

# THE VALUE OF EARLY ENGAGEMENT IN PLANNING

Evidence of the benefits of early  
engagement in land use planning  
decisions

11 June 2020



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# Summary

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## **The Value of Early Engagement in Planning: evidence of the benefits of early engagement in the development process**

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**Year of publication: 2020**

### **Keywords**

engagement; planning; developers; development; value; benefits

### **Background**

Improving community involvement and ‘frontloading’ the planning system has been a key aim of planning reform in Scotland since 2015. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the value, from the development industry’s perspective, of early conversations with communities about significant land use changes.

### **Main findings**

- Research participants from the development industry have identified a range of benefits from early engagement, alongside examples of current practice, indicative costs and suggestions for future improvements.
- A framework for future collaborative early engagement is proposed, with the intentions of supporting good practice in land use decision-making and contributing to the Scottish Government’s ongoing work programme to implement the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Why is this research needed?

With land reform and planning reform so high on the political agenda in Scotland, evidence of the benefits of early engagement should be of great interest to policymakers in both arenas.

Improving community involvement in land use decisions and ‘frontloading’ the planning system has been a key aim of planning reform in Scotland since 2015. Involving communities in proposals prior to formal planning processes provides an opportunity to contribute, share views and improve understanding of the intended plans, reducing the risk of objections at a later stage.

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the value, in a development context, of early conversations with the Scottish communities about significant land use changes. The intention has been to understand the real and tangible benefits of meaningful engagement early in the planning and development process – not just what those benefits might be in theory, but what they actually are in practice. Looking more closely at examples within this context could provide useful learning for managing land use change beyond the planning system.

The research has deliberately focussed on developers and landowners, in order to:

- understand when and why developers and landowners choose to invest in early engagement – in other words, to appreciate the **benefits** that accrue to them.
- identify the **costs** associated with early engagement.
- **share evidence** of those benefits and costs with the wider development industry to encourage more early engagement.
- inform development of a **new collaborative framework for early engagement** which not only meets public policy aspirations but will also benefit the development industry.

The aims of the report are as follows, illustrated through the words of research participants (see section 1.5 for an explanation of the research methodology):

1. To provide **credible evidence** from the development industry to challenge sceptical attitudes towards early engagement.

*“Our default is that we avoid early engagement if we can. We’ve learned through experience that if we prod people by giving them an opportunity to object, it just makes it easier for them to do so.” [developer D13]*

*“Generally, the housing industry sees the 3 month engagement period as a ‘tick box’ exercise. Some developers recognise the benefits of engagement while others treat it as a process that they simply have to get through in order to secure a planning consent.” [developer D12]*

2. To share **evidence from developers** of the benefits of early engagement, including how to engage to generate those benefits.

*“I don’t think you can put enough into pre engagement – you get it back in dividends. You may not like all the information you hear, but it’s all useful.” [landowner L4]*

*“Great to do this research. Good to see local authorities and others doing more community engagement, but I’m not sure that everyone understands why they’re doing it – so evidence of the benefits is really essential.” [membership organisation MO11]*

3. To give **insights into the costs** of early engagement.

*“Yes, there are slightly additional costs associated with good consultation, but the costs aren’t substantial. At the end of the day, time is the killer. It’s the cost of when you’ve committed from buying the site to when you get yourself on the site, that’s when the money drains. The money doesn’t get drained on the consultation side.” [developer D5]*

4. To suggest what would be **practical and appropriate** to expect from developers and landowners, in order to inform future advice and guidance.

*“If we’re talking about making the consultation more relevant and less of a box-ticking exercise, if there’s guidance going to come out on that, I don’t think you’re going to get much resistance from the housebuilding sector. I can’t speak about the commercial development sector.” [developer D5]*

5. To outline a **fresh collaborative approach to early engagement**, involving developers, local authorities and communities, that would make early engagement the norm and generate multiple benefits.

*“Engagement helps us to deliver our aims as an authority. It’s a way of delivering a broader agenda, added benefits. It delivers other things for us rather than just to do with development proposals.” [planning officer PA6]*

### 1.3 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- **Section 1: Introduction** explains the purpose of the research and its aims (1.1), the context surrounding the research study (1.3), and an introduction to the research methodology (1.4).
- **Section 2: Policy and literature review** outlines the benefits of early engagement as currently understood, focussing largely on public policy, guidance and research relating to planning, land use and community engagement.
- **Section 3: Current practice** outlines where engagement in planning is at the moment in Scotland. It explains current opportunities for early engagement in the Scottish planning system (3.1) and currently available advice and guidance for community engagement (3.2).
- **Section 4: Development industry perspectives** outlines research participants' perspectives of how early engagement works at the moment (4.1) and what good early engagement looks like (4.2).
- **Section 5: Evidence of the benefits of early engagement** summarises evidence from interviewees – particularly developers, landowners and consultants.
- **Section 6: The costs of early engagement** provides a commentary on the costs of early engagement, based on information from developers, landowners and consultants.
- **Section 7: A new collaborative framework for early engagement** proposes a new framework for early engagement beginning from the Local Development Plan / Local Place Plans stage through to planning applications and beyond, involving developers/landowners working together with planning authorities and communities.
- **Section 8: Conclusions** contains a number of recommendations.

### 1.2 Context

This research links to both the land reform and spatial planning agendas, each of which recognise the importance of early engagement in decisions on the use of land.

Following the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, the Scottish Government issued a Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement which summarised the benefits of public engagement. Significantly, the Statement emphasised that “wide public engagement on decisions taken in relation to land and buildings can help to build trust” (Scottish Government, 2017b, p32). Subsequent guidance from the Scottish Government and Scottish Land Commission has spelled out the benefits of early engagement from a land reform perspective in more detail (see section 2.2 below).

In terms of spatial planning, the current Scottish planning system, which has its legal basis in the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, contains a number of opportunities for public consultation. These are detailed in section 3.1, and include:

- Public consultations by planning authorities on **Strategic and Local Development Plans**, which set planning strategy and policies for an area.
- Public consultations on National and Major planning applications (typically more than 50 houses or commercial buildings greater than 10,000 square metres), organised by the applicant through a process known as “**Pre-Application Consultation**”.
- Providing written representations to planning authorities in response to **planning applications**.
- Providing written representations to the Scottish Government in response to **planning appeals**, where planning consent has been refused and appealed.

The Independent Review of the Scottish Planning System (Beveridge, Biberbach and Hamilton, 2016), a key document in the Planning Review that led to the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, suggested significant dissatisfaction with Pre-Application Consultation and its contribution to mistrust between developers and communities. The Independent Review concluded that:

*“...there is consensus that getting public involvement right early in the process is instrumental to securing positive outcomes. ... There should be a continuing commitment to early engagement in planning, but practice needs to improve significantly. Front loading engagement remains a valid and attainable goal and must be at the core of the planning system.” (ibid., pp.37-38)*

A number of other subsequent publications related to the planning review and the wider land reform agenda also refer to the positive outcomes of greater early engagement from a public policy perspective. Indeed, there is plenty of public policy support for early engagement, as explained in more detail in section 2 of this report. There has, however, been little analysis of positive outcomes from the development industry’s perspective.

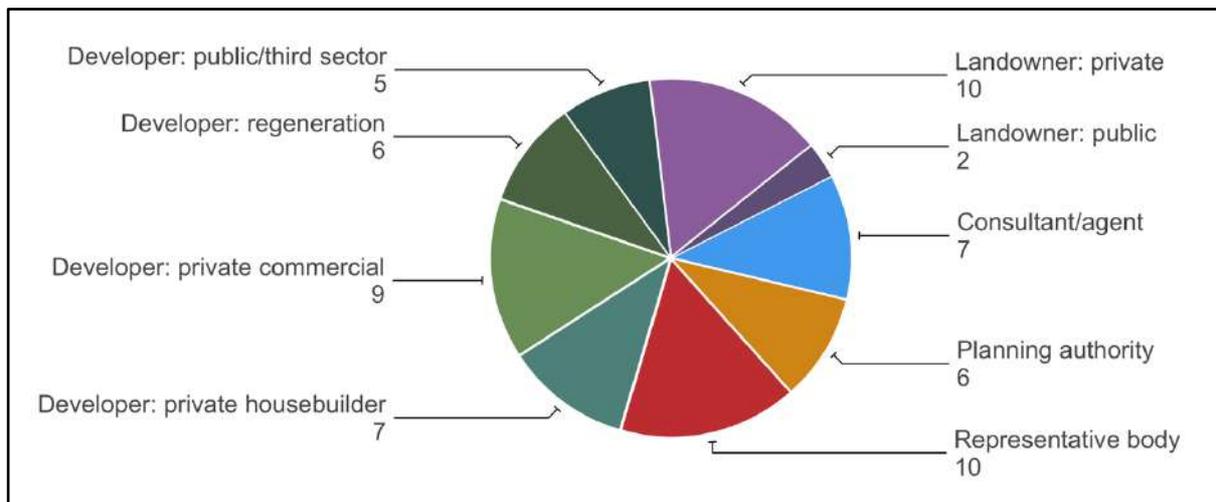
According to the Transforming Planning: Post-Bill Work Programme (Scottish Government, 2019), the Scottish Government will take the community engagement aspects of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 forward, with an emphasis on enabling communities to have meaningful and positive influence in future developments in their area.

### **1.3 Research methodology**

The aim of the research was to generate evidence of the benefits and costs of early engagement in planning, primarily from developers, landowners and their consultants. That had to be done in a way that would generate a body of useful, credible data.

Having considered a number of research techniques, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate technique. Annex 1 contains more information on this technique and why this technique was selected and how it was undertaken. Simple content analysis was undertaken of all interview material. Qualitative analysis was used to identify similarities, differences, consensus and divergence amongst the interviewees' material. This provided common themes, which form the basis of sections 4 to 7 of this report; each of those themes is illustrated through quotes from participant interviews, which have been anonymised through the use of 'anonymous identifiers' to preserve confidentiality.

A total of 44 organisations participated in the research, a significantly higher number than was anticipated at the outset. Annex 2 contains more information on the research participants and how they were selected. As Figure 1 shows, the participants covered a range of development types and sizes, site locations, and types of developer/landowner from different sectors; a number of planning authorities and relevant representative organisations were also included. A list of participants is contained in Annex 2.



*Figure 1: Range of research participants  
(NB: some of the 44 participants fall into more than 1 category)*

The distinction between different types of developer is not always clear-cut: for example, some developers may be primarily commercial but also promote residential development, and they may develop privately-funded as well as publicly-funded housing. Similarly, it is not always possible to differentiate between landowners and developers. Essentially all developers are also landowners at some point in the process. For example, a historic landowner might also act as a commercial developer if it wishes to develop a part of its landholdings for anything from a steading conversion to a new community. A commercial or residential developer, on the other hand, may have an option-to-purchase over a site during until planning consent is granted, and only at that point becomes the landowner; in this situation the developer is effectively speculating and acting as agent for the original landowner until planning consent is granted.

What matters for this research is **who promotes the development and is responsible for community engagement**. That can role can be taken by more than one organisation through the course of a large project (e.g. starting with the landowner establishing the principle of development and developing infrastructure, before parcelling up the site into a number of smaller sites for individual developers to take forward to detailed planning consent and construction).

Individual participants were offered the opportunity to discuss “on-the-record” or “off-the-record” because of the commercially sensitive nature of some questions. Although most discussions were “off-the-record” to ensure confidentiality and frank responses, eleven “on-the-record” case studies were generated (see Figure 2 overleaf).

Table 1 (below) describes the types of specific developments that were discussed in detail by research participants. This includes 28 developments, comprising the case studies identified in Figure 2 (overleaf), plus a number of others referred to in sections 4 to 6 which are not named for reasons of confidentiality.

*Table 1. Nature of specific developments discussed with research participants*

<b>Location</b>	City	9
	Town	8
	Urban edge	7
	Rural	4
<b>Existing land use</b>	Greenfield	14
	Brownfield	14
<b>Primary proposed land use</b>	Residential	14
	Commercial	8
	Mixed use / other	6
<b>Scale (type of planning application)</b>	Major	18
	Local	7



Figure 2. Map showing geographical distribution of case studies contained in section 5. Map data ©2020 GeoBasis-DE/BKG (©2009), Google.

## 2. POLICY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

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The early community engagement and its benefits have been promoted through a number of areas of Scottish public policy. Those most relevant for this research are:

- Planning reform (see section 2.1 below)
- Land reform (section 2.2)
- Community empowerment (section 2.3)

There has also been a limited amount of research by the development industry into the benefits of early engagement, which is summarised in section 2.4.

### 2.1 Planning reform

This section summarises how early engagement has been promoted in the current Scottish planning reforms, which began when the Scottish Government commissioned the Independent Review of the Scottish Planning System (Beveridge, Biberbach and Hamilton, 2016). The Review was a key document leading to the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. At the time of writing, the Scottish Government was working to implement the Act and wider planning reforms through a Post-Bill Work Programme scheduled to last until 2022 (Scottish Government, 2019).

The Independent Review of the Scottish Planning System (Beveridge, Biberbach and Hamilton, 2016) stated that:

*“there is consensus that getting public involvement right early in the process is instrumental to securing positive outcomes” (ibid., p.3)*

*“There should be a continuing commitment to early engagement in planning, but practice needs to improve significantly. Front loading engagement remains a valid and attainable goal and must be at the core of the planning system.” (ibid., p.38)*

Subsequently, in 2017, the Scottish Government published a consultation paper on the future of the planning system, which stated that:

*“Developments where the existing community have been fully involved from the start can often have a smoother journey through the planning process.” (Scottish Government, 2017a, p.23)*

*“Developers can benefit where they take communities with them, rather than meeting local resistance to change at every stage. Communities also have much to gain from helping to shape change, rather than reacting to it.” (ibid., p.23)*

Although there is no detailed explanation of those benefits for developers, presenting evidence of those benefits is a fundamental aim of this research report (see section 5).

Analysis of public responses to two separate Scottish Government consultations on planning reform record support from the development industry for early engagement:

[areas of agreement amongst respondents] *“Support for more front loading from the business sector and development industry. Support from civil society, policy and planning and business sector for enhancing the requirements of pre-application consultation (PAC). It comes primarily because of those who feel that the current requirements are inadequate. For developers who were supportive, they recognised that there is best practice in the approach to PAC and that this should become the standard.” (Kevin Murray Associates and University of Dundee, 2017a, p.37)*

*“Across the respondent categories, there was support for getting more people, particularly young people, involved in planning. Business and development industry respondents were supportive of early engagement.” (Kevin Murray Associates and University of Dundee, 2017b, p.35; emphasis added)*

The Scottish Government has also published a research report into barriers to community engagement in planning, which states that:

*“too often, engagement activity is about managing expectations and securing consent for development proposals rather than a serious effort to work with communities to achieve better planning outcomes” (Yellow Book, 2017, p.3)*

*“There is a lack of clarity about the purpose of engagement with communities. Communities want to know if they are being offered a real opportunity to shape vital planning and development decisions, or if planners and developers are merely going through the motions. A majority of community and third sector opinion believes that most “consultation” is really about securing endorsement for developers’ proposals rather than shaping them. Ultimately, the purpose of engagement should be to encourage communities, developers and local authorities to participate in the joint enterprise of “delivering great places now, and for future generations”. In practice, planning appears to be driven more by delivering development than by placemaking.” (ibid., p.27)*

## 2.2 Land reform

Land reform is another area of Scottish public policy which promotes early engagement.

Following the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, the Scottish Government issued a Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement which summarised the benefits of public engagement:

*“Decisions relating to land and buildings can have social, economic and environmental impacts on local communities. Wide public engagement on decisions taken in relation to land and buildings can help to build trust between the land owners, land managers, communities and others with an interest in land and secure better outcomes for communities and landowners.....”* (Scottish Government, 2017b, page 32)

Subsequent guidance (Scottish Government, 2018) explained those benefits in more detail:

*“Engagement helps ensure that the aspirations and concerns of communities across Scotland are rightly taken into account, enabling and empowering them to help shape decisions about land. It helps to create trust between local communities and those with control over land and demonstrates that land is being managed well.”* (ibid., p.3)

*“Engagement will also help to foster trust between communities and those who are making decisions about land, which in turn will often lead to better decisions.”* (ibid., p.6)

The guidance went on to explain those benefits in more detail, including how early engagement builds better outcomes and better relationships, and the importance of starting engagement as early as possible in order to maximise benefits, even if there is no statutory requirement to do so (ibid., p.7).

The Scottish Land Commission has issued a number of publications which describe the benefits of community engagement on decisions relating to land. Firstly, engagement guidance (Scottish Land Commission, 2018, p.3) listed the benefits as follows:

- *“People with control over land are valued members of a local community, who contribute to its wellbeing and sustainable development.*
- *Relationships and dialogue are established, and the value of community views are recognised.*
- *People are better informed and understand the decisions made.*
- *All parties better understand the wishes, concerns and constraints of others.*
- *Evidence of local needs and aspirations to support proposals.*
- *Opportunities for economic, social, cultural and environmental improvements are increased.*
- *Priorities and options are tested.*
- *More ideas are brought forward.*

- *Resources are used more efficiently.*
- *Conflict and delay can be reduced.*
- *Communities feel more involved and better connected to local land.*
- *Outcomes reflect community aspirations and support sustainable growth.*
- *Sustainable development is supported, and mutually beneficial solutions to local issues can be developed.*
- *Engagement can also help to build communities by bringing people together.”*

Secondly, the Protocol for Community Engagement (Scottish Land Commission 2019a) which, according to the accompanying media release:

*“... highlights the benefits for all parties: genuine engagement is good for land owners because it can reduce potential conflict, help make businesses more resilient and promote innovation. Meanwhile communities will be better informed and people will have a better opportunity to engage, understand and influence potential change and opportunities.”*

Finally, research into community engagement (Scottish Land Commission, 2019c, p.2) notes the following benefits of community engagement:

*“73% of landowners and managers who responded indicated that they believe there are benefits to engaging with local communities. On describing the benefits, respondents stated that engagement:*

- *Helps the public to understand what’s happening better.*
- *Promotes better understanding of other perspectives and builds relationships.*
- *Provides a chance for landowners to explain proposals and reduce misinformation.*
- *Can provide valuable local support for planned changes, reducing controversy and opposition.*
- *Promotes more open-minded views and makes those who own or manage land more aware of local opinions.*
- *Allows people to comment, express views and make suggestions, and provides an opportunity for these to be responded to and incorporated into decision making.”*

This baseline data, sourced from a survey completed by 64 landowners and managers from across rural Scotland, provides an important starting point for the current research – which aims to provide deeper insights into the benefits of early engagement from a range of landowners and developers across urban and rural Scotland.

### 2.3 Community empowerment

Community empowerment is the third area of Scottish public policy relevant to this study which has promoted early community engagement, which has generated a significant body of policy and literature. The Scottish Government webpage on community empowerment (Scottish Government, 2020) is a good starting point. It includes a summary of the benefits of community empowerment (which, of course, involves community engagement as a pre-requisite):

*“Research has shown that when communities feel empowered, there is:*

- *greater participation in local democracy*
- *increased confidence and skills among local people*
- *more people volunteering in their communities*
- *greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood*

*Better community engagement and participation leads to the delivery of better, more responsive services and better outcomes for communities.” (ibid.)*

### 2.4 Other perspectives

The Scottish Government has stated that early engagement can lead to developments having a smoother journey through the planning process (Scottish Government, 2017a, p.23). The current research aims to test and seek evidence for this.

Although there has been little evidence collated from a developer’s perspective in support of early engagement, a recent research report by a private developer argues the need for more early engagement from the development industry’s perspective:

*“The public doesn’t trust the planning system. Nor does it trust private developers. ... This lack of trust defines an often confrontational debate about development, regeneration and building new homes. We see it in stand-offs between communities, councils and private developers.” (Grosvenor Britain and Ireland, 2019, p.3)*

The research was based on a survey of over 2,000 respondents and concluded that:

- Only 2% of respondents trusted private developers to act in an honest way.
- The biggest drivers of distrust in developers was that they only care about making or saving money, not about the local community.
- A popular way of increasing trust was more opportunity for local people to influence the outcomes of large-scale development, cited by 71% of respondents.

