



GROSVENOR

A guide to better public  
engagement:

# *Positive Space* In Practice





***Positive Space*, our Community Charter, aims to set a new standard for public engagement and offer the communities we work with meaningful involvement in how their neighbourhoods evolve.**

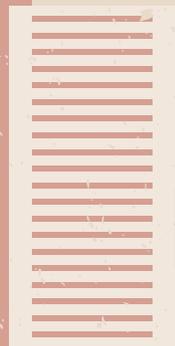
The pandemic has proved that getting this right is more integral than ever to the success of our business, to delivering social and commercial value, and ultimately to helping more places thrive.

We have run a ten-session training programme to build the capability and confidence of our employees to put Positive Space into practice. This was delivered in partnership with 20 experts, on topics from active listening to influence and accountability.

Through this guide, we aim to capture the wealth of insights and tips that emerged. We're sharing it publicly because poor engagement creates worse places and undermines public appetite for getting involved in other kinds of civic activity too. That's why we're investing in training our staff and sharing what we've learnt to help and inspire others too.



**Community Charter**





## *Listen first*



- 1 How to listen actively and build a human connection
- 2 How to reach young people
- 3 How to rethink residents as local experts

## *Open up*



- 4 How to enable community organising
- 5 How to be clear about influence

## *Make it easier*



- 6 How to do more with digital
- 7 How to make it easier for residents

## *Be accountable*



- 8 How to be accountable
- 9 How to give communities accountability in managing places



Navigate through the sessions for insights & tips



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# How to...

## listen actively and build a human connection



### Top tips

- Make time to prepare for and process conversations – clear your busy brain!
- Say people's name to validate their presence.
- Use simple language with no jargon to redress balance between you and another.
- Let a little bit of who you are into the conversation to help build a connection.
- Reciprocity helps. Give something when asking for something and ask for something when giving.
- Check in that you're hearing correctly.



[The human connection framework](#)

### Insights



Active listening is key to building a human connection and reducing the distance between people and interests.

*Matt McStravick  
Deepr.*

To truly listen we need to clear our busy brains.

*Catherine Greig  
make-good.*

Listening isn't just about hearing those shouting the loudest. It's about genuinely deepening your understanding of the range of different perspectives to find balance.

*Kate Nottidge,  
Grosvenor Britain  
& Ireland*



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# How to... reach young people

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## Top tips

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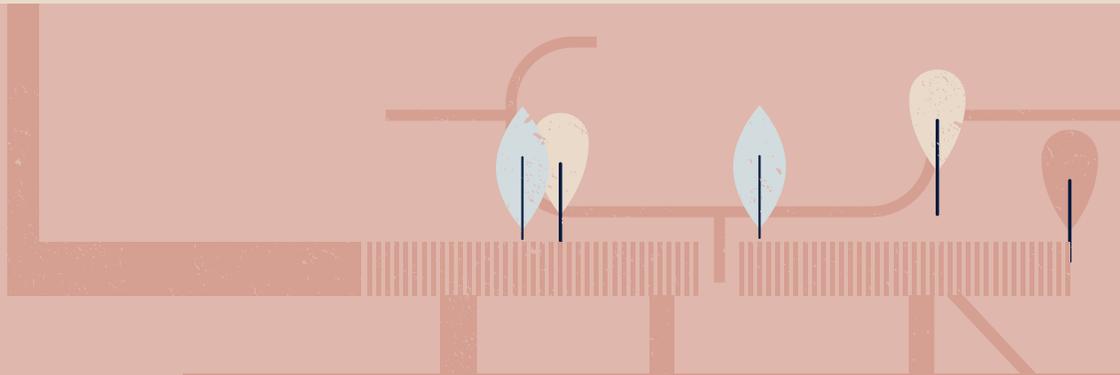
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- Partner with others who can help you connect with ‘hard to reach’ communities. They’re not hard to reach – you’re just looking in the wrong place!
- Treat young people as a client and don’t underestimate their capabilities.
- Incentivise, and consider if it’s appropriate to compensate for someone’s time.
- Consider social media as a route to reaching young people and tools like google classrooms to create familiar spaces for collaboration.
- Involve young people in your conversations with the wider adult community. Don’t keep them in a box.
- Involve others in the community in your conversations with young people too. It helps highlight different needs and perspectives.



[Youth engagement toolkit](#)



## Insights



Young people are like an indicator. If you can deliver a place that works for them, you’re delivering a sustainable place that can work for everyone.

*Ava Doherty,  
Westminster Youth Council*

89% of 16-18 year olds say they’ve never been asked their opinion on the future of their neighbourhood but 82% want a say.

