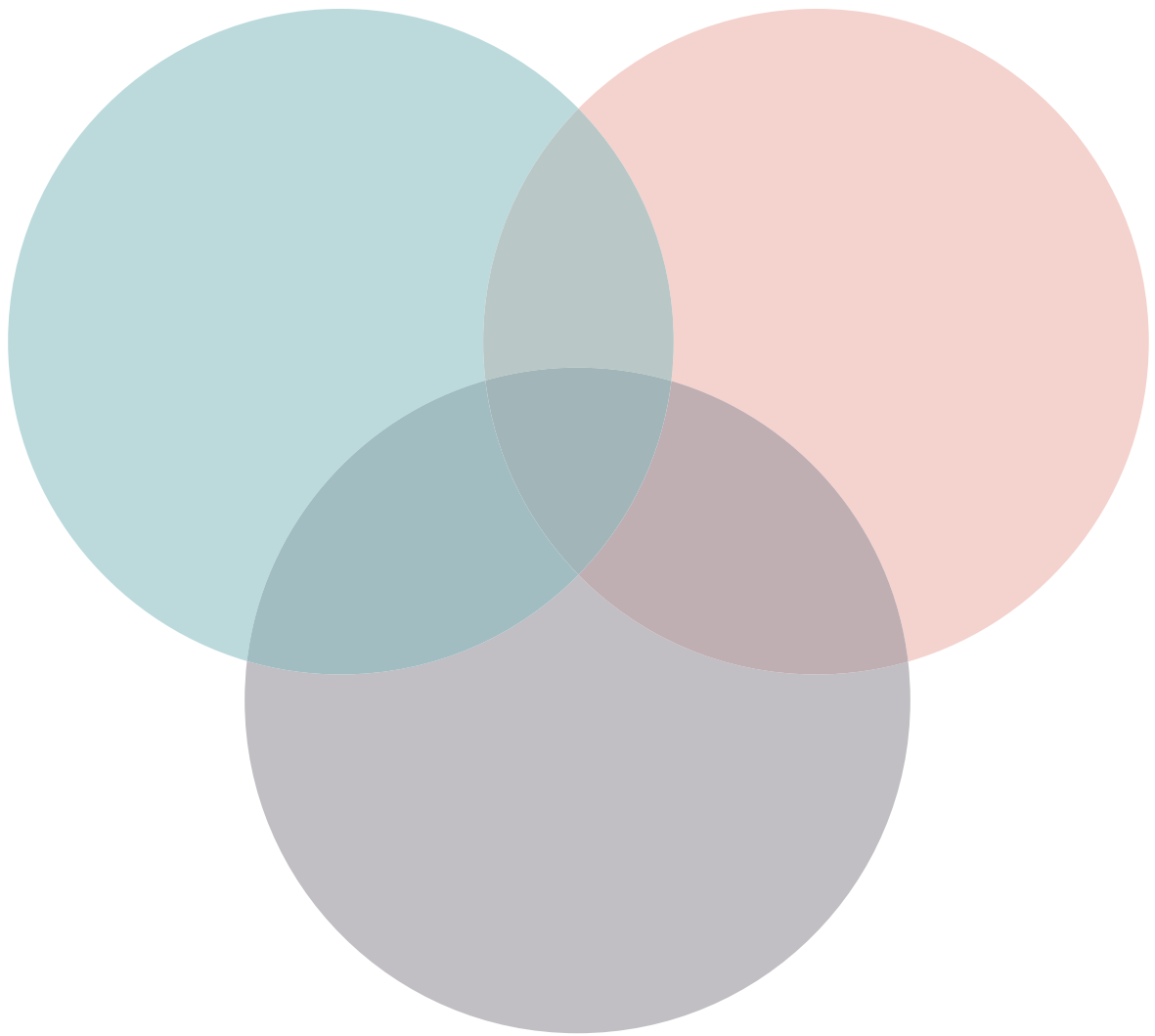


Co-PLACE

Innovation in Planning



PART I

delivering democratic policy, guidance and placemaking

Keep raising
the ambition

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**URBAN
DESIGN
GROUP**



Co-PLACE

Community Programme to Learn and Action in the City
Environment

Introduction by
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Introduction

Here in Nottingham, we are continuing our journey towards great Placemaking, to develop our city with world-class architecture and design; to develop our city into a place we can all feel proud to call home.

