



HOUSE OF LORDS

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Inquiry on

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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Witnesses: Carole Reilly and Sophia de Sousa

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Members present

Baroness O’Cathain (Chairman)
 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff
 Lord Freeman
 Lord Inglewood
 The Earl of Lytton
 Baroness Parminter
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Examination of Witnesses

Carole Reilly, Head of Neighbourhood Planning, Locality, and **Sophia de Sousa**, Chief Executive of The Glass-House Community Led Design.

Q171 The Chairman: Welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment. You have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared by Members of the Committee. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary, but I will begin by asking each of you to briefly introduce yourselves to the Committee, please.

Carole Reilly: Hello. Thank you very much for inviting me to give evidence today. My name is Carole Reilly and I am the head of neighbourhood planning and community housing in Locality. Locality is a national charity and we are a membership body. We represent 600 community organisations that are actively working around the country, developing enterprises, developing assets and delivering services in their local communities. In addition to being a member body, we also run a number of contracts for Government, so I run the neighbourhood planning contract; we run the community rights, the right to build and the community management of assets programme. We used to run the asset transfer unit and, until very recently, we ran the community organising contract for OCS, so we have a really grounded root in the community, as well as running national programmes.

Sophia de Sousa: Good morning. My name is Sophia de Sousa and I am the Chief Executive at the Glass-House Community Led Design. We are a national charity; we work around the UK, working with communities and the professionals with whom they work on shaping

places. Our starting point is that the quality of our places affects our quality of life. The quality of places can be improved vastly by engaging local knowledge, networks, infrastructure and skills, so we work to help embed new processes, learn from existing processes and innovate as to how participatory, community-led and collaborative design processes can be embedded into practice, can be innovated and can be learned from by others and picked up.

Q172 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: What are the main opportunities and challenges associated with neighbourhood planning? In practice, how is the neighbourhood planning process working?

Carole Reilly: Shall I start with that? To start with the opportunities, we have to look at mass. We look at numbers. Neighbourhood planning is complicated; it is time consuming but, despite that, it has really captured the hearts and minds of communities, so we have almost 1,700 communities around the country taking up this challenge, in a relatively short period of time. That reflects 8 million people who live in areas that are covered either by a neighbourhood plan or a local plan that is beginning to be worked on. We have only 100 that have gone through a referendum—110 exactly.

It is really complicated and it takes a long time, and yet it is appealing to communities. You have thousands of people working on it. We have to think about why that has worked so well. In the Localism Act, a lot of new powers were given to communities, and this is the one that has had the most appeal. That is because it has struck a really good balance between the effort you put in and the outcome you get out, and that has to be based on the statutory weight of the neighbourhood plan. All the work that communities do is worth it and has to be listened to.

It is underpinned by genuine engagement and it very much enhances the planning system. Those people who we see are involved in neighbourhood plans are not really the usual suspects in terms of volunteering. They are often highly skilled professionals. Sometimes they are quite time poor, but it has brought to the planning system a much wider group of people who would not normally be involved, and that can only enhance the system.

Planning can be—no offence—a bit boring, so why are all these people involved in it? It is not necessarily because they are really passionate about the built environment; it is because they are passionate about where they live. This maybe helps them to compute that the built environment is terribly important around health, well-being, crime, safety and building

neighbourliness. Those are the opportunities for neighbourhood planning. If we had 100 people doing it four years on, we would say that it has not really worked but, despite the difficulties involved in it, it has really worked from the numbers that we have. There are 8 million people in the areas covered by growing neighbourhood plans.

To touch a little on the challenges, I have mentioned time. It takes a long time, which is why we see that only 110 have gone through a referendum now, but we will see, within the next 12 to 18 months, hundreds of neighbourhood plans coming through examination and referendum, being made and taken into law. We are going to see that 2015-16 will be the year of the neighbourhood plan. That would be really good.

Groups are doing it, embracing it and dedicating hundreds and thousands of hours to it, but they also need support. As was talked about by the previous evidence panel, they need technical support and guidance. Grants still exist; groups can get up to £18,000 or £14,000, depending on their need, and they can also get technical support around very specific areas that they need help with. Without that, groups would not really be able to take it any further.

Not all my answers will be this long, but another challenge is that it is much harder for forums to start it off. Parish councils exist; they have a telephone; they have an infrastructure; they have a legal personality; they know about it; they have a network that is informed about it. They kicked off with it, and we saw in the very early days that this was just being led by town and parish councils. Increasingly we see forums. In our last review of expressions of interest to the programme, about 30% came from urban areas, which by virtue are forums. It is much more difficult for them. Ask yourselves, if you are involved in local plans around the country, where you would be without a vehicle to do it. It is more difficult for forums. More support has been given from Government, but it would not be achievable without that.

Sophia de Sousa: The first thing I would like to say is that a very useful outcome of neighbourhood plans and this whole initiative of Government has been to raise the profile of community engagement and empowerment in the built environment. That has been useful. We have seen as an organisation, in speaking to developers and housebuilders, that they have started to think about it a little more and a little differently.

We do have some concerns with neighbourhood planning. It is not an area that we focus on particularly, because we find it quite prescriptive. I would like to share a quote from Sir Tom

Shebbeare, who was involved in a neighbourhood plan and recently wrote a think piece for us on neighbourhood planning. He said, “It took four years and we were asked by professionals to produce a document of 600 pages that 12 people read”. That shows the challenges of the magnitude of the task that is being asked. While neighbourhood planning is a tool in the box, it is one tool. It is important that we look at, and a bit later I can talk about, more of the other ways of engaging communities in the built environment.

