



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Young people and the built environment

Tuesday 28 April 2026

11 am

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Members present: Lord Gascoigne (The Chair); Baroness Andrews; Lord Bailey of Paddington; Lord Bassam of Brighton; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe; Viscount Hanworth; Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer; Lord Porter of Spalding; Lord Ravensdale; Viscount Younger of Leckie.

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 21 – 32

Witnesses

I: Sara Candiracci, Associate Director, Arup; James Delaney, Founder, BlockWorks; Huan Rimington, Founder, Build Up Foundation; Neal Shasore, Founder, School of Building CIC.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Sara Candiracci, James Delaney, Huan Rimington and Neal Shasore.

Q21 The Chair: Good morning and welcome back to the House of Lords Built Environment Select Committee. Sadly, this session brings to an end our short inquiry into the role of younger people in the built environment. We have had some excellent sessions, and today we will continue with that with the star witnesses who we have before us to look at cultivating and growing younger people's interest in the built environment, mainly through play but also through gaming as well.

We have four great witnesses, which I think is a record number, so it is a very heavy session. We have Sara Candiracci, an associate director at Arup; James Delaney who is the founder of BlockWorks; Huan Rimington, founder of the Build Up Foundation; and Dr Neal Shasore, who is a founder at the School of Building. Thank you all so much for coming before us. This is something that I know you care about passionately and that we are very interested in. There is a very exciting session ahead of us. With that, I will start the questions with Viscount Younger.

Q22 Viscount Younger of Leckie: I thought I would dive straight into looking at the level of interest in the built environment among children. Can you tell us what you think the level of interest and understanding is?

We heard an interesting presentation on Minecraft. It would be interesting to know from where young people derive their interest. It could be with video games, but I am particularly interested to know where else their interest comes from. Could it be from their parents, teachers and career services? Those are some general questions. I wonder whether we might start with Sara first.

Sara Candiracci: Thank you very much for the invite. It is a big honour to be here.

There is a lot of interest in the built environment from young people and children. Based on my experience, they are curious the moment that they are given the opportunity to be involved in decisions related to the place where they live. I have been conducting and designing several workshops with children and young people from across the globe, from Italy to the UK, Brazil and South Africa. So I have been engaging many children and youths over the years to inform a master plan, undertake an assessment and understand the criticalities, challenges and opportunities where they live. When they are asked what they like or dislike about the place where they live, they are quite clear. When you ask them what they need or what their desires are, they do not struggle to answer. They are very able to identify where they like to meet with their friends, where there are scary areas, and the spots where they feel joy or a bit bored. So they show interest.

It is also interesting, when you engage with them, to see how they perceive risks in their environment in a different way to their parents, caregivers or adults. What their parents think is dangerous or messy is,

for them, actually a space for socialising, exploration and adventure. Their point of view is very interesting. So the short answer is yes, they are very interested.

But we need to give them the opportunity to be involved in a meaningful way in decision-making and planning decisions, depending on their age group, because you can engage children from three or four years old up to 18 or 19 years old. Depending on their age group, you need to be able to develop and tailor methodologies and tools so that you can talk about the same topic with them, which might be decarbonisation, climate resilience or social value, and cover the same topics about their built environment. But of course you need to understand what the best way to communicate with them is.

For instance, with small kids of four years old, we have been running workshops in Italy and the UK where we use storytelling, drawing or happy/sad mapping. The moment that you engage with 12 or 13 year-old preteens, say, you use Lego or "Minecraft" to engage with them. You need to talk the language in many cases. Digital is more like a physically constructed language. With teenagers you can have more sophisticated conversations about justice or transport at the beginning, but they are more reluctant to speak out because they feel a bit ashamed in front of their peers. So it is very important to be able to create a space that is safe for them to express what they like, what they do not like and what they feel, and be humble enough to give away some of our power as planners and decision-makers and accept the fact that they might have different opinions, views or ideas that can in many cases be much better than ours.

I will stop there, but I am happy to give more detail.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: Thank you very much. Let us go to Neal now and then work our way back to James.

Neal Shasore: Thank you. I think there is a high level of interest in the built environment, and there is a huge number of initiatives, programmes and organisations that have been set up to engage them. At the moment, they struggle financially because of the way that funding works, especially in the third sector. But the bigger issue is that we do not have any infrastructure to gather and understand data on engagement. It seems to me that without creating a hugely onerous additional regulatory framework, there are none the less certain things that we can do, with very little effort, to ensure that some meaningful and longitudinal data around youth and children's engagement in the built environment is monitored in some meaningful way.

Huan Rimington: Simple answer: yes. I suggest we rephrase the question: why is the built environment sector not interested in young people? Our experience of working with young people—within Build Up we have worked with 2,500 young people over 10 years—is that they care strongly about the world around them. They have a strong sense of fear and anxiety about the rapid changes which are happening to them,

not by them. They feel ignored, sidelined and neglected. In this context of rapid regeneration and the insecure rental sector, young people feel precarious, and they are concerned. What makes it worse is that they cannot see or understand how these changes happen. The sector is completely opaque to young people. It is not clear who has power, who the actors are and how young people are able to influence it. How can they do something about the world around them?

If we want them to be part of the sector, it is a very difficult environment to start off with: why would you join a club that does not invite you? When we speak to young people about their built environment, they talk about a lack of youth spaces and being forced out of places. They speak about a lack of gathering spaces, which has an adverse impact on their mental health and affects their ability to form a community. They say, "If we want to grow up into adults with civic roles and civic responsibility, how can we do that without roles and a say in the communities that we exist in now?"

Viscount Younger of Leckie: That is great. Can I just pick up those points before we come to James? I would be particularly interested, James, in understanding how you see the role of parents and teachers, because there is so much discussion about the role of phones taking over children. We spoke about "Minecraft" but I think this balance is important, so I would love you to put me right in terms of where the interest is derived from.

James Delaney: It is a difficult question. Digital environments and games are a strong background to young people's interest in this space, but also physical toys and something like Lego. I played Lego before I studied architecture; everyone I studied architecture with played Lego. Now it might be more moving into the digital space, but physical play is still very important. Talking to the risk of screens, I would say that it is a complicated debate. In general, screen time is not necessarily good or bad—it is just screen time. That is something we could get into later, but I think it is more about the quality of that time spent on screens rather than the quantity of it. We can talk about that later.

On young people's attitudes to the built environment, if you are running participatory workshops, you get kids who are engaged. I think there is a big section of the population who are just not interested and not engaged at all, and who are not going to come to those sorts of workshops in the first place. That probably derives from them feeling that they have no stake in it. They see the built environment as a static thing that they have no hope of changing. We see that once they attend workshops like the one Sara was describing, it completely changes their view of what the built environment is and what their place is within that.

Q23 **Lord Cameron of Dillington:** I have two questions. The first one, to be very provocative, is: why should we encourage children and young people to care about the built environment? After all, are they going to add anything that an experienced, empathetic architect, planner or designer cannot already contribute? What is the benefit of bringing young children

into this agenda?

Huan Rimington: I will start with the phrase “Nothing about us without us”. Young people have experiences of themselves and of their communities that do not exist in this room. Those young people should be making decisions, and they can make the best decisions for their communities that a supportive architect, planner or politician cannot make on their behalf.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Very good; very precise. Thank you very much. Neal, how about you?

Neal Shasore: I think part of the challenge that we have is that the language that we use around the built environment and its cognate subsectors is inconsistent. Certainly, one of the things that I have been thinking a lot about is a place literacy framework that establishes some way for a whole variety of stakeholders who might otherwise be marginalised from the processes that produce the built environment to participate in it at a level that they are comfortable with. But otherwise, I strongly agree with Huan’s diagnosis.

