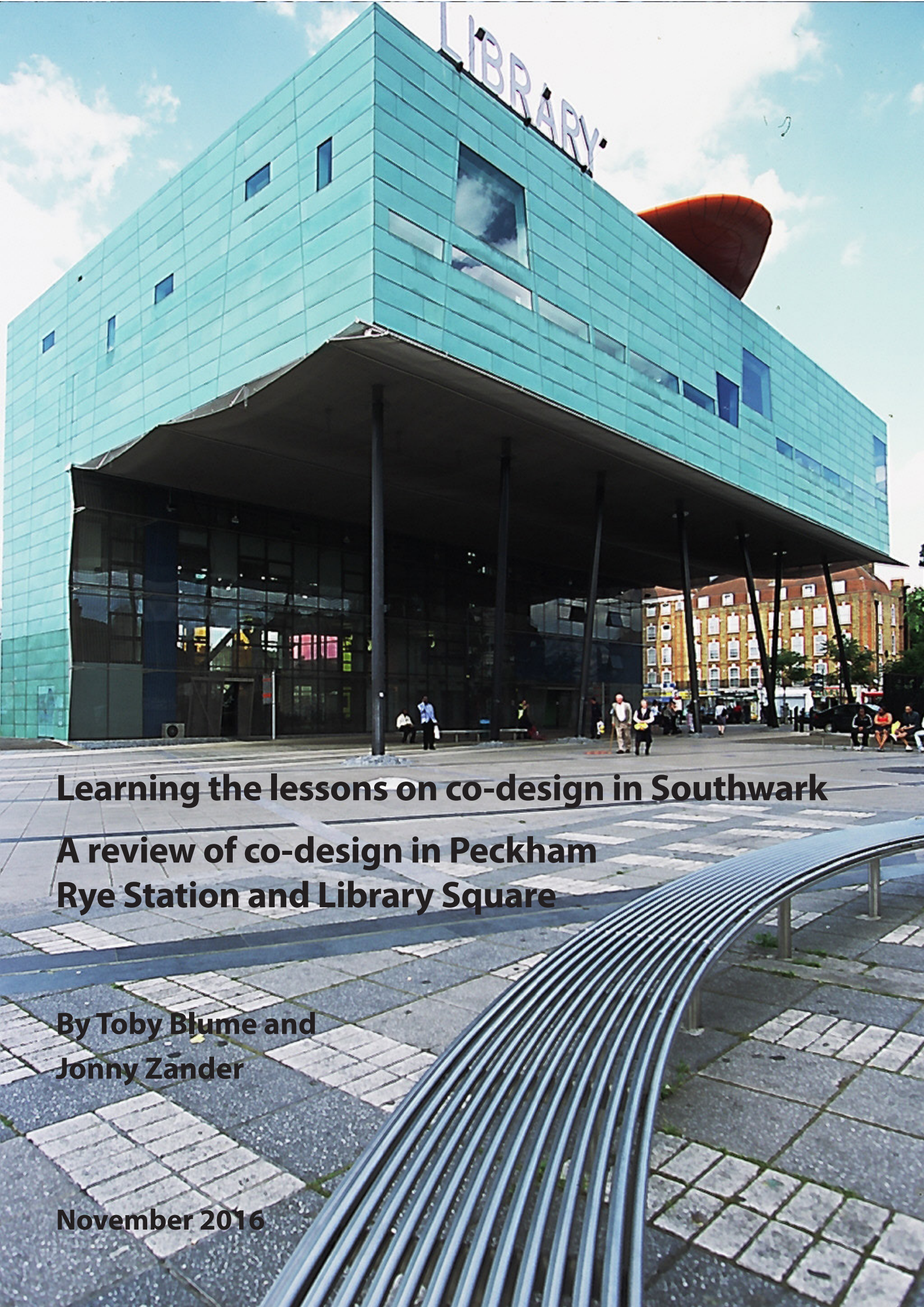

Learning the lessons on co-design in Southwark

A review of co-design in Peckham Rye Station and Library Square

By Toby Blume and Jonny Zander

November 2016

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In particular we would like to thank Lauren Sharkey from LB Southwark for co-ordinating the project and Eileen Conn from Peckham Vision for not only sharing her considerable knowledge about the schemes but also for giving feedback on the survey design and research approach.

We have attempted to reflect the different opinions and perspectives of those we spoke to in a balanced and objective way. However any inaccuracies or misrepresentations are ours and ours alone.

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Purpose and scope of the Review

Kaizen were commissioned by LB Southwark to conduct an independent review of the co-design processes that were part of the Peckham Rye Station and Peckham Library Square developments. The context for this review taking place was the recognition that there was a significant amount of learning that could be extracted from these co-design processes and that in order for the council to be better placed to effectively use co-design approaches in the future it would be essential to learn the lessons from these projects.

According to Peter Senge learning organisations are: ***"…organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together."***[1]

Although Co-design dates back to 1970s and 1980s Scandinavia, its application in UK public policy is a relatively new concept, and for LB Southwark these projects were the first significant attempts to use co-design in a development process. As such it is to be expected that there would be learning available from the experience and it is inevitable that with the benefit of hindsight aspects of the process could be strengthened.

There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate the positive impact that co-design *can* have on development. It can improve design quality, provide efficiency savings in the whole-life costing of a site and enable better social, economic and environmental outcomes. Design Council research (from the Department for Communities and Local Government supported community-led housing and development programme) illustrates some of the benefits:

"Where residents and landlords work together, new housing is more likely to meet the needs of the community and create a place that residents feel proud of." [2]

However, when done poorly, co-design can delay development, add costs and leave local people and professionals with a bitter taste in their mouths. Getting co-design right offers real benefits but the potential downsides can also be significant if poorly executed.