There is a problem of awareness generally. The general public is not necessarily aware that they can go and do a neighbourhood plan, and they are not necessarily aware of the power of a neighbourhood plan. It is a tool that can be extremely powerful. It is a tool that can really help shape the quality and equality of places, but there is such a focus on getting groups across the line and getting the document produced that I fear we could be doing more to really open up the conversation about what the absolute purpose of this is. The purpose of this is to create places that work for people, great places of great quality and equality.

Q173 Lord Inglewood: Clearly neighbourhood plans, if they are put together by an intelligent community and then those who are responsible for implementing planning, be it developers or other bits of the public sector involved in regulatory activities, can work well, if the relationship exists properly. Every community has its fair share of local busybodies, so how do you stop these things becoming the vehicles for local busybodies to stick their noses into other people’s affairs and bully their neighbours?

Sophia de Sousa: May I object immediately to the term “local busybody”? I believe anybody who is a so-called “local busybody” is passionate about their place. The question is how we can turn this from a starting point of threat to opportunity.

Lord Inglewood: Passion is insufficient by itself.

Sophia de Sousa: There are vehicles to engage people in the conversation that get beyond a knee-jerk reaction. That is true of any kind of community engagement. The knee-jerk reaction is to protect our interests. We see it everywhere we go, so there needs to be investment. I talk about the investment of time and of commitment—it requires funding from somewhere as well—to support an honest conversation about the opportunities from any changes to the area and the compromises that will need to be made. Openness from the start will help that conversation along.

Lord Inglewood: That is what I was wanting to find out about, the conversation and openness, but are we sure that this is always how it happens on the ground?

Sophia de Sousa: No, it is not.

Carole Reilly: We also have to think that we have just come from a period where neighbourhood plans did not exist and now they do, so there will always be teething problems. That is going to be an issue. One of the things about avoiding the hard-to-avoid groups of people who sometimes want to dominate is that neighbourhood plans have a referendum, so there has to be a point when the community at large has a certain say—the most formal say that has been given to communities, other than in general elections and local elections, about whether the plan should exist or not. There is quite a spread in terms of turnout for the referendum, but in some areas it is in excess of 60%, which are general election levels.

With a neighbourhood plan, whilst you might have a few people who are annoying, at the front and want to dominate, they risk this being rejected at referendum if it is not really covering the will of the local people. Community empowerment and community engagement have to happen from the very beginning, and part of that is about setting up terms of reference for groups, making sure they know how to operate, doing a community engagement process that is not the same old boring standing in the library for four hours with 15,000 pages, saying, “Do you want to read this?” but looking at ways that are very different. We have seen some fascinating models of community engagement.

Lord Inglewood: You think that the referendum at the end of the process is a good counterbalance to excessive enthusiasm.

Carole Reilly: I think it can be.

Lord Inglewood: Have many of them been chucked out by referenda?

Carole Reilly: Two plans have failed so far by the examiner.

Lord Inglewood: They were failed by the examiner.

Carole Reilly: None of them has been turned down by the referenda. On the whole, the average vote in favour at a referendum is 88%, I believe.

The Chairman: Could you give us those sorts of details?

Carole Reilly: Yes.

The Chairman: I do not think they are in your evidence.

Carole Reilly: No, our evidence is broader.

The Chairman: They would be very useful because, as a Committee and individually, we all come up against this sort of nimbyism or BANANA, as they call it now. It is an interesting sideline on it.

Q174 Earl of Lytton: Good morning to you both and, Sophia, a particular good morning to you. Our paths have crossed before in a similar type of situation. One particular question is to do with the fact that planning is inevitably a longish-term process, particularly the bit that we are interested in, which is the longevity of the built environment. How we create and foster that is important. When some years ago the RICS, my professional body, had a land and community commission on which I sat, one of the people who gave evidence to us said that “I can get a lot of people to volunteer for a project, a sort of task and finish, but if you are talking about the ongoing future management and maintenance of the process, once you have got it started, I get very few buyers”. Is that a problem still, or are there ways in which either of you think that we can break out of that and somehow make Huck Finn’s painting of the fence, or whoever it was, something attractive and desirable for the long term?

Sophia de Sousa: As I said earlier, it is a tool in the box. Planning and that long-term vision is a tool in the box. There is a huge amount of activity going on, on the ground, as there always has been, of small, incremental, organic elements of change that make a huge difference to the community. Again, it is about giving people a sense of an understanding of what getting engaged in this long arduous process can produce. What really are the outcomes? We would all like to hear more about four years on and what we know now. It is important to share that with the general public and make it appetising.

If what we know is that it is really hard and not enough people can get it to the end of the line, we need to ask ourselves why and whether it needs changing. If we understand that it works—it is making a real difference and changing the way people engage—we need to shout about it a bit more. That is one of the things. We also need to recognise that the spectrum of community engagement is vast, it is one way and it is not a way that is appropriate for everybody. That is fine, and it is best left to those who passionately want to do it, because it is a big ask.

Carole Reilly: I speak with two hats on, in many ways. I speak with my Locality hat, where we see hundreds of representatives from community organisations across the country painting that fence and pushing Huck Finn out of the way, because they want to paint it. You see

community activists who want to do those really complicated things, like take over the difficult heritage building, because they want to save it. As Locality, we have done an enormous amount of work about encouraging social investment, negotiating with funders and making sure that those organisations are business ready, robust and able to stand on their own two feet into the future to deliver community services. We see that.