We also know that the thing with children and young people is that they get older and become adults, therefore to start to cultivate not only place literacy but a kind of what I would call a spatial citizenship, in which we have more active participation in these processes and a greater understanding of agency, would be a good thing in the long term for all of us.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Sara, what about you? Would Arup ever employ a team of youths to design some of your buildings?

Sara Candiracci: Adding to what was just said, which I fully agree with, it is important to engage and to encourage children and youth to care about the built environment. First of all, it is their right. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly says that children have a right to be heard on all matters that affect them. That is the first thing. Then we need to empower them and to create a sense of citizenship and responsibility from an early age. We do not have to wait until they turn 18 to become active citizens. That is also very important, as Huan just said.

The other critical thing is that only by engaging with them do you contribute to create a sense of care and connection with the environment where they grow up. The built environment—and the natural environment—is like the third teacher of children: there are the parents, the school and then there is the environment. Depending on the type of environment where you grow up, you can collect different types of experiences, memories and trauma as well, so it is very important that children have a role to play in shaping the environment where they grow up, and this helps to create a connection. I love this quote by David Attenborough, who says that only people who experience the nature of the environment can care about it. You need to give children, in a very

practical way, the opportunity to be involved in designing and activating the spaces where they live, because you really create a connection with the built environment and at the same time with the community of their neighbourhood. That is the main reason I really push forward always to make sure that children are involved in the process.

James Delaney: Just to reinforce what everyone else has said, I think the main thing is that children will inherit the design decisions we are making today, so we have a moral imperative to include them. They will be the inheritors of what we are designing, so it is a bit mad not to include them in the process. We know that when we do, they become better citizens; they become stewards of those spaces and become more engaged.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: I will move on to my next question, which I suppose follows out of the answers you have already given me. What is so special about the built environment? I get the impression that children are really interested in this agenda—which is a sort of political agenda in a way—more than any other political theme that they might follow, and I just do not know quite why that should be. Is it just because it is local and very relevant to them, or is there a particular thing about the built environment that attracts them? Sara, perhaps you could go first.

Sara Candiracci: Okay. The built environment is special. It is not only political but pragmatic, because it is all around us. We grow up in different environments and, as I said before, I think the environment is our teacher. From when we are small—depending on the type of connection and interaction we have with the spaces where we live and the people living there—we are shaping our brain, our physical behaviours and our emotions. This is an important element: we live in a place and we want to contribute somehow to make the place adapted to our needs.

At the same time, if as a child you contribute to the design of a street or a play space, and then you see it built, there is a very pragmatic, tangible result; it is not just theoretical. Kids are not interested in politics, of course; they just want to be heard. They want to express their ideas. Even if they are crazy ideas, they are great ideas in many cases.

The moment we are able, as planners and designers, as decision-makers, to translate these ideas into practical interventions, we are showing kids that we care about them, that we are really listening to them, and that built environment then becomes really tangible. This is a way to empower them, to give them a role in society that they deserve.

I think we underestimate the power of kids and their capacity to decide for themselves and for the community where they live. Culturally, we think that engaging with them is something nice to have, rather than something critical that we should take seriously as part of our decision-making and planning processes.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Thank you. James, is this interest

provoked entirely by good marketing by “Minecraft”, or is there something else inherent in the agenda that attracts the youth of today?

James Delaney: I think it is something inherent in children, which is that they play, and so much of that play is creative: it is building and design, whether you term it as that or not. Most kids make things as part of their childhood, and we know that how you play—the quality, quantity and type of play—has a massive impact on your interests and your future career.

So much play in this country and around the world is physical; it is construction-based, whether it is Lego or Meccano or whatever. I think we underestimate the value of that. What the built environment needs to do is tap into that and not just approach people just before they go to university saying, “Oh, have you thought about architecture?” No, when they are playing with Lego or playing with “Minecraft” at that young age, draw the lines between that sector and that form of play.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Do you want to add to this, Huan?

Huan Rimington: It is important. The reason young people are involved is the same reason why we are all in this room. It is important and has a huge effect on the world around them; that is why they care about it. It is also tangible. As others were mentioning, young people can specifically and easily engage with what this thing is and what the change is.

Young people spend more time in public spaces than anyone else. They know how the built environment works. They are experts in that world, much more than architects, much more than adults, much more than people who operate in different spaces. This thing is already so close to them. By spending that time, they are already interested, they are already engaged, and they can see how it can be changed. It is right here. It is not like how it happens does not happen elsewhere. It is very real, and that is worth engaging.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Neal, would you like to add anything?

Neal Shasore: I would just add that, for me, it is much more about place than it is about “the built environment”, as a mouthful, being especially appealing to anybody. People in the built environment sector, the construction industry, the real estate sector, need to move to a place where it is clear that its higher purpose is the sustaining and enriching of places, not just construction for the hell of it and the built environment as part of that. Just as justice is, at least in theory, the higher purpose of the law and the judicial system, and health is the higher purpose of medicine, pharmacology and all the rest of it, so place is why we have a built environment sector. It is, in that sense, serving the creation and sustaining of places.

The Chair: Thank you. We will go online to Baroness Andrews next.

Q24 **Baroness Andrews:** My question is about play, learning and the integration and involvement of young people. However, I think a lot of

what you said has overtaken this question, especially the definition that we heard from James about play, which was terrific, but every one of you has addressed the issue in different ways. I think that Neal's argument for place literacy and the emphasis on place as the vocabulary of engaging young people is vital and brings this to life in a way that nothing else does: "built environment" is a meaningless expression.

I will get to my question, but I want to try to relate to all these things. I note what Huan has just said about the precariousness of children's lives and the need to engage them in something tangible, so that they see an outcome which they can identify and belong with. What if we put all this together and ask the question, how can in-school and after-school experiences be made more responsive to these ideas? Do any of you have any solutions, other than putting something else into the curriculum, which we know is really difficult?

Sara, your playful cities concept is, of course, an external visualisation of what is possible. Can any of this be done in learning settings, either in the school day or outside the school day?

The Chair: Who would you like to go to first? Who is your first victim?

Baroness Andrews: I would like to start with Neal.

Neal Shasore: Thank you. My answer is, emphatically, yes. There are lots of people with quite nicely resolved ideas about how that would happen. I think you spoke to the Built Environment Schools Trust, and to the inimitable Mr Pinder.

One of the models that I have tested is the project qualification, the PQ. This is best known through the lens of the extended project qualification, EPQ, which is a level 3 A-level, but there is also the higher project qualification, HPQ, and the FPQ, foundational project qualification, at level 1. Those models work really well, because they cultivate a sense of autonomously driven or, to a degree, independent learning, but you can give it a very nice framework. When I was running an architecture school, we built an EPQ and HPQ programme. In the case of the EPQ, we were told that, while we might recruit some young people, we would probably lose about half of them, as it is a 100-hour programme and it goes from November to May.

In the first year of running that programme, we had extraordinary retention, and 70% of the students who participated got an A or A* in their PQ. That was really extraordinary, and that was working with schools in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Islington: we recruited, as much as we could, from schools with a high proportion of students on free school meals. So, I think there is a lot to be said for the PQ.

I would add, anecdotally, that I have seen the ways in which, in some cases, behaviour and imagination are marshalled in the school environment. I recognise that there are all sorts of reasons why that might happen in, for example, a school in Hackney. However, one thing that works in the project qualification is that sense of freedom, and the

freedom to imagine is also underpinned by a set of core skills—in this case, the fundamentals of architectural projection in plan section and elevation.

Baroness Andrews: My question for Huan is: given your engagement on the ground in the real space, whether play spaces or non-play spaces, can you relate what you do to what Neal has just said? Can you learn from each other in terms of playfulness, integrating learning and career choices?