*Nicola Wood,  
Grosvenor Britain  
& Ireland.*

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# How to...

## rethink residents and businesses as local experts



### Top tips

- Ask for input at the brief building stage.
- Encourage design teams to become part of the community and the community to become part of design teams.
- Help people participate by keeping models and design tools accessible.
- Test ideas in real life to help spark ideas and share learnings with communities.
- Blend specialist with local expertise so everyone can learn from one another.
- Catch people who don't typically get involved by offering something in return.
- Consider establishing forums or panels specifically for otherwise under-represented residents, businesses & workers.

### Insights

“ Consider more organised structures, like Community Review Panels, for less-represented members of communities to have a voice too.

*Tony Burton CBE, Community Activist*

Go to the community with tools to develop ideas together instead of proposals to show.

*Martin Lydon,  
Haworth Tompkins*

Too often we fear the voice of the 'other' before we understand it.

*Paul O'Grady,  
Grosvenor Britain & Ireland*



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# How to... enable community organising



## Top tips

- Get alongside communities. Don't create an environment where it's them and us.
- Support natural community leaders who you can test problems with and who can help identify collective goals.
- Invest time in developing authentic relationships to encourage others.
- Map the assets in your community to identify the role you can play in bringing those together.
- Consider ways the community could become part of your team - helping translate materials into different languages or supporting engagement with young people, for example.
- Support immediate community priorities as part of longer-term development to help build trust.

## Insights

“ Local communities are not a problem to be solved. Think about harnessing their collective power to achieve collective goals.

*Will Brett, Grassroots Campaigns Specialist*

It's not about empowering the community. Let the community empower you to achieve the best outcome.

*Serena Simon,  
Westminster City Council*

Supporting community leaders within existing networks can help us tap into the amazing wealth of ideas and insights in our communities.

*Silvia Lazzerini,  
Grosvenor Britain & Ireland*



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## How to... be clear about influence



### Top tips

- Give communities clarity on where the scope for influence is. Where there isn't scope explain why.
- Match the level of involvement you're offering to the scale of the change.
- Open-up communities to the trade-offs in decision making.
- Use your scope of influence as a public facing tool to enable communities to hold you to account.
- Always close your feedback loop - communicating what you're doing with the feedback received.
- Involve communities in the governance of projects, for example on oversight panels or managing funds.



**Scope of influence framework**



## Insights

“ Involving people leads to better outcomes. That's not a leap of faith, there's a wealth of evidence that supports this.

*Stephen Burns, Peabody*

What is the point?  
For engagement to be meaningful, you need to have a great answer to this question.

*Catherine Greig,  
make-good*

Deeply consider what is of interest or importance to your audience and use that as the place to start the conversation.

*Chantal Henderson,  
Grosvenor Britain &  
Ireland*

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# How to... do more with digital



## Top tips

- Use digital tools when and where they are most useful – not everywhere!
- Integrating online and offline methods creates inclusive & convenient ways for everyone to engage.
- Don't only think survey - you can crowdsource ideas, run online workshops, share ideas via a virtual map.
- Eye-catching visual content is key.
- Look out for digital tools that enable you to easily translate materials into other languages.
- Use the data generated to share the full picture.
- Digital engagement tools only work if people know about it – effective communication is key.



[FAQs on digital consultation](#)

## Insights

“ Make it fun through creative and interactive digital tools such as gamification.

*Lora Botev, CitizenLab*

Having an open conversation online de-polarises communities. Most respondents read 10-15 other comments before sharing their own.

*Mike Saunders, Commonplace*

We have a huge opportunity to do more with digital engagement; tapping into the collective intelligence of our communities and developing a deeper understanding of who we're communicating with.

*Charlie Howard, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland*



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# *How to...* make it easier for residents, workers & businesses



## Top tips

- Have difficult conversations early - being honest and transparent leads to respect.
- Be open and honest about commercial aims.
- Share information at different levels so people can engage at the depth they want to.
- Use plain English and keep language and materials visual and accessible.
- Don't wait for residents & businesses to come to you - knock on doors, situate yourself in the spaces you manage.
- Offer something in return for communities giving up their time.
- Role play another perspective to deepen your understanding of it and problem solve from a different angle.



## Insights

“Spend the time getting to know communities. You will learn from them and they will feel less suspicious or angry if they deal with real human beings.”

*Anood Al-Samerai, North Bermondsey  
Ward Councillor, Southwark*

Engage early on the concept. If people find out late they panic and battle lines are drawn.