As we speak today, we have a conference with 600 community activists in Liverpool, our national convention, which is one of the most inspiring places you can go to to see people who really are the stickers—who continue there, year on year, in small communities, really trying to plough a furrow.

Secondly, just going back to the neighbourhood planning programme, whilst I said earlier to Lord Woolmer that it is more difficult for forums, with neighbourhood planning you have the challenge of evidence. All neighbourhood plans have to be evidence based. That has been a bit of a challenge for people, because when people say, “We need this here and we need that there”, you have to say, “Let us have a look at some evidence, shall we, and then we will see what your housing needs are, what your problems with immigrant communities are or what your transport needs are?” That has been an incredibly useful discipline for communities. Communities that have been through this process, and lots of them are reaching the end now, have galvanised, have done an enormous amount of work and are there as a strong body to take actions forward in the future.

We have run programmes under contract to DCLG for about four years. In the last programme, two groups dropped out. We gave grants to 1,000 groups and two of them went bad. That is really incredible. Grant-making bodies do not see that and, in terms of technical support, it was the same. You can see groups like Fortune Green & West Hampstead. They designated 15 areas of green space and are really interested in employment. They are a forum that did not exist prior to neighbourhood planning and now are a group of people who know what they see in their area; they know what they like and they love, but they also know the figures and statistics underneath it, what is true and what is not. That evidence and passion will create something that will give people a launch pad into the future to work on it.

Lord Freeman: Just specifically on this point, what was the main lesson that you learned from the Great Yarmouth initiative that you were responsible for? I think I know the building in question.

Carole Reilly: In my old life, in the Priory Centre in Great Yarmouth, for those of you who are not aware, I used to run a development trust. It was one of the largest in the area. It was based in a Grade I listed building. I spent half my time going, “This is an amazing building”, and half my time going, “Oh my God, the toilets have backed up and it is going to cost us £15,000 to repair them”. I was trying to navigate my way between community meetings in incredibly deprived areas and meeting the needs of a heritage building, having that funny thing where people would object to stuff just for the sake of it, when you are trying to encourage and bring the local community on board.

I learned a hard lesson on heritage in that one. For the first couple of years, I thought, “Why do we not have a nice new build?” I could have done all my work around mental health, well-being and teenage pregnancies, and we ran two Sure Starts—all of that business—without worrying, but that gave an incredible sense of place to people. Great Yarmouth ranks so highly in terms of indicators of deprivation. The Priory Centre is one of the very few buildings that are Grade I listed in daily use and in secular use. You have ordinary people going to a job club, with their mental health issues or trying to take their special needs kids to our special groups there, in a place of incredible beauty. As we were very lucky with Sure Start funding to develop that stage in those very early days, the renovation of the building was beautiful and people had an incredible sense of pride in it. My lessons are to take a deep breath, make sure you understand that you are on a marathon and not on a sprint, keep the long-term goal and use those buildings to create a sense of pride.

Subsequent to that, I sit now on the Heritage Lottery Fund, because of my passion for making heritage work for people, challenging this “We cannot change anything” view and making it work. Those buildings have lasted because they have adapted.

The Chairman: You have certainly enthused me to go to Great Yarmouth. It is great to see that and I do not think you are a busybody either, just one with real passion. There is a similar sort of thing in King’s Lynn. I was very impressed by what they have done there.

Carole Reilly: King’s Lynn is amazing.

Q175 Baroness Rawlings: It sounds really good, very important and everything that one believes in, with the neighbourhood planning, the commitment, the community engagement, the good intentions and looking four years on. I wonder what happens when things become major difficulties and things perhaps go slightly wrong, like recently around Stratford and around the Olympic Park, where there had been some bits where there was

neighbourhood planning and, because of outside competition that has been very successful—that is, Westfield—everything is now boarded up and people have left whole big chunks. Some of them are nice buildings; some of them are not. The neighbourhood there has collapsed. The leader who started it all with the Olympics is not there anymore. I wonder how you would deal with that.

Carole Reilly: That is surely a lesson for neighbourhood planning, which is for engaging people and bringing people along. All of the developments in Stratford started prior to neighbourhood planning and a lot of them were imposed. In a lot of the work that happened around Stratford, people were taken out of local authority housing and moved to where they did not want to go. It looked very post-war, in terms of those approaches.

The Chairman: It was a special case.

Carole Reilly: Yes, it really is a very specific case. It is not an example for neighbourhood planning. The converse of that is that, if you want to make a change, if you bring people on, the power of neighbourhood planning is that it takes objection out of the planning system. Mostly, and as an unintended consequence of planning, the principle is, “I do not agree with you; I do not want that here”. That has been recurrent through the planning system and planning officers are tired of it. Neighbourhood planning tries to bring a consensus and have an understanding that we have to jointly solve this problem. Stratford is not an example of neighbourhood planning. There are also lots of areas where planning permission predates neighbourhood plans and communities are having to work around that. Those are very difficult areas to work to.