In this review we have attempted to be forward looking, drawing out the key insights and important learning from the two schemes in order to provide the council and the community with a report that is useful in shaping the future. We have not sought to provide detail on what individual people said, or chosen to conduct a forensic audit of the schemes, but rather attempted to identify practical learning points to inform future practice. Consequently the quotes included in this report are unattributed, as we did not consider it important who said them, but rather that they were said.

1 See: http://infed.org/mobi/peter-senge-and-the-learning-organization

2 See: http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/community-led-design-development

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The review was purely focussed on the co-design process itself, and we did not seek to assess whether or not the people involved liked or agreed with the final designs and the scheme, but rather engaged with questions exploring the *process* by which those designs were developed. That said, we have attempted to understand the impact that co-design had on the development design and to recognise the difference that community contributions made to the schemes.

We are conscious that the audience for this report are not just council staff and built environment experts but also members of the wider community of Peckham and Southwark. With this in mind we have aimed to produce a report that is accessible, practical and engaging. Those expecting a lengthy academic research report may consequently be disappointed but our interest – and the brief we have been asked to follow – is in producing something of value and use for the future.

There are many important elements to a successful co-design process, but perhaps none is as important as the willingness of members of the community to give up their time and volunteer their energies and resources. Without this, there can be no 'co' in co-design, and we want at the outset to recognise and appreciate all the community members who did step up and participate. At whatever scale this involvement happened (whether giving views on questionnaires, attending meetings, sharing ideas, building models, encouraging others to get involved, or in challenging and holding the council to account) the involvement of community members must not be taken for granted. Peckham is blessed with many passionate and highly skilled community members and the willingness of local people to get involved in these projects and many others in the local community is to be highly commended.

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3

Methodology – What we did

Research Questions

At the outset we identified key broad research question areas to be explored in the review. The questions were developed by Kaizen and then shared for comment with council staff, councillors and Peckham Vision. While this did not mean the questions were co-designed it did ensure that a variety of perspectives were included in shaping the process and the questions. Once the broad research questions were agreed, the actual questionnaires and detailed interview questions were developed. Again, council staff and Peckham Vision were asked to give feedback on the draft questions and their suggestions included in the final question sets used on the project.

Primary Research Questions

- What aspects of the co-design processes worked well and why?
- What aspects of the co-design process could have worked better, and why?
- How did different stakeholder groups (council, architects, community groups, local residents, businesses) experience the co-design process?
- How effective were efforts to engage different groups in the engagement and co-design processes? Were there particular barriers/factors that prevented particular groups from participating effectively?
- What are the lessons from these co-design processes that could be used to inform future co-design?

Research Methods

To carry out the review we used a range of research methods – combining qualitative and quantitative research gleaned from face to face and telephone interviews, online surveys and desk-based research. The approach was intended to offer a range of opportunities to people and to include both those who had been actively involved in the co-design process and others who may not have been aware of it. Our methods included:

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1. **Desk research** and a review of the wide range of documentation surrounding the two projects.

2. **In depth interviews.** The interviews lasted from 20 minutes to 3 hours in length and the majority were conducted face to face in the interviewees' home or place of work. The interviews aimed at hearing from a broadly representative selection of people involved in the two schemes with the intention of hearing from people with different perspectives and roles. The initial list of interviewees was drawn up by LB Southwark and included, local residents, local businesses, representatives from community organisations, council staff and councillors, architects and the GLA. All but two of the people identified for interviews were engaged and interviewed in the project (the final two were not able to be reached). 20 people involved in the Peckham Station scheme were interviewed and 11 people involved in the Library Square scheme were interviewed (8 people were involved in both).

   The split of the 24 interviewees by role was as follows:

   - 9 were local residents
   - 6 were council staff or councillors (including 3 Cabinet Members)
   - 5 were local business people (also mainly local residents)
   - 3 were architects1 interview was with the GLA

   We developed an interview structure with a standard set of questions but also had the flexibility to explore different avenues of enquiry with different people based on things that they wanted to discuss and highlight.

3. **Online Survey.** A short online survey was developed and shared by LB Southwark's Regeneration team with everyone who they had on a database connected to the two schemes. The link to the survey was also shared and promoted by Peckham Vision. In total 56 people responded to the online survey. The survey contained a mixture of closed and open questions and significant space for people to add comments on different aspects of the process. The intention of this survey was to enable a wider range of local people the opportunity to feed their ideas into the review process. The online survey was an attempt to reach wider than the interview subjects and make sure that no one felt they were excluded from giving their view on the process.

4. **Community Outreach Survey.** As well as the online survey with people on the database we conducted a small amount of outreach engagement in the area around the two locations. The intention of this was to reach beyond those people who were actively involved in the process to investigate general levels of awareness about the co-design projects in the immediate local community and to hear from people who did not chose to get involved what their reasons were for not participating in the co-design. In total 99 people were engaged in the outreach fieldwork.

Analysing the data

Both the online and the community surveys were analysed using quantitative analysis of the closed questions and thematic analysis for open questions; hand coding for themes that emerged using the principles and approach of Grounded Theory. The term 'grounded theory' refers to theory that is developed inductively from a body of data, rather than from the preconceptions of the researchers. A similar approach was used to identify themes from the in-depth interviews. Because of the relatively small sample size for the surveys we have not attempted to draw many conclusions from sub-group analysis (comparing responses by age/gender etc) as the accuracy of such small samples would not be reliable, though some interesting potential trends have been referred to in the findings.

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Key Themes – what we learned

We have attempted to draw together the strands of learning into broad themes. Across the stakeholder interviews and the online survey there were elements of strong agreement and other aspects where people expressed extremely different – and often diametrically opposed - views about the co-design process.

For each aspect or element there were people who thought it was very effective and others who thought it was a disaster. This is probably due to a combination of different needs, expectations and personalities, but it is indicative that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to co-design. It also serves to underline the expectations around engaging diverse communities in co-design: people have very different and very personal preferences and expectations about development and we should not underestimate the challenge of bringing them together into a coherent and viable scheme design.