The report concludes that developers and government have work to do to restore public trust and improve placemaking and democracy. It identifies one of the challenges as “extending the public’s influence over places: attracting meaningful, practical and popular public

influence over the results of large-scale development” (ibid., pp.9-11). Figures 3 to 5 (overleaf) contain more detailed results from the report.

Figure 3. Trust in developers and councils. (Grosvenor Britain and Ireland, 2019, p.4)

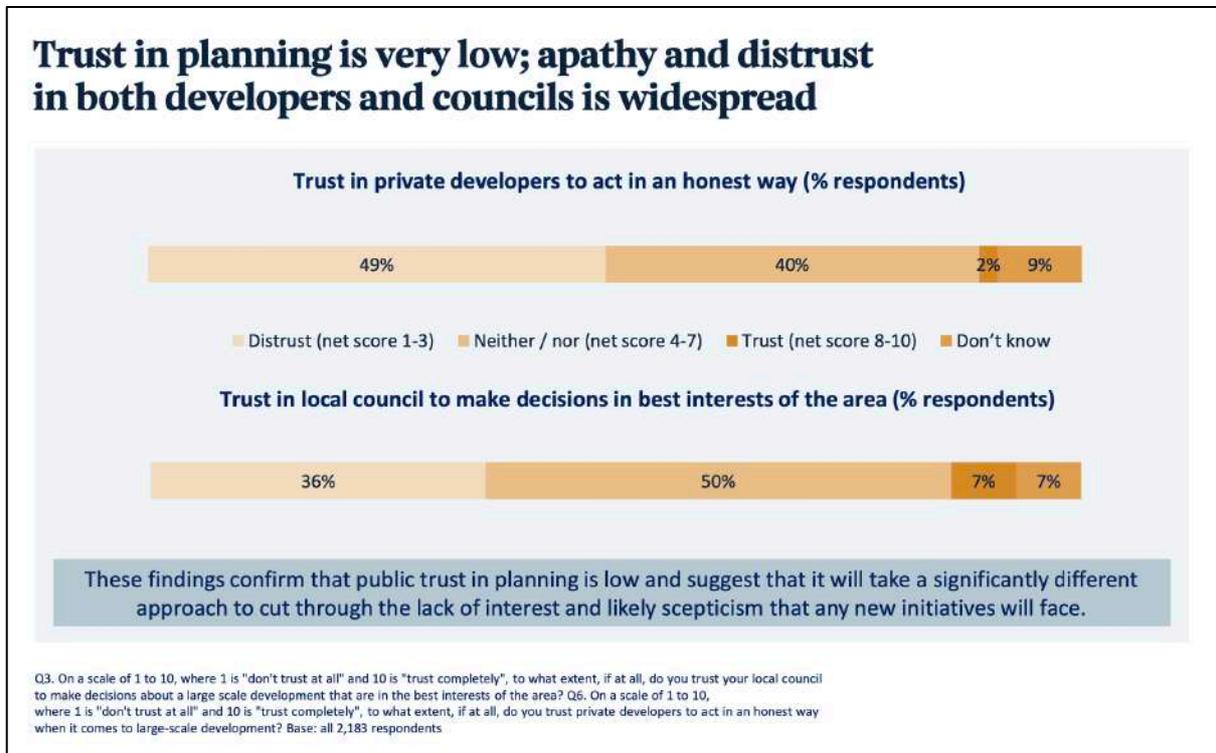


Figure 4. Reasons for distrust of developers. (ibid., p.5)

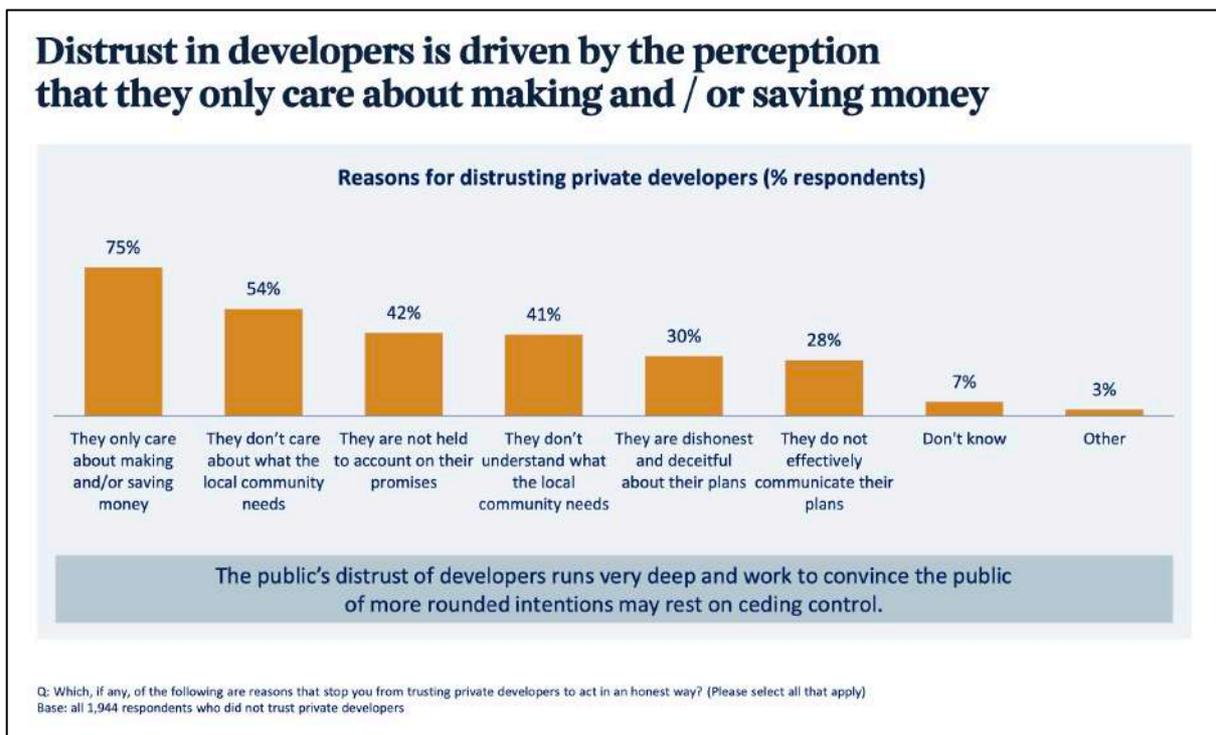
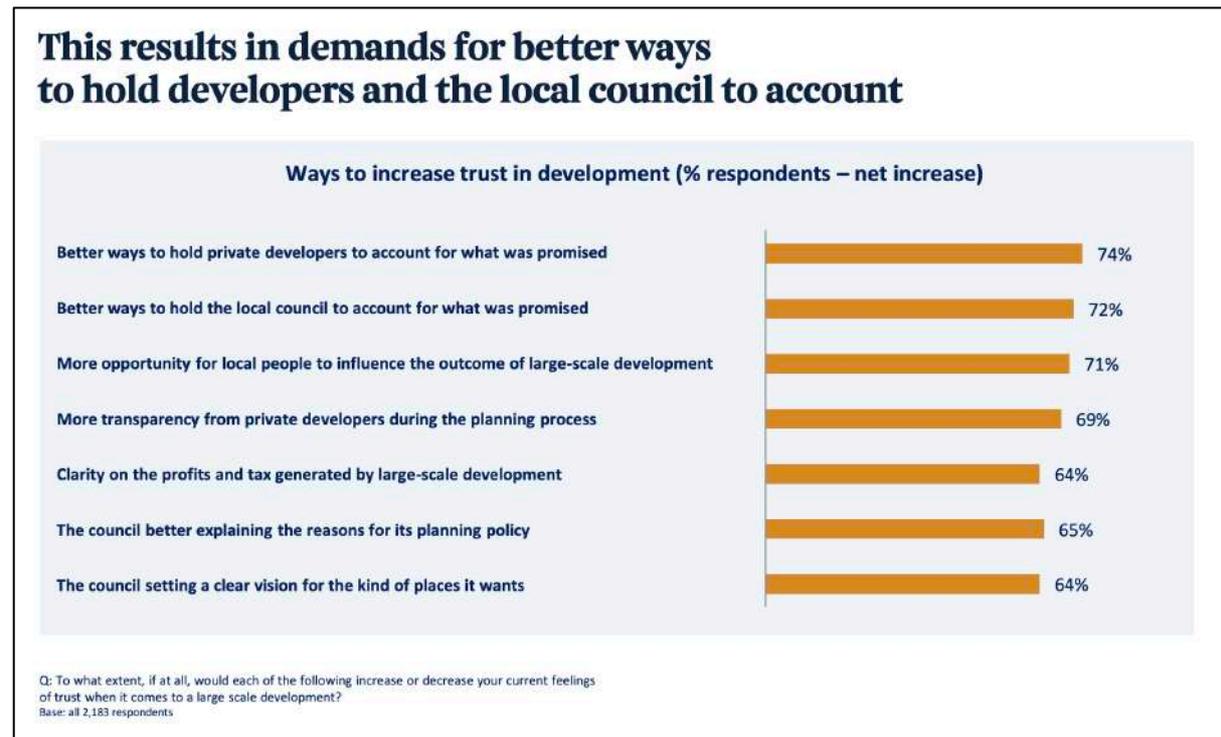


Figure 5. Demands for better ways to hold developers and councils to account. (ibid., p.6)



### 3. CURRENT PRACTICE

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What is the system for early engagement in Scottish planning at the moment? What support is available? The answers to these questions are important background information.

This section of the report outlines the current situation by summarising:

- Current opportunities for early engagement in planning, including development planning (policy) and development management (applications) (see section 3.1).
- The main sources of advice and guidance relevant for early engagement to Scottish planning that are currently available (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Current opportunities for early engagement

Current opportunities for early engagement in the Scottish planning system are summarised in the accompanying infographic (see Figure 6 overleaf and Annex 4).

The infographic shows opportunities for public consultation in both development planning and development management, with links to sources of further information. Please note that the infographic describes the current planning system based on the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

#### 3.2 Current advice and guidance for early engagement

The primary free sources of advice on community engagement that are relevant to Scottish planning are shown in Figure 7 overleaf. Although there is plentiful guidance in general, there are opportunities for further support:

- Much of the available support is generic, relating not only to planning or land. Without training or experience, it can be challenging for practitioners to confidently design and deliver community engagement in relation to planning.
- Different sources of guidance and support often appear to put forward competing methodologies for community engagement, with little over-arching guidance as to which strategies or techniques might be most appropriate in any given set of circumstances.
- There is limited availability and take-up of planning-specific community engagement advice and training available. At the moment, the sole source is the PAS SP=EED guide and training (PAS, 2019). Increased recognition for SP=EED and greater integration with the Scottish Government's National Standards for Community Engagement (Scottish Community Development Centre and Scottish Government, 2016) would be beneficial.

Figure 6: Current opportunities for public involvement in the Scottish planning system  
(See Annex 4 for full page interactive version with weblinks)

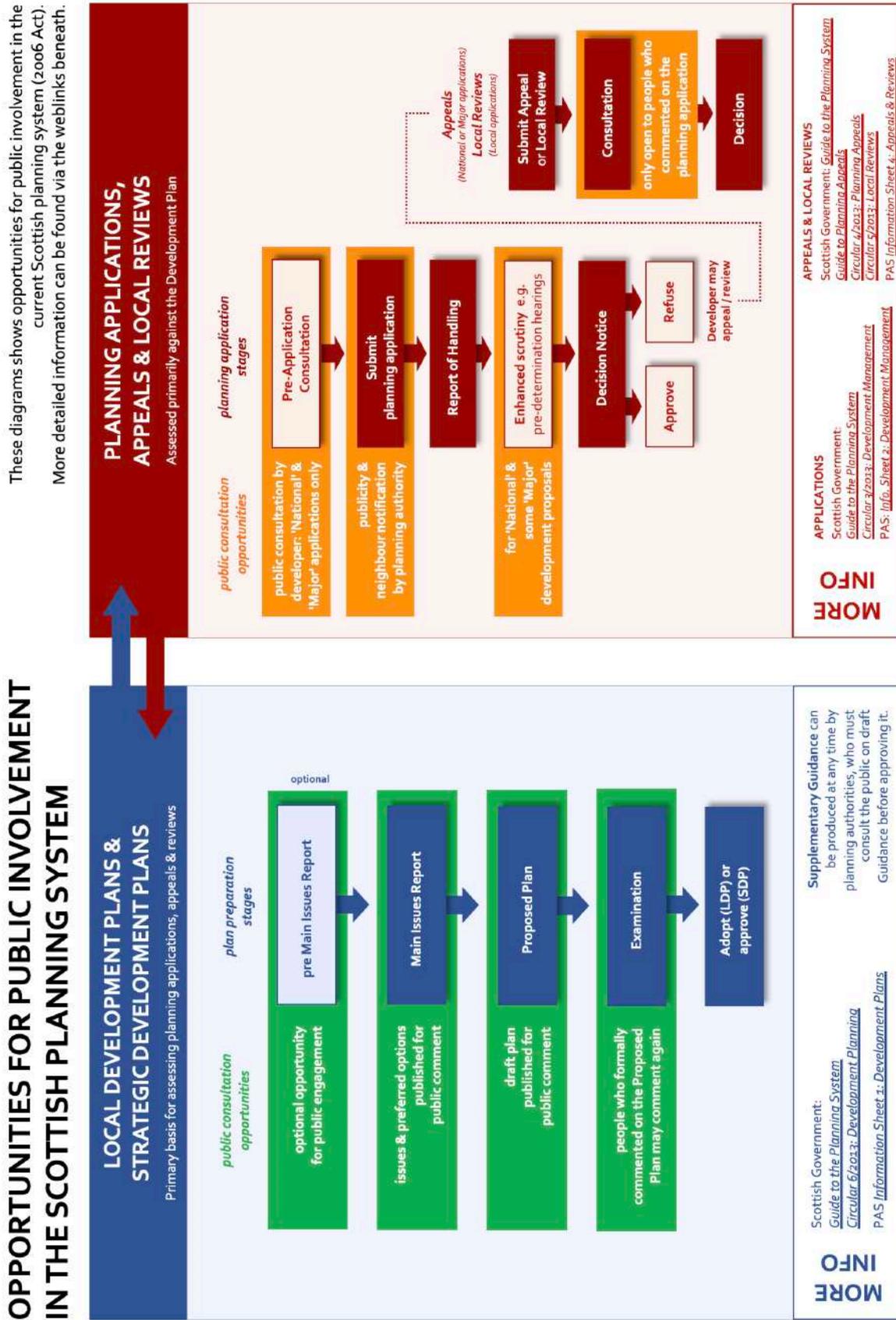
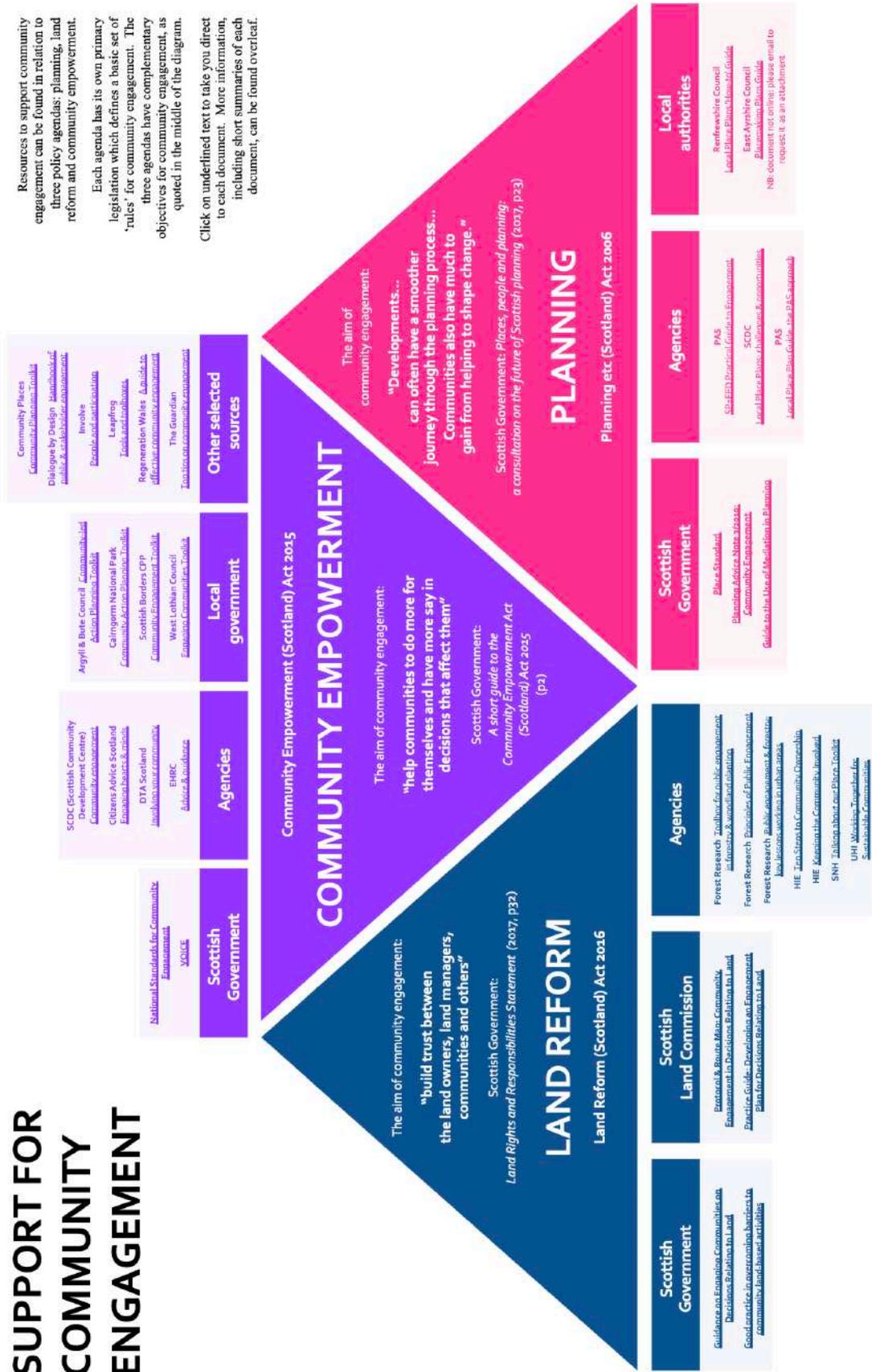


Figure 7: Current advice and guidance for early engagement  
(See Annex 5 for full interactive version containing weblinks and supporting text)



Resources to support community engagement can be found in relation to three policy agendas: planning, land reform, and community empowerment.

Each agenda has its own primary legislation which defines a basic set of 'rules' for community engagement. The three agendas have complementary objectives for community engagement, as quoted in the middle of the diagram.

Click on underlined text to take you direct to each document. More information, including short summaries of each document, can be found overleaf.

## 4. DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

What does early engagement look like at the moment from the development industry's perspective? That is important to understand before considering the benefits of early engagement, which the report considers in section 5.

