exchange knowledge, experience, opportunities, lessons learned and interesting practice.

Help people to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Reach the right audiences – for example, the resources need to be useful to decision-makers.

Understand how methods, connections and conversations affect planning outcomes

**Please tell us your thoughts on what
you've read.**

Re:Place