Sophia de Sousa: Just briefly, it is a question around, as Carole alluded to, the confrontational nature of planning. Many see it as a vehicle for objection. There is something about setting up processes, whether neighbourhood planning or other processes, for a collaborative starting point. One of the things that we have been very excited about, in the work that we are doing, is bringing communities, developers, housing associations and academics—a mix of people—together at the starting point, so there is a joint conversation for a vision for change and a vision for the place. Everyone will not always agree, but it is that honesty at the outset that makes a difference. Allow people to say “This is my position, this is what I need to get done and these are my fears”, working through it from a starting point of honesty and collaboration. If we can use neighbourhood planning as a step towards

a more collaborative approach to place making, and this is one of the tools in the box, that would be very helpful.

Q176 Lord Inglewood: I would like to explore what you have been saying a bit further. As an aside, it struck me that your experience of Great Yarmouth had certain application perhaps to the building we are sitting in now.

You have talked about promoting community engagement and, first of all, what are the policy changes that you think might be introduced to make community engagement work more effectively, bearing in mind that, when it works, it clearly works well, because you achieve the consensus that you are talking about? It is quite easy to envisage circumstances where you are going to get great tension between communities and national policy, for example, or perhaps communities and design considerations, both of which, in different ways, are discrete skills and expertise that necessarily stand outside the community's comprehension. How do you square the circle?

Sophia de Sousa: First of all, there is a big difference between engagement as a consultation tool and engagement as an empowerment tool. We are talking about ensuring that everyone in the process has the skills to engage in that conversation. In some cases, and the Glass-House has been working for 15 years around this, it is embedding design skills within communities, but also within local authority departments, which do not necessarily have a design and place-making background. Some of the skills gap is around how to engage a conversation or how to start a conversation: how to put forward a process that is open and transparent, and which harnesses what everyone can bring to the process. We tend to talk about communities as just people who live there, but communities are hugely rich with skills and experiences that we have harnessed effectively, but also local organisations and networks, which can be collaborators and allies, not opposition. If we create policy that first of all supports investment in a collaborative rather than an oppositional approach, and an investment in experimentation and risk taking—certainly within parameters, not just wildly trying anything—there is something about an expectation of engagement not just asking whether you like something or not but starting a process of empowerment and collaboration. There are some fantastic examples of the built environment and engagement being a process to embed employability skills in communities, but also, as shown by Great Yarmouth and other fantastic organisations around the country, they become a hub, a resource, a network to bring people into the conversation.

Lord Inglewood: Do you find in these conversations that the participants speak the same language? I do not mean English, as it were, but the comprehension whereby each understands what the other is really getting at and trying to achieve.

Sophia de Sousa: There is an investment required of time and resource to create a shared starting point. As I said, sometimes that requires embedding design skills over there, engagement skills over there and understanding of the planning system over here, getting everyone to a starting point where they can have a sensible conversation. That requires political will; it requires the will of developers, housing associations and local authorities to invest staff time in that conversation and to have the resources to engage people. They are struggling with that at the moment.

Lord Inglewood: If I granted you one wish for something that would happen to bring this about that does not happen now, what would it be?

Sophia de Sousa: I would say that the requirement for new development should go beyond simply consultation and require any new development or regeneration to have an element of community empowerment, along with the standard consultation, so that you can create a really good working group.

Lord Inglewood: Forgive me for just pressing further, but when you use the word “empowerment”, what precisely do you mean?

Sophia de Sousa: I mean giving people an understanding of the process that lies ahead and giving people the information and skills they need to participate constructively. As I said earlier, there is a knee-jerk reaction. If someone is going to come and clear your street and demolish your homes, you are certainly going to fight against it. That is a knee-jerk reaction. There could be a way to say, “This is the situation; these houses are crumbling down. Let us have a conversation about what is best. Do we refurbish them? Do we redevelop?” To have those conversations really intelligently, people need to have the facts, and there is a real fear in the development and the regeneration world to give those facts and put them on the table.

There is a real fear that, if people are told there is a budget of £50 million, they will say, “We want the moon”. When you start to go through the process of what that can really buy and what is essential, and again that conversation that neighbourhood planning is trying to have about what is important to our area, people can have an intelligent conversation. But there

needs to be a starting point of honesty and openness, and there needs to be investment in everyone coming to the conversation with some shared information and tools, I believe.

Carole Reilly: I would just add briefly that the important point is to know the parameters of what you are engaging on and to manage expectation. Quite often when you see areas that are really suffering from engagement fatigue, because they have been asked 50 times seemingly very similar things, and nothing has changed, it feels like “I am not answering because you are not listening”. One of the things is about being absolutely realistic. We know what neighbourhood planning can and cannot do. If you want to say, “No houses here”, and you are in a growth area, neighbourhood planning is not for you. We have to manage expectations very clearly and help people to understand the direction of travel they are taking.

For example, I have worked with a number of communities on neighbourhood planning that have started with quite a nimby anti-growth approach but, on the basis of really thinking through where they want to go to, understanding what the needs of their community are, talking and looking at the evidence, they say, “Actually, we do not want five-bedroom executive homes. We want starter homes for our kids. We want retirement and downsizing opportunities for those who stay in this village”. You find a 180-degree shift from going, “Absolutely no”, to “Yes, we will, but we want to shape and influence it, and we do not want it to be done to us”. Any engagement has to understand what the parameters are and what you can and cannot do because, if the engagement started with that group to say, “No homes, that will be absolutely fine, no problem”, but you knew that there was housing target in that area for 200 homes, it is pointless.

Lord Inglewood: You have to start from the wider planning framework. It is no good, if HS2 is going to your village, saying, “We should send it somewhere else”.