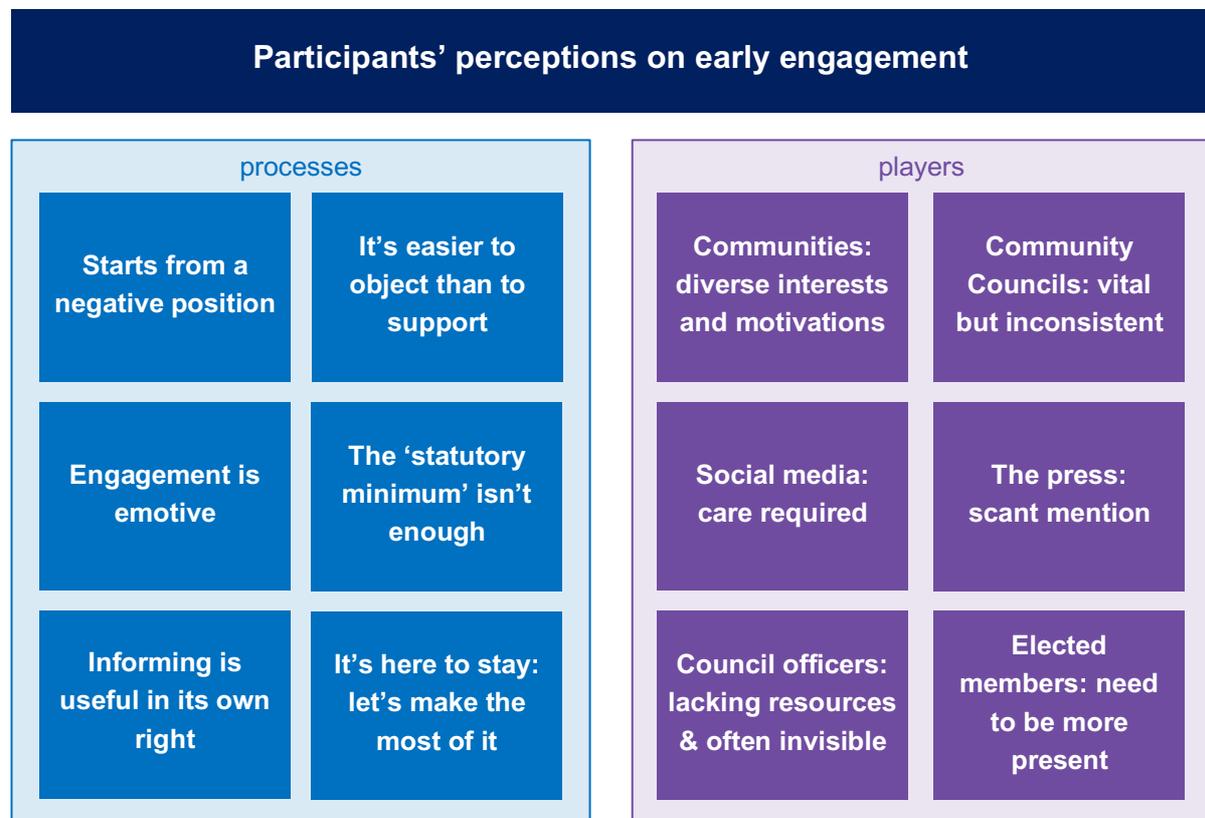
This section of the report outlines development industry perspectives on:

- How community engagement is working at the moment (section 4.1).
- Characteristics of good engagement (section 4.2).

### 4.1 Perceptions on current practice

How does community engagement work at the moment from the perspectives of research participants, particularly the development industry? This section outlines participants' current perceptions on early engagement, which are summarised in Figure 8 (below). The twelve boxes in Figure 8 refer to sections 4.1.1 to 4.1.12 on subsequent pages.

Figure 8: Perceptions on current practice



#### 4.1.1 Engagement starts from a negative position

Approximately two-thirds of research participants noted that people's engagement with the planning system or an individual development proposal often starts from a negative position:

*"The placing of an advert in line with statutory planning requirements can stimulate an immediate emotional and negative reaction" [developer D3]*

*"We got lots of useful information, but also negative stuff from people who might not understand what's proposed or start from a mistrustful point of view" [developer D9]*

*"General opinions tend to be negative rather than supportive. It is important to find ways of getting a fair representative balance when undertaking engagement." [consultant C2]"*

*"Public benefit tends to be gaining a positive outcome from a proposal whereas an individual tends to concern themselves with negative issues." [consultant C4]*

*"Negativity needs to be managed and preferably removed otherwise it is difficult to get positive change. The best position is that the community organise positive engagement through their own 'champions'." [developer D8]*

*"From experience of being engagement exercises, it is not just that the community is wary of the developer but they also have a negative view of the Council." [consultant C5]*

*"We need to tackle the mistrust amongst communities about what we're doing – because there is so much about. We need to engage people about the priorities for their place, rather than just asking them for their response about a proposal. Which should make it much easier to engage people on development proposals when they come along." [planning authority PA4]*

These comments mirror findings from previous research cited in section 2 above:

- Scottish Government research into barriers to community engagement in planning (Yellow Book, 2017, p.26), which cited "lack of trust, respect and confidence" at the top of its list of consultation findings.
- Grosvenor's survey of 2,000 respondents which concluded that "trust in planning is very low; apathy and distrust in both developers and councils is widespread" (Grosvenor Britain and Ireland, 2019, p.4).

#### 4.1.2 *It's easier to object than to support*

The planning system and people's psychology means it's more likely that people will object to development proposals than support them:

*"People hardly ever write in support of a proposal, but they'll happily write in and object!" [developer D13]*

*"It is generally easier for a community to seek to resist change rather than a community trying to get change to occur." [consultant C3]*

*"I don't think the planning process has ever been harder in the last 20 years... not because of the planning process, but because of social media. "Here's a proforma for your objection, do say this, don't say that." They're motivated, they're organised, they're well informed. We should be well informed too." [developer D8]*

One developer told us that the consequence is that, when they know they will be faced with objectors who have made up their minds without reference to facts, investing in early engagement has little point:

*"If a project proposal is within a location where it is obvious that there is clear opposition and people are not prepared to consider the evidence (their opinions are already established), then there is little point in extending the engagement process." [developer D12]*

#### 4.1.3 *Engagement is emotive*

Around a third of research participants made the specific point that engagement is an emotional process for many participants, for example:

*"Those objecting may be a minority group and while not necessarily having objective reasons they aim to frustrate the process on emotional grounds." [consultant C2]*

*"There is a lack of objectivity in engagement proceedings with some people more focused on irrational behaviour than considering the facts of the case." [consultant C5]*

*"Social media is generally avoided as it often fuels reactions which are more emotionally charged rather than being rational... Such emotional and individual activism can be a brake on advancement." [landowner L5]*

Comments such as these were often accompanied by statements that communities need to be well-informed (see section 4.1.5) and all those who might be interested need to be reached (see section 4.1.7).

#### **4.1.4 Doing ‘the statutory minimum’ isn’t enough**

“Pre-Application Consultation” (see sections 1.3 and 3.1 above) is the only statutory opportunity for public involvement in the current planning system for which developers are responsible. Unsurprisingly, therefore, this was a focus for almost all research participants.

The regulations for Pre-Application Consultation set minimum standards for consultation, essentially a public exhibition which must be advertised in a local newspaper. In interviews, participants often referred to this as “the statutory minimum” which can easily encourage a “tick box” mentality:

*“Engagement should not be treated as a ‘tick box’ exercise but should be positive and meaningful.” [developer D12]*

*“Engagement must be more than one formal event... Many of the engagement projects have a habit of becoming a ‘tick box’ exercise with insufficient judgement being given to the evidence.” [consultant C5]*

*“Some community engagements can mean following a process that simply ‘goes through the motions’. This can be the case on say a larger development with a phased planning application. In these cases, it is often the same people attending the engagement event as the previous phase even though they know the story. In effect there is little value arising from such a form of engagement as it tends to become a ‘tick box’ process” [developer D3]*

*“As to what are the best techniques to employ at an engagement event, such matters largely depend on the project proposals and the type of people being engaged. While developers are required to meet the statutory requirements for engagement, there is a need to look more broadly.” [developer D3]*

*“My experience shows that a more comprehensive approach to engagement is beneficial. Even for a seemingly straightforward development proposal like [location withheld], where there has been one controversial issue – car parking. So we’re doing some workshops with the local community about that particular issue, even though we’ve already finished the statutory Pre-Application Consultation – not just to address the issue, but so that people can see it’s being addressed.” [developer D5]*

*“A charrette report is essential baseline project information that we regularly revisit. The charrette has ‘decent shelf life’ and informs the project business case / plan, project design proposals and subsequent planning application. For all these reasons engagement is beneficial. The charrette report also is a useful document to share with other stakeholders such as local authority departments, utility companies, businesses etc. All of these matters provide tangible benefits well beyond ‘ticking a box’ lip service approach at the pre-application stage.” [developer D6]*

One participant who is not from the development industry made an important observation about the current Pre-Application Consultation system:

*“the system does not incentivise good behaviour” [membership organization MO1]*

#### **4.1.5 Informing is useful in its own right**

Not every member of the public wants to have a say: some just want to be kept informed. Around three-quarters of research participants’ comments were clear that ‘informing’ is just as important as ‘consulting’ or ‘engaging’:

*“The developer needs to... explain the facts behind the proposal in order for community people to make an informed judgement.” [developer D3]*

*“Once people have been furnished with wider national and regional objectives, they can be more informed to make judgements.” [developer D12]*

*“After three phases of engagement with over 1,000 people involved, there were less than 40 written objections to the planning application.” [developer D9]*

Of those, some mentioned the importance of keeping information flowing throughout the course of a development, from initial idea right through to completion:

*“While early engagement is very important, we employ a strategy of continuing engagement throughout a phased development. Our projects are usually large scale requiring a number of phases, and we see the value in keeping community representatives including new occupiers and surrounding neighbourhood residents fully informed.” [developer D14]*

*“Actually we have a good example in my village just now, where a guy is moving to the village and is building a house. He is posting stuff up on the Facebook page and being very open about the development.” [membership organization MO1]*

The basic point – that many people simply want to know what’s happening – is reflected in PAS SP=EED benchmarking for community engagement in planning (PAS, 2019; see section 3.2 above), which recognises that good early engagement can be done well at a number of levels: informing, consulting and partnership/co-design.

#### **4.1.6 Early engagement is here to stay, so let’s make the most of it**

Every developer and landowner involved in the research recognised that early engagement is here to stay and can have benefits for developers and communities alike (as explained in section 5). So, they want to make the most of it.

What emerged from the interviews was that enlightened developers do much more than the statutory minimum required by Pre-Application Consultation regulations (see 4.1.2 above). Every research participants realised the benefits of engagement, provided it is done well and people engage appropriately. For example:

*“Generally, the housing industry sees the 3 month engagement period as a ‘tick box’ exercise. Some developers recognise the benefits of engagement while others treat it as a process that they simply have to get through in order to secure a planning consent. However, as a developer we are interested in community feedback particularly around place making, building materials and connectivity to existing places. We see production as not just about building houses but creating places which are of particular interest to the existing community.” [developer D12]*

*“There is a need to try to get to a ‘level playing field’ and more balanced participation. What constitutes proper consultation is a matter for the developer, but it is highly likely to be greater than the statutory requirement which is relatively minimal. Given our focus on large scale developments, we will always do more than the legislation requires.” [developer D14]*

*“While the statutory engagement represents the minimum requirement it is about having the right level of engagement not just at the beginning of a project but as an on-going process.” [developer D2]*

This begs the question: what is “the right level of engagement”? Pre-Application Consultation requirements were widely regarded by the vast majority of respondents as insufficient to enable the views of a cross-section of interested parties to be represented; nobody volunteered that the requirements were appropriate as they are. The regulations were typically described as:

- tending to reach a limited demographic (those who read public notices in newspapers or who will attend public events) and geographic extent (those who live in the immediate

vicinity of the development proposal, rather than a wider spread of population who might also have an interest).

- failing to encourage engagement methods that are in touch with modern life, with too much focus on events and meetings, and too little focus on using digital tools and meeting people in their own time and space.

So, if Pre-Application Consultation does not provide a benchmark of quality, how do developers and landowners make the most of engagement?

Fortunately, research participants provided a wealth of examples of good engagement cutting across small and large proposals, by public and private sector developers, in housing and other sectors. That information is summarised in section 4.2 (below).

#### **4.1.7 Every community is home to diverse interests and motivations**

All the developers engaged in housing regeneration activity in urban areas believed that community engagement was a positive experience as people wanted to see their area improved and were generally keen on helping to shape development proposals:

*“In urban regeneration projects, communities are likely to be more supportive of development that helps to renew their places than in communities with greenfield sites. Urban community stakeholders also differ from those on the edges of towns as they tend to have less power and influence. They have different interests too – for example, in some cases urban communities can be resistant to development due to concern over parking and additional traffic generation.” [developer D2]*

*“In regeneration areas people tend to be more supportive of ideas. It is frustrating that people only appear to be supportive of development when it can be seen to make a beneficial environmental change.” [developer D12]*

*“In the case of urban land that requires renewal such as vacant and derelict land, then generally communities are supportive when they can see improvements taking place in their area.” [consultant C2]*

*“Other than Edinburgh, there is generally a lack of residents in town centres and community objections are less likely for say an office development. That said, there can be engagement issues around some uses such as bars” [consultant C3]*

Put another way, affluent communities have different interests from less affluent ones, often protecting what they have rather than aspiring to what their community could be:

*“Essentially more affluent areas have a focus on conservation and the protection of the place’s heritage. Whereas in more deprived locations the community are looking for the place to be regenerated and improved.” [consultant C3]*

A small number of research participants said that housing proposals routinely attract more community involvement.

*“Whether early engagement is beneficial will depend on the location and the demographics of the place. Housing development in some locations attracts significant levels of ‘nimbyism’. Such people are focused on “what I’ve got rather than what it could be”. If a developer seeks to engage too soon it can lead to a “bonfire” of opposition irrespective of the development proposals. This is common on sites located in attractive places which inevitably means in wealthier locations. If development is proposed in less wealthy places then engagement is different with a greater likelihood for communities supporting the proposal.” [developer D12]*

Almost all research participants recognised that communities are home to a whole range of different views:

*“There is never one community but a range of interests of which some groups might be in agreement but also some can conflict. This creates a range of views, which makes it difficult for the developer as well as planners and councillors to determine what the community consensus is on any given proposal” [consultant C2]*

A few participants commented that older people who live nearby often have more time to pick up on and respond to the engagement methods required by statutory Pre-Application Consultation regulations:

*“Engagement is not wholly truly representative. Very often those attending engagement events are retired people who have more time. It can also act as a forum for some people to ‘showboat’ without being overly informed about the project.”*

It can of course be a challenge to get beyond those who claim to represent the community. What of the views of families and younger people? Or potential occupiers of the proposed development?

*“Some people purport to talk for the community when they are seeking to protect their own personal interests.” [landowner L5]*

*“In our experience the most productive places for engagement were in local schools where typically 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year secondary students enthusiastically engaged on their own places.” [developer D3]*

*“We need to differentiate between people who have a specific interest - like neighbours - and the community which has a wider interest. Whoever shouts loudest and turns up at the door of the Councillor will get heard.*

*But there are definitely other and different interest groups in the community. We need to isolate and differentiate between objectors and a wider community of interest, because objectors will just continue to fight fire with fire - we need to get to all those other people who have an interest, for example the whole of Bearsden, Milngavie or Bishopbriggs - not just the objectors and any association they may have.*

*Can't we do it properly, with higher numbers, demographic analysis and so on? So rather than focus on the 115 who object on stopdevelopment.com, can we turn it round to 40,000 people support development?” [developer D8]*

*“Certain communities have perennial objectors whose intention it is to resist any change, usually small in number but with the ability to disrupt progress regardless of the potential benefits to be derived from the proposal.” [developer D9]*

Research participants spoke of the varied motivations that different members of a community might have. For example, immediate neighbours might be more concerned with physical design, whereas the wider community might be more concerned with uses:

*“There can be a significant difference between those people adjacent to a project than those from the wider neighbourhood. Those with adjoining interests often have concerns that tend to be about physical design elements, whereas the wider neighbourhood may see the positive benefits of more housing for local people. Often people will engage as they want to be part of the project – to move into one of the new homes.” [developer D11].*

*“Parties with a specific interest, such as those living close to the project, may be different to broader community opinions. Somehow, there has to be a judgement and recognition that local stakeholders are not one body but an assembly of multi stakeholders. Some will have macro interests while others have micro interests and the task of the planners and developers is to try and balance and blend such interests to get an informed judgement.” [developer D12]*

*“A developer has to understand that there are differing community interests. There are people who are adjacent to the project and there are those in the wider community. Adjacent interests are more associated with personal matters such as the impact of development as opposed to those having wider public / society interests. These two groups inevitably have differing motivations and one needs to establish for whom do these people speak for? Therefore, it is imperative that one understands the differences between community and individuals.” [landowner L5]*

#### 4.1.8 Community Councils: vital but inconsistent

Community Councils were mentioned by around three-quarters research participants, which is not surprising given their statutory role in the planning process. What emerges is that Community Councils are seen as potentially having a valuable role in engagement – but performance is inconsistent across the country, and too many fall short:

*“While being a statutory consultee some community councils are unrepresentative of their neighbourhood. This is particularly the case in the demographic representation with the majority of community councillors being retired” [consultant C3]*

*“Community Councils can be difficult and not necessarily reflect the requirements and aspirations of the community. Often Community Councillors are self-selecting and have not necessarily followed a democratic process.” [consultant C2]*

*“Community Councils can be a dangerous thing, as powerful lobbies can go against sound planning arguments.” [developer D13]*

*“While working with community councils is a statutory requirement their performance is sometimes patchy and not always a positive experience. Engagement needs to be much more than a ‘tick box’ consultation with representatives of a community council. It is more important to get amongst the community groups and get the local councillors involved in the process. At [...] a ‘local delivery group’ was established which included representatives such as tenants from the local housing associations, council officials and councillors. This delivery group was a formal group. One problem with community councils can be that they do not necessarily provide a balanced demographic representation. It was felt that having a ‘local delivery group’ was a more effective approach.” [developer D6]*

*“Often community council representatives arrive at an event with a negative perception but with no understanding of what is being proposed. Some good community councils will take the time to respond until such time as the facts are explained, but others come with a preconceived opinion without reference to the specific proposals... Successful community engagement is dependent on the approach adopted by the community council and its ability to objectively engage with the project proposals...*

*The provisions of the recent Planning Act bringing about training for Councillors should be extended to include Community Councillors. Community Councils are very influential, often without knowing their parameters. Those engaging in the development process should always seek to be better informed prior to forming an opinion.” [developer D3]*

*“English Parish Councils are generally more professional than Community Councils. They are political, they often have Councillors sitting on them, they have some say on how Community Infrastructure Levy is spent... which means they are incentivised. Parish Councillors feel more in control of their community and more able to shape it. Because they can be more proactive, it’s a more constructive relationship. Don’t get me wrong, it can still be difficult, but it’s more constructive. Yet, at the same time, Community Councils have a very strong role in many local authorities - their objection to a proposal can be a material consideration for big planning applications, and make the difference.” [developer D8]*

#### **4.1.9 Social media: care required**

Social media was mentioned by around three-quarters of participants. Almost all were were nervous about it, with some avoiding it altogether:

*“Engagement can be somewhat combative, particularly social media. One has to be aware of falsehoods and uninformed opinions all of which can lead to an unpleasant battleground.” [landowner L5]*

*“The use of social media to circulate ill-informed and often misguided information only serves to disrupt progress and create uncertainty in the minds of the public” [developer D4]*

*“As part of the engagement social media has its place, but you need to be careful that social media platforms are not hijacked by specific interests that get out of control and fuelled by a few people simply ‘having a go’. Care has to be given to unrepresentative people claiming that they represent the community.” [developer D6]*

*“Younger people are more likely to engage on-line, however, social media is fraught with biased irrational behaviour. Understandably, developers do not wish to engage in social media engagement that is fuelled by uninformed observations that are often rhetorical untruths.” [consultant C4]*

*“Social media is an opportunity for certain representatives to promote ‘negative value’. Rarely does social media address detailed objectivity and it is unusual for platforms like Facebook to generate positive messages. For this reason we don’t engage in social media, preferring to directly engage with local stakeholders including the community council and identifying local community networks.” [developer D14]*

But a handful of developers believed that social media could have specific value:

*“Technology is really important - so we try and summarise all the myriad technical documents [submitted as part of a Major planning application] into a 3 minute YouTube video. We’re now looking at how to get that out into people’s social media feeds or apps, and how to get feedback.” [developer D8; quoted also in section 4.2.4 below]*

*“We target community groups using social media for communication. This would typically be Facebook, Twitter and our website.” [developer D11]*

#### **4.1.10 The press: scant mention**

Much less mention was made of the press than of social media. Of the couple of respondents who did refer to the press, one made the point that:

*“Frequently, once an advert is placed in accordance with statutory requirements, the press pick up the reaction from local people which is not necessarily founded on facts but an immediate emotional response that development is bad. It is important to get balanced reporting from media sources but that is often difficult to achieve particularly when the detail of the proposals have yet to emerge.” [developer D3]*

#### **4.1.11 Local authority officers: lacking resources and often invisible**

A general lack of involvement of local authority officer involvement in early engagement was noted by over half of participants:

*“Pre-application community engagement should be a good thing but there is a lack of resource, skills and experience within local planning authorities. Access to planning officials is often difficult to obtain for both developers and community representatives.” [consultant C5]*

*“We found that public servants were not keen in participating in the charrette exercise. They found that Councils preferred not to engage and discuss issues. The general observation was that public officials find the experience of engaging somewhat uncomfortable.” [landowner L5]*

A frequent comment that many local authorities insufficiently communicate and promote their Local Development Plan (LDP), particularly for development proposals which are in accordance with the LDP. Development which complies with the LDP, it was argued, should be seen as helping local authorities to deliver “their” plan.