*Richard Cutt,  
Residents Society of  
Mayfair & St James*

It's so important to get out from behind our computers and have genuine dialogue with the people in our communities. We're all human beings at the end of the day.

*Anna Bond,  
Grosvenor Britain & Ireland*

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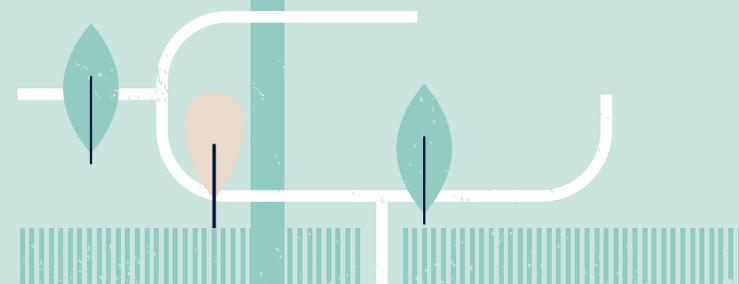
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## How to... be accountable



### Top tips

- Don't leave talking about accountability until it goes wrong.
- Understand communities' expectations of what you are accountable for.
- Understand who the 'representatives' you are working with are accountable to.
- Set out who is responsible for what and how to contact them.
- Always do what you said you were going to – even if it's just finishing a meeting on time!
- Openly report your progress and performance.



## Insights



Community accountability is as much about the process and the journey as delivery and outcomes.

*Paul Braham,  
Regeneration Specialist*

Be clear about decision-making responsibilities from the beginning.

*Helen Nicol, Blue Chula*

Creating clarity from the outset about who is accountable to who and for what provides the bedrock for the complex task of building trust, openness and support.

*Andy Creamer,  
Grosvenor Britain  
& Ireland*



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# How to...

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## give communities accountability

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## in managing places

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### Top tips

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- Property managers need to be good at facilitation and enabling.

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- Do a little bit less to create space for communities to have ownership and do more.

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- Find safe spaces for communities to be accountable and learn by doing.

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- Focus on what communities need and care about.

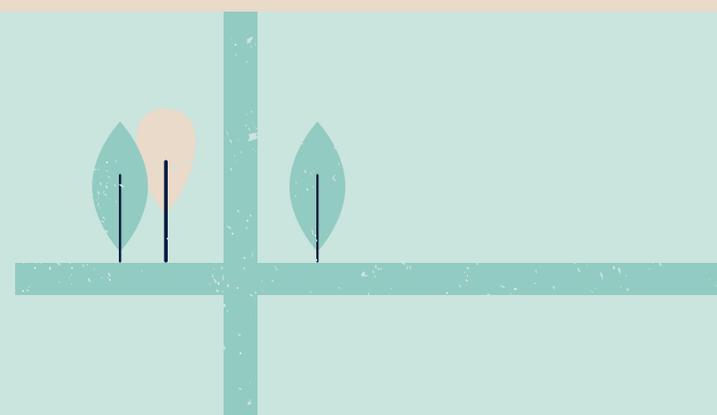
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- Start off small with initiatives that can make an immediate difference and draw others in.

- Consider practical projects that could help connect residential and business communities.



**Structures for community led governance on large-scale sites**



## Insights

“ Introducing enabling and facilitation expertise into the roles and skill sets of people involved in managing places can lead to more being achieved together.

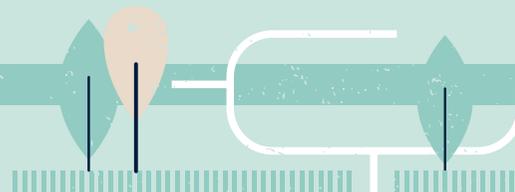
*Frances Wright, TOWN*

People need to own a project to be galvanised by it. Put the time in to find out what people really want from their neighbourhood.

*Tim Wood, Bankside Open Spaces Trust*

The greatest gift we can offer the communities we work with is to ensure they are empowered to take ownership and to make their own decisions and mistakes. Then it is truly theirs.

*Merlene Austin, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland*



**Grosvenor Britain & Ireland would like to thank everyone that shared their time and insight as part of *Positive Space in Practice*, including:**

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Debbie Jackson, Westminster City Council  
Deborah Denner, Frame Projects  
Frances Wright, TOWN  
Helen Nicol, Blue Chula  
Lora Botev, CitizenLab  
Martin Lydon, Haworth-Tompkins  
Matt McStravick, Deepr  
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Stephen Burns, Peabody  
Tim Wood, Bankside Open Spaces Trust  
Tony Armstrong, Locality  
Tony Burton CBE, Community Activist  
Will Brett, community organising specialist



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