Carole Reilly: Absolutely, if that is what you are engaging on. It is about really managing expectations. A much wider programme that we have been involved with, which was funded by OCS, is the Community Organisers programme that you will be aware of. It started off with this very non-prescriptive approach: what do you love about where you live and what would you like to change? The agenda was stripped bare, and so residents thought, “Oh, what do I love? I love this little walkway there. What would I like to change? I would like to change a bit of lighting here”. Community projects developed from that and they were absolutely bottom-up, engaged in small or sometimes slightly larger areas. Community

engagement works if you make the balance right, if you are clear about outcomes and if you are absolutely clear about what can be achieved by the process. There cannot be one model for what community engagement works.

Going back to neighbourhood planning and repeating myself, 88% yes votes and sometimes 60% at a referendum are significant figures. Who went to the police commissioners referendum? It was 15% on average. People do really care and they are really engaged, but you have to make sure you ask the right question. I said I would be short and I was not.

The Chairman: We have to rush on a bit. We are running out of time for questions. There was something you wanted to say.

Sophia de Sousa: I wanted to reiterate that it is about creating a resource in the community, rather than an obstacle, in a nutshell.

The Chairman: And a measure of trust, I should think, which has not been mentioned.

Sophia de Sousa: Absolutely.

Q177 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I was interested in your experience to know how much the communities understand the health needs of other groups, so for spaces, safe routes, cycle routes and so on, but also how much they understand the problems sometimes of refitted buildings, particularly when there is asbestos in them, and managing that. What has the view been towards boarded-up buildings being put to a different use, possibly a use for people who perhaps may not be viewed as the most socially desirable in their area, so temporary housing, transit housing or accommodation that is used for homeless to use as temporary transit accommodation?

Carole Reilly: In terms of boarded-up buildings, as Locality as a whole, we have been really concerned with the high street and the demise of the high street, in many ways. We are concerned about changes to permitted development. It is quite shocking what you can do now without planning permission, and small changes have massive impacts and unintended consequences. We can look at what does happen in our high streets. We have worked with an organisation called Meanwhile Space, which has really supported this pop-up initiative, which at least removes the boarded-up-window approach—the feeling that everything is going downhill a bit and that you have to get in your car to drive to Tesco.

The Chairman: Can I just intervene on that one? Pop-ups are fine in theory but, in practice, they make the people who are existing on the high street, at least where I live, think, “Oh, three more pop-up shops this month. That means we are really on the way out”. They are

adjusting their buying patterns, their travel patterns and their demand for public transport. It is a very difficult one. It was an extremely good idea, but I also think about long-term security in a place. When the elderly people there see these shops popping up, they think, “Where is it all going to end?” because they go.

Carole Reilly: We need a delineation, though. Ironically, at the end of my street—and I live in a conservation area in a row of listed buildings, all Grade II—we have just had a pop-up and they are selling tinsel and tat. I feel exactly the same way, but we have examples of a number of other pop-up shops where young entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs are looking at very interesting concepts that they want to try out. It is not a one-size-fits-all model.

The Chairman: They are saying that is why they are doing it, but they are not doing it that way. That is the point.

Sophia de Sousa: There is a point about leadership in the local area, about which pop-up shops are going in. There is looking at what is there already on the street and not creating competition that will hurt others but complementary activities.

The Chairman: Can I just point out that we are in a very small community of 3,500 people, and we have had three pop-up fudge shops? When I go home tomorrow, there will probably be one, if that. It is horses for courses, but it is a dangerous concept.

Carole Reilly: The market is difficult in terms of the high street because, if we do not look at pop-ups, we look at what has developed in any high street recently, where you have much more ubiquitous chain stores and out-of-town shopping centres, then you have hairdressers, cafés and now knitting shops. We are looking at very different high streets from what we saw 10 or 15 years ago.

Sophia de Sousa: Can I just come back to boarded-up homes, because there are some fantastic examples of communities delivering change and growth. Liverpool is one of them where streets were cleared for housing pathways and streets died for many years. Thirty-four out of 200 homes were occupied. There are fantastic examples. Cairns Street was just celebrated—I know you have worked with them as well—at the Academy of Urbanism awards. It was a group of people who stood up and said, “Our streets should not look like this and we are going to do something about it”.

When we talk about growth and fulfilling housing need, that community got together. They repainted. They refurbished. They revitalised their street, and homes that were empty and

being compulsorily purchased for £8,000 are now being sold for £100,000 each, so there is also that organic change. There are some very effective homesteading policies, the £1 homes initiative and those sorts of things, if they are done with a sense of shared commitment and a sense of real regulation in place, so that they cannot fall prey to just development but are a vehicle for community building and revitalising places.

I just wanted to make one point on people's understanding of each other's needs. One of the things that communities have most often told us, and particularly young people, is that engagement processes very often speak to groups in their little boxes. They will go and speak to the young people and they will go and speak to older people and they will go and speak to young single parents, but very rarely do they create an environment in which those people can have a conversation together.

Q178 Baroness Rawlings: You did touch very briefly on leadership. With all that you have been talking about, I have been listening very carefully to lots of dialogue and discussion; people are going to be talking forever. I was wondering about your Great Yarmouth success. There must have been a strong leader there driving it, who is there getting everything together, because otherwise everyone consulted talks for hours and hours and hours, and it goes on forever, unless you have somebody driving it who is a strong leader. You hardly mentioned that at all. Like your Great Yarmouth project, was there one visionary there who really drove it? It is all very well everybody talking about it. What is your view?