*“local planning authorities are insufficiently resourced to engage at the LDP stage and meeting Scottish Government objectives. Successful planning will be realised by planning authorities employing more sophisticated approaches which require good management and facilitation rather than simply telling people the purpose of their plans. However, communication is often far too late.” [landowner L5]*

*“In an ideal world we would very much like to be able to have discussions on ideas with the planners and get their feedback right at the very start, and this in itself would be very very helpful in framing and liaising with local communities in that it should be about bringing everybody with the development rather than trying to tick off individual boxes” [landowner L6]*

But, from those and other respondents, there was widespread recognition of the resource constraints faced by local authorities:

*“Early engagement needs to be resourced in what is already an under resourced system.” [developer D12]*

*“the very nature of ‘planning’ engagements is evolving/broadening to cover much wider interests – the localism agenda is a particularly hot topic for us at the moment in [our authority]. How to engage all relevant Council departments, Community partners and private sector partners in such events is tricky, time consuming, and requires ownership, organisation and coordination at the corporate level of Councils and community partners at least.” [planning authority PA4]*

*“Early engagement is a nice-to-do, not a have-to-do, so less resource might be available in the future. Engaging needs political will and people to do it.” [planning authority PA5]*

#### **4.1.12 Elected members: need to be more present**

There were mixed views on the level of involvement of elected members in early engagement. A couple of participants found their involvement satisfactory, but significantly more remarked that there were instances where Councillors did not participate in engagement, often on the premise that they should keep their distance from engagement activity because of their decision-making responsibilities in the planning system. It was suggested that many Councillors are missing out on hearing engagement dialogue and getting thorough understanding of development proposals:

*“Not all councillors choose to avoid engagement but many do the bare minimum” [consultant C4]*

*“Councillors should attend, as even if they do not engage it is a good opportunity for them to get an understanding of the proposals and any issues that might arise from community interests.” [developer D11]*

*“We have had experience of councillors declining an involvement in the engagement process by not attending events. Councillors have a duty to inform their communities and build up their knowledge of community issues.” [consultant C3]*

The decision-making responsibilities of Councillors were mentioned:

*“In the event that communities are supportive of the proposal then it follows that local councillors will tend to be more supportive of the proposals and the application process becomes easier.” [consultant C2]*

*“Politicians have a vital role to play in this process but they rarely lead and don’t tend to engage on longer term matters that are beyond the focus of the political cycle. As one gets closer to the planning application stage it is apparent that parties divide into ‘us and them’ as opposed to a narrative that is about ‘we’...”*

*...it would be helpful if local authority politicians could be more participative in measuring development on an economic and social basis rather than the focus being on the emotive local judgement of physical aspects of development change.” [developer D12]*

*“Planning should not be politicised. Decisions should be driven by planning reasons rather than a political agenda. Proposals should reflect the policy and hopefully have support from local community groups. However, this may conflict with some politicians who have differing agendas. The lack of consistent judgement illustrates that planning is used as a political football with decisions shaped by previous judgements rather than for good planning reasons.” [consultant C5]*

The view was expressed that more leadership is needed – across all stakeholders - to explain positive outcomes from development in terms of LDP delivery and wider strategic policy outcomes such as climate emergency, access to housing and rural depopulation.

*“Councillors should be part of the early engagement process and rather than hiding from such engagement under the cloak of a quasi-judicial position, councillors should have a duty to engage with their people as part of the planning process. Councillors must see themselves as more than a judge. Such political engagement has significant public democratic value.” [consultant C4]*

*“It is frustrating on projects where sites are already allocated within the LDP that planners and politicians can still give equal weight to objections about the principle of development. There will always be some community groups who will look for ways of frustrating development and seeking ways to stop development proceeding regardless of LDP allocation for residential use.*

*Councillors need to be trained not just on the technical aspects of planning but on appropriate procedures which include how to engage without fearing that they are conflicted in the decision making process. Councillors should be taking more responsibility by leading and guiding the process. There are some good examples where this does occur, but the general trend is for non-participation in the process.”*  
 [developer D12]

If developers need to engage more to objectively promote their proposals, then could planning authorities do the same where there are development proposals that contribute to delivering the LDP?

#### 4.2 What does good engagement look like?

Many participants made clear that the quality of engagement is essential to its success:

*“The quality of consultation is much more important than just a box-ticking exercise, even if the site is allocated in LDP – because nowadays people do take much more of an interest, and do challenge assumptions much more.”* [developer D5]

*“While the statutory engagement represents the minimum requirement, it is about having the right level of engagement not just at the beginning of a project but as an on-going process.”* [developer D2]

But what does good engagement look like? This section summarises its main characteristics according to research participants in 10 themes, which are summarised in Figure 9 (below).

Figure 9: What does good engagement look like?



#### 4.2.1 Get to know the community

All urban regeneration developers and those who used charrettes indicated that they always engaged with the community before proposals are fully developed, to understand the evidence of the place and the community's aspirations before developing design proposals.

*"Early community engagement does allow the developer to understand the issues for the community and helps us to address these matters prior to a planning application."  
[developer D3]*

The lesson: understand the community and its aspirations first. The Broxburn, Dalrnarnock and Sunderland case studies are all excellent examples of this (see section 5, below).

One developer explained why they decided to spend more time working with the community:

*"We've owned the site for 15 years. I'm at the stage now where we got such a bruising when the application was refused – despite good Pre-Application Consultation – that I don't want to run the risk of that happening again, so maybe it's just experience dictating that I actually have to have a much more comprehensive approach, even before I get into the statutory part.*

*So, before even thinking about development proposals, I want to encourage local community and cultural organisations to do 'meanwhile' activities on the site, which will then provide a platform for thinking about future use. This is a prelude to, not a replacement for, formal Pre-Application Consultation on the planning application. I want to use it to help develop a scheme for the site, and bring local credibility that I don't have." [developer D5]*

#### 4.2.2 Start early

Most participants commented on the need for engagement to start early in the planning process, at the planning policy or masterplanning stage rather than waiting until the Pre-Application Consultation stage:

*"People tend to see change as more difficult and their default position tends to be more status quo. What is required is an engagement process that is early and deals with objective matters underpinned by evidence." [consultant C4]*

*"Empowered communities will engage at the most important stage, that is, the Local Development Plan stage when land use policies are discussed. Failure to engage at the LDP stage means that by the time it comes to a planning application 'the horse may have bolted'". [landowner L5]*

*“Early engagement is particularly important at the Local Development Plan engagement stage. But getting communities to engage then is problematic. Different approaches such as through schools can generate wider participation and interest in the development of policies associated with their own communities.” [developer D3]*

*“Our approach is to first develop a masterplan that sets the development framework for renewing a place, and ensures that the community can play its part in shaping their place. This approach helps to give focus and clarity to community engagement. The masterplan isn’t just about aesthetical and environmental improvement but also includes what infrastructure is required and what kind of uses can operate over the longer term. These are essential components of place renewal and understandably they are important factors for the community too.” [developer D2]*

This need for early engagement applies as much to local Councillors and officials as much as to the wider community:

*“One way of avoiding public official and Councillor nervousness in the engagement process is by having more informal early engagement that is held well before the formal pre-application engagement process. A good way is to create an environment of working that is focused on a ‘one team’ approach. This allows stakeholders to recognise that the proposals are being framed as ‘our project’.” [developer D6]*

Several participants flagged up the need to have some initial thoughts or framework for discussion at the outset (see also section 4.2.7 below):

*“The important point is to start engagement early, which enables the developer to anticipate the issues. A developer should prepare for engagement and be ready for the ‘left field’ questions and challenges.” [developer D2]*

*“It is arguably not helpful to engage too early, before ideas have been thought through and engagement might instill fear as more questions are asked than can be answered. Quiet preparation is therefore of use - so as not to cause alarm, with hopefully many answers prepared almost before the questions are asked. But not to the degree that the process can be held into question with the allegation that the response has already been written and the consultation is really just to tick boxes.” [landowner L7]*

### 4.2.3 Take your time

Over half of participants referred to the need to build trust with communities, which many said takes time:

*“To build an environment of trust took around 2 years. While this may seem a long time this patient approach did build trust and paved the way for developers to come to the area and not be faced with objections. All this needs time to prepare the foundations... At the start the community believed that our consultation would be the same as previous experiences – ‘just like the rest of them’ – but through our early engagement efforts and subsequent action the community gained confidence.”*  
[developer D2]

*“Over last 3-5 years, there’s been a lot of hyperbole from developers about how well they engage with communities. The challenge for an enlightened developer is not just being able to parrot the lines, but to do it on the ground. It’s still early doors for us (development takes time), and we’re not perfect by any means, but we’re getting there.”* [developer D16]

### 4.2.4 Reach out

As described in section 4.1.7 above, a community is not one homogeneous body of opinion. Most participants emphasised the need for wide demographic and geographic reach, with engagement facilitating a range of local views from those living close to development boundaries to those further afield, those of different ages, and those with different interests in the development:

*“An important aspect of engaging with people is to ensure that engagement covers the whole age spectrum. Many community representations have a tendency to be orientated towards retired people some of whom are less amenable to change and have more time to actively engage in engagement processes.”* [consultant C4]

*“We want to get away from “the 80/20 rule”, where developers spend 80% of their time engaging with 20% of the community, with that 20% often being from a certain demographic and being anti-development.”* [developer D16]

*“In one particular case where we were having difficulty in engaging with the local community, the community council suggested we engage with the local primary school. The teachers in the local primary school enthusiastically engaged in this approach recognising the cross benefits from such an engagement. Engaging with a younger cohort (P6 & P7) also helped to inform parents who thereafter became engaged in the project.”* [developer D3]

*“It is essential to try and embrace the ‘silent majority’ in engagement proceedings.”  
[consultant C2]*

*“It costs less to engage more. The costs of engaging badly are enormous, they tend to be overwhelming. An angry community, politicians are upset, already paid for the land, can’t get the consent. So it’s partly risk mitigation to manage the process well – good business sense, if you like. But it will also create better places through a more involving process.” [developer D16; quote is also contained in section 6]*

Developers of larger sites, in particular, were more likely to raise the need to try to engage with future residents of their developments too:

*“Our view is that this [engagement] exercise is not just about the existing community but the future community. At our development in [location withheld], we recognised that there wasn’t an existing community and therefore deliberately engaged with people to find answers to the question: “What would persuade you to live here?” This engagement with a potential new community is very difficult both in identifying people but also getting their response. But it is important to recognise that no community stays the same forever.” [developer D6]*

*“Often people will engage as they want to be part of the project (potential occupiers)”  
[developer D11]*

*“We do a lot of work with young people. Of all the people who don’t get properly involved at an early stage, the really interesting one is young adults – because they are the most ignored (or least often involved), and the most pro-development. They’re also our future customers.” [developer D16]*

#### **4.2.5 Account for a range of views**

In the words of one participant, how does one account for the “silent majority”? A small number of participants suggested there should be some form of citizen panel or public vote on larger proposals, which could then feed into the deliberations of the local Planning Committee:

*“maybe engagement process should include some form of ballot that requires majority support for developer proposals that are already consistent with planning policies – as in community empowerment and land reform legislation” [consultant C2]*

This is already happening unofficially to a limited extent through online surveys, for example:

*“We also use SurveyMonkey to gain anonymised opinions. The data can be localised by using the first three digits of people’s postcodes whilst also ensuring anonymity. We provide survey data is provided to the Council and Councillors, because we think it is essential to try and get independent data to demonstrate that the community view is not just those that shout the loudest.” [consultant C3]*

#### **4.2.6 Work with Community Councils and local groups**

As explained in section 4.1.8, Community Councils were mentioned by the majority of research participants, many of whom commented on both their importance but also their inconsistency.

In terms of good engagement practice, Community Councils not only have a statutory role in the planning process, but can perform a really valuable role – although developers may sometimes need to support them over a period of time and build a relationship to realise the value of that role.

*“As a statutory consultee in the planning process it is essential to communicate with the Community Council’ [developer D4]*

*“Community councils are often very good at signposting who to consult however, some community councils are somewhat entrenched in their views and methods. Community councils are capable of helping to fix problems but they must be engaged at the start of the process.” [developer D14]*

*“The performance and support from community councils vary from one location to another. Some Community Councils recognise the importance of getting the detail on the proposals and the special circumstances of any given neighbourhood. In one particular case the developer was having difficulty in engaging with the local community and at the suggestion of the community council the developer engaged with the local primary school.” [developer D3]*

#### 4.2.7 Information, information, information

Providing information to communities was regarded by many research participants as essential to help them make informed judgments:

*“Early engagement helps educate, raise awareness, build momentum – especially in hard to reach groups, or groups we’re trying to target like working age families and young people. The ‘informing’ role of engagement is really important... Developers would do well to talk about the value of their development for communities – help educate communities.” [planning authority PA6]*

Developers were seen as having a key role in facilitating this:

*“The community need to understand all the information... Developers should seek to get the information across rather than providing a minimum input.” [consultant C4]*

*“Information needs to flow between the developer, the community council, community groups and individuals from the neighbourhood. Essentially all of this is about building trusting relationships rather than process policies.” [developer D3]*

What information needs to be communicated? The need for good technical baseline information to be available was mentioned by several participants, to ensure that proposals are deliverable and to counter misinformation:

*“It’s a big site for a new community, the land is allocated in the LDP, but there have been delays with many barriers being put by individuals using a variety of tactics to stall progress. These typically cited the presence of rare natural species as a method to require further investigations. The developer had consistently undertaken studies and the facts were inconsistent with the allegations brought forward by objectors. From that experience, we’ve learned it’s vitally important to get research completed and an objective professional analysis of the site and its proposals prior to engagement.” [consultant C2]*

Another respondent noted how such information is now rarely available to communities early enough to make informed judgments:

*“The impact of planning over the last 20 years has seen a transfer of roles from public to the private sector... This means rather than planning authorities doing technical studies into potential LDP sites, developers now do them (impact studies etc). This has led to detailed investigations being put back to the application stage, often when the land use has already been allocated within the local development plan... It makes little sense that impact studies are carried out after the land use has been established. While impact studies are not engagement it is important to realise that all this investigation work is arriving far too late to be properly scrutinised by communities.” [consultant C3]*

Several developers, especially those who have been involved in charrettes, explained the importance of helping people to understand how a development will actually look and feel:

*“Our experience is that people have a different view once they have seen the development proposals.” [developer D14]*

*“So many times we were working in places that were resistant to development – but once you moved to drawing elevations of buildings, rather than plans, that people recognised and were comfortable with, there was a chance in the room. We moved from pitchforks and torches to hugs and thank yous. That relied on weeks of groundwork – the “listening and confidence phase” – before starting to introduce ideas, locations or principles for development. If we’d waltzed in and shown pictures of house types that would sell, that wouldn’t have worked.” [developer D10]*

*“A masterplan approach to community engagement allows people to get a more three dimensional understanding of the proposals” [landowner L5]*

Others spoke of the challenge of ensuring that what is discussed is realistic and deliverable:

*“Quite a lot of times developments have a confidential commercial nature which makes discussing in a public forum quite difficult and a decision has to be made about whether and how to frame this.” [landowner L6]*

*“Sometimes early engagement is too restricted because of commercial sensitivities, which hinders engagement as the public don’t realise that not everything is being discussed – which can lead to public frustrations.” [planning authority PA3]*

*“I’m a firm believer in the power of community engagement to influence and improve development – for everyone. But it’s important to have someone realistic involved in the process, someone with a commercial perspective, who understands what the sales values can support in terms of design improvements, for example.” [developer D10]*

A number of developers and landowners spoke of the need to help people to understand how development contributes to wider public benefits, often expressed as the need to balance national and local issues:

*“Communities can form better judgements by being better informed not just about project proposals but the wider policy context. It is not just about what the developer is proposing but also what are the relevant policy inputs and objectives from both national and local governments. Such information gathering and disseminating is a significant exercise.” [landowner L5]*

*“Once people have been furnished with wider national and regional objectives, they can be more informed to make judgements... It is important for the general public to be provided with a ‘road map’ that signposts the relevance of national matters with local issues.” [developer D12]*

#### **4.2.8 Get beyond the emotion**

A recurring theme from around a third to half of development participants, and implicit in a number of quotes in this report, is that engagement is emotive for many involved – possibly because engagement inevitably heralds change and therefore uncertainty.