Huan Rimington: Yes, fundamentally. When young people come to us, they have already been through the school system. They have years of being taught in a specific way. Often, that is years of being told they are crap at doing something—they are not good, they are not clever, they cannot do well—and then they come to us and can learn in a different way. That is often through learning practically, learning through doing, in a real context: for example, onsite using tools. Those young people can come into their own. For some parts of the built environment sector, a big issue is that the skills that you need to go into it are not valued, and not taught in school. Young people have no experiences of them until they do something outside the school setting. There are a huge number of examples of projects in the extracurricular space, in an environment where the school is not providing these experiences, that have stepped in and are providing a wealth of creative, vocational and practical skills and experiences that widen young people's understanding of who they can be and what they can do, whether in the built environment or another sector. Those organisations are the people we work with, because they are doing that already. They are providing something that has been squeezed out of schools.

Baroness Andrews: James, do you go into the extracurricular space?

James Delaney: We do. Sometimes we are in school, sometimes we are out of schools. There are two points here. One is that most education systems are built around periods of learning and periods of play, and the implication of that is that play is not valuable—play is what you do between the learning, between the lessons. We need to address that to get the true value of play.

Something that Ken Robinson says is that so many education systems are basically about unlearning creativity. The older kids get, the more time they spend in schools, the less creative they are. What the built environment badly needs is a creative, playful approach to serious issues. I do not have specific solutions for that, but that is where we need to go.

Baroness Andrews: It is a pedagogic issue, isn't it? Basically, it is a question of how and where we learn and how we relate all these things to each other. What about you, Sara? Can you solve this problem?

Sara Candiracci: I wish. This problem needs to be addressed from different points of view; one person or institution cannot solve it. As has just been said, play is a serious business but is still considered silly,

something that children do when they get bored, so it is not taken into account in a serious way. However, it is extremely important because, through play, children develop, and adults at different ages develop different skills—physical, cognitive, creative, relational and social. Play is extremely important, yet it is not taken seriously.

There is what we call a play crisis. The data are quite alarming regarding the decline of outdoor play for children, which has declined by 80% over the past 50 years. School definitely has a role to play here. Over recent decades, schools have focused a lot on academic rigour, delivering high marks and being competitive. That prepares children to become professionals but forgets, as James said, what creativity is. The more you study, the more you get disconnected from your inner creativity, but when you are a child, it is your entire world.

The methodology of learning through play is used in different curricula. For instance, the Lego Foundation works a lot with schools to embed learning through play in their curricula so that play becomes part of the learning process and is not, as James said, just something that you do in between, when you get bored.

At the same time, if you want to address the play crisis, it is important to work at other levels too. At home, for example, it is important to support parents or caregivers, because they can be too busy. Children say that they want to play more with their parents, but their parents are very busy, and indeed kids are busy because they have too many additional extracurricular activities that do not allow them to get bored and then become creative.

Then of course you need to work in this space at the political level. It is a multidimensional problem that is the result of different issues. In order to address play and support it in our life, it is important that we bring together different expertise, as you are doing now, working and discussing the topic with different people from different backgrounds. That is the way to go in order to understand what we can do.

Q25 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** We have talked about schools and the curriculum, and I am interested to know how we could go beyond that. What networks would you use to engage young people? In the old days, we might have talked of youth clubs, although there are fewer and fewer of those. What networks or places can you use to engage young people? At the moment, how do you make sure that it is just not the self-selecting few young people who are engaging with you? Obviously, some will be very keen to come forward, express their opinions and get engaged with it, but presumably you want as many as possible in that area to be engaged.

Huan Rimington: We approach this by working with a combination of local partners, community organisations and residents, and people who already have trusted relationships with young people. That works well to support a wide range of young people to get involved, by those organisations supporting young people who might not get involved

otherwise to join an activity. In a more practical way, the way we work as an organisation is that we have open access to recruitment, so people can join at any point during a project. Young people see what is happening in a public space and come and sign up. Those young people are probably not going to enrol two weeks in advance, or four months in advance, but when they see a change happening, when they see their peers and friends being involved, they get involved later.

To give you a more expansive answer beyond Build Up, often the challenge with working with young people is that, while we put the solution wholly in the youth sector or youth teams, other parts of local government or the state relating to young people have a much bigger effect on their lives. There is no statutory duty or responsibility to consult young people as part of planning, so that never happens. If that were to change, there would immediately be far more conversations between young people. They might not be amazing, but you would have a system where young people were actually being spoken to and there was a culture and a practice within the different departments that affect young people's lives of engaging with young people.

For us as an organisation to be able to engage with young people, we need to get the departments that do not already work for young people on board—planning, highways, places, communities and the police. It is them that we work with, and it is them that we try to shift. We try to support them and work with them to listen to young people and engage with them on the decisions that affect them.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: I will open this question up to the others. I will say that there is a statutory obligation to consult adults, but a lot of adults do not feel that they are consulted about planning either.

Neal Shasore: That is partly because we do not have a common language or framework for talking about place. Not everyone needs to be a built environment professional and have that professional language, but they need to be able to articulate what they feel about their places and spaces. If there were a statutory obligation to consult with children and young people, and I am wholeheartedly for that, some care might be taken, to go back to my first response, to create a dynamic database of that engagement and its quality.

I feel that the Public Services (Social Value) Act and other planning and procurement levers, which I will perhaps come on to in more detail later, are great, but they have created sub-industries that are very hard for SMEs and micros to operate in. They are all doing amazing work but, as I say, the funding model is tricky.

Obviously, there are digital platforms that help with significant reach. We have heard about Block by Block, but we also built a program on the Unifrog platform that now reaches whatever percentage it is of children in schools. But again, these scalable solutions are great as long as they are encouraging a deep engagement with real-world places.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: We had some evidence last week about the social value framework and how it really undervalued young people's engagement—it was quite stunningly undervalued.

James Delaney: As Neal said, a lot of the digital tools go for scale. But from what I have seen, the engagement is quite shallow. At the moment, the problem is that you can run a workshop with people on the ground and reach a small number of people and have great, deep engagement, or you go digital and wide but it is a bit shallow. I do not have an answer, but I think that digital tools can reach some very hard-to-engage audiences, particularly young people, but it needs to be done very carefully and in a way that maintains the quality of that engagement.

The kids are out there—they are already on these platforms. Again, with "Minecraft" there is a community group called BuildTheEarth that is literally building the entire world in "Minecraft" at 1:1 scale. The London group has spent 15,000 hours and has built this building. There are hundreds of them and they do not see themselves as architects or builders; they are just gamers having fun. We need to tap into those kinds of people and speak the language that they are already talking.

Sara Candiracci: It depends on the nature of the projects and whether it is a master plan or regeneration plan or design for a building. When we engage with children or young people, we normally do it through local authorities and schools. Then, of course, there is also the involvement of parents and caregivers through local partners. That is the usual way of engaging with them. But unfortunately, it is still more extraordinary than ordinary. I wish I could say that we engage with children or young people in all the projects that we do, but unfortunately that it is not the case, because it is not part of a process that is regulated by law.

We try as much as possible to push clients and also colleagues within Arup to make sure that children and youths are involved in the planning process. Sometimes we succeed and other times we do not, but that is the beauty of the challenge that we are facing. It must be really intentional and, to do that, the barriers are, as was mentioned, a regulatory challenge because it is not mandatory by law. The law, and I am not talking only about UK law, says that you should ensure that communities are involved, but it does not specify the age. Normally, the easier way is to engage only with adults, because to engage with children and youth you need to be prepared. You cannot go there and have a boring consultation as you can have with adults; you need to really engage with them if you want their attention and their feedback. If you want them to be really engaged throughout the process, it has to be playful, creative and engaging as a process, and to do that takes time and money, which in many cases is unfortunately not included in the project budget, so it is extra work that we have to do.