Carole Reilly: Briefly, I was the Chief Executive in Great Yarmouth and I took it forward. What we see at Locality, in terms of community development trusts that make things work—and everybody knows Coin Street in London, and Goodwin in Hull—we look at amazing development trusts that have brought local people on board. Leadership is incredibly important: making sure people on the ground have managed expectations, are brought in and understand what can be done, but there also has to be money to match it.

One of the things that we absolutely can evidence in Locality and in development trusts before us is that these community organisations deliver on the ground. They deliver on the ground because they are rooted, they are not going anywhere and they are going to be there for the next 10, 20 or whatever years. We need to match regeneration funding to community organisations, because you get incredible value for that. For state-based regen programmes, if we look at the empty homes that you spoke about, Baroness Finlay, if they are delivered not necessarily by the local council alone but co-produced by residents'

associations and by local development trusts, things will work, especially where people know and love an area, and want to stay there. Was that brief enough?

The Chairman: Yes, that was fine.

Sophia de Sousa: I am going to be brief. The point is around collaboration, but it is also around leadership coming from a number of groups and organisations working together. It requires leadership in the council, leadership with a community organisation and leadership within community groups. One leader is not enough. It requires, when that leadership is there, all of those leaders to mobilise their various assets, and I mean “assets” in the very broadest of terms. When that happens, you can do a lot with not very much.

Lord Inglewood: How do you achieve leadership?

Sophia de Sousa: It is important that leadership is not one person. You need that person who has inspiration and a driving force but, to be very brutal, if that person goes under a bus, it all falls apart if it is one leader. You need a group with leaders coming from different areas who are working together.

Carole Reilly: There is also a thing about small amounts of money that kick-start groups and give the confidence that allows leaders to come forward. In our community-led housing programmes, it is around a bit of cash that can help a community organisation either sort out its governance or buy an option for land, so they that they can take something forward. Those bits of money are not huge; they are reasonably insignificant, but they can build confidence—and confidence builds the foundations for good leadership.

Sophia de Sousa: That investment should have a collaboration caveat attached, I believe.

Q179 Lord Freeman: My question is about the balance of responsibility between national government and local authorities. Do you think that balance should be shifted more towards greater responsibilities at the local level, not just northern powerhouses, but communities all over the country?

Carole Reilly: I will be brief on that. Clearly in terms of planning policy anyway, we see a massive vacuum. You have national planning policy and then you have local/neighbourhood here, with this kind of gap in between, apart from in London where we have the London plan. You can see a vacuum and there is a real confusion about what you do about infrastructure, what you do about transport and how those things work. They impact enormously on the local thing—the neighbourhood plan in planning terms—but they are decided at a national level.

In Locality, we really are welcoming the discussions happening around devolution. We think that our community members could really be great vehicles for making sure that devolution onwards, double devolution, is worked out on the ground, but we have to make sure that you do not get another layer of bureaucracy and politicking that stops power and money going down to neighbourhood areas. We are having discussions with a number of areas that are interested in doing devolution deals to see how we can keep it going down. We have to look at devolution onwards, and we have to make sure that the power rests at the neighbourhood level, because that is where you get the most worthwhile outcomes, as long as they are managed properly.

The Chairman: You mentioned the London plan, but we went to Birmingham on a site visit and that was very obviously part of a plan to remove the concrete collar around the centre of Birmingham. It was very successful. Any more on that one, Lord Freeman?

Lord Freeman: No.

Sophia de Sousa: I think there is a balance between leadership and policy. When we are talking about national and local government, and the balance of power, there is a responsibility for national government to have a very strong leadership role in being demanding about place quality and equality. There is certainly a challenged environment for local government, which has had its resources depleted significantly, and a lot of the skills have been drained from place-making departments of local government. There is a question there; there is a tension, if you like, but there is also an opportunity. This tension of lack of resource can help push the collaborative economy approach—developers, housing associations and community organisations together. If they pool their resources they can achieve more than they could alone. Creating vehicles to make that easier and encourage that will be really important.

Baroness Whitaker: Such as?

Sophia de Sousa: There is a real problem around stepping into a proposition. Let us take the example of a community park. Many local authorities are simply handing them over for community management or ownership, because they do not have the funds to look after them. That is a big ask for a community and there are some very good resources within local authority networks; there are good resources within community networks.

It is important when you are looking at all of these—asset transfer has been a really interesting journey, and we have worked together on that in the past—that you make sure

that any new process, like asset transfer, like handing over management to any organisation, has checks and balances attached in terms of accountability, but also creates opportunities and helps support that networking. One of the most important roles a local authority has and one of the most important tools is the networking opportunity. They know everyone. Who they do not know, the community organisations know. Who they do not know, the local authority does. How can you put those mechanisms in place for structures that support that networking collaboration approach?

Q180 Baroness Parminter: The question I was going to ask you has already been answered, because it is about how we get communities to engage in taking on new housing. You are saying that, as long as you use neighbourhood planning so that people feel it is being done with them, rather than being told to them, that is the way forward, so I am not going to ask about that. I am going to ask a supplementary question. You keep talking about education, education, education. Is there anything concrete? Do you mean formal changes to Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3, or are you talking about education in a community setting?

Carole Reilly: Clearly, education is really important. There have been such enormous changes. I have been talking about training people to upskill and to support them for specific bits of skills, so I do not really have anything to add on education.