> ***"You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time"***
>
> John Lydgate

For this reason the approach we have taken is to draw out key themes and broad learning points from across the two schemes rather than dwell unduly on specific details.

Before listing the key learning themes we wanted to highlight a couple of aspects of the projects that many (if not most) people praised as being particularly effective.

The ambition

There were many plaudits for the Council in adopting the co-design process and for trying something that was ambitious and different (in fact this was one of the very few things that pretty much everyone agreed on). As an innovative and iterative process it was almost inevitable that there would be bumps along the way and things that – with hindsight and experience – could have been improved. However there was widespread positive recognition for the Council's attempts to follow a more participative, inclusive and meaningful path with a co-design process.

> ***'The Council has tried to do something really bold and they should be applauded for that.'***

Similarly the Council's commitment to learn from the experience – particularly through the commissioning of an independent review – was warmly welcomed. Stakeholders generally felt that the review demonstrated the Council's willingness to learn from the experience, to acknowledge that there was room for improvement and openly encouraging people to have a chance to reflect on their own experience. Again this should be recognised as a strength.

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Creativity

The approach taken to engage people and encourage them to offer ideas and opinions used a variety of techniques including both traditional and more unusual creative methods (especially in the first phase of the Peckham Station co-design led by Ash Sakular). Whilst there were differences of opinion about the ways of accommodating divergent thinking into the design process, the value of creative methods of participation were almost universally acknowledged, and many people identified this aspect of the co-design as being particularly effective. In particular the approach to generating ideas to include in the 'Atlas of Aspirations' and the pop up exhibition were mentioned as positive examples of creative ways of involving a diverse range of people.

Community building

Many people pointed to the positive links, connections and friendships that had established as a result of the co-design process. This added value – building and strengthening community in the local area – should not be underestimated and should be regarded as a key outcome from a co-design approach. The process undoubtedly builds social capital – both bridging and bonding capital – which in turn will build community resilience. The downstream impact of stronger community ties and resilience can be significant, with potential savings on public health, community safety and a range of other local outcomes.

> ***"Members of the community) that were involved in the co-design process were transformed by it. It gave them a far greater sense of awareness of their community and knowledge of the people and issues. It forged new links and built networks – relationships were cemented through participation. People were more engaged locally as a result."***

Learning Themes

We have identified, from our research, a number of lessons from the two schemes which we feel are pertinent to using co-design effectively in the future. They reflect elements of effective co-design which have emerged from reflecting on participants' perspectives, coupled with our own knowledge and experience of community participation. Their inclusion as learning themes should not be construed as implicit criticism of what happened in Peckham; they include positive aspects of the process that we feel are important to recognise and retain as well as areas that we feel could be strengthened in the future.

Clarity is vital and is needed in all aspects of a co-design. The importance of this cannot be overstated. At a starting point, the main elements of the process need to be set out clearly from the beginning. If people are going to be engaged effectively to participate in a community project, they need to know more or less what the process will be like, how they can contribute throughout and what to expect. There was a significant absence of clarity on both schemes and many of the challenges faced in the projects (and the discontent the research has highlighted) stem in part from this lack of clarity around the process.

Clarity is also needed for the architects, and it is important that co-design is included as a key part of the design brief, with clear expectations setting out how the co-design process needs to be managed. The clarity around expectations will then enable the council to hold architects to account in the delivery of the co-design, to make sure what is agreed is then delivered. Architects are not necessarily trained in co-design methodologies and so the council cannot assume that every practice will be able to effectively deliver what is an inherently complex process and additional support for this may be needed.

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Clarity is also needed on how decisions are made, and crucially on what aspects of the design are open for community influence and those that are not. Effective collective decision-making is integral to co-design working smoothly and this is an aspect where both schemes had issues at times.

It is unrealistic to expect a diverse range of community members to arrive at genuine agreement with each other - after all it can be hard enough to reach agreement with family members and close friends. Therefore expecting to achieve consensus on decisions is perhaps more of a hindrance than a help in co-design. A more achievable approach to collaborative decision-making can be the concept of *alignment* – where the question is posed as "can you live with this?" rather than "do you agree with this?". Establishing clear processes for how decisions will be made at the outset is likely to be hugely beneficial and this can on its own contribute to mitigating some of the issues that emerged in the two schemes. The process of development is such that clarity is not always possible from the outset (and indeed even the best laid plans are extremely likely to change) nonetheless a commitment to clarity of intention and process can help establish trust which will enable future changes to be more easily navigated.

There may also be times where it is impossible for the community to reach a place of alignment (an example of this was over whether to keep the arch in Library Square) and in this situation there needs to be a clear process for who will make the decision and how. The lack of clarity at the outset about how to address a situation of deadlock like regarding the Arch, meant that when that decision was eventually made by the council it caused some upset with community members who felt it invalidated the co-design ethos.

> ***"(the) crucial decision to remove Peckham Arch made by councillors outside of the 'co-design' forum renders workshops as meaningless talking shops"***

Related to this is the importance of transparency – if people are not clear (and things are not transparent) then there's a real risk of people 'thinking the worst' which impacts adversely on trust. By being transparent the risk of 'conspiracy theories' emerging is minimised. This also applies to partners (eg Network Rail – who appeared to some to have a different agenda which was at times perhaps less visible).