On the tools that we use, it is a mix of tools. Normally, we try to be more hands-on: so, really building, using your hands to draw, build and collage. We use a lot of photographs and mapping as well, using the photos they take and mapping them against the emotions that they feel

in relation to that photo and their built environment. Depending on the project, we shape and adapt the tools based on what we want to get out of the consultation.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: My final question: with our other hat on, this committee is conducting an inquiry into new towns. Do you think that young people will be more excited and engaged with planning a new community that will relate to them?

Neal Shasore: I am not sure I would draw such a distinction, because it is fundamentally the same thing whether you are regenerating or redeveloping or building a new place. Ultimately, you are trying to sustain community. They have different challenges in different ways. The thing with the new towns movement and its long history is a particular political inflection to community and to youth, which is the idea of centring those activities in particular typologies, those being a youth centre or a community centre, and it might be wise to understand the histories of those typologies and, as it were, third-sector services, to hopefully distribute them a little bit more.

Huan Rimington: We recently discussed this issue with our young people and they felt that young people's needs are very much put as secondary to the need for new housing in that, when new housing was created, third spaces where people can spend time outside homes is very much forgotten and neglected. So, from their perspective, they definitely want to be involved and feel that young people's spaces should be included and thought about as part of creating housing, which in their view does not happen currently.

James Delaney: When we have run participatory design projects, if it is a blank canvas, it is very difficult. It is almost like there are too many options and their creativity goes wild. We have seen better results where there is already something to work with and it is about modifying, updating and improving that. I guess it depends on the age group as well, but for a lot of kids, "We're building a new town; what do you think?" is too broad.

Sara Candiracci: I fully agree. It is very important first of all to make them understand the timeline for when this new town will be built, so that they are aware that, actually, it is not a place where they will move tomorrow but maybe a place where they are going to live with their kids in the future or alone. It is very important to make them understand the process, because they want to understand that.

As James said, you cannot just have a white canvas. It really depends on the age group. If you engage with 18 year-olds, you can create a master plan with them. You can give them the conceptual design and then build the master plan with them. But if you engage with younger kids, it is good to give them something to work around, such as designing a square or waterfront or something concrete that resonates with them. That is very important. Also, at the same time, we have to make sure that their inputs are taken on board, because there is nothing worse than engaging

with people—children in particular—and getting their ideas and inputs but then they are all discarded. That is like inviting someone for dinner and asking, “Where do you want to go?” and they say, “I want to go to this place,” and then you say, “No, let’s go somewhere else”. It is kind of the same thing, right? If you ask my opinion, it means that my opinion matters to you. Then, if I give you my opinion and you discard it, it means that you were just doing it because—well, I do not know. It is very important to value and respect what kids say. It does not matter how old they are, it is very important that at least some of their ideas are taken on board in a serious way.

Neal Shasore: Can I add to my response? One runs the risk of rhetorically treating children and young people as a homogenous unit. Obviously children, as we all do, have intersectional identities, form communities of interest and associate in all sorts of different ways. Perhaps this speaks also to Lord Cameron’s earlier point about whether we want children designing places. This is partly about the integration of children and young people into a conversation among citizens in a democratic process. It is not just about saying, “You’re over there and we’re over here”. As I said, they tend to become us in the fullness of time.

It is also about where that input might happen. At the moment, in the case of new towns, consultation and co-production might happen at the end of stage 1 and stage 2, in RIBA plan-of-work terms, but certain parameters might be set through genuine community-wide conversations much earlier and a set of what you might call morphological rules, to understand how that place is going to evolve over time, which might start to enfranchise young people and children to imagine what those places might become in real time as they become adults and professionals.

The Chair: Fantastic. That leads us nicely on to Lord Bassam.

Q26 **Lord Bassam of Brighton:** This is the first generation of children and young people who have grown up almost entirely in a digital world, and that mounts something of a challenge in understanding how we engage with them. It seems to us as a committee, from some of the evidence we have had, that the built environment as a notion has a bit of a public relations problem with younger people. The question we want to pose is: how do we become more welcoming? How do we overcome that? How do we become more accessible, perhaps even cool, for younger people?

James Delaney: You will not be surprised to hear that one of my answers is video games. We need to meet kids where they are at. We need to talk their language and be at their level. We should not try to drag them into the processes that we have already defined as how our built environment is designed but bring those processes into their play, their pastimes and what they are already doing. That would be a good starting point.

Neal Shasore: I demur from articulating anything as cool. Again, this is partly a rhetorical question, in so far as labelling anything as for “youth”,

“young people” or “children” is not necessarily a good comms strategy. A lot of this relates to skills and workforce as well as a general need for a kind of spatial citizenship. The culture of those industries of real estate, the built environment professions and the construction industry needs to show that it is a place of imagination—of serious play, as we have discussed—but can also give you a good life, and that part of being a citizen in a democracy is understanding how places and the built environment work.

At the moment, there are lots of voices because there are lots of people, who are well-meaning and motivated, trying to push certain agendas forward. I celebrate that and it is important, but one wonders whether that in itself is hugely intelligible to young people, or to anyone. Again, it is not about an additional regulatory framework; it is about levels of engagement and common language.

Sara Candiracci: This is a nice question. At the moment, the built environment sector is not perceived by young people as simple to understand or navigate. It is far away from their daily life. We can make it more real by making sure that they are treated as equal partners in the process, not just involved when we want to take nice pictures and have the media show how good we are at engaging kids and youth. We have to make sure, also from a regulatory point of view, that engagement with children and young people is done in a meaningful way.

There must be a requirement in projects in the real estate sector. Unfortunately, over the past decades, cities have been designed only for grown-up adults, the wealthy and the physically able. There is no space for kids, not only in the decision-making but, as a result, in the way that cities are designed. There is a need to change the narrative, moving from planning applications to designing for people, for fun, for play and for well-being, not just designing to build and sell more homes or for functional needs. We need to look at the needs of people more broadly and of children in a particular. We must try to treat them as equal partners to show in a practical and pragmatic way that they are involved and their ideas are taken seriously by the different stakeholders who work with them.

Huan Rimington: Let us start with our young people’s response to these questions. In their words: “These questions are written as though there is a recognisable field which is the built environment sector. We don’t think there is a field and the work needs to be done to the market and state who are the actors and who is affected and who are the people involved ... Our experience of the field is that it is something which is done to people, not by people, and this doesn’t make a great environment for people to get involved in the sector”.

Young people have a lack of understanding of who the stakeholders are. There is a sense of helplessness. How do you access and change the world around you? There is a sense that the change happening is inevitable and their voice is unimportant in that process. What makes it feel really exclusionary is that how things happen, who controls the

power and how you can change that is so obscure. It is a really hard starting point for young people to want to get involved when it is a thing over there that happens to you, not by you.

Lord Bassam of Brighton: Are there ways in which we can engage better—other tricks of the trade to get better engagement from younger people who perhaps have a negative view of how things are, as you put it, done to them rather than coming from them?

Neal Shasore: It always strikes me that professions, let us say, and the construction industry have lots of initiatives about engaging with and empowering young people, but, to Huan's point about the visibility of power, in real estate there is very little engagement with young people or opportunities for careers to develop there, when we know that in our system that is partly how you make things happen in the built environment. We need to pitch this at the highest level, as it were, regarding power and how change is made in the built environment, but we do not do that terribly well at the moment. Certainly some of the professions do not necessarily provide people with the kind of income they might need.

Lord Bassam of Brighton: What figures within the industry would be likely to be able to attract young people into that future that might provide them with a good life?

Neal Shasore: Figures as in individuals, or numbers?

Lord Bassam of Brighton: Public figures. Who is the rock star in the built environment world that is going to inspire young people?