Sophia de Sousa: We have recently been involved in some really fantastic projects working with developers in schools, in areas where there is large-scale development happening. We are using a local development process as a means of talking about place and talking about citizenship, taking young people through a training programme, which is a big-picture programme, using a place as a vehicle for skills development and empowerment. That is interesting as a mechanism because not only does it start to bring young people, their families and local networks into the development conversation but also introduces them to a sector of employment opportunity they knew nothing about. For instance, this particular project we did in White City led to work placements for the young people with the developers involved. There are vehicles like that that take great will on the part of local schools and developers, and they are not easy to set up, but hold great value. They should be shared and celebrated, because it is a very effective model. When a young person engaged in such a programme says to you, "Now I understand why I have to go to school", that is a place, and development, doing some good.

Q181 Baroness Whitaker: I absolutely support that communities must have a predominant role in the shaping of their own local environment. They have a range of skills, but there is a body of expertise in design and high quality place making that some communities may be unaware of. What policy measures do you think should be taken to bring communities into the knowledge that they really need to have to make sure that it is a high-quality place that they are going to shape? How can community engagement support good design in place making?

Sophia de Sousa: I believe it comes down to a starting point of not asking, “Do you like this?” or “Do you not like this?” but “What is special about your place?” and “What fills you with delight?”

Baroness Whitaker: On the process, if I could just pick you up on something that happened in Manchester’s New Islington, the architect, I cannot remember who it was—maybe it was Terry Farrell—had a large group of local people to whom he put alternatives. “Which do you like? Do you like this? Would you rather have that?” They were very participative, but he was a very skilled place maker who was showing them the options. Do you not think that something like that works?

Sophia de Sousa: People require training to engage, if you are really getting into a detailed conversation about assessing plans and development options. It is unreasonable to expect a person to just step in front of a set of plans and understand them. We have been delivering training for 15 years for community organisations, and they are most effective when community groups and organisations are trained alongside project officers and members of the development team, so they are developing a common design language. The architects that we have then worked with have said what a difference it makes when we have a starting point of a shared language and vocabulary. It is a whole lot easier then.

Baroness Whitaker: How could this be inculcated on a national scale? Do you have any thoughts?

Sophia de Sousa: It requires an investment, both of will and of financing. There are assets out there that can be mobilised. The development community is one. They have said that they will happily support engagement if the vehicles are there to do that. There are procurement issues and competitive advantage issues that get in the way of that early work. We do work in schools. There is a lot you can do to talk about place and get people thinking about it. We are involved in the Place Alliance with Matthew over there, and the objective of

that is to start a national conversation. We do not talk about place nearly enough in this country, and that is really the starting point, but then ministers need to engage with the diversity of voices that come back.

Baroness Whitaker: National leadership?

Sophia de Sousa: You need the national ear as well, willing to engage with the diversity of voices. It is too easy to route all of the opinions and views on place through organisations like Carole's or mine. We can be fantastic spokespeople, because we work with hundreds and thousands of communities, but there will always be voices out there that need a route into the ear of government. Hopefully the Place Alliance is starting to tackle that.

Carole Reilly: If I take this back to neighbourhood planning, we have to say it is one of the vehicles that has the biggest number of people working on it in the country. Increasingly, we see neighbourhood plans having urban design policies in them. People care about it. We would encourage them not to be on a minute level around the detail of design of particular buildings, because the NPPF takes us away from that. It says it should be broad. We can see in neighbourhood planning groups that there are a number of really creative groups out there that are keen to embrace new development and to understand that we should be looking at a heritage for the 21st century, instead of just replicating old things or making a pastiche.

We have a vehicle that works. We have a vehicle that is being embraced. Through DCLG, we run a support programme, where we have just started to do a big piece of work in east Shoreditch around design and design codes. As long as neighbourhood areas are engaged in the process of what is going to happen to the area, they can say, "This works" and "That does not work", in terms of permeability, or "How do I get my bike across?" or "If you build that estate there and it faces outwards, no one will use our shop and it will close, because everyone will get in their car". These are the things around making a place that really make it work and build into it health, well-being and neighbourliness principles.

We can look at a couple of examples, like the Wing neighbourhood plan, which passed its referendum in March or July. I cannot quite remember. The shovels are in the ground now. They have worked with developers all the way along. Importantly, that has allowed them to influence design. It has allowed them to influence place making. It has taken conflict out and sped up the process of getting growth. We really need to see that, when you do that and

have a collaborative approach, things will kick off, but again the health warning is managing expectations. You can only do what you can do under this legislation.

Q182 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I have a brief question following on from that. Given that data can speak volumes, have you got any data from an area, such as the ones you have just been referring to, that show a drop in consultations for depression or mental health, a drop in disturbances in the community through disturbed teenagers or whatever, so that there is a number there—a before and after comparator?

Carole Reilly: No. I am afraid at this point I have to sit back and say neighbourhood planning is still relatively new. We only have 110 that have gone through referendum and 87 that are made. It is still too early. The impact on health and well-being measurements would lag where the neighbourhood plan was, although we are about to work with the OCSI, which is developing the data on deprivation, to look at this evidence planning for neighbourhoods. They could do something looking backwards on it, but we do not have it at this point.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I am not sure about the lag, because there is something about a sense of belonging to a community that brings about very rapid health benefits, quite apart from the longer term ones later.