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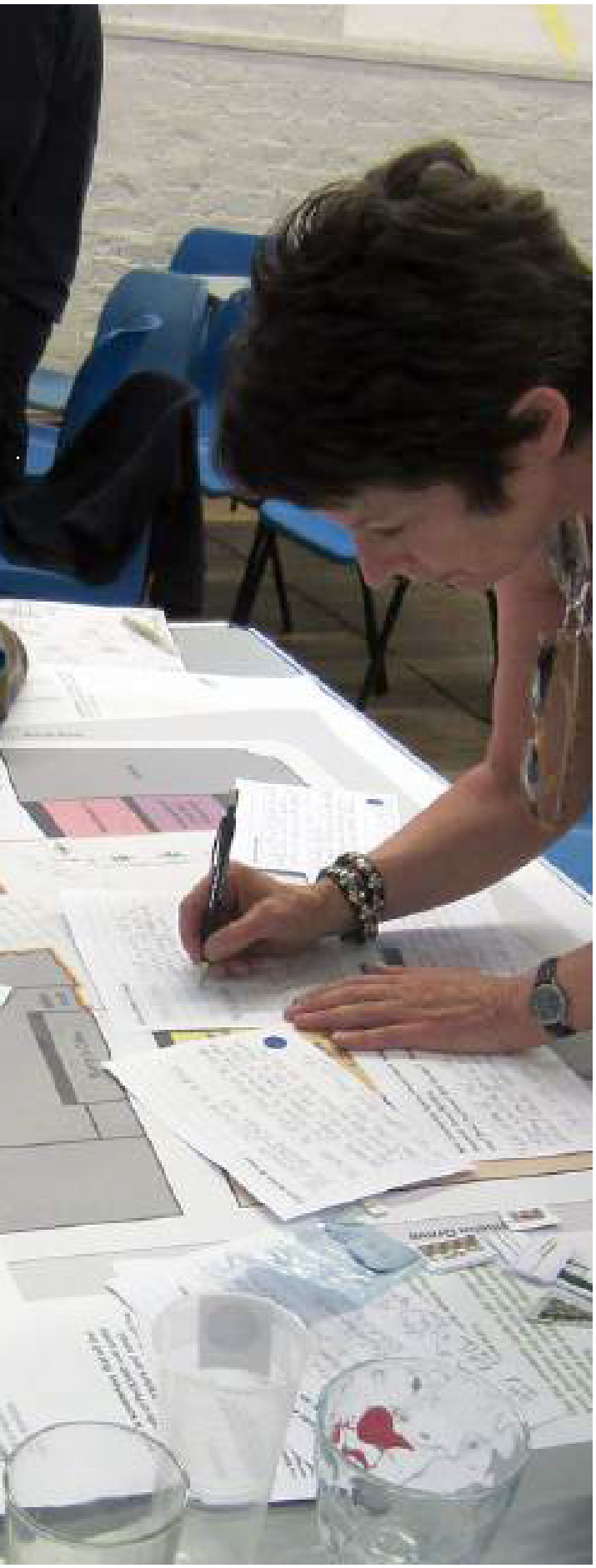

Being clearer about the constraints and limits to the co-design process – identifying the 'red lines' which proposals had to operate within – would also have helped people to understand better what was and wasn't possible.

> ***"My feeling is that everyone was learning about the process and there was not quite the full clarity that would have been helpful on costs, timescales and importantly, the limit of community say over a piece of' privately' owned land."***

Expectations – people's expectations at the outset differed wildly and as a result their views of whether the process met them were also very varied. Some of this stems from a lack of clarity about the process and the (in) effectiveness of communication, but some was the result of differing perceptions and understanding of what co-design itself actually means.

Expectations were not managed as effectively as they might have been and as a result, a significant number of people felt disappointed that the co-design process did not deliver all they had hoped it would. More prominent and continuous reference to the need for prioritisation and compromise through the process could have helped better manage expectations, whilst (if skilfully facilitated) avoiding limiting ambitions and creativity for the potential of the site.

> ***"I think the community needs to be thought of as a client. And their role, responsibility and scope to be very clearly defined and set out, ie manage expectations or you will create fatigue"***

There were also differing expectations related to the high level of built environment professionals in the local area who wanted to contribute their considerable expertise and knowledge to the process. A more effective way of enabling them to contribute their skills and knowledge might have been possible – for example inviting them to a specifically organised event/s where the discussion could be more technical and specialised. Where a local area is known to have a significant level of expertise of this type, this might be a more appropriate way to manage the differing expectations and capabilities that exist, in order to avoid potential conflict emerging.

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> ***"I wanted to be involved because it was a good opportunity to bring my expertise to my local community, but it was very hard to actually get involved. A lot of the activities felt like they were paying lip service to co-design rather than actually inviting input."***

> ***"…designers forget local people have intimate knowledge of the area, but also expertise and skills"***

Understanding of co-design – as mentioned above, people's expectations around co-design varied considerably. Differences in understanding stemmed from the level of knowledge (quite crude through to very sophisticated understanding of co-design as a process) and levels of confidence in the process and in the Council to deliver. We encountered huge differences in opinion at the most basic level of whether either project was in fact a co-design process. These differences in in understanding/definitions of what co-design was, also led to substantially different expectations and assessments of whether the process delivered what it was intended to.

Some people believed co-design meant having a chance to influence specific designs, while others thought it was about contributing ideas at a more strategic level ('vision') whilst others felt it was about the process of doing things together working collaboratively. There is no right or wrong answer here (though some of these expectations are not, in our view, strictly co-design) but what does matter tremendously is clarity – so people know what they are being asked to contribute to and the limits to their involvement and to decision-making. This would mean that everyone can at least get on the same page at the start of the process.

Communication needs to be a continuous, effective, multi-channelled dialogue. Information needs to be provided that is timely, accurate and useful, and packaged in a way that people can easily engage with it. Opinions on the quality and effectiveness of communications throughout the co-design process varied considerably – possibly reflecting differences between the two schemes and variation across the phases of the project. Some stakeholders felt they did receive very good information and were kept in contact well over progress but others felt differently – highlighting different expectations people had (and are likely to have) in any participatory process.