Neal Shasore: Part of the issue is that the sector is not hugely diverse, and we do not have a culture in, for example, the cultural sector on television or radio, where we have a particularly energising or exciting discourse about the built environment—no disrespect to "Grand Designs" and other such programmes at all. So in a sense it is partly about fostering those voices. I am not sure whether they need to be rock stars, but people who are making change in their communities—definitely.

Huan Rimington: Young people who get involved in construction most likely do so because of a parent or because they have a figure around them who they respect, and they see that that person has gone and done it and they can do it. But a lot of young people do not have that person and they do not have any kind of awareness of what these jobs are, what you could do and how to get there. When we are speaking to our young people about this and how to change that, they say, "Schools already do information on careers. We've been to the museums and we've been to cultural spaces. Why aren't we going to construction places? Why aren't we having information about how the sector works and how it can change?"

James Delaney: “Bob the Builder”? I do not know if that programme is still going, but the point is that it starts young. People’s passion for these kinds of things starts a lot younger than you think.

Lord Bassam of Brighton: You had Norman Foster in your “Minecraft” earlier.

James Delaney: Exactly. Again, going back to games, and not just games such as “Minecraft” which are about building, there are games such as “Assassin’s Creed”, which hundreds of millions of people have played, which are built on breathtaking recreations of amazing historical environments. You can climb the inside of the dome of Florence’s cathedral or walk up the pyramids, and that is allowing young people to engage with the built environment in a totally new way that has never before been possible. There is a whole generation growing up on that, and we need to understand what the implications are and how we can reap the benefit of this.

Lord Bassam of Brighton: Sara, you live in an Italian environment where inspiration was magnificent, in many forms with many great inspirational architects and designers. Is it a different atmosphere than in the UK?

Sara Candiracci: Not really, because we take it for granted. We are so embedded in it; it is so much part of the history and the landscape that we take it for granted. Of course, by walking around Rome, there are more opportunities to understand the history, the architecture and the planning, so that is of course part of our lived experience. For us, as for everyone, the type of landscape where you grow up resonates with you when you find it somewhere else. But going back to what we discussed at the beginning, the role of education—of schools—is extremely important. Again, the subject of STEM or the built environment is maybe touched on only if you do geography, and maybe in a kind of repetitive way. If you really want to engage kids and make them passionate about the built environment, teachers themselves need to transmit this passion. It cannot be something that you just cover in one lecture, or in one lesson or in a programme. It is something that should be embedded across the curriculum to cover it from different points of view: from a political point of view, from decision-making, planning and engineering, trying to cover the topic from different perspectives to create that passion, because it is like a seed you plant that grows.

There are organisations such as Lego which Arup has been working with quite a lot on the Playful Cities initiative. For instance, we designed with it these workshops called “Build the Change”, and they run workshops across the globe, in schools and libraries, to talk about Playful Cities and play and biodiversity to create that knowledge that is sometimes missing in the regular curriculum. It is about exploring play and the role that children can have by different stakeholders and in different ways.

Q27 **Viscount Hanworth:** My designated question was to ask whether digital tools can provide opportunities for young people to engage in the built

environment, and I believe that James Delaney has already answered that in the affirmative by his demonstration of “Minecraft”. I must confess that I had been under a misapprehension; I had imagined that it was an adventure game in which the players battle with cyber monsters, but clearly not—albeit that I think that is one aspect of it. I would like to get a better understanding of the “Minecraft” environment. Can one reasonably dichotomise the users into the generality of unskilled gamers and those who are responsible for creating the environments? On the latter, what sort of programming skills are involved? Are they required, for example, to code in Java, and in general, how do they marshal their resources? Next, on the gamers, are they more or less passive users, or do they also have opportunities for shaping the environment and generally to feel in control of the environment rather than simply wandering through the streets of Booth’s London following a white line?

James Delaney: With “Minecraft” specifically, you can do both. You can be a participant in the creation of an environment or you can explore an environment that other people have made. You can play the game as you wish—that is what we call a sandbox game. There are no rules. There are rules that govern how the game works, but there is no specific narrative you have to follow. It is basically like a digital set of Lego; you can play with and explore other Lego models that people have made or make your own.

In terms of the accessibility and coding, you can use code in the game, but for the projects we have worked on, we do not. We have taken “Minecraft” to places where users have never used a computer before, and within a day they are building 3D models. So we are not just teaching them “Minecraft” but teaching them a keyboard and mouse, and a digital application. From that point of view, it is phenomenally intuitive and easy for people to get to grips with.

Having said that, one of the benefits we find is that, despite how easy it is to use, kids are just quick at it; they are naturally good with it. When we are running these kinds of workshops, pairing up younger people with older people works really well because the younger person can explain how the game works and talk them through it, and the older participant can say, “Well, I’ve lived here for 40 years. Have you thought about that?”, using that digital skills divide as a sort of conversation starter and a way to make sure that we are not as, as Neal said, putting kids over here and everyone else over there. That can be quite useful. I might not have addressed all your points. Was there anything else?

Viscount Hanworth: With the advent of the microcomputer, the prominent notion was that you should create so-called modeless programs. That meant hanging all the functions on the menu bar, which is highly confusing to anybody who is not au fait with the manual or whatever. The other sort of nostrum would be to follow a well-defined path with possibly dichotomies at various points and only very limited menus. What is your experience of inducing unskilled users into the programme?

James Delaney: Particularly if we are talking about how it can be used for the built environment, it is not just, “Here’s ‘Minecraft’—build what you want” but creating mechanics or parts of the game which can focus them a little bit. It could be giving them a certain set of resources to build with. In “Minecraft” you can choose between resources but, if you are engaging kids with designing a public space, based on the context of that space, you could ask if they have thought about using sustainable materials or wood or something that responds to the environment, and you can code that into the game.

You could also look at participatory budgeting. You could say to 20 kids, “You have to build this new space, but you have only a budget of this and you can buy materials”. There are different ways of adapting it. We have done environmental simulations where they build something and we can see what would happen if sea levels rose. We have done that in relation to flood-risk communities in south-east Asia.

As it is a game, it is not just a 3D modelling tool; there are any number of simulations or tests or things that you can run on top of that, which makes it quite interesting.

Viscount Hanworth: Do you get my point about dichotomised decisions versus long menus of choices?

James Delaney: Yes. It is a game that anyone can pick up and play without having those menus. We tend not to overlay the game with lots of menus, widgets and buttons. It is a case of “Here is the game. Here is what we want you to do with it”, and then see what they make of it.

Viscount Hanworth: Can I invite anybody else to make a comment, or not if they do not wish to? It has been rather specialised in relation to that environment. Huan, do you have any experience to offer here?

Huan Rimington: Not on this area.

Viscount Hanworth: Neal?

Neal Shasore: I think a lot about the possibilities of digital learning and virtual learning environments—not to dent the monopoly of “Minecraft” on digital learning and gamification of learning. Ultimately, this is about having much stronger pedagogies, evidence-based, to underpin the various tools that one might use, gamified or not.

In other words, you can do immersive learning in an extremely lo-fi way and in a very high-tech way. It is about an attitude to the way that you teach. I do some work with a digital learning organisation called Unthinkable, which built FutureLearn for the Open University. We have had lots of conversations of this kind. For me, it is about having a set of archetypes and resulting artefacts and scenarios through which you learn or play, or both.

Again, I think we are very bad in the sector at fostering that kind of testing and critical reflection.

Viscount Hanworth: I think there needs to be a diversity of artefacts at the moment. "Minecraft" originated in Sweden in 2011 and that is just the blink of an eye. Sara, do you have a comment?

Sara Candiracci: Yes. When you engage with youth and children, they are the digital generation so that is what they know. They know much better than we do how to use or create through digital platforms.