Sophia de Sousa: If I may, a really useful resource on that sort of information is the fantastic work being done within the Connected Communities programme funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. That supports action research, which is a collaboration between academia and practice on the ground, and communities. There are some fantastic projects. We have been involved in many and have a strategic partnership with Open University around that. What can we learn while we are doing? There is a huge resource there, both in gathering learning from experience and testing new methodologies, but also a resource in creating new opportunities to test models and support communities with free support. It is worth looking into. There is a vast spectrum and a large programme around communities and design.

The Chairman: It has already been slotted in by my policy analyst.

Carole Reilly: Can I just briefly add to this? Neighbourhoods are not defined in the NPPF. Neighbourhoods are as defined as the people who live in them, in terms of neighbourhood planning. Whilst that is great, one of the problems is that data collection might not fit in with your health authority area or data collected by police for your safety measures and so on. We have been working with a number of organisations that are rapidly developing a

reporting system that can make a bespoke area and will do a best fit around numbers of data sets, so that data will come online. There is open data and it fits to the local authority boundary, the ward boundary and the education boundary, and they are really complex to understand, but there are massive developments to be made on that and we are working closely on it. I would really hope to say that, in a year, we can give you all this.

The Chairman: That sounds very promising.

Sophia de Sousa: May I just add one point, which is the value of stories and voices? We can talk about data but people's stories about engaging with placemaking are equally important. A young man said one of the most powerful things that has ever been said to me, which was: "Before I got involved in a local garden project, I sat in my house all day long, on my own, watching television, and now I am a trained youth worker and I am out there with people".

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: Those stories need to be collected and collated, and then used, otherwise they get lost.

Q183 Baroness Young of Old Scone: We have been hearing quite a lot about a diminution in the level of skills in local planning departments. Are there some particular skills that you think local planning departments should have and do they have them?

Sophia de Sousa: Planning departments are being asked to be enablers now. There has been a real shift in their role from being reviewers and deciders on plans and policy. They are now being asked to help communities engage in neighbourhood planning, so there is a whole skills set required there. I know from going around the country, and I also sit on the Urban Panel, which goes into a lot of former market towns and former industrial cities, simply that local authorities do not have many personnel with a place perspective or with place expertise. That is a real problem, be it in heritage, planning or any of the architectural built environment professions. They are being chipped away at, so it is a problem.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: What is the solution?

The Chairman: Our report would recommend it.

Sophia de Sousa: I do not think it is necessarily about expanding government out again. It is about recognising there is a critical mass of skills sets required within a team to carry out certain duties. Particularly if devolution is happening and more duties are being handed over to local government, they need the mechanisms and support structures to do that. We can do some creative sharing of expertise across areas, and there are some nice examples of different local authorities pooling their resources to create a collective bank of knowledge

that they can share and a personnel resource that they can share, and we will need to look at that more and more. Caseload is going to be an issue with something like that and local knowledge will be an issue with that.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Does basic training for planners, architects, surveyors and builders need altering?

Sophia de Sousa: The education system should inject that. The built environment education works in silos, so they do not know enough about each other's professions. A shift is starting to creep into higher education courses now. We are asked to go and do lectures and workshops, and embed what we have learned within university courses. The role of the designer and the planner is changing, and the higher education degrees need to reflect that. There is something we can do to help send them in the right direction. That investment is needed.

Carole Reilly: In terms of skills and capacity shortages for local authorities, there is no doubt that local authorities are incredibly stretched. Three or four years ago, they were far more suspicious of neighbourhood planning and the demands it would put upon them. Planning departments feel like a game of musical chairs where no one is removing the chair; they are removing the people. You go in and there are loads of empty chairs in the department, and so it feels like more work for us and we cannot do it. There is also a level of suspicion towards communities in terms of: "What do you know about this anyway?"

We have seen a significant change in that way. Local authorities are much more confident, and I could name a couple of local authorities that encourage neighbourhood plans to be developed in their areas. Bassetlaw, for example, is one of those that regularly encourages their groups. Leeds is another one. They feel like they are more confident about the skills of communities to take this forward, and it feels more collaborative. If they can state clearly, "We are the local authority; under our duty to support, we will give you this, but we expect this back", and if there is a really clear give-get or ask-offer between the local authority and the community body—some kind of contract—it makes it work. It means that skills shortages can be overcome.

One of the things we see, in terms of the reducing planning departments for neighbourhood planning, is one of the solutions is to produce loads of resources, and then people can take them and know how to write a plan. Remember, four years ago, there was no plan. Three years ago, there was no neighbourhood plan. It is like writing a thesis and no one had ever

done one before. You do not know what it is. Now we see that there is much more, but we have to be really careful about just producing tool kits and resources, because otherwise neighbourhood plans will be defeated. They reflect the uniqueness, the individuality and the character of that area, as made by those local people. If you just build it from loads of different tool kits, it becomes a cut and paste job and it will mean nothing to local people. The power is in the people who wrote it and own it.

One last thing to say is that the community engagement and the skills needed have been reflected, as I said before, in referenda. It has inspired local authorities. I would really like to watch this space to think, "Will they do that then? Will they work with the community, as widely and as deeply, in terms of developing their local plans, when they have big changes for the area?" You have to look at non-traditional ways of engaging, getting different people around the table and getting their voice heard. It is not that costly if you know how to do it right.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. It has been a most interesting session. Thank you for all the preparation you have done and for your written submissions. You will get the transcript and you can correct it where it is necessary. Thank you. It has been most useful.