There were wildly differing views of whether community views (ideas and aspirations) had been incorporated into the final designs or not as a result of the co-design process. Some people pointed to numerous examples of how the final proposals had been influenced by the process whilst others expressed huge disappointment that community input had been ignored. What is abundantly clear is that people were not always aware of how community views had contributed to design proposals. More explicit, unambiguous communication spelling out precisely how community views had been incorporated (or considered and rejected) into proposals will help strengthen the co-design process. This would also help reduce the risk of community members feeling they had not been listened to.

> ***"The process was interesting and positive, but I am not sure how much it was taken into account in the final plans."***

Balancing divergent and convergent thinking – there is plenty of scope for creative (divergent) thinking in a co-design process of these types. However, insufficient prior thought was given to how this would feed into the subsequent convergent thinking which was needed to develop viable schemes for submitting a planning application. In particular, the connections or transition between different parts of the process was less clear than it might have been – possibly because the process itself was iterative and not clearly defined at the outset.

As a result the flow from one phase - of idea generating and divergent thinking - to the next phase – of convergent thinking and designing a viable scheme for a planning application - was more stilted and less smooth than it could have been. Connecting these different phases and managing the transition between them would strengthen the approach. This could be achieved through the use of an independent facilitator working throughout the whole process, providing the necessary continuity and with the trust of the community to help 'join the dots'. In the Peckham Station scheme many people commented that the handover between the two sets of architects was not nearly as smooth as it could have been and that this impacted negatively on their experience of the process and the levels of community engagement.

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CO
DESIGN
PECKHAM

Trust – to be effective, co-design requires a high level of trust among participants. It is clear that at some points, and among some parties, a lack of trust significantly hampered the co-design process. Further, for some community members, the gap between their hopes and expectations and the reality they experienced in the co-design, has actually seriously damaged their trust in the council that will impact on future co-design processes and their relationship with the council more generally.

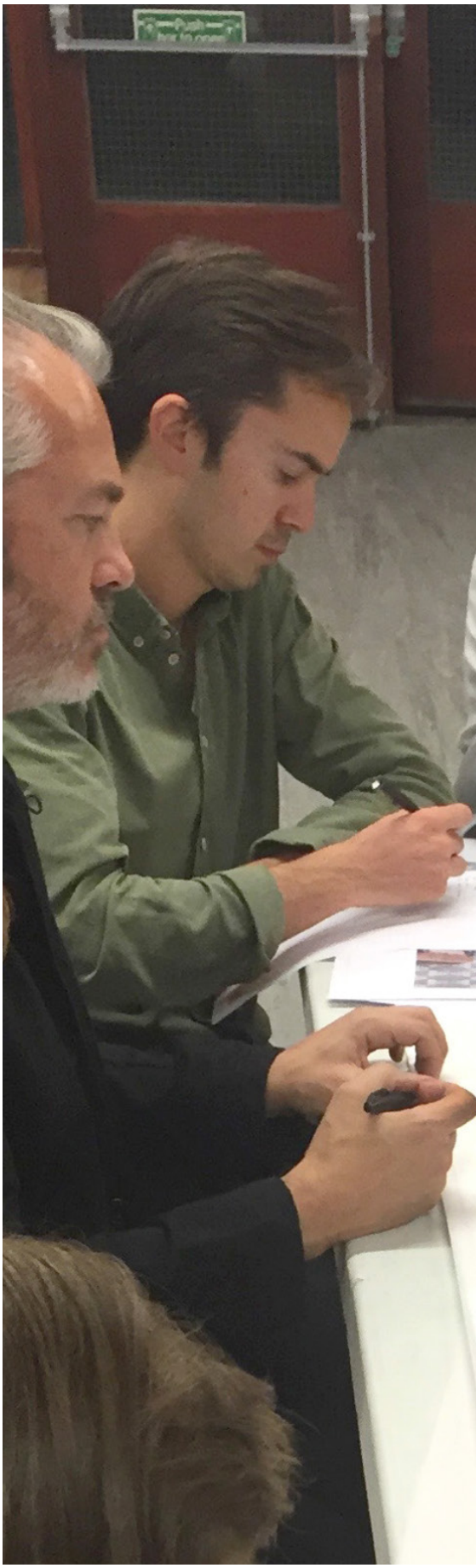
> ***"The process as experienced in the Station Square and Library Square projects has left a lingering feeling of distrust, alienation and scepticism about the council and its' community engagement process. This is deeply damaging to our local democratic fabric."***

The 'co' in co-design could be taken to mean collaborative; and trust and understanding are critical elements in effective collaboration. For this reason, time and emphasis must be put on developing and maintaining trust as it this can be either a key enabler or a major barrier to an effective co-design process.

In neither scheme was enough work done to foster and encourage trust to grow. Trust can take a long time to build and a very short time to damage and an awareness of this dynamic needs to be present in all aspects of co-design planning and delivery.

Leadership – whilst co-design requires inclusive participation and enabling people to have their say in order to influence and inform the outcome, it should not come at the expense of strong and decisive leadership. Decisions ultimately need to be taken and competing interests (including from more or less vocal quarters) need to be balanced in the broader interests of the community. This requires strong leadership. At times it appears as if there may have been some nervousness about showing leadership for fear that this would be inconsistent with co-design. It is not and should not be the case.

Participation – it appears as if there was a feeling with some people that the co-design process was seen as being 'outsourced' and that the council should not therefore fully participate in it. Some people felt that the council staff removed themselves too much from the process to the extent that they were not as involved in the discussions as they could have been and therefore were less informed about the subtleties that lay behind views that were expressed. Whilst seeking support to facilitate a co-design process is an extremely effective approach, the Council must continue to see the importance of engaging fully in the process. Council staff need to participate throughout the process – alongside community members and other stakeholders – and resist any tendency to step aside to leave it to independent consultants.