In addition to "Minecraft", there are other ways of doing that. You can now use AI-generated illustrations, which can be a very helpful tool. For instance, when you engage with the youth, they may not feel very comfortable drawing or they may not know how to draw. Through AI, you are giving an additional tool for them to express their ideas. They may not be able to do it manually, but maybe they have had an amazing idea that they are not able to translate into visual images. That is kind of powerful; that tool can be quite interesting.

For me, videos and photos are also kinds of digital tools. They can create stories about where they live or videos about the challenges they face. There are different tools, on "Minecraft" too, of course, that can be used on the one hand to make sure that we communicate with young people using tools that they know better than we do.

At the same time, we have to be conscious that it cannot be only digital; it has to be digital plus. Digital is great because kids love it. At the same time, it is about complementing the use of digital tools with additional hands-on work.

We are also working to avoid discrimination. We have tried, for instance, to develop an augmented-reality tool to rewild cities but, to use that app, we needed a specific device that not every kid has; it is not something that you can download on a mobile.

It is very important when we think about digital that we think also about the types of devices and the type of support that they need. Not every kid has access to iPhones or to specific types of devices. It is very important to be conscious of the socioeconomic context in which you operate, to make sure that kids are not excluded from the exercise.

Viscount Hanworth: I have suggested in the past that an architect's computer-aided design programme should be perfectly accessible to a young person, particularly if the architect is standing just beside them. Is that your experience, or do you think I am fantasising?

Sara Candiracci: It may be accessible if they are provided with the right device. Not all kids have access to the digital devices that can support the design programmes that architects may create. In particular, if you work in vulnerable contexts, it is very important to make sure that the digital tools that you are using are accessible by the kids, without your having to bring the appliances every time. It must be kind of low-tech and, at the same time, high-quality, to make sure that everyone has access. It is not

about difficulty. For me, it is more about the digital devices that are needed in some instances to support the programmes.

The Chair: Lord Bailey, I believe you have a question.

Q28 **Lord Bailey of Paddington:** Good morning, gentlemen. I am going to leap around and ask you three different things. So many things have happened in this conversation, which has been very interesting, so it feels like my question needs to grow slightly. I want to start with the consultation of young children; I am going to come to you, Huan.

I have been a youth worker for over 35 years now. Often, people use young people to get their political point across. You go in there, you pretend that you have worked with young people, or you might genuinely believe that you have worked with young people, but all you have done is taught them what you believe. You have not absorbed what they believe. How do you avoid that in your work? How do you check yourself to make sure you are not just imparting your own views? Also, what do you do when young people give you views that are entirely and only centred on their well-being and not on the rest of the community?

One thing I have to reject is the idea that young people's views are not heard. With anybody who is a parent, grandparent, uncle, auntie, or just a bystander—and it is one thing that Britain can be proud of—we often include thinking as to how a young person will have to exist with a thing, and we have many rules to support young people. How do you navigate those situations and make sure that you are bringing out the views, not putting in the views?

Huan Rimington: In relation to how we work and do that type of work with young people, I guess the person doing it is not the designer. You have someone experienced with working with young people as their practice. They are not an architect who wants to do something different in that environment. They are not trying to push their own design; their purpose is to promote young people's ideas.

Obviously, youth workers also have their own priorities, and there is still scope for some of that blur to happen, but you have a person who is experienced in drawing out and supporting young people. Their purpose in that role is to support those ideas, and to fight for those ideas. Within our team, that person is different from the person who then does the design work.

What often happens with bad consultation around young people is that the people doing it are the people who are leading the project, and leading the promotion of a particular way forward. That gets unstuck because those people will just promote their ideas.

The other thing we should be aware of is that the way we educate young people is to teach them to tick boxes and give us the right answer. We find, when we work with a younger cohort, that they are good at kind of being honest, but, as young people get older and spend more time in the school system, they get better at ticking the box, and you have to do

slightly more work with them and spend more time. It is not just a simple question of what you want; you need to spend some time on a creative process for young people working with their peers to explore what they want and to come to a decision that way.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: When we redid our estate, we had a teeny budget but the young people wanted to spend it all on them. There was a series of discussions about how much care they had to employ for other people. How do you challenge them? How do you get them to think beyond their immediate need?

Huan Rimington: That is not actually a situation that we are familiar with in our work with young people. We have always found that young people are not included in processes but are really good at including others beyond their needs. If that situation happened on our projects, we would have a discussion between different people involved and facilitate it to help young people to understand, “Whose needs are here? How are they being supported?” and support them—basically, to understand their needs and others. As we touched on earlier, often when we talk about communities, we speak about communities and young people as if they are two separate things. Young people are members of their community, and if we are going to engage people then we need to engage all ages as part of the same process.

Q29 **Lord Bailey of Paddington:** James, my question here says something about the challenges of screen time, but I am less concerned about the challenges of screen time because of something that you said earlier on: it is about the quality. My son is arguably a bit of a “Minecraft” expert—this morning we were downloading shaders and all kinds of stuff—so I have had to pay for an expensive PC to run a very full version of “Minecraft”. What would you say to a parent about the value of screen time, how it is employed and when to employ it? How could we go even beyond “Minecraft” to use the tools at our disposal to make any education, but in particular the built environment, more entertaining? A child who is inspired does not need to be pushed or dragged, kicking and screaming, to learn something they are not interested in.

James Delaney: On the first point, like I said, it is about quality not quantity. Parents need to understand what kids are doing on these devices. It is quite sad that if you had a kid who did a drawing that they were really proud of and they took it to a parent, they would probably say, “That’s amazing. Put it on the fridge”, but most kids who make something amazing in “Minecraft” or any other game are just not going to approach their parents, first, because their parents do not understand what it is, and, secondly, because it might actually be critical that they have spent 100 hours making this amazing thing. In Norway it is called the 80-80 problem: 80% of kids play games more than football—it is the national pastime—but 80% of parents have no idea what they are playing, why they are playing it or how it works. Fundamentally, parents need to enter into these worlds and ask questions about what their children are playing and what the games are to get a better

understanding of what is safe and what is not, what is good and what is bad.

To your second point, in order to get the full value of these digital tools, as others have said, we need to relate them to the real world. We cannot just spend time in these games and digital environments for its own sake; we should understand them as a bridge to real experiences in the real world. In a school or educational setting, that is a bit easier to do. When we run our “Minecraft” workshops, we start with a physical tour of the real site, then we go into “Minecraft”, and then we come back into the real world again. That back and forth really connects kids with what they are doing digitally and the tangible impact it can have.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I come to the doctor now. One of the upsides of any digital tool is that it has a far greater ability to tell a story. Take the game “Prince of Persia”; some young people never knew Persia existed until “Prince of Persia” arrived. These games put those ideas in young people’s minds. But it strikes me that our red-brick universities in particular have done little to no work to modernise how they teach or to design packages that they can sell. If you can digitise or encode anything—say, learning how to strength-test materials—in a much more interesting way, then you could sell that as a course. I put that economic imperative there because I am stunned that no one has done that work. Or am I incorrect? Is that work being done using digital tools to encode what would be looked at as traditional education, to make it more accessible and more interesting?

Neal Shasore: There are exceptions but, overall, I am inclined to agree with you, particularly in relation to the built environment, design and construction industry. I find it—and found it, when I was running an architecture school—baffling, especially, as you say, given the economic circumstances and the failing financial settlement for the higher education sector. However, having tried to build such tools and programmes, where you get up-front capital funding, which you need—be that grant funding or loan funding; frankly, I do not mind—escapes me at the moment. We do not have a dedicated pot of money where learning providers, particularly small independent ones like the ones that I have been involved in, are able to access that funding. So you have a will for innovation and an understanding of the market and ways in which you might want to disrupt it, but then you are immediately faced with a funding barrier.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: The larger universities should be ashamed of themselves since they have the money to do that, and I think people should approach the games industry instead. That industry is awash with cash, might more easily understand what the product could look like and would have things to add to it. But that is just me pontificating.