*“Communities often have a tendency to engage when feel under threat. But early engagement should be positive rather than negative – so early engagement through local place plans and LDP is of critical importance” [landowner L5]*

Some of those participants explained that they try to get beyond emotion:

*“The process of engagement is to try and remove the emotion and concentrate on the proposals.” [developer D3]*

*“Our view is that engagement should be based on setting out the rationale for a development. The proposals should objectively demonstrate, through evidence, why approval should be granted. The community and individuals should assess the proposals within a set of rules or principles either by assessing these against existing policy or in the event of no policy the planning reasons why a proposal should be supported or not.” [consultant C2]*

Research participants recognised that the emotive nature of engagement means that how it is done may have an impact on outcomes, for example:

*“Some 20 people attended the focus group, the majority being retired people. The consultant made a presentation supporting the proposal with a range of statistics, but attendees were opposed to the development. Interestingly the consultant decided to persuade the group to retire to the local pub for more informal discussions, whereupon other younger people joined in the discussion. It emerged that many local people were supportive of the proposal because it could more affordable housing in an area where high values denied them access to housing. By the end of that ‘informal session’ it was the younger people who persuaded the older people of the need for more housing, rather than simply examining the proposal through a single lens of how it impacted on people’s own self-interest.” [developer D1]*

*“Developers employing marketing consultants to do community engagement is regarded by communities as a sales job – presenting with gloss, rather than open discussions.” [planning authority PA3]*

#### **4.2.9 Explain wider public benefits**

For development proposals that comply with (and help to deliver) the Local Development Plan, engagement should be used to communicate the role of development in delivering wider public benefit like jobs, homes and so on:

*“Engagement is valuable when all parties listen, consider and respond to proposals and how these could be further shaped. Engagement is not valuable where individuals or parties don’t listen, and recognise key principles e.g. the need for new homes.” [planning authority PA1]*

*“There is also, and understandably so, a challenge when dealing with local communities, because they can take a very local view with regard to proposals - which can actually run contrary to the wider objectives of the county or even the Scottish government.” [landowner L6]*

*“The start point for engagement should be ensuring that there is a clear understanding of what is the ‘Vision for Scotland’ in a global, regional and local context? What are the key economic areas of activity and where might these be located? This national perspective should then be disaggregated down to a finer grain at regional level reflecting where people should live and work. These matters are not necessarily site-specific but help to get a consistent strategic approach before getting to the micro-level. This needs to be communicated to people, rather than broadcasted, so that they can be better informed and understand the context of any development proposal that is linked backed to the strategic objectives.” [developer D12]*

*“Significant explanation is required by a developer / planners to inform community groups about Scottish Government policies and objectives that are relevant to the project. These matters maybe background for community groups, but they nevertheless have to be reflected in their judgments. For this reason the community needs to understand all of the factors involved.” [landowner L5]*

*“Developers would do well to talk about the value of their development for communities – help educate communities, raise awareness, build momentum. The ‘informing’ role of engagement is really important.” [planning authority PA6]*

#### 4.2.10 Good communications (plural)

To generate the broad reach referred to above, the need for a range of engagement channels and techniques was noted by almost all respondents. For example:

*“there is a need to try to get to a ‘level playing field’ and more balanced participation”  
[developer D14]*

*“The objective for any engagement is to ensure that everybody’s voice can be heard. This means providing the right space for engagement. For example, a crowded hall may help louder people get their message across but it will restrict participation from quieter people. It is the quieter people that need the space to be able to engage (similar to the points made about the ‘silent majority’). It is likely that those that have a close association with the project site are more likely to have negative reactions, whereas others may engage on the basis of seeking the best public benefit outcomes such as the creation of jobs, better schools, better housing and other amenities.”  
[landowner L5]*

Many developers and landowners noted the fundamental importance of face-to-face contact:

*“The best technique to engage with people is primarily on a face to face basis.”  
[developer D6]*

*“Our engagement events are deliberately not large and are usually arranged in a ‘drop in’ format, allowing us to engage with people and get their input and reaction. Separate events might also be arranged to target specific groups such as neighbouring residents.” [developer D11]*

*“There are many people spreading untruths through social media. Such emotional and individual activism can be a brake on advancement. For this reason we always prefer face to face engagement as it is ‘humane’.” [landowner L5]*

*“We engage communities using a range of approaches from one to one discussions to the large halls for presentations and exhibitions. A key aspect is to build up a strong rapport with groups and maintain this over the duration of the project.” [developer D2]*

One of those developers also recognised the importance of other modes of engagement (note the mention of collaboration with the local authority):

*“Using the Council twitter account enabled the community to stay informed and as a result there was no real negativity from community stakeholders.” [developer D6]*

Many developers were wary of social media, primarily because of concerns over using it as a tool for a dialogue. But a number believe it has its place for keeping people updated and sharing information, for example:

*“Technology is really important - so we try and summarise all the myriad technical documents [submitted as part of a Major planning application] into a 3 minute YouTube video. We’re now looking at how to get that out into people’s social media feeds or apps, and how to get feedback.” [developer D8; quoted also in section 4.1.9 above]*

Some examples of the wider range of techniques that could be considered:

*“How we engage is important. The days of standing at a traditional drop-in session on a Saturday morning with posters are old hat... it’s not surprise that the demographic is predominantly retired folk. We as an industry need to get to all those folk who doing other things on Saturday mornings.*

*We’re now starting to speak first of all to politicians, community councillors, then traditional drop-in sessions but timed to be alongside nursery and toddler events at the same time (so we were going to them more than them coming to us, but not quite gatecrashing them). We also used a couple of booths in McDonalds drive-thru for an afternoon. Use video rather than pen and paper - but remember that doesn’t work for everyone, as some people may wish their comments to remain anonymous.” [developer D8]*

*“We use local radio as this is believed to be very effective. Targeting the community audience is aimed more at the local music station rather than the BBC in order to try and get a more balanced participation in the engagement programme” [consultant C3]*

*“Every circumstance will be different and one needs to tailor a bespoke approach to each project and each location.” [developer D2]*

Section 5 goes on to explain the benefits of good quality engagements such as those described above.

## 5. THE BENEFITS OF EARLY ENGAGEMENT

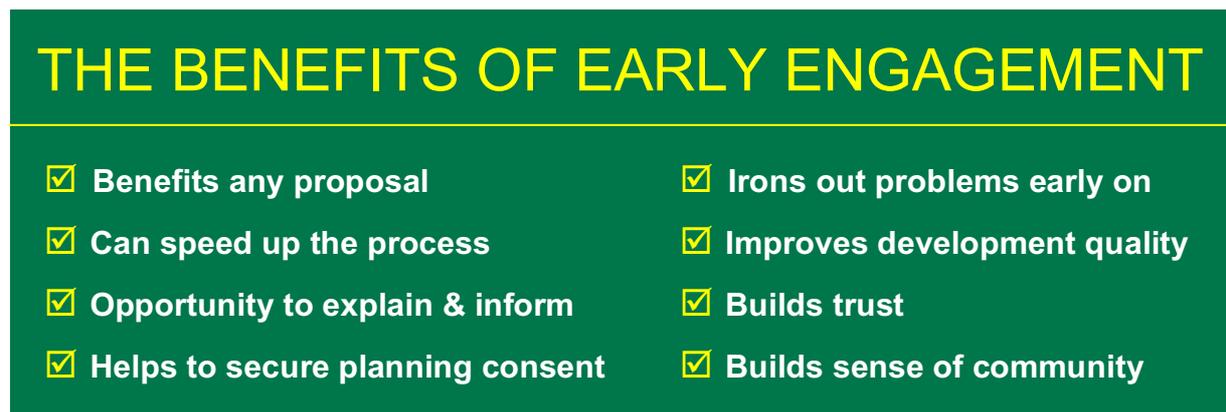
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Public policy extols the benefits of community engagement (see section 2). But it says very little about the benefits for the development industry.

During the research, developers, landowners and their consultants have told us that early engagement can deliver important benefits – for any scale of application, location, developer or type of development. Building on the evidence presented in section 4, this section explains what those benefits are.

The eight key benefits are shown in Figure 10 (below). They are explained in more detail in sections 5.1 to 5.18 (overleaf), each of which is illustrated by at least one short case study.

*Figure 10: The benefits of early engagement*



## 5.1 Early engagement can benefit any proposal

This point was made by almost every research participant. For example:

*“Irrespective of the planning legislation requiring consultation on sites with a capacity greater than 50 dwellings, we always engage with the community irrespective of the size of the development.” [developer D11]*

*“We now seek to engage on smaller projects – for example, a proposal for 10 dwellings which, following community engagement, ended with local support for a consent for 30 dwellings.” [developer D3]*

*“Anything more than 2-3 new houses, 3,000-4,000 square feet commercial or say £250k gross development value, and it will be valuable to engage with the local community.” [developer D1]*

## Killearn: three-way collaboration

This 36 house development proposal represented the first new homes to be built in Killearn for over 20 years. The site was allocated in the Local Development Plan for housing. Although Pre-Application Consultation was **not a statutory requirement**, the developer (Mactaggart and Mickel) was keen to ensure that the local community was given the opportunity to positively influence the design and layout of the scheme.

The developer therefore invested in a two year community engagement process, **working with the local Community Council and local authority** to maximise community involvement and create a sympathetic designed development.

The engagement process enabled the local community to make suggestions which **influenced various aspects of the development**. These included a reduction in density and the number of units, more smaller

homes, alterations to the layout, improved pedestrian access, a revised mix of homes in response to a needs assessment by the Community Council, and replacement of the council's preferred option of a mini-roundabout with a priority junction (again in response to the Community Council). A preferred construction supply chain vehicular route was also agreed with the community and the local authority in order to avoid the village centre.

One of the public events held during the engagement process was an evening panel discussion. Interestingly, **the panel included the Council's planning officer** alongside representatives from the developer and their design team. Having the planning officer there to independently and objectively explain the planning policy situation for the site, for example, helped the community to make informed judgments about the proposal.



## 5.2 It can speed up the planning process (but not always)

Development industry participants were broadly split 50/50 as to whether early engagement speeded up the planning process:

*“We’re very clear that early engagement does assist in shortening the planning process... While the process takes time, it does not necessarily mean that longer pre-delivery periods are due to community engagement.” [developer D2]*

*“The brutal reality is that early engagement probably doesn’t shorten the planning application process.” [planning authority PA4]*

*“whether early engagement extends the development period depends on the project and the type of engagement used” [developer D11]*

*“With contentious projects however early engagement with the community is unlikely to shorten the planning process.” [developer D9]*

*“It is doubtful that community engagement actually slows up the process as there are other issues in the planning system that slow up the process. For example, there is a planning resource problem which delays the process more than engaging with the community.” [developer D6]*

*“It is doubtful that early engagement actually speeds up the process. The issue is that anyone can oppose the proposals and this is often the case in locations such as the edge of settlements.” [consultant C2]*

*“Unfortunately there isn’t a lot of evidence supporting the benefits of early engagement, in the form of ‘We consulted and it got us through planning consent better’. But the counterfactual is very strong – I struggle to think of developers who’ve stood up and said, ‘I didn’t invest in community engagement here and it got me through planning faster’.” [developer D16]*

Despite differences of opinion on the impact of early engagement on speed, there was widespread consensus that it can help avoid time-consuming delays or controversies once a planning application has been submitted by:

- helping communities understand the complexities of policies, plans and proposals.
- helping developers and planning authorities understand community concerns.
- creating time for developers to amend their proposals, so not causing delays later.
- alleviating negative perceptions and creating trust (see section 5.7).

Speed-related benefits included:

*“Engagement does not shorten the process but it allows the community to raise issues that we can hopefully address as part of the design process... The loss of time is not really seen as a risk as the exercise is run as a parallel element of the design and development process” [developer D14]*

*“Essentially early engagement doesn’t make any difference to the development programme... [but it] achieves momentum which is important to a developer.” [consultant C2]*

*“And from a business of point of view, it’s better to have that early engagement upfront, rather than wait until we’ve got an offer on the table and are almost into legals, only for a community then to say: “We would have like that!” Although it does stress the programme, I’d rather have that upfront in the programme. And now we’ve got used to knowing how long communities need, we’ve allowed a bit more flexibility in terms of timing, it all works quite well.” [landowner L3]*

*“Engaging with community interests, if done well, should shorten the development management process but does not necessarily shorten the political input. Where engagement takes place prior to elections (national or local), there is often political posturing which is rarely helpful in the engagement process.” [developer D12]*

## Glentress: paving the way for planning consent

Glentress Forest is one of a number of forests in the Tweed Valley managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). Attracting over 300,000 visitors per year, Glentress is a key component in the Scottish Borders' tourism offer, and has grown to become one of the UK's premier mountain biking destinations over the last 20 years. It is at the forefront of FLS's plans to ensure that important forest resources continue to be accessible to the public and offer a range of activities.

F&LS was keen to develop Glentress to help extend the low average stay of visitors in the area and support the local economy. To guide future development, FLS decided to adopt a **masterplanning approach**.

At the outset there were lots of sensitivities, so F&LS was **keen to strengthen relationships with local communities and businesses**. Early engagement was therefore very important: not just about FLS land, but about the wider corridor between

Peebles and Innerleithen, to determine how FLS and Glentress could complement rather than compete with other local initiatives and help grow the market. As engagement progressed and the masterplan took shape, FLS found that ongoing workshops with local businesses, community groups and the council really helped to build relationships.

Once complete, the masterplan was **adopted by the local authority as Supplementary Guidance** – a first for FLS – to guide future planning applications. This included an application by Forest Holidays, an FLS partner, for fifty new cabins and relocation of facilities. Forest Holidays had experienced challenges in securing planning consents on similar forestry sites in England. But, through that process of early engagement leading to a masterplan with community support, they were able to **secure consent** at Glentress and attract new investment to the local economy.



### 5.3 It is an opportunity to explain proposals and inform communities

Early engagement enables developers to get their message across about the benefits that their development intends to deliver, and later on about development progress and other things.

*“For many people, fear of the unknown leads them to make objections – getting information out takes away the tendency for Chinese whispers.”  
[planning authority PA1]*

*“If we hadn’t done the engagement, it would have been harder to get our point across. For a big complex scheme that needs to be explained, like this one, this was very important. I suspect the outcome would have been worse. The planning process would have taken a lot longer.” [developer D9]*

*“It is very important for developers to get a balanced view from community groups and this is often done by taking time to speak on a one to one basis and enabling the case for the proposal to be explained” [developer D3]*

Not only is early engagement an important tool for informing people about a developer’s intentions, it is also useful for explaining how a proposal helps to deliver national and local policy objectives.

*“Engagement can be a challenging environment but it allows developers and their consultants to explain proposals and how these fit within the neighbourhood. It is essential that the engagement reaches all user groups and local people.”  
[consultant C5]*

*“Significant explanation is required by a developer / planners to inform community groups about Scottish Government policies and objectives that are relevant to the project. These matters maybe background for community groups, but they nevertheless have to be reflected in their judgments.” [landowner L5]*

## Dalmarnock: a masterplanning approach

Clyde Gateway is a public urban regeneration agency in Glasgow's east end and Rutherglen. It began work on the South Dalmarnock Integrated Urban Infrastructure Framework in 2009, the aim of which was to **develop a masterplan to unlock development opportunities** in an area that has witnessed significant post-industrial decline and dereliction.

**Community engagement was an essential but challenging task**, given the mix of land uses, community groups, land ownerships and other ongoing consultations.

A four stage strategy was prepared, with a focus on **good communications** throughout:

- 1 *Networking* Contact with diverse local community groups including, showpeople, other residents, local businesses and property owners. This was involved individual face to face discussions, and meetings with the community council, community planning community reference group, the local housing association etc.
- 2 *Orientation and Updating* Engagement with the wider local community to ask about their place and how things could be improved. Workshops, walkabouts and youth events were held over two days, covering housing, integration of new residents, sites for showpeople, river management, remediation, public transport and communications.

- 3 *Options Testing* Three community sessions exploring emerging development options that tackled community priorities like employment, retail and services, rail station, showpeople sites and a community/ commercial hub at Dalmarnock Cross.
- 4 *Preview Emerging Framework* Review of the final framework with the community.

The Framework acted as the **platform for subsequent development**. What was important was that community groups had the opportunity to shape the future of their place. The way that **proposals emerged through community engagement** meant that people felt that they had some ownership of how things would be developed. The Clyde Gateway team orchestrated events, informed people about technical constraints where necessary, and maintained project momentum. After the Framework was complete, a series of **ongoing engagement** sessions was organised on specific delivery projects which were being taken forward.

This layering of engagement throughout the development process proved to be an important aspect of **keeping people informed** of progress, maintaining good community relationships, **building trust**, and helping people to understand that their voice counts.



## 5.4 It helps to secure planning consent

Almost every research participant, from the very small to the very large, suggested that early engagement helps to de-risk the development process, primarily by reducing objections:

*“The engagement strategy was predicated on the basis of de-risking the process with the intention of minimising the level of objection... In the end, there were 50 letters of objection to the planning application out of a total of 5,000 houses.” [landowner L5]*

*“After three phases of engagement with over 1,000 people involved, there were less than 40 written objections to the planning application. And only half a dozen of those had strong planning arguments. The planning process was relatively short. It was very simple for the Council to determine the application.” [developer D9]*

*“There’s no doubt we benefited from doing such a comprehensive Pre-Application Consultation when it went to Planning Committee. It involved two phases of public drop-ins, online engagement, one-to-one meetings with local folk and amendments to the proposals in response to comments. That thorough and genuine process definitely helped get the planning consent by getting the trust and support of key local activists.” [developer D5]*

A planning officer offered a strategic perspective on the positive impact of early engagement:

*“Our tactical focus on pushing early engagement, which started a few years back, was because engagement helps to deliver our aims as an authority. It’s a way of delivering a broader agenda, added benefits. Engagement delivers other things for us rather than just to do with development proposals.*

*Last year we saw a big pipeline of development come through, much more so than previous years – proposals that had been discussed with local communities for many years. And we were seeing development proposals go through the planning process much more easily having had that early engagement in the preceding years, e.g. prosperous small towns and villages with development proposals of 50-100 homes but only 15-20 objections.*

*In one, the Community Council objected originally. But developer engaged with them, altered the scheme, and the Community Council subsequently supported the proposal.*

*There’s a maturity in the discussions about development. Communities saw benefits of development for their local shop, upgrading the school and so on.” [planning authority PA6]*

## Dargavel Village, Renfrewshire: keeping information flowing

Dargavel Village is a Community Growth Area at Bishopton west of Glasgow. Its designation is embedded in Strategic and Local Development Plans; there is a long planning history, involving multiple stages of consultation over the last 20 years.

The site owner, BAE Systems, has taken a long term approach to the transformation of the site from a former Royal Ordnance Factory – around 1,000 hectares of former factory land once referred to as ‘**the biggest brownfield site in the country**’. This has involved engagement with a wide range of stakeholders over the last two decades. In the early years, fundamental questions were raised by stakeholders about the scale of development and land remediation. More recently these concerns have largely evaporated as the landowner has demonstrated, through positive action, that it is safe to recycle former industrial land and build new housing.

The **transformation programme has changed significantly over the last five years**, switching from a mix of housing and employment uses that planned to deliver around 2,500 new homes, to housing-led regeneration that will deliver over 4,000 homes, along with appropriate physical and community infrastructure.

The commitments and obligations associated with the original programme have needed to be adapted for the new approach. A **renewed focus on engagement has been invaluable** to help the many stakeholders involved understand how and why this is happening.



Engagement has taken many forms at various different levels, including the local community, the local authority and statutory authorities. There is a complex matrix of stakeholders, whose active involvement from the earliest stages of a project of this complexity and scale has been vital. Consensus is needed for technical and design solutions from a range of organisations with overlapping interests and responsibilities.

**Informing community and political stakeholders** through a number of channels has been particularly important. Stakeholder interests range from the impacts of the scale of development to how educational and health needs of a growing settlement are met. The landowner has co-ordinated the engagement to address technical, design, community and political angles. For the local community, a combination of public events, dedicated website, newsletters, noticeboard and the Bishopton Community Liaison Group have all been essential.

The **Community Liaison Group** is a forum for representatives from different interests from the local community, local authority and landowner. It provides an opportunity for key issues, views and aspirations to be discussed openly. The Liaison Group has met on a regular basis for many years, and had an important influence over the shape of the Community Growth Area as well as providing a channel for information to flow to and from the wider community.

The effectiveness of this latest period of engagement was put to the test when planning applications were submitted for the new housing-led development approach. In sharp contrast to the concerns raised at the Development Planning stage, **recent statutory approvals have been relatively uncontentious** and stakeholders have been more willing to play an active role in developing the Community Growth Area as a successful and sustainable place.

## 5.5 It irons out problems early on

Over half of research participants explained how early community engagement has helped them resolve problems at an early stage in the process, perhaps things they didn't know about, before they get too big and expensive to fix. The Killearn case study above is an example.

*"...objections to proposals are low as most of the issues are discussed at an early stage and remedies found that are acceptable to the parties." [developer D15]*

*"I don't think you can put enough into early engagement – you get it back in dividends. You may not like all the information you hear, but it's all useful. Not sure if it's speeded up the process or it's cheaper, but we have ended up with a better plan." [landowner L4]*

*"The value of early engagement is that it can help to identify the issues... and take the sting out of debate. It can allow for a sharing of information (both ways) so that consultees can feel that their views can count." [landowner L7]*

*"I don't think early engagement speeded up the planning process [on this very large project] although this will depend on the type and scale of the project. But it did allow us to understand the issues for the community and helped address those matters prior to the planning application. [developer D3]*

## Broxburn town centre: adapting proposals and policy to community aspirations

When the abattoir in Broxburn town centre closed a few years ago, there was widespread local concern: 1,700 jobs were lost and a big vacant industrial site appeared in the centre of town. Two years after the closure, the site was purchased by a developer with an open mind about how to redevelop it.

The site had a planning policy designation of industrial land. **To help them work out what kind of uses would work on the site**, the developer undertook three rounds of pre-application engagement, more than they would usually have done. Large numbers of local people involved; several hundred people, for example, responded to a survey.