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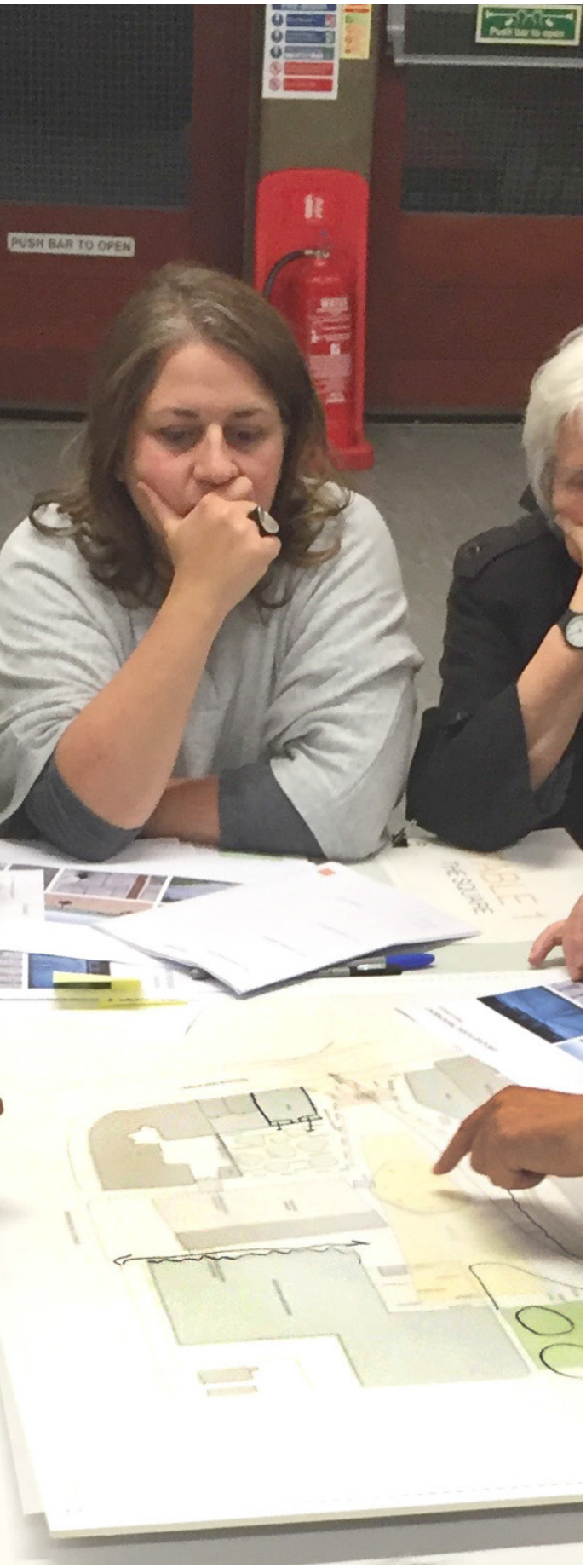

Early Engagement - It is important to begin the engagement (whether for a co-design project or a consultation) at as early a stage as possible in the process. Involving people earlier on increases the chances of identifying potentially controversial issues (that might delay development) and enable the community to exert greater influence over the strategic design of proposals.

> ***"Developers should spend more time and money investing in early engagement to gather ideas and aspirations and work out how development can resonate with local views. "***

For some community members the fact that they were not able to influence the overall strategic approach and scope for the co-design invalidated the integrity of the process as one of genuine co-design. Again this comes back to clarity of expectations and the importance of establishing at the outset what is and what is not within the scope of the co-design.

> ***"The brief itself must be co-designed with the community, otherwise the brief is imposed and the contradiction sets the scene for a mismatch between expectations and a failure to link well enough to local community dynamics and communications."***

Inclusion – ensuring that all sections of the community have the opportunity to participate in a co-design process was universally recognised as important among stakeholders. However, there was also an acknowledgement that some groups had found it more difficult to contribute and feel heard, especially in the large meetings, and neither scheme was as successful as it could have been in engaging the widest diversity of the local community.

Significant effort was made (with varying degrees of success) to engage different sections of the community, but there are opportunities to strengthen this to ensure less vocal or technically proficient people are engaged and supported to participate. The community outreach highlighted the extent of the gap in terms of raising awareness about the co-design, with a vast majority of people we spoke to saying that they did not know that there was a co-design process for either project.

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> ***"…the main inhabitants of Central Peckham – harder to reach because they don't all speak English, they don't necessarily use social media, they may be less conversant with the process of planning and local government, perhaps unwilling to get involved with the authorities either through habit or necessity – were largely neglected in the process. It didn't feel like a coming together of different communities, which is what it needed to be"***

Facilitation – the benefits of a skilled and independent facilitator to a co-design process should not be underestimated and both schemes could have benefited from this. Having an honest broker – similar to the resident advocate model often used in estate regeneration – to work alongside experts and residents to guide and facilitate the process can provide invaluable capacity and capability. This would help the process run more smoothly, help build trust and ensure confidence in the process and enable the Council to actively participate more freely in the co-design.

An independent facilitator can also have the role of making sure that expectations are clearly understood at the outset and to manage any conflict that emerges from the process. Just as an architect would not actually build the building, or make structural engineering assessments, it may be that the specialist skills of community engagement and facilitation need to be brought in to deliver on this aspect of the co-design. It could be that the council ask for specialists in this area to be included in a project team at bid stage or even that the council stipulate that any successful bidder would need to work with a council approved facilitator. Either way could work, but to leave this aspect up to architects to deliver themselves is potentially a risk that is not worth taking as community facilitation is not a core skill that is widespread in the profession. Having said that, in different ways, all the architects were praised for their work on the co-design aspect by some and criticised by others.