I have a question for all of you so anyone can chip in here—including, sorry, our online guest as well. This is a deeper question: should we have young people making decisions when—and I am being provocative here—they do not understand the impact of those decisions and have no

experience in the world? Should we have them making serious decisions? Bear in mind that the greatest help to a young child, in my opinion, is to provide them with somewhere to live. If you impose a process that reduces the amount of places they would have to live, then are you creating a tension there? At what point do you draw the line about consultation for young people? Has it gone too far? We have talked about a statutory requirement but, I can tell you now, if you put that in then it will slow down the process and add cost. Is it worth that risk?

James Delaney: It is worth the risk if it is done well and managed correctly. It is not about just letting kids run wild and design all our new towns and cities; it is about having guided experienced professionals imparting some of their knowledge to get the best out of kids, which is their lived experience, their creativity and playfulness. It has to happen in conversation.

It has been touched on in the past that where it can go wrong is at the point at which you run a consultation: kids have come up with the idea and that then has to be taken forward by a professional. The professional is going to have to draw these things, and that is where a disconnect can happen. We try to mitigate that by having the professional plans validated or presented back to the young people, and the architect will say, "Is this really what you had in mind?" It is a conversation. It is not just bringing in kids for half an hour to tick a box. It is about having an ongoing dialogue as these places are built.

Sara Candiracci: Yes, it is not about age, it is about informed decisions. Indeed, many adults take important decisions without actually understanding the impact of those decisions. It is about being informed and making sure, when we vote or share our ideas, that we have read about them. We should be conscious that our decisions and choices have an impact on other people. It is not about age groups. I think there are kids who are much wiser than adults, honestly. It is about working with kids to make sure that they are put in a position to decide. That does not mean we have to guide their decisions. If you are talking about, say, biodiversity in their city then you need to spend some time with them for them to understand what biodiversity is, what it means, why it is important, the different species that exist there and how to take care of them. We should give them the tools they need to take an informed decision; that is more important.

As James said, in the end, there is no right or wrong because what they express is their lived experience. What is right for them is wrong for someone else. It is up to the facilitator, the designer, the planners and the decision-makers to capture all these differences and try to find a solution that works for the majority of people. It is impossible to find a solution that works for everyone, but a solution that is informed by different ideas is better than a solution that is created by only one person. It is about the process of trying to understand different needs, abilities and challenges; trying to find a solution that addresses these in a

systematic way; and finding the right balance about which not everyone but the majority of people involved will be happy.

Huan Rimington: We are here today because the built environment sector has failed at creating effective places that include young people and older people—people of all ages. I do not think that there is an alternative. We need to do something different if we want to create sustainable places that fundamentally create a sense of belonging and care and create bonds and connections between people in our society. We need to do that right now more than ever, given the world that we see when we look outside and are part of. Cities play a really important role in doing that. It is not just about places for people to live; it is about bonds between people. Young people should be a part of that process, as well as other people, to create spaces where people can belong.

Lord Bailey of Paddington: I happen to agree, but the built environment is part of that, and it has failed less than other parts of society in making us comfortable in the places we are in.

Neal Shasore: There is a difference between an engaged citizenship and an entitled citizenship. Part of all this, on both sides—the adult world and the world of younger people—is engagement. It is not always about happy-clappy consensus building. Agonism in a democratic conversation, certainly around the physical environment, is really important. Therefore, there is a distinction between infantilisation and meaningful engagement in co-production with young people as citizens who are equal to us in a democracy. You can infantilise adults as well as children—in fact, again, the planning process does that in lots of ways to all kinds of people who feel that their subjectivity and agency are curtailed by the process.

The Chair: Baroness Miller has a quick question before we move on.

Q30 **Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer:** Is one of the downsides of relying on digital tools the fact that there is a gender divide? Do girls engage with digital tools to the same extent?

James Delaney: It depends on the tools. Games, which we have talked about a lot, are surprisingly gender-balanced—it is about 48% female in this country—but it is about finding the right tools for different contexts. We have done projects with women and girls specifically to create spaces that they feel safe in. We might approach that slightly differently, but it is still the same tools that we use and they get on with it just the same.

Q31 **Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe:** Congratulations, James. I thank you all immensely; I have found this session really helpful. My stated question is: how do we engage carers, parents and guardians of children and young people, and what resources do they need? First, though, I want to pick up on a few things that you have said, in order to give a bit of context.

On the difference between engagement and entitlement—absolutely. On having no infrastructure to gather data on engagement, could you give us a couple of things we could do about that? If you could, I would be really

grateful. It is about not just housing but outside spaces, where you go, where you play, the way you walk to school and all that stuff.

James, you mentioned Ken Robinson, who was a really innovative educator in learning through play. Sadly, Ken is no longer with us, but maybe we could share a link to his work. Ken was a Liverpudlian. One of the things I find frustrating—this was all marvellous, by the way—is that it is quite difficult to hear examples from outside London. I represented the north-west. What about Barrow? What about Crewe? Seb Dance was the MEP for London, and I was the MEP for north-west England. Every time Seb said, “What about London?”, I said, “What about Manchester? What about Liverpool?” From what you have said, it seems that you wonderful experts and engaging people are quite networked. How can we widen that network both intersectionally and geographically? Huan said, “Nothing about us without us”, which is the mantra of the trade union movement and just transition. How can it be about us if it is not engaging with us from the beginning?

Spatial citizenship is loved. We need more about place and sustainability, as well as on things such as change, statutory responsibility and planning. Baroness Miller picked up on this as well. It is about changing the framework for value added and social value engagement. There are specific things that we can do but, basically, we have a shedload of parents with no resources who are trying to put food on the table. In my region, we have parents who do not have computers at home. How do we help them to enable their children and young people, and how do we enable their children and young people? Sara, I know that you have a presence in Manchester, so let us start with you.

Sara Candiracci: Sure. That is a very important point because parents and caregivers are important enablers in the ecosystems of children, especially when the kids are very small. They are the important focal point for the well-being of kids. They need support because, in many cases, they are under a lot of pressure. Time poverty is becoming more of a key challenge that most parents have to deal with. So they really need support from different types of organisation, such as grass-roots organisations and public authorities. That is particularly the case for single parents who juggle work and many other things and also take care of the kids. We grow as parents together with our kids. It is not that you go to a school to become a parent; there is no such thing in life. Of course, you can read books, you can be prepared and you can be a good parent as part of your personal growth, but, at the same time, when kids come, your entire world changes.

Parents need support to understand how to help children to thrive, not only by looking at their physiological needs—food, water and sleep—but by stimulating kids. Play is extremely important to being able to stimulate kids, but, at the same time, you need to have time to do that and you need to understand the importance of play. If all parents could understand how important play is for their kids, I am sure that they would find the time to play with them, but play is undervalued,

underestimated and seen as something to keep children busy. Parents need support to understand their role as a parent and how they can play a better role in growing their kids into better adults.

Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe: Neal, how do we resource this? How do we make it happen?

Neal Shasore: Perhaps I could start by answering what I think we might be resourcing, certainly when it comes to data collection. We have been thinking about this a lot in the Place Literary Campaign, particularly in relation to social value. We developed something called "social value in place". I know that you have had other conversations about this. Equally, I know that the London Assembly has written a letter based on its report to the mayor. Clearly, we need a framework that includes white-labelled learning materials or structures so that they can be evaluated according to some common framework, then a central place to gather that data against which programmes and other interventions under social value, involving in particular children and young people, can be measured. I do not think that needs a huge amount of resourcing. Legislation, regulation and common practice, as it were, all contain within them the possibility of doing that. As part of my general appeal, as with digital pedagogy and data infrastructure ontology like this, we just need some funding from one of the funding councils or from the CITB. But, because of the nature of the construction industry and development, that funding tends to go most easily to established and larger players, and it does not give an opportunity for, as I say, disruption and innovation to present new ideas.