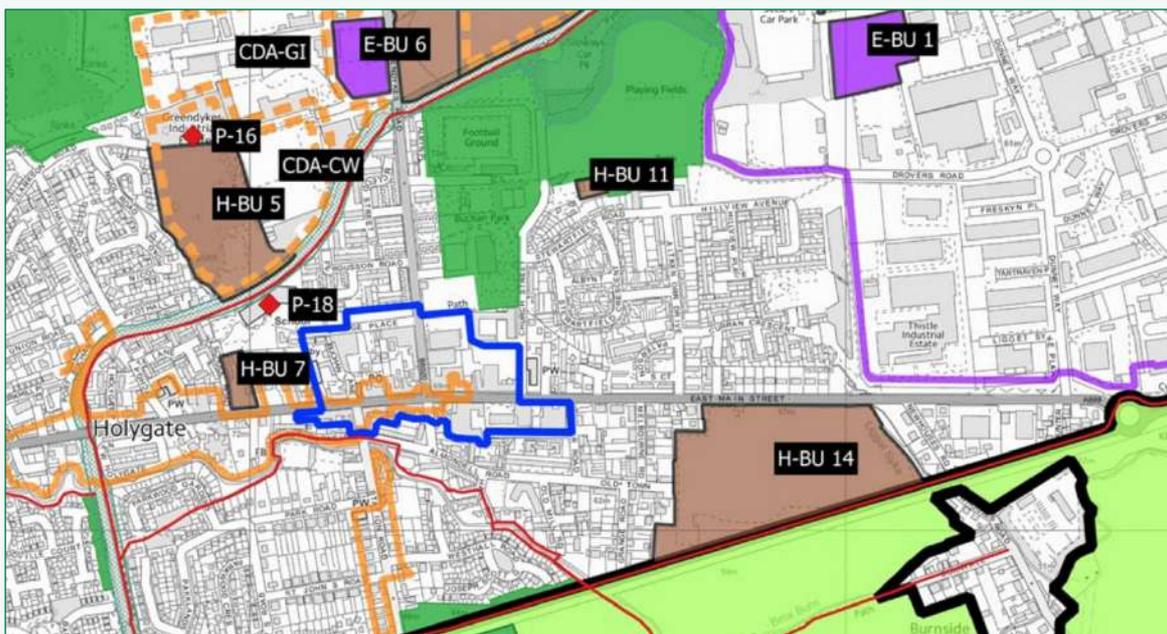
The developer **used local people's suggestions to work up a range of options** for the site and ask people what they thought. For example, should the site have a supermarket or family restaurant? Should it have housing? If so what sort of housing? Who for?

The community's responses to those questions **helped the developer to shape the planning application**. It was very clear that the local community didn't want an

industrial use like the abattoir running 24/7 again, with all the related issues of noise, traffic, air pollution and so on. They preferred a mixture of residential and commercial development.

Ultimately, the developer ended up proposing 100% housing on the former abattoir site, but also acquiring another derelict site across the road. This is in the process of being developed with a supermarket, a family pub and other suggestions that emerged from the local community. So, as a direct result of the ideas community input, there will be more investment, less dereliction and more jobs created.

As well as being a good result for the local community, the developer believes that early engagement **undoubtedly helped get planning consent**, because it helped the council understand that it was acceptable to go against the industrial planning policy designation. A positive example of a **flexible and pragmatic developer and a responsive local authority**, enabling the community to shape the project.



## Fort William 2040: better proposals, better outcomes

This project provides an example of where wider community engagement on placemaking as part of the Fort William 2040 project coincided with engagement on a particularly significant development for the Fort William community.

With major plans to expand their aluminium smelter operation, Alvalde British Aluminium (formerly known as Liberty) – one of Fort William’s biggest employers – decided to invest in early community engagement to support submission of their planning application. From the company’s perspective, that engagement enabled them to **get the message out to the community** about what they wanted to do and the benefits that it would bring.

The company found the engagement very helpful in a number of ways. Firstly, it helped them to **understand that not everyone was in favour**. Responses ranged from ‘when can you start’ to ‘we don’t want you here’. That was useful to know early on.

The engagement also **enabled some aspects of the initial proposals to be improved**. For example, travel to work: the community was concerned that the town gets very congested in the summer, so discussions about traffic helped the company think differently how it could potentially use the port and the rail network more effectively to move its materials around, which could lead to fewer truck movements on local roads.

Early engagement also helped to **dispel some people’s fears** about the visual impact of the proposals, as the site is at the bottom of Ben Nevis. In response to these concerns, the company used a 3D model to show the relative size of the proposed new operation and how it would fit into the landscape. That helped to alleviate people’s fears.

Another benefit was that Liberty’s engagement was complemented by a comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement exercise **about the town as a whole**: Fort William 2040, led by public sector partners (Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and The Highland Council). This was a response to the scale and pace of change that developments might bring to the town and the need for a coordinated approach to their delivery.

The benefits of early community engagement on the smelter proposal are, therefore, now having a **positive impact on the future of the town** as a whole, as a town-wide community vision aims to deliver more co-ordinated investment and better outcomes for people in Fort William and Lochaber.



## 5.6 It improves the quality of development

Around three-quarters of research participants, and all developers involved with large scale urban regeneration projects or urban extensions, highlighted how early engagement provides an opportunity to improve placemaking and design aspects of projects.

*“Early engagement should provide feedback to the developer to inform in terms of principle, design and layout, access and other local issues. The information gained should as a result assist in terms of gaining planning support at determination.”*  
[developer D4]

*“Part of the community engagement process is that it provides an opportunity for us to ‘soft test’ ideas. Often, a developer thinks that they know a place but as a result of community engagement it becomes apparent that we don’t.”* [developer D6]

Improvements made as a result of early engagement can vary hugely in cost, from substantial to virtually nil – but all generate value:

*“A good example of this was engagement around the landfill site which was in the minds of the community a “ticking time bomb”. The community were aware of similar projects elsewhere and was understandably keen to see a solution to a problem that was both seen as a risk and a blight upon their place. We undertook remedial action on the landfill site and brought it into sustainable use as a public park at a cost of around £6m. Such action removed the community’s lack of confidence that no-one was going to address the neighbouring dereliction and potential hazard. This intervention not only addressed a physical concern but also generated valuable goodwill from such an action.”* [developer D15]

*“Where community councils and wider community interests objectively consider proposals and make rational observations will enable the developer to consider and amend their proposals. An example of this was when a community representative made representations on the fact that development would remove a long standing ability for local families to go sledging. While sledging might not necessarily be regarded as a significant public interest benefit, it wasn’t overly difficult for the developer to include a space on a hillside within the proposed development that allowed sledging to continue. This specific sledging example is not overly important but the principle was that the developer listened to the concerns of local people and thereafter reshaped their proposals to their satisfaction.”* [developer D3]

One large developer explained the benefit of community support not only in gaining planning consent, but also in generating better placemaking and social outcomes:

*“In our experience, engaging people early and openly – not just consultation on plans which have already been prepared – makes it much more likely to get support from a community when it comes to your planning application. You could view this strictly through a tactical and political lens, in terms of building support. Or you could be doing it in terms of the place-based and social outcomes, which will be much stronger, with a degree of co-production, and will make a much better and more relevant place.”*  
[developer D16]

Early engagement can also be used to produce informative data about community opinions to inform planning authority decision-making – particularly where the engagement has been reached a good cross-section of interests. Another developer suggested:

*“Technology also lets us produce more data. Why not have surveys like in airport toilets, where you press a smiley face or an unhappy face on an iPad to quickly register your view on a proposal? That could produce valuable data which would help planners and developers understand community aspirations.”* [developer D8]

## Inverkeithing: building quality, trust and community

Kingdom Housing Association's highly praised phased regeneration project in Inverkeithing is replacing 234 flatted homes in three-storey blocks with 189 houses and apartments over a phased redevelopment programme. Central to the project approach has been to engage tenants and local residents in the design and decision-making process.

Involving people was seen as vital to **nurture a new sense of ownership**, particularly because tenants were facing the uncertainty not only of demolition and new build, but also a change in landlord from the local authority to the Housing Association. So, as well as giving tenants the opportunity to feed into the design, the Housing Association wanted to **build relationships and trust** with their new tenants, and make sure that they were ready to move into their new homes. To achieve this, a **range of activities** were carried out with the Council and main contractor including construction academies to create employment and training opportunities, financial advice, tenancy support, site visits, street renaming and a logo competition for the project identity.

To engage with as many people as possible, the Housing Association communicated using a **range of methods over a number of years**: newsletters, social media, open days, community memories and textile projects, schools engagement, bus tours, a dedicated webpage and social media platforms, a 3D model to help people visualise the plans, and individual tenant visits. Using the correct

communications and getting the timings right was an important focus for the project team.

The **local community chose the new site layout** from a series of three options. Returning tenants were then involved in the detailed design of their new homes, and quite a number had specific needs in terms of family size or disabled needs. As one resident explains:

*"[During the design stage] Kingdom and their architects were in my house... I explained that we'd like a bigger family area in the kitchen, and a bigger room for our daughter to accommodate her wheelchair and equipment. A large door was also included in my daughter's bedroom that is wide enough to accommodate her hospital size bed in the event of evacuating the house. I also chose the wet wall, the floors in the two bathrooms, the kitchen and we had the choice of sliding or opening doors on the fitted wardrobes. So we had a lot of input."*

The process **took time, commitment and patience** on the part of the Housing Association, to make sure that the new homes would make a difference for new tenants and the community. The regeneration work so far has **energised the community**, broken with the stigma of the past, built trust, and created a place and homes that people are proud of.

For more information, visit Kingdom's dedicated [Fraser Avenue webpage](#) and the [Architecture and Design Scotland website](#).



## 5.7 It builds trust

The majority of research participants - covering all sizes, sectors and types of organisation – referred to an important positive outcome of early engagement being to build relationships and trust with communities. This is an important benefit because previous research into barriers to community engagement in planning has revealed it as one of the most fundamental barriers (see section 4.1.1 above):

*“What did the community engagement do? It brought ‘sides’ together. It confirmed we are all humans – not just names or titles on a list. It broke down barriers so there is thereafter a set of names and faces, a context and a belief that there are perhaps common factors amongst proposals.” [landowner L7]*

*“It gives communities early notice about our future plans, and shows them that we’re being very open, transparent and honest about what we’re doing, and I would say as a result of that, we’re developing stronger relationships with community organisations, rather than the old us-and-them approach. [landowner L3]*

*“We see value in early engagement, recognising that clarity of purpose builds confidence with all stakeholders. Most importantly our objective of building relationships and trust is highlighted by the fact that people and community groups value are informed and as a result become more supportive of the project.*

*We’ve no doubt that at a time of increasing community empowerment people can act as a brake on development programmes. But if the community has an understanding of what is proposed and can participate in shaping the development, then investing in community engagement at an early stage is very worthwhile.” [developer D15]*

*“To gain credibility with community groups, plans must be supported by a delivery mechanism.” [developer D2]*

*“Engagement builds relationships with communities... we keep going back to communities each year, even if the turnout is low it’s always worthwhile” [planning authority PA1]*

## Winchburgh: building long term community relationships

The Winchburgh project is a substantial extension to a small existing settlement in West Lothian. It has been in progress since submission of the initial planning application in 2005 and commencement on site with enabling infrastructure in 2012, and throughout that time the lead developer has put great emphasis on community engagement.

In terms of construction of infrastructure, facilities and housing, the project is now on phase 2 of 4. Over 500 of the projected 3,900 homes are occupied. The **community has played an active part** in planning future phases and community facilities like schools and a park, as the examples below illustrate.

**Engaging on park design:** The park is a good example of the effect of community involvement. It is located on a former landfill site. Originally the masterplan proposed that the landfill site would be remediated and set out as an informal open space suitable for dog walking etc. But after community engagement it was decided to upgrade the open space to a formal park. Engagement covered planning, design and construction. The park was linked to the housing development by a Section 75 agreement, enabling the park to be created before work started on the housing.

**Different engagement approaches:** The developer uses a range of engagement approaches from informal one to one discussions to presentations in packed halls. Rather than deliver a message cold to an uninformed audience, these follow more informal early meetings and other engagements to share and work up development ideas. By the time of Pre-Application Consultation, most issues have been addressed and the community is usually supportive of proposals.

These big presentations have now become annual events, providing an opportunity for the developer to update on progress and outline proposals for the forthcoming year.

**Bringing communities together:** The developer is conscious that the priorities of new residents may be different from those in the original village. The developer's community consultant has spent much time working with the groups in the original village, some of whom are older.

This led, for example, to a call for more 'cottage' housing for older people like the workers' terraced cottages in the existing village. In response, proposals were brought forward for affordable bungalows designed for older people to live on a single level.

**Place ambassadors:** Part of the community consultant's role is to manage emotions and keep people informed. As the development population increases it is logistically challenging to keep everyone informed.

One successful approach has been that a number of residents are now acting informally as 'Winchburgh Ambassadors'. They have a two-way role, to communicate information to the community as well as relay information back to the developer about areas of concern or where there is community support.

For more information, please visit Winchburgh Developments Ltd [website](#).



*Image: Local school pupils who helped design the park returning to the site to check on progress. They are also members of the Winchburgh Ambassadors programme.*

## Countesswells, Aberdeen: a structure for community liaison

Countesswells is a new community of 7,000 people being developed on the western edge of Aberdeen. The project is a private sector led development, with a managing developer and a number of housebuilders involved.

Given its scale, the site covers three community council areas. Each represented surrounding areas with differing challenges and interests. The developer recognised a need to act in a facilitating capacity by **bringing the three different community councils together**. Engagement took place in the three community areas but, from the developer's perspective, there was a need for a co-ordinated response.

A **community liaison group** was therefore created, comprising representatives from each of the three community council areas. The group was established once the site was zoned for development within the Local Development Plan. Initially there were some tensions but eventually the members began to understand each other's perspectives and moved towards consensus.

This group was the **forerunner of the residents' association** that has now been established, and which plays an **active role in helping to manage the new community**. It may, in the future, become its own community council. The role of the developer has been to act as the broker in the process of bringing separate communities groups together.

Operating for a four year period before development began, the liaison group became a **proactive participant** in the development and design process rather than being a reactive brake on the project. It highlights that community representatives can positively contribute towards the development process.



## 5.8 It builds a sense of community

The positive impacts of using engagement to build and sustain communities were raised by around a quarter of developers, including:

- major long-term new communities like Winchburgh (see case study above).
- regeneration initiatives like Inverkeithing (see case study above).
- small street design projects such as Queen Street in Dumfries (see case study below).

The common message was that early engagement has benefits in building and empowering communities which extend far beyond the physical development proposed in the project.

The way that engagement takes place and that projects are delivered can of course support community development and community empowerment, as the Winchburgh, Inverkeithing and Dumfries examples illustrate. These quotes from other projects illustrate different approaches used to support local communities:

*“In the past we’ve established a ‘community chest’, which helps to build up an investment fund pot for future activities. This is not dissimilar to a Business Improvement District where businesses contribute funds to make the place function better. But in this case, it’s the developer working with the community that seeks to create a fund to invest in the local place. Activity is generally small scale but can still create good energy for community action and sow the seeds for a long term co-operative community culture.” [developer D6]*

*“With several developers participating on our site at any one time, each with common community benefit clauses, significant local opportunities can be generated through better apprenticeship training programmes and so on.” [developer D15]*

*“We believe the involvement of community participants is much more than engagement. We believe it should also include the opportunity for communities to directly own and invest in assets.” [developer D2]*

## Dumfries Neighbourhood Street Design: community empowerment

This street design project in the Queen Street area of central Dumfries was led by Sustrans Scotland with the local authority and the local community. The intention was to **transform a once neglected part of Dumfries town centre** into a more liveable, inclusive and active travel 'friendly' neighbourhood through a collaborative design process. The project was a response to longstanding concerns over traffic movement in the neighbourhood.

**Rather than start by thinking about design, the project began by asking local people about their place.** A variety of interesting engagement methods were used including competitions, workshops, on-street consultations, guided bike rides, popup installations and a Big Lunch. As well as the variety, the aims of this engagement were significant: the activities were specifically designed to bring people together, to inspire their long term interest in their neighbourhood, to strength social connection and empowerment, and to co-design solutions.

Sustrans Scotland explains that the aim was to **build up trust and learn about the community** – getting people out of their houses, meeting their neighbours and bringing folk together. This achieves far more than better street design: it gives communities a sense of momentum, strengthens them, empowers them, and creates community cohesion. In short, it gives them the ability to look at their own place, and to do something about it.

The collaborative process didn't only deliver the requisite physical outputs of safer streets and a better environment. It also **created a more empowered community**. Even during the project, residents decided to form a

constituted community group, DG1 Neighbours, which **continues to undertake neighbourhood improvements** even after the initial project itself is complete, such as the creation of a community garden.

This example may be of a different scale and type of development to others in this research report, but the conscious decision to **use early engagement to generate community benefits** is eminently replicable.

More information on the Sustrans website [here](#), or hear from those involved [here](#).



## Riverside Sunderland: start early, go local

This major regeneration project in Sunderland, led by Sunderland City Council with support from Igloo Regeneration, which will develop 1,000 new homes, 750,000 square feet of commercial space, a new Civic Centre and City Library, eye hospital, primary school, revitalised urban park and new bridges over the River Wear.

But **none of this was proposed at the outset**. The project deliberately started by finding ways of getting people to provide their thoughts about their place – never an easy thing to do, but the City Council and Igloo wanted to understand the community's aspirations before thinking about proposals. So the project began with an Ideas Shop and community workshops, with **no specific proposals**: just simple themes to stimulate discussions with the local community, and their local knowledge and aspirations, to seek the views of the people of Sunderland on how the plans should be shaped.

Before the workshops began, the development team took an empty shop in a local shopping centre, and opened an Ideas Shop. The aim was to **go to a place where people congregate**, a place with high footfall to maximise contact. It helped to tease out conversations about what people thought

about their place and their expectations for the future. People just dropped in when they were passing, and could leave ideas or stop for a chat. 230 conversations took place in the shop, with 440 interactions or inputs logged.

The Ideas Shop was staffed for three days and open for around five weeks the community workshops. As well as providing lots of valuable baseline information about the local community, it **established positive communications** and promoted the community workshops.

The community workshops were held over four days, again on a drop-in basis. Around 135 people attended. Both the Ideas Shop and the workshops were organised on different days to attract a range of people, for example more families at weekends and more retired people and shift workers during the week. The partners thought it was important to get a **balance of views** from the neighbourhood and wider community.

This early engagement was vital, not only in starting to establish the masterplan framework for the area's future, but also in **establishing trust and relationships**.



## 6. THE COSTS OF EARLY ENGAGEMENT

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### 6.1 Introduction

One of the aims of the research was to establish the costs of early engagement. A question about cost was therefore included in the topic guide for the semi-structured interviews with participants (see section 1.3 for more information).

From the responses, it was clear that those research participants who undertake early engagement (developers, landowners, consultants and indeed local authorities) do not routinely keep a record of the costs of early engagement. Only one developer kept a budget line specifically for engagement. Many others explained that engagement costs would be wrapped up within other budgets, normally either external design team fees or internal time/overheads.

The vast majority of respondents were therefore unable to undertake their own cost-benefit analysis on early engagement, or indeed share that with the project team even on a confidential basis. That said, most respondents recognised that providing a reasonable assessment of costs required an understanding of the time involved in an engagement process, the number of people involved, amount of materials and other associated costs.

### 6.2 Budget figures

Fifteen respondents provided indicative estimates for early engagement. In considering these figures, it should be remembered that a number of those respondents said that their actual costs for community engagement could easily be double the estimated figures that they mentioned.