> ***"Certain voices are inevitably louder than others in workshops and meetings. This sometimes meant it was a frosty environment."***

> ***"I felt that the architects really listened to people, and took great trouble to prepare presentations that explained all the options and why they were or were not feasible. They were very patient!"***

> ***"The 'professionals' had their view and rubbished any opposing view."***

Pragmatism and flexibility – it is important to strike a balance between defining a clear process from the outset and remaining flexible as things develop. There will always be twists and turns in any effective engagement process and it is important to respond to these in an open-minded way – rather than seeking to 'shut down' anything that does not fit with a pre-determined plan. This is far easier said than done as it is a judgement call to decide when sticking with a specified plan is correct and when it makes more sense to change things. As well as being flexible, it is important to be pragmatic: we are dealing with the 'art of the possible' and must remain focused on realising the end goals, in this instance a viable scheme that can be submitted for planning approval.

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5

Key recommendations – looking to the future

One of the strongest areas of agreement was the hope that Southwark continued to use co-design approaches, learning from and building on, the experience of Peckham. Our hope is that the recommendations contained here can help shape thinking about how best to continue to use co-design while strengthening practice and avoiding some of the pitfalls that can jeopardise an effective co-design process.

Establish a clear framework for co-design in Southwark – This framework could be a practical guide that would set out not only the key approaches but also give a structure for planning and delivery on co-design in Southwark. Ideally it would extend beyond just co-design to include other forms/levels of participation.

A clear framework would help in a variety of ways, including to:

a) Determine whether or not co-design was in fact an optimal method to use in the circumstance of a particular scheme or project.

b) Identify the most appropriate level of participation for a particular project/initiative/development and a checklist or diagnostic for selecting the right approach

c) Set out the expectations and design principles of each participatory approach (eg information, consultation, co-design, community control – broadly following Arnstein's ladder)

d) Establish a broad approach and key elements that could be adapted for any co-design process

In an ideal scenario, the framework itself would be co-produced with community members and other stakeholders.

What's in a name? - Is co-design a helpful term or is it actually a hindrance? Co-design is one of those terms that means something different to each person, and amongst those interviewed views differed significantly on whether or not this had indeed been a co-design process, or whether it was merely extended consultation with a 'co-design makeover'.

Whilst some genuinely felt this was co-design – and delivered what it should have – others believed it was a long way from the true spirit or practice of co-design. Our view is that it was a somewhat variable process that occasionally lacked consistency – going from genuine and successful co-design at points through to fairly unambitious consultation at other parts of the process. The term 'design' itself has specific connotations that led to differing understanding of what the process offered with some people assuming that this meant that they would actually be involved in the architectural design process itself.

It would be worth considering whether the term *co-design* now carries too much baggage to be usefully used and whether there are advantages to side-stepping the negative connotations that have now built up and to instead describe any future collaborative process in a different way.

It is also important to reflect at the outset whether a process will genuinely be co-design before describing it as such. Not everything has to be co-designed and indeed there are times when it would be inappropriate to do so (see Proportionality below). But when describing something as co-design - and in view of the learning from the experience of these projects - it is important to be certain that it truly is co-design that is being used.

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Co-design is a continuum - The continuum of co-design runs from tokenistic, through to effective and empowering and it is important that throughout the process an awareness of this dynamic is maintained. It is not enough to say you are doing a co-design process like it is a single defined process (like a planning application). Rather co-design is fluid and needs tending and nurturing as well as a clear commitment to try to do effective and empowering co-design. If there is not the resource (time/money/skills) to realistically do effective co-design then perhaps it is better to not do it at all and just concentrate on effective engagement around a planning process. To do poor co-design not only damages the individual scheme integrity but it destroys trust in the council and in the concept of co-design, and that has repercussions far beyond the individual scheme.

Co-design is not necessarily suited to all circumstances and the type of framework mentioned above could help the council to identify which types of schemes to deploy it (and at what scale) and where to adopt more appropriate forms of active participation and consultation.

Proportionality – co-design needs to be proportionate – useful some of the time, but not always, and if done it has to be delivered to a high standard. People are generally far more willing to accept more limited engagement done well than to be offered something more ambitious only to find it doesn't live up to their expectations. If it comes down to a stark choice between under-promising and over delivering or over-promising and under-delivering (and in practice it is often not that simple!) then it's generally better to exceed more limited expectations. That should not be confused with being ambitious – which is to be encouraged. But it is incredibly important to follow through on what's been promised.

Sufficient Resource - Effective co-design can be resource intensive – both in terms of budget but also in demands made on the time of council staff, architects and community members, and it is vital that there is sufficient resource to be able to deliver an effective process. Whilst we remain convinced that it ultimately delivers significant return on investment, it is important to acknowledge the upfront investment it requires. It also can't be rushed and there needs to be sufficient time in the schedule to work at the speed of the community. Early engagement before appointing architects, would mean that the community could be involved in the commissioning process, but this adds further to the time needed and it opens the question of who would be doing the early engagement if it is before an architect team is contracted to the scheme. Additional resource needs could include venues, support for community dialogue, engagement specialists, translators, digital space etc. There is no way to do effective co-design on the cheap, and in fact any attempt to do so significantly increases risk of having unwanted negative impact from the process.

Asset based approach - Understanding and harnessing existing local knowledge and assets can help not only increase engagement and reach through using existing networks, but also improve communications and project delivery. An asset – or strength - based approach seeks to focus on the available or latent assets (people, skills, knowledge, networks and aspirations) in a community, recognising the positives, rather than focussing heavily on problems. There are very well established community organisations in Peckham and individuals with substantial experience and more could be done to make sure that any further co-design projects recognise and mobilise these assets effectively from the outset.

An example of how an asset-based approach could have been better employed would be the Southwark Young Advisors. This is a group of young people from the community who are trained and paid to give their views as consultants. Young people were not significant participants in the more formal meetings and deliberative parts of the co-design processes but by engaging the services of the Southwark Young Advisors in future co-design projects it would be possible to not only have a clear voice of youth in the process but to use a resource that the council has paid for and established for just this type of situation.