Huan Rimington: With regard to parents, something our young people are speaking about as a big issue is their being allowed to go to things. Sometimes it is because of worries about safety and sometimes it is about these things not being valued. From their perspective, it is about parents supporting young people to engage in that kind of diversity of activities outside the curriculum.

When it comes to thinking about spaces and spending time in spaces, a lot of that lived experience parents also share with their children and young people. It is about having those conversations, speaking about their local area and speaking up about the changes in their local area and what is happening. I understand that that is probably not on many parents' priorities list, but being able to speak about where we live, what that means to us and what places we like is a really important building block for people thinking about this industry, and it is a starting point of having that understanding.

Baroness Griffin of Princethorpe: New father?

James Delaney: To build on what Neal said, something we have seen a lot is that the big players in construction in this industry are the ones with the budget to reach more kids and be a bit more experimental. But they are so traditional in their thinking that that is really hard to do. On the other hand, you have great small groups and smaller firms which want to innovate and do things differently but do not have the funds. So that is a

mismatch that we have struggled with. Where we have realised that we can scale and have most impact is, in training or engaging people at a policy level in local government about the value of youth engagement and digital tools; that is the way to do it. There are only so many workshops that I, Sara and other people here can run. But if you embed that in local planning through architectural schools and things like that, it will take a while, but that would be the way to distribute it more nationally.

Q32 Lord Ravensdale: Building on what Baroness Griffin was talking about and some of the answers you gave to the previous question, this is really to try to get more of a view on what role central and local government have to play in this area—thinking forward as well to some of the recommendations that we might make in our report. Can you tell us what role central and local government have in this space, and if they have one, how does this best perhaps flow down from central to local government? To pick up on the previous question, how can this implement this approach more broadly right across the UK? I know that Neal and Huan are both working in London-based initiatives. How can we get this rolled out more broadly? I know, Neal, that you have talked about how this is not just about a new regulatory framework. We have a lot of what we need in the existing frameworks. Maybe you could open up on that, thinking more about that bigger picture of central to local and how that links up.

Neal Shasore: Procurement is fundamental—it makes the world go round—as is having some implementable guidance and guidelines at a range of governmental levels to effectively require place-responsive social value. Current frameworks struggle with that, and I think there seems to be a growing consensus about that. That will allow a percolation of this kind of stuff to happen, but it needs some sort of very light-touch framework of quality assurance and data capture. Otherwise it is just development by development, authority by authority, regional government by regional government, and then we do not get a sense of what shift is happening. I do not know whether there is something for central government or regional governments to do to convene that conversation, basically, because I think there are lots and lots of people who are thinking along the same lines.

I would like to see some kind of requirement or again, method or evidence-gathering exercise, about young people participating in the planning process—I emphasise, not infantilising and not giving people some sense of entitlement, but it is actually just about having a voice in that democratic contestation. There needs also to be some national guidance on shared methods for understanding and engaging with place. That is of fundamental importance for all kinds of reasons. It gets us away, in the built environment certainly, from slightly arcane conversations about beauty and from simplistic arguments about what places are in particular in post-industrial centres. Focusing on place, which means geography, ecology, history and future, is a much better way of doing that.

Lord Ravensdale: Thank you. That is really helpful: more of a light-touch framework at departmental level. James, you mentioned in your answer to the previous question about how local authorities could perhaps be guided around this approach. Do you have any thoughts on what role central government might have to play in this and how that could perhaps flow down, or do you think it is all about local authorities and better engaging them?

James Delaney: It is a bit of both. We have worked at both levels, admittedly not in this country, but we have seen local governments really run with an idea and have a big impact instead of in a localised way. However, where we have perhaps had the most impact is if we can get national government to get behind—when there is someone in government who is in charge of youth engagement in the built environment, or there is a specific role that can then filter down. That is where these things scale a bit more quickly and effectively.

Having some kind of toolkit or methodologies that people can easily take that are approachable and not super scary, because these are very advanced digital tools, is important. Where you can, you can also bring in industry that is already doing engagement, but maybe doing it badly or using quite difficult tools. So it is at every level.

Lord Ravensdale: Sara, it would be really interesting to get your view, as you work for a large corporation in this space, and with your existing links with government, on how you see this working in terms of the interface with government, local and national.

Sara Candiracci: It is an important question. It depends also on the context where you work, because it can be national, regional, metropolitan or local government. So it depends, of course, on the context where the projects are to define who are the key stakeholders that actually have the power to change policies and processes, and who also understand their community. It is about trying to find the right balance between working on one hand with national Governments, which is very important because it sets the scene or frames how the planning policy should be and how to then deliver it at a local level. Sometimes funds come from national government to invest in research or to support organisations that are working with youth or with parents at the same time, so it is about trying to find the right balance. A lot of our responsibility is at local level. In the UK you have to follow the local law for planning design and for social value, so it is important to work with local authorities.

Ideally, the first thing they should do is acknowledge the importance of making a child-friendly, family-friendly or play-friendly approach to urban design and planning mandatory as part of the planning process, and to avoid creating additional silos or complexity. We should try to make the connection between this approach and existing agendas or policies, focusing on the health or education climate. I think embedding this approach across existing policies is the most successful way. Take the example of Barcelona, which has a play policy. When you go there, you

understand that they are actually delivering that policy; everywhere you go, you can see that the space was designed thinking about people. Many playful elements are embedded in the design of the city, and they are not only for children but for everyone.

In addition to that data, it was mentioned that we need to understand the gap that exists and the needs in order to identify the priority areas in which intervene. To do that, we have of course been talking a lot about the engagement of children and youth, but we should also give a role within the local authority to youth, perhaps through a youth panel or a youth committee, so that they have an active role on a daily basis in decisions that are not just about them but about the city where they live. That would expose them to different topics and get them to understand what the needs are in relation to different aspects of the city where they live.

Lord Ravensdale: On those international examples that you mentioned, if you could write to us afterwards with any more detail, that would be helpful.

Huan Rimington: We as an organisation do a lot of work with local authorities, and the most difficult part of my job is shifting organisations that are not used to working with young people into practices that involve thinking about young people. There are very much some exceptions—we work with some amazing people at some authorities who buck that trend—but there is a massive cultural issue of young people not being thought about as part of delivering services at all levels of government, which we are fighting against.

In terms of what affects young people the most, we find that there is a whole range of local authority departments. We are not talking about the youth team, if there even is one; we are talking highways, parks, communities, planning, housing and the police. If we want to change that, we really need some pressure from above as well as from below. We have to support and legitimise ways of working where young people are heard and recognised.

Pressure from above affects things for us and our young people. Our young people said time and again that the housing-at-all-costs policy approach harms youth spaces and takes away spaces where young people can spend time and have an alternative future. If we were going to fund one thing, it would be funding and preserving youth spaces—spaces where young people can create that future together outside school and home.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I echo what Lord Ravensdale was just saying about examples from this country or elsewhere. We have talked about community benefits, social justice and human rights, but we would like to know if there are direct financial or commercial benefits from going down this route as well. Sara, I do not know if there is anything that you could write to us with, but if you have other examples out there then please get in touch.

That is the end of the meeting, you will be pleased to know. Thank you so much. It has been interesting and we really appreciate you giving your time. Paternity leave can now resume, James, and congratulations again. Thank you for all that you are doing. Again, if there is anything you wish to write to us about, please do so. Thank you.