Key points from the project team's analysis of respondents' estimated figures:

1. Typical costs associated with Pre-Application Consultation for a Major planning application lay within the range £20k-£50k, with most at the lower end of that scale.
2. Most respondents stated that the scale of a development proposal had little impact on the cost of Pre-Application Consultation. However, a couple of very substantial projects (a new community and a large commercial development with a capital value of over £100m) had Pre-Application Consultation budgets of over £100k.
3. The duration of the project does, however, make a difference. A new community that involves community engagement over decades of design and construction will entail substantially higher costs than a one-off Pre-Application Consultation. Large multi-phase projects will need substantial sums for early and ongoing engagement to keep community groups and individuals informed, which may involve dedicated community

liaison staff. Two developers quoted annual budgets over £100k for this type of ongoing engagement.

4. Charrettes, essentially a form of more intensive early engagement that goes considerably beyond Pre-Application Consultation requirements, can vary hugely in cost. We were quoted costs that a range of costs from below £50k to well into six figures. There are a number of significant variables that leads to this large range, not least the amount that is invested in pre-charrette background technical studies. We estimate that typical charrette costs for a development project be £75k-£100k with additional costs for more detailed masterplanning.
5. The cost of Pre-Application Consultation appears to represent around 5%-10% of the total costs of a developer's planning application, although this figure may vary with the type of development proposed, its location and the area's characteristics. Such a percentage can be a substantial figure on a large project.
6. In terms of the percentage of Gross Development Value (GDV) that would be spent on early engagement, the figures from research participants suggest up to around 0.3% of GDV on residential projects and considerably less on commercial projects.

### 6.3 Additional insights

The following comments from participants give additional insight into financial and cost matters around engagement.

What is important to note is that the private sector will assess the benefit (in terms of financial value or worth) in investing in community engagement to gain a planning consent. Even a substantial 6 or 7 figure investment can be worthwhile if it generates sufficient income over the long term, such as may accrue from a major development – as this planning officer explains:

*“Often developers balk at the value of engagement, not the cost – particularly where community conversations are less mature.” [planning authority PA6]*

One large commercial developer who undertook a comprehensive Pre-Application Consultation process with three phases of engagement, at a cost in fees and expenses of over £100,000, made interesting points relative to cost and value (overleaf):

*“After three phases of engagement with over 1,000 people involved, there were less than 40 written objections to the planning application. And only half a dozen of those had strong planning arguments. The planning process was relatively short. It was very simple for the Council to determine the application...”*

*[Without that level of engagement] I suspect the outcome would have been worse. The planning process would have taken a lot longer.*

*On a scheme worth over £100m, the engagement was not a mindblowing sum, and was worthwhile. I don’t begrudge it – but I might for a larger sum spent on a smaller development.” [developer D9]*

Whatever the costs of engaging early, this large developer clearly explains the potential costs of **not** engaging well at an early stage:

*“It costs less to engage more. The costs of engaging badly are enormous, they tend to be overwhelming. An angry community, politicians are upset, already paid for the land, can’t get the consent. So it’s partly risk mitigation to manage the process well – good business sense, if you like. But it will also create better places through a more involving process.” [developer D16; quote is also contained in section 4.2.4]*

Other developers emphasised that it is not engagement that costs money, but delay and uncertainty – both of which engagement can help to minimise (see section 5):

*“Yes, there are slightly additional costs associated with good consultation, but the costs aren’t substantial. Focussing more on quality than box ticking doesn’t increase costs... All in all, I’m in the camp that supports consultation exercises. If it’s less to do with box ticking and more to do with the qualitative aspects of it, I don’t think it puts much of a demand financially on developers, I really don’t. You’re talking about a couple of thousand pounds here or there.*

*At the end of the day, time is the killer. It’s the cost of when you’ve committed from buying the site to when you get yourself on the site, that’s when the money drains. The money doesn’t get drained on the consultation side.*

*On balance it doesn’t cost much more to do it properly, but you are less likely to get lumpy bits later on – you’re hoping there’ll be a saving of time, which will be more than compensated for the extra couple of grand that you’ve had to pay to do the work.” [developer D5]*

Participants did not deny that early engagement has a cost, although opinions were split on whether public subsidy is required:

*“Doing that [intensive] level of engagement needs resources – it needs engineers, landscape architects, planners, architects and people with commercial knowledge. A team like that costs money. And the process needs time, which also costs money.”*  
[developer D10]

*“Early engagement is a way of bringing about change that is seen as beneficial making a wider positive change. The charrette approach is a good instrument for engagement demonstrating that the expenditure in such activity is beneficial. However, this method of early engagement will need some public funding contribution.”* [developer D6]

*“Any big change coming along to a place, there should be some form of early engagement – it’s a no brainer. It’s good use of public resources down the line. It can only help, even though it does take time and resource.”* [planning authority PA6]

## 7. A NEW COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY ENGAGEMENT

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### 7.1 Introduction

This research study has revealed good examples of early engagement in the development process (see section 4.2) and credible evidence of their benefits (section 5). What is missing is a planning system that encourages and incentivises good engagement so that good early engagement becomes the norm, so we as a country can reap the benefits.

The ongoing planning reforms create an opportunity to rectify this situation. The Scottish Government is currently preparing secondary legislation and guidance following the Planning (Scotland) Action 2019. The government's work programme states that "improving community engagement has been a key aim of the reforms from the outset" (Scottish Government, 2019, p4), and explains that the community engagement related aspects of the Act will be taken forward as a package to be completed by the first quarter of 2021.

This section of the report proposes a collaborative framework for early engagement beginning from the Local Development Plan / Local Place Plans through to planning applications and beyond, involving developers and landowners working together with planning authorities and of course communities. The framework suggested below is a practical, positive and deliverable response to this report's evidence, and also complements ongoing planning reforms and the Scottish Government's [Place Principle](#).

### 7.2 Pre-Application Consultation should happen much earlier

Pre-Application Consultation is too late: that was the widespread conclusion of research participants. Most remarked that it should effectively be brought forward to the much planning policy stage – where Local Development Plans (and in the future Local Place Plans) set the vision and policy for communities. Where the principle of development is established in the Local Development Plan, it should not be revisited through community engagement at the planning application (or current Pre-Application Consultation) stage.

There is nothing new in this: under the guise of "front-loading" it has been a central tenet of planning reform for several years now, as explained in section 2.1. What is significant is that developers and landowners are promoting it and see the benefits.

### 7.3 'National Standards for Community Engagement in Planning'

New guidance should be developed for all developments, to encourage early engagement and give a clear framework for the development industry, local authorities and communities to collaborate and engage well.

New guidance should emphasise that early engagement must be bespoke rather than the tick-box mentality which is so criticised by research participants. We therefore suggest that it be based on principles, rather like the existing [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) (Scottish Community Development Centre and Scottish Government, 2016) and [PAS SP=EED](#) guide to community engagement in planning (PAS, 2019). Indeed, much of the necessary content is already contained in these two documents, which should form the starting point for new National Standards for Community Engagement in Planning.

From discussions with respondents, those new standards should cover:

- The need for engagement strategies to be tailored to individual circumstances.
- How to select, design and use engagement techniques and communication channels to reach a wide demographic and geographic community, including face-to-face and digital.
- Providing communities with appropriate information to help them make informed decisions about proposals and their public impacts, including making plans and proposals “real” for people by helping them understand how their community will look and feel with the changes that are proposed. This will require some site-related technical studies which are currently carried out for planning applications, such as transport and environment, to be undertaken earlier in the process, so that they can feed into engagement on the Local Development Plan.
- Begin by discussing the future of the community and the place, not with proposals, planning issues or processes.
- The importance of continuous engagement throughout the development process (policy through to design, consenting, construction and occupation) and how engagement should evolve through that process.
- The value of a “Developer’s Charter” for individual developers to explain how they will engage with the public.
- Narrowing the scope of engagement as the process proceeds, from the principle of development at the Local Development Plan stage to detailed design and layout issues at the planning application stage (assuming that sites are in line with the LDP).
- Clarity on the roles of Councillors, planning officers, Community Councils and developers, how they should collaborate with each other, how their roles change through the development process, and expected standards of behaviours.
- Using engagement to support and inform wider goals of placemaking and community empowerment (such as by integrating with Local Place Plans), as well as to inform design and decision-making on the development proposal in question.
- Appropriate resourcing for early engagement.
- Plus other relevant principles in the existing National Standards for Community Engagement and SP=EED.

Section 4.2 has examples of these from research participants’ own experiences.

## 7.4 Large-scale developments

For large scale land releases, engagement should be a regular occurrence to enable people to help shape the future form and use of their places. Engagement should not wait until the current Pre-Application Consultation but start at the planning policy stage - before site acquisition. In line with Scotland's plan-led system and as exemplified in some of the case studies in section 5, engagement should take place at each stage:

1. *Evidence gathering* – engagement to establish community aspirations alongside other technical impact assessments, to ensure informed decisions are made in Local Development Plan policy designations and the Local Place Plan. This suggests that some site-related technical studies currently carried out for planning applications, such as transport and environment, should be undertaken earlier to inform Local Development Plan engagement and decision-making.
2. *Masterplanning* – creating a development framework through an iterative co-design process or a charrette, with the community influencing the pattern and mix of uses.
3. *Detailed design and consenting* – further targeted engagement relating to planning applications, which could include with non-binding community votes to provide a barometer of opinion to the planning authority and developer.
4. *Construction and community-building* – keeping the local community informed of development progress, operational matters, helping new residents to integrate, and empowering the community.

## 7.5 Informing

As many research participants emphasised (see section 4.2), providing information to communities is essential to help them make informed judgments. That information should include public policy objectives, technical assessments, information on 'deliverability' and development proposals. This information should be made available at the LDP engagement stage to enable people to make informed judgments about the future of their place (see sections 7.3 and 7.4 above).

Communities need to be able to strike a balance between national and local issues, and the development industry and planning authorities have roles in enabling that. Engagement deliberations need to include a greater understanding of national, regional and local objectives and examine how these can be blended with community requirements.

## 7.6 Collaboration

Engagement should be seen as a collaborative endeavour for sites allocated in the Local Development Plan. Local authorities, developers and communities should work together to deliver the Local Development Plan and also, therefore, national public policy objectives like the climate emergency, health and wellbeing, and inclusive growth.

Training and standards may be needed for different players to support them to deliver their roles. Training for the leadership and listening roles of Councillors, for example, can be incorporated into curriculum for Councillor training that will be delivered as part of the ongoing planning reforms. Community Council training on planning has already been developed by PAS and individual local authorities over many years.

Standards are already in place for Councillors, Community Councillors and public officials through the [Councillors' Code of Conduct](#) and [Nolan Principles](#). In a similar manner, 'engagement charters' should be adopted by developers as a statement of commitment to good engagement (see, for example, Grosvenor Britain and Ireland, 2019).

Local authority officers and members should take a lead role in facilitating the Local Development Plan stage, and by working collaboratively with local communities on Local Place Plans - which are themselves an opportunity for communities to focus on real things rather than the more strategic policies found in Local Development Plans.

Should planning authorities also be given responsibility for Pre-Application Consultation? The purpose would be to remove potential bias and build public trust. Such a change would mirror the way that responsibility for neighbour notification was transferred from developers to local authorities after the 2006 Planning etc. (Scotland) Act.

At the detailed planning application stage, local authorities should support engagement by being clear that the site helps to deliver their Local Development Plan (such as the Killearn case study in section 5). Adequately resources would obviously be required to support this (see next paragraph).

## 7.7 Resources

Clearly, implementing this new framework for early engagement will cost money, whether for greater levels of engagement by the private and public sectors or earlier site impact assessments at the Local Development Plan stage. Land value capture mechanisms could potentially provide new ways of thinking about seeking resources.

## 7.8 Other recent research

Finally, it is worth noting that the recently published report of the UK government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (2020) contains similar conclusions to those described above. It states that:

*Local councils need radically and profoundly to re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which they engage with neighbourhoods as they consult on their local plans. More democracy should take place at the local plan phase, expanding from the*

*current focus on consultation in the development control process to one of co-design.  
(ibid., p3)*

*We should be offering the public a voice in planning decisions from the very beginning  
of the planning process, and with a view to adapting the result to the needs and  
desires of the local community, both existing and incoming. (ibid., p34)*

## 8. CONCLUSION

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### 8.1 The case for change

This report has explained the benefits and value of early engagement using qualitative evidence from developers, landowners, public officials and other practitioners in the planning and development process. From analysis of this evidence, we have put forward proposals which suggest a way forward to embed early engagement in decisions relating to land and realise its benefits more widely.

Although this report has focussed on the benefits from a development perspective, it is important to remember that the broader context of this research is land reform and the planning review (described in section 1.2 above). The benefits of early engagement described in this report are therefore only a part of the picture, as they sit alongside a range of benefits described in land reform guidance (see Scottish Land Commission, 2018, p.3) and the planning review (see for example Scottish Government, 2017, p.23).

Our outlook is positive. The ongoing planning review offers an opportunity to refresh the system – with a practical, positive, collaborative framework to improve the general standard of engagement and bring forward its focus to the planning policy stage, as we have described in section 7.

The aim, of course, is to avoid this situation described by one developer:

*“Where there are significant [community] problems and this is threatening the developer’s return on capital then it is likely that the development proposal will be abandoned and the developer will move to another community / site” [developer D12]*

### 8.2 Recommendations

To deliver the collaborative framework for early engagement described in section 7, our key recommendations are:

1. **Effective beneficial community engagement needs to be considerably more than the current statutory Pre-Application Consultation requirements.** It should not be a ‘tickbox’ exercise.
2. **Pre-Application Consultation should be recast and brought forward** to begin at the Local Development Plan / Local Place Plan stage. ‘Early engagement’ at the application stage is too late.
3. **New ‘National Standards for Community Engagement in Planning’ should be developed** and promoted as the basis of good practice. The central purpose should be to give everyone in the community the opportunity to participate in shaping the future of their place, and allow a balance of opinions to be captured. The suggested content of

the new Standards can be found in section 7.3. Much is already in existence in the existing [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) and [PAS SP=EED](#), as explained in section 7.3.

4. Early engagement at the LDP/LPP stage **should be informed by all necessary evidence and strategic policy context** to enable everyone to make informed judgments.
5. The necessary **resources for change** can be made available by exploring land value capture mechanisms further.

Practical information on each of these five points can be found in section 7.

### 8.3 Delivering change

We believe that the recommendations described in section 8.2 are entirely practical. Indeed, we hope that an important contribution of this evidence-based report is to give others confidence that the development industry itself sees benefits in early engagement, and that many within the industry would support a greater emphasis on early engagement – provided that it is workable and effective. A number of research participants gave clear indications about what is practical and appropriate to expect of them, as these comments illustrate:

*“Real change needs culture and capacity, not policy and funding, which makes it a real challenge for government. You can’t regulate to build trust. Government needs to signal and create a narrative that engagement matters, and should then invite the development industry to up its game, because that’s in its own self-interest... The development industry needs to take hold of this opportunity, and do something about it partly through self-interest and partly because it builds better places and communities.” [developer D16]*

*“If we’re talking about making the consultation more relevant and less of a box-ticking exercise, and if there’s guidance going to come out on that, then I don’t think you’re going to get much resistance from the housebuilding sector.” [developer D5]*

*“In general, the planning system could be a lot smarter about what early engagement it asks developers to do, and what we get out of them. Our local authority has always tried to do more than Pre-Application Consultation, ever since it was brought in with the 2006 Act, but other authorities say that the 12 week PAC period can be an unnecessary impediment for smaller or less controversial applications. More flexibility for authorities on being able to adapt engagement requirements to different situations would be helpful.” [planning authority PA3]*

*“In terms of what can be improved, statutory engagement should be seen as the ‘baseline’ but [to make engagement work well] there is a need to do much more. Additional engagement through enforcing statutory rules would probably be unhelpful. It is important to allow developers to use their own initiative and recognise the benefits by way of good practice. A rule based approach to engagement would not be appropriate as engagement is more of a cultural behavioural matter... Engagement is much more than showing a plan at the local town or village hall. There is a need to improve the developer’s credibility and see how development can bring about positive change.” [developer D6]*

Those ‘positive changes’ as a result of good development are of course positive for Scotland as a whole – contributing to tackling climate change, inequalities, inclusive economic growth, health and wellbeing and the other major challenges and opportunities that face the country. Those are the prizes of doing more early engagement and doing it well.

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## **ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research design***

The aim of the research was to generate evidence of the benefits and costs of early engagement in planning, primarily from developers, landowners and their consultants. That had to be done in a way that would generate sufficient useful data as well as demonstrate appropriate rigour.

Having considered a number of research techniques – including workshops, focus groups and surveys – the project team selected semi-structured interviews with individuals or small groups of people known to each other as being most appropriate. This was because the project team:

- anticipated wishing to explore some sensitive issues which would benefit from confidential one-to-one conversations to enable candid discussion. For example, asking interviewees how they decide to invest in early engagement in different situations or projects.
- was more likely to secure involvement of participants if they travelled to them for interviews or contacted them by phone, rather than expect them to give up more time to travel to a workshop or focus group.
- expected that many of the participants would also be sources of case studies, for which a one-to-one discussion is a better way of gleaning information than a workshop or focus group.

Individual participants were offered the opportunity for discussions to be either “on-the-record” or “off-the-record”, because of the commercially sensitive nature of some of the discussions.

### ***Data gathering***

The project team’s selected research technique of semi-structured interviews, both face to face and by telephone, utilised a topic guide. The main points of the topic guide were:

1. Does early engagement shorten the planning process?
2. When does it help to engage in early engagement and when is it a hindrance?
3. What do you see as the best techniques for early engagement with local communities?
4. Who do you seek to engage? What role do Community Councils have?
5. What broadly are the costs of engagement?
6. What is the value of early engagement? (or is it simply a planning obligation that needs to be addressed?)
7. What potential development risks might there be in undertaking early engagement?
8. Are there any specific issues that you think could be improved in the current engagement process?
9. Are there any other matters that you see as relevant in undertaking early engagement with communities?

This topic guide proved to be a useful structure to prompt discussion and generate the type of evidence sought by the project team.

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### ***Data analysis***

After interview transcription, the project team checked draft material from “on-the-record” interviews with participants to confirm their interpretation of what had been said.

Simple content analysis was undertaken of all interview material. Qualitative rather than quantitative analysis was used to identify similarities, differences, consensus and divergence amongst the interviewees’ material. This provided common themes, which form the basis of sections 4 to 7 of this report. Although the analysis was qualitative and is primarily illustrated through quotes and case studies, the project team indicates in these later sections of the report the approximate proportion of interviewees who made similar comments.

In the later sections of this report, anonymous identifiers are used to denote respondents to preserve confidentiality. These are explained later in the report.

### ***Research participants***

A total of 44 organisations participated in the research, a significantly higher number than was anticipated at the outset.

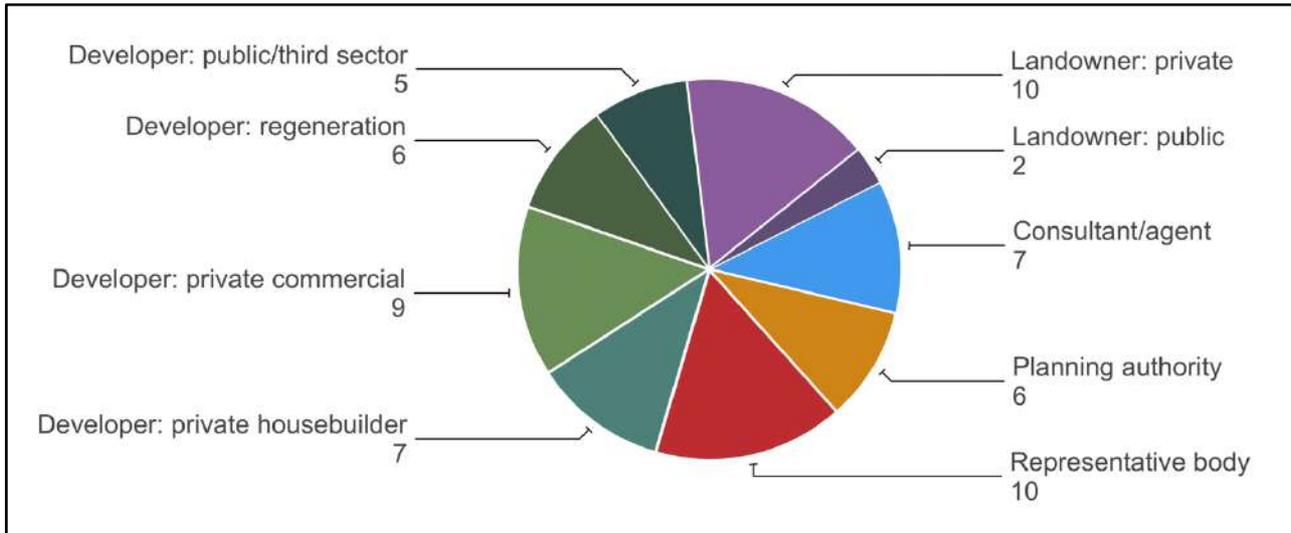
There was a good level of positivity from those who were approached directly to be involved, a list which was specifically designed to reach:

- a range of development types and sizes, site locations, and types of developers and landowner.
- representative or membership bodies related to the development industry or planning profession, and which might wish to offer evidence related to the research or have members who might want to do so.
- a sample of planning authorities who might wish to share evidence or contacts related to the research.