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Ensure training and support for Council officers is made available – where officers (and Members) are tasked with designing and leading co-design processes (and potentially other types of non traditional engagement) access to appropriate support and guidance is important. Co-design is different to consultation and it's important to recognise the difference. It requires a different set of skills to do it successfully and these aren't necessarily capabilities that have traditionally been needed by (or present in) the Council. Support might include training courses, signposting to online materials and ways of sharing knowledge within/across the organisation. Support should be practical (whilst ensuring officers have sufficient knowledge of underlying theory/principles) to enable easy application to real-life working; flexible and ongoing.

Training and support could also be usefully made available to community members, architects and other stakeholders where it is identified as appropriate to do so, enabling them to better engage and participate effectively in the process.

Establish links to other council strategies and services - The recent work with the VCS community to develop a strategy for how the council will collaborate with the not-for-profit sector has obvious links to the co-design themes and the proposed framework mentioned above. Ensuring that connections to other current and existing council collaborative processes are made and developed will enable future co-design processes to capitalise on the work in other directorates beyond regeneration. Co-design, as a process, has the potential to contribute to broader positive outcomes on health and well-being, economic development and community cohesion (to name just a few). Understanding and quantifying these links – whilst not without challenge – will help to maximise the impact of resources expended and provide a strong business case for co-design in delivering improved outcomes.

Independent facilitation – the use of a skilled and experienced facilitator would have helped provide continuity, and clarity – particularly with different professionals and agencies being engaged to deliver different elements of the process. It would also help to gain (and retain/rebuild) the trust of the community, in the process and in seeing that they had an advocate 'within' who could influence the process on everyone's behalf. The facilitator would need to be outcome focused and tasked with ensuring the process enabled all parties to participate and to encourage and remind all participants of their roles and responsibilities.

Having an independent facilitator would also enable council staff and architects (in particular) to be fully a part of the process as 'participants' rather than being pulled between the (potentially conflicting) roles of facilitators, leaders and participants/stakeholders. Co-design processes will often involve the need to manage divergent perspectives and needs and to bring people together behind a common goal or vision. A skilled facilitator, with the clear aim of reaching alignment, can be invaluable in achieving this as well as in managing conflict when it does emerge.

Continue the process of evaluation and reflection - It cannot be expected that, even with a clear framework, co-design will instantly prove to be effective for all parties. For this reason it would be a good idea to continue the process of review and reflection and to embed this in any upcoming co-design processes so that learning could be captured at the time (rather than primarily after the event as happened in this case). This would allow changes to be made to the co-design process while it is happening, if was of making it more effective are identified. This would include capturing data about participants and their perceptions of the different elements in the process and their experience of it. This type of commitment to learning and development can also help to build trust, manage expectations and develop a collective sense of shared purpose.

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6

Conclusion

In conclusion the authors would like to reflect that what the council attempted to achieve in these schemes is inherently complex and 'messy'. There are reasons why there are few really successful examples of co-design in large scale urban regeneration, and while part of this is because it is a relatively new approach, it is also a fact that many organisations and authorities are scared to take the risk to genuinely try to attempt it. So LB Southwark needs to be applauded for its boldness in initiating two significant co-design processes and for the desire to capture learning in this review process in order to better understand how it went and what could be done differently in the future.

It is also important to acknowledge that as a new approach, and one which both the community and the council had to adjust to and learn as they went along, it was inevitable that it would not be without challenge along the way. The experience of adopting co-design in these two developments should build knowledge and expertise that can make things easier and smoother in future.

Co-design will never be a neat and tidy linear process and any attempt to turn it into a tick-box exercise adopting a 'cookie cutter methodology' is bound to fail. To do so would miss the true essence and potential of co-design which is that it must be organic, iterative and reflective of the wonderfully diverse communities which are a tremendous strength of places like Southwark. It could be helpful to consider that effective co-design is a cha-ordic process (a mixture of chaos and order) where there can be clarity of structure, expectations and approach and yet the flexibility to be inventive and responsive. No two co-design processes will be the same although learning and core principles can be consistent.

It will always be possible (if not ever easy) for people to criticise co-design projects; both from those who do not believe in co-design and from those who are passionate supporters of co-design for whom there can never be enough "co". We hope that the criticism can be seen as an inevitable part of the learning process that comes from trying to deliver complex processes in diverse communities.

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The reflections from the architects, was that while co-design was a lot of work (and in all cases more work than they had anticipated) it was worth it, and they all valued the experience. There are considerable potential benefits and added value to be derived from encouraging co-design that could have impact far beyond an individual scheme by influencing behaviour among built environment professionals and communities. Whilst this goes beyond the scope of this review, the lessons from it to inform this broader agenda are worth recognition and further consideration.

Despite wildly varying views on the extent to which community views had been incorporated into the final proposals, a considerable number of people (including community members, council staff and architects) felt that the design proposals had been improved as a result of the co-design process, even if only in small areas. In the online survey a clear majority of people said they felt there had been some positive improvement because of the co-design process.

> ***"It's DEFINITELY so much better than it might have been ☺ That doesn't mean it couldn't have been – oh – so much better still!"***

We strongly encourage and hope that LB Southwark continues to explore how it is possible to include communities at depth in design processes, as we believe that it has the potential to not only create better places but to have a wide range of other positive impacts – for the individuals involved and for the wider community.

> ***"I would do it again and again and again. It's a far better way of getting some thoughts together from the community."***

> ***"Any co-design process is imperfect – it's how you manage the bumps along the way and respond to them in a flexible and open way."***

Finally, the fact that something is now happening is also important to acknowledge. Nothing had happened on these sites and that was a source of frustration to the community, the council and the GLA. While the process may not have been perfect, the fact that development is now proceeding is a major step forward. The risk of the whole development being shelved was real and it was in no small part down to the willingness of community members and the council to engage with the process that brought viable proposals forward.