The original list of potential participants was supplemented with a number of additional participants who were suggested by other research participants.

As Figure 1 (overleaf) shows, the 44 participants covered a range of development types and sizes, site locations and types of developer/landowner from different sectors; a number of planning authorities and relevant representative organisations were also included. A full list of participants is contained in Annex 2. The identities of a small number of participants have been redacted for reasons of confidentiality.

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*Figure 1: Range of research participants  
(NB: some of the 44 participants fall into more than 1 category)*

A number of participants fall into more than one category. This is because, firstly, the distinction between different types of developer is not always clear-cut: for example, some developers may be primarily commercial but also promote residential development, and they may develop privately-funded housing as well as publicly-funded. Secondly, it is not always possible to differentiate between landowners and developers. Essentially all developers are also landowners at some point in the process. For example, a historic landowner might also act as a commercial developer if it wishes to develop a part of its landholdings for anything from a steading conversion to a new community. A commercial or residential developer, on the other hand, may have an option-to-purchase over a site during until planning consent is granted, and only at that point becomes the landowner; in this situation the developer is effectively speculating and acting as agent for the original landowner until planning consent is granted.

What matters for this research is who promotes the development and is responsible for community engagement. That can role can be taken by more than one organisation through the course of a large project (e.g. starting with the landowner establishing the principle of development and developing infrastructure, before parcelling up the site into a number of smaller sites for individual developers to take forward to detailed planning consent and construction).

### **Case studies**

The research draws on the experiences of over 20 developers, landowners and consultants, who between them have been involved in many more developments than that. Although most discussions were “off-the-record” to protect confidentiality and ensure open and frank responses, a small number of “on-the-record” case studies were also generated.

## ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

We are grateful to the organisations and individuals who participated in the research in a range of different ways, including:

Aberdeen City Council	Planning Democracy
Alvance British Aluminium*	Port of Leith Housing Association
BAE Systems / Cass Associates*	Rettie
Brodies	Robertson Residential
Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)	RTPI Scotland
City of Edinburgh Council	Savills
Clyde Gateway*	Scottish Communities Alliance
Fife Council	Scottish Community Development Centre
Forestry and Land Scotland*	Scottish Government
Grosvenor Britain and Ireland	Scottish Land and Estates
Heads of Planning Scotland	Scottish Property Federation
Highland Council*	Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF)
Homes for Scotland	Stewart Milne Homes*
Igloo Regeneration*	Sustrans*
Kingdom Housing Association*	Turley
Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park	Urban Union
Mactaggart and Mickel*	Winchburgh Developments*
Moray Estates*	

\*An asterisk indicates an organisation which contributed to a case study.

We are also grateful to those other organisations which participated but have not been named for reasons of confidentiality.

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### ANNEX 3: ANONYMOUS IDENTIFIERS

To preserve confidentiality, research participants are not cited by name but by 'anonymous identifiers'. These are grouped below according to participants' primary roles. Note that the anonymous identifiers are not numbered in the order that participants in the right hand column.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Anonymous identifiers</i>	<i>Research participants</i>
<b>Consultants/ agents</b>	C1 – C5	Rettie Savills TPS Turley and one other (name withheld)
<b>Developers</b>	D1 – D16	Clyde Gateway Igloo Kingdom Housing Association Mactaggart and Mickel Port of Leith Housing Association Robertson Residential Stewart Milne Homes Urban Union Winchburgh Developments and others (names withheld)
<b>Landowners</b>	L1 – L7	BAE Systems Forestry and Land Scotland Liberty British Aluminium Grosvenor Britain and Ireland Moray Estate and others [(names withheld)
<b>Planning authorities</b>	PA1 – PA6	Aberdeen City Council City of Edinburgh Council Fife Council Highland Council Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Scottish Government
<b>Membership organisations</b>	MO1 – MO11	Built Environment Forum Scotland Heads of Planning Scotland Homes for Scotland Planning Democracy Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland Scottish Communities Alliance Scottish Community Development Centre Scottish Land and Estates Scottish Property Federation Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum Sustrans

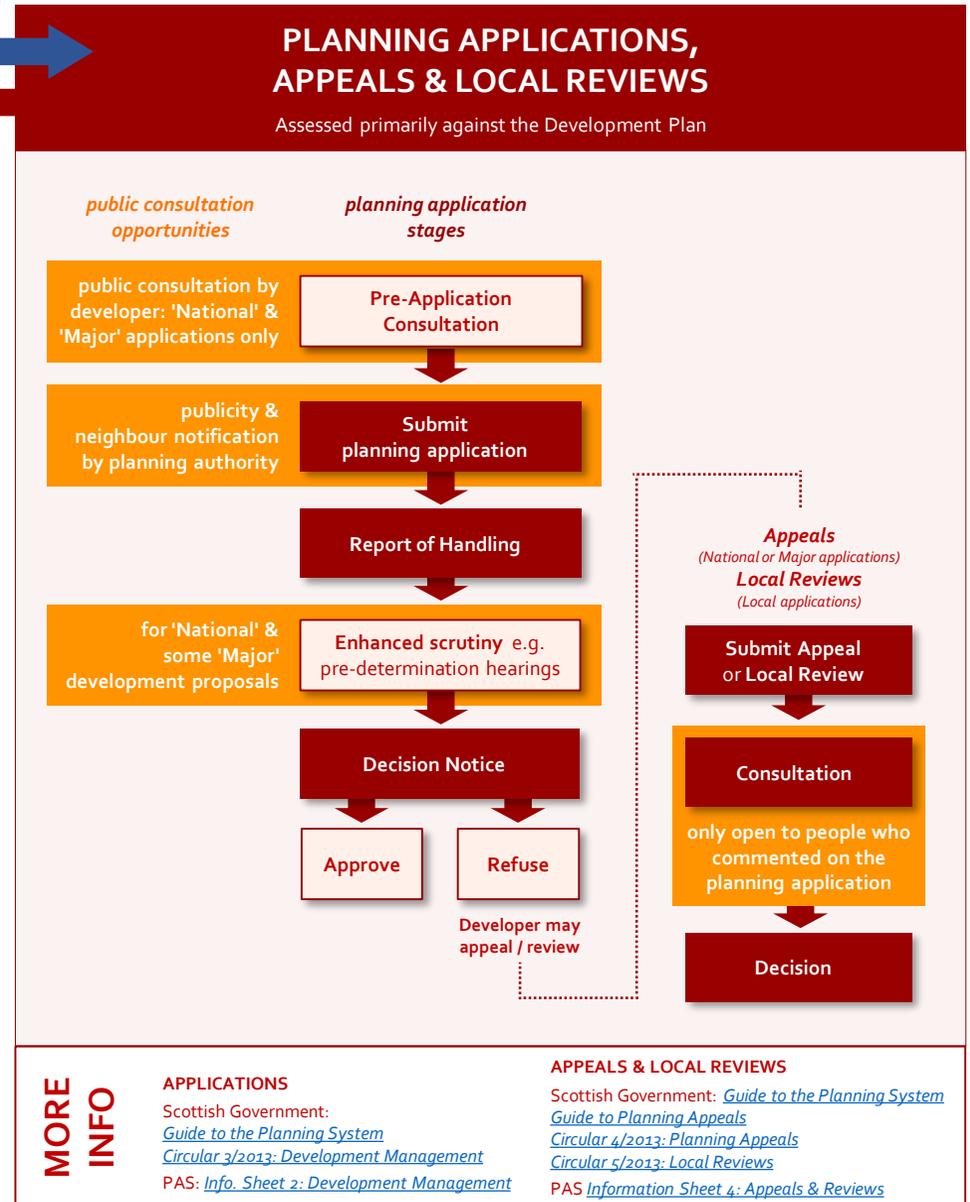
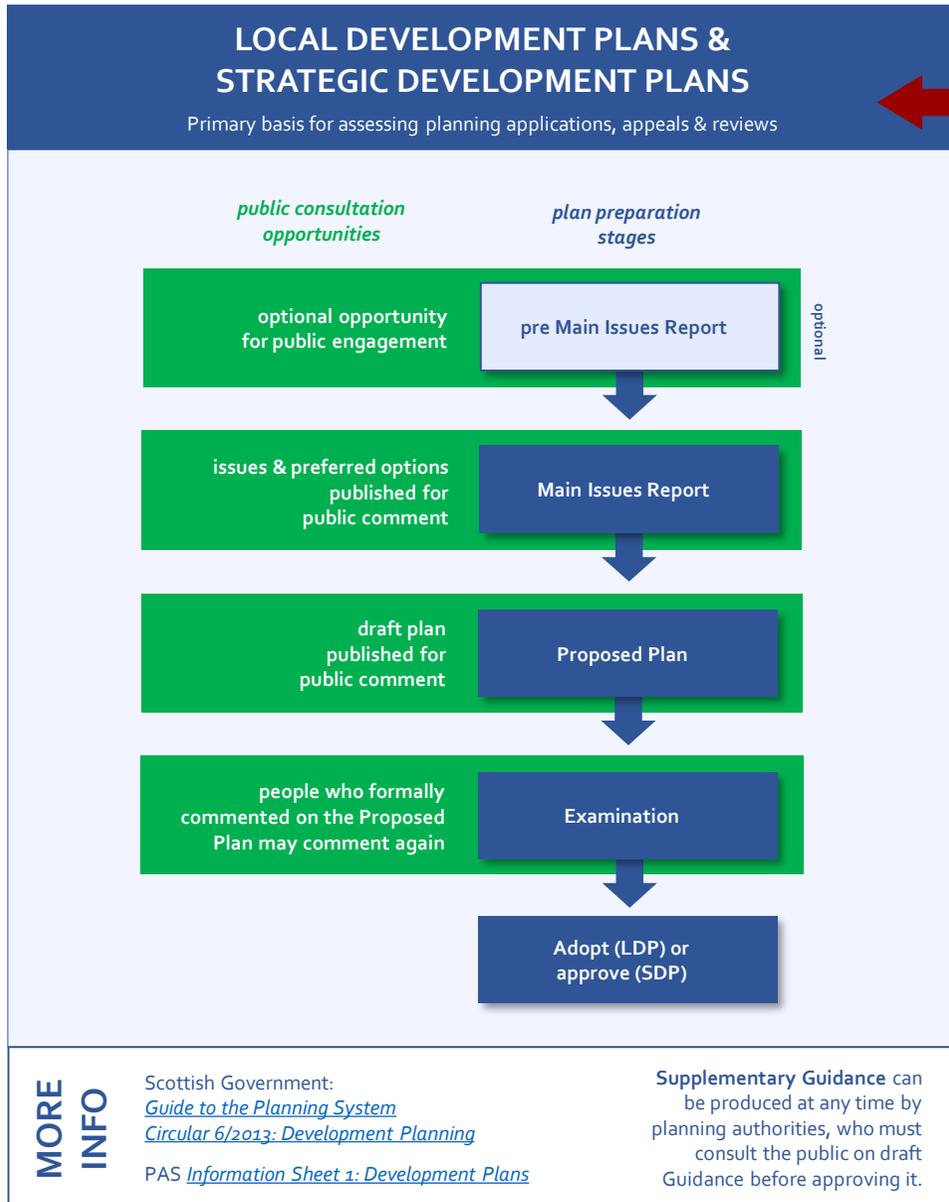
## **ANNEX 4: CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING**

Please see overleaf.

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# OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCOTTISH PLANNING SYSTEM

These diagrams shows opportunities for public involvement in the current Scottish planning system (2006 Act). More detailed information can be found via the weblinks beneath.



## **ANNEX 5: CURRENT ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR EARLY ENGAGEMENT**

Please see overleaf.

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# SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Resources to support community engagement can be found in relation to three policy agendas: planning, land reform and community empowerment.

Each agenda has its own primary legislation which defines a basic set of 'rules' for community engagement. The three agendas have complementary objectives for community engagement, as quoted in the middle of the diagram.

Click on underlined text to take you direct to each document. More information, including short summaries of each document, can be found overleaf.



**Scottish Government**

[Guidance on Engaging Communities on Decisions Relating to Land](#)

[Good practice in overcoming barriers to community land-based activities](#)

**Scottish Land Commission**

[Protocol & Route Map: Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land](#)

[Practice Guide: Developing an Engagement Plan for Decisions Relating to Land](#)

**Agencies**

[Forest Research Toolbox for public engagement in forestry & woodland planting](#)

[Forest Research Principles of Public Engagement](#)

[Forest Research Public engagement & forestry: key lessons working in urban areas](#)

[HIE Ten Steps to Community Ownership](#)

[HIE Keeping the Community Involved](#)

[SNH Talking about our Place Toolkit](#)

[UHI Working Together for Sustainable Communities](#)

**Scottish Government**

[Place Standard Planning Advice Note 3/2010: Community Engagement](#)

[Guide to the Use of Mediation in Planning](#)

**Agencies**

[PAS SP=EED Practical Guide to Engagement](#)

[SCDC Local Place Plans: challenges & opportunities](#)

[PAS Local Place Plan Guide: the PAS approach](#)

**Local authorities**

[Renfrewshire Council Local Place Plans 'How-to' Guide](#)

[East Ayrshire Council Placemaking Plans Guide](#)

NB: document not online: please email to request it as an attachment

# COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

## OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“help communities to do more for themselves and have more say in decisions that affect them”

Source: Scottish Government, *a short guide to the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) Act 2015* (p2)

## PRIMARY LEGISLATION

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

## GUIDANCE

### SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

National Standards for Community Engagement *Good practice principles designed to improve and guide community engagement.*

VOICE *Complementing the National Standards, VOICE is a digital tool to assist individuals, organisations and partnerships with delivering meaningful community engagement.*

### AGENCIES

**Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC)** Community engagement *Webpage with news, links and training.*

**Citizens Advice Scotland** Engaging hearts and minds *A high-level guide explaining how public agencies can take the public with them when planning new buildings or activities, with case studies from Scottish Water and others.*

**DTA Scotland** Involving Your Community *A practical guide to the benefits and techniques for involving and consulting local communities in community asset based projects.*

**EHRC** Advice and guidance *Promoting equalities in community engagement.*

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Argyll and Bute** Community-Led Action Planning Toolkit

**Cairngorm National Park** Community Action Planning Toolkit

**Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership** Community Engagement Toolkit

**West Lothian Council** Engaging Communities Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Community Engagement

### OTHER SELECTED SOURCES

**Community Places** Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement *Provides guidance on issues to consider when planning and designing community engagement.*

**Dialogue by Design** A Handbook of Public and Stakeholder Engagement *This handbook has a special focus on how to design engagement processes – for example, which method to use in different types of situation and how to keep track of stakeholder participation.*

**Involve** People and Participation *This guidance sets out how to plan for participation and choose from amongst the many available participation methods, with practical detail.*

**Leapfrog** Tools and toolboxes *Simple tools for bringing people together, exchanging ideas and making stronger, more active communities.*

**Regeneration Wales** A Guide to Effective Community Engagement *This 2015 guide identifies some key engagement techniques that have stood the test of time and are recognised internationally as valuable approaches.*

**The Guardian** Top tips on community engagement *Simple tips on how to engage communities successfully.*

# LAND REFORM

## OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“Engagement helps ensure that the aspirations and concerns of communities across Scotland are rightly taken into account, enabling and empowering them to help shape decisions about land. It helps to create trust between local communities and those with control over land and demonstrates that land is being managed well.”

from: *Scottish Government, Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land, April 2018 (Ministerial Foreword, page 3)*

## PRIMARY LEGISLATION

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016

## GUIDANCE

### SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land *Principles and guidance for landowners and agents to engage fairly with communities on land-related matters.*

Good practice in overcoming barriers to community land-based activities *Research report outlining success factors and examples of good engagement between landowners and communities.*

### SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION

Protocol and Route Map: Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land *Straightforward principles and specific expectations to support greater collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land.*

Practice Guide: Developing an Engagement Plan for Decisions Relating to Land *A guide to help decision-makers about the use or management of urban and rural land to develop an engagement plan to effectively communicate and engage with communities.*

### AGENCIES

**Forest Research** Toolbox for public engagement in forestry and woodland planting *Practical easy to read advice about when and how to engage members of the public – not just for foresters.*

**Forest Research** Principles of Public Engagement *Core values and design principles involved in planning public engagement.*

**Forest Research** Public Engagement and Forestry: Key Lessons for Working in Urban Areas *Practical advice on public engagement in an urban context that summarises key lessons, experience and methods, with relevance to a wide range of contexts.*

**HIE** Ten Steps to Community Ownership *A toolkit of guides, advice videos and templates for community organisations wishing to own land or property.*

**HIE** Keeping the Community Involved *Simple community engagement guidance for community organisations undertaking projects.*

**SNH** Talking About Our Place Toolkit *For local communities to organise engagement and projects to understand and shape their local place, with a focus on landscape and natural environment. It includes guidance and practical tools.*

**UHI** Working Together for Sustainable Communities *A report of projects carried out between 2007 and 2012 exploring collaborative initiatives between privately owned estates, communities and other partners, including guidance and advice.*

# PLANNING

## OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“Developments... can often have a smoother journey through the planning process... Communities also have much to gain from helping to shape change.”

from: Scottish Government, *Places, people and planning: a consultation on the future of the Scottish planning system*, 2017 (p23)

## PRIMARY LEGISLATION

Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006

## GUIDANCE

### SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Place Standard *The Place Standard tool is a way of assessing and evaluating places to support communities and the public sector, private sector and third sector to work together to deliver high-quality, sustainable places.*

Planning Advice Note 3/2010: Community Engagement *This 2010 advice links with the National Standards for Community Engagement (subsequently updated in 2015). It provides advice to communities on how they can get involved in planning, and advice to planning authorities and developers on ways of effectively engaging with communities on planning matters.*

Guide to the Use of Mediation in the Planning System in Scotland *The purpose of this 2009 guide is to help those involved in the planning system in Scotland to understand how mediation can be used to enhance the planning process.*

### AGENCIES

**PAS** SP=EED Practical Guide to Engagement *A practical guide to effective community engagement in planning.*

**SCDC** Local Place Plans: challenges and opportunities *This Scottish Government funded report contains suggestions for forthcoming national guidance on Local Place Plans as community-led plans to support planning reform, community empowerment, and alignment of community and spatial planning and local governance.*

**PAS** Local Place Plan Guide: the PAS approach *Pending formal guidance for Local Place Plans from the Scottish Government in early 2021, this guide is intended as a helpful resource for any community group looking to prepare a Local Place Plan.*

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

**Renfrewshire Council** Local Place Plans ‘How-to’ Guide *This ‘How To Guide’ explains the local authority’s expectations for Local Place Plans in Renfrewshire, and outlines steps in their preparation.*

**East Ayrshire Council** Placemaking Plans guide *Please email via the link to request a copy of the guide, which guide explains how to prepare local ‘Placemaking Plans’, community-led plans which take forward the spatial and planning elements of local Community Action Plans.*