Nottingham City Council is at the forefront of a national reform of the planning system. Rather than continuing to use archaic and cumbersome traditional consultation practices, Co-PLACE is an innovative design tool created and developed here in Nottingham and is garnering attention and traction across the country.

The essence of Co-PLACE is that place users should be the central driving force in planning: planning from the ground up. After all, who better to comment on the requirements of a place than the citizens and communities directly involved? This may sound obvious, and yet traditional planning systems do not afford this in any meaningful way. Co-PLACE brings agencies together to work towards a shared goal: to make Nottingham a great place to live.

This publication gives an overview of Co-PLACE: what it is and why it is preferable to existing tools used in practice. We hope this will prove useful to all those involved in placemaking, as we continue to strive for great, future-proof design processes and practices that will benefit all.

Training on how to make effective use of Co-PLACE is available for people from across the board - individuals, community groups, those in the design industry, local authorities - and is delivered by our highly-skilled and knowledgeable facilitators.

We hope you enjoy learning a little about our work here in Nottingham and that you find Co-PLACE a superb tool to bring about greater democracy in Placemaking.



Councillor Linda Woodings
Planning Portfolio Holder

About Co-PLACE

ethos and principles that make Co-PLACE an
innovation tool for design and planning



Dentest

What is Co-PLACE?



Brian Clough statue in Nottingham City Centre.

"We talk about it for twenty minutes and then we decide I was right..."

... quipped Nottingham Forest legend Brian Clough, words immortalised in his statue on King Street in Nottingham city centre. Brian was reflecting in his typically witty and pithy way on how he handled disagreements with players. However, his words could also be applied, in part at least, to traditional consultation in planning. Decisions are typically made in a top-down fashion by those with power. Input or feedback from those "on the ground" - the individuals or groups that have to live with the planning outcomes - can often be little more than token. Whilst decision-makers invariably look to do their best, the constraints of the archaic system often lead to them being viewed as out of touch with the needs of the communities they serve.

Co-PLACE turns this on its head.

Individuals and communities are empowered to join the other stakeholders - developers, designers, planning officers, local authorities, councillors - in driving schemes from the ground up. Active engagement becomes a key part of the design process, and feedback given at the start of projects and right through to end-point delivery informs and guides the decision-making.

"Co-PLACE is very relevant as it will help to identify the needs of local communities and empower them to become more resilient. The impact of Covid-19 on more deprived neighbourhoods has shone a light on needs that haven't been addressed."

"The Co-PLACE framework will provide a platform for communities to fully benefit from the forthcoming changes to the planning system."

"The combination of Co-PLACE and the planning reform will enable communities to shape how their neighbourhoods are developed."

Co-PLACE participants and trainees (2021)

Co-PLACE is the Community Programme to Learn and Action in the City Environment that brings communities, authorities and industry together, joining the principles of Community Organising with the tools and strategies of Placemaking to deliver better places and a more democratic planning system.

Why do we need Co-PLACE?



Often, traditional planning consultations are run by professionals with little or limited expertise or experience in event facilitation. Jargon language and complex graphics can make members of the community feel unheard or disenfranchised from the planning process.

Sometimes, participants raise issues that have little to do with the subject of the consultation, diverting time and resources to unrelated issues. Professionals can tend towards illustrating technical matters that mean little to local residents and users. Different sectors and backgrounds may attend events with a wide range of differing agendas and, seemingly, very little common ground. Inexperienced facilitators then struggle to manage the inevitable conflicts of interest, which can lead to consultation events feeling uncomfortable and largely ineffective.

The Co-PLACE programme is an engagement process that empowers all agents to participate and contribute. It brings along community organising tools and participation strategies to identify barriers to communication, to increase mutual understanding across sectors and to offer a neutral, shared platform where agencies can find common ground.

Why do we need Co-PLACE?

Nottingham City Council has worked closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as they produced the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. With Planning Delivery Funds, Nottingham worked in parallel to central government to deliver a local version of the ambitious new planning models. Co-PLACE is the project that explored how authorities, industry and communities could work together to deliver better places.

On the 21st of May 2021, a press release from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was published online:

"A new national design code meaning areas are beautiful, well-designed and locally-led is being tested across 14 areas in England.

- 14 councils across England given £50,000 each to develop new design codes

- Codes will set out design principles for new development in local areas

- Local design codes will be expected to enhance the character of the local area - for example by using honey - coloured stone in the Cotswolds or red brick in the Midlands

- Selected areas will test how to give communities a real say in the layout, design and appearance of buildings in their area - helping the country Build Back Better."

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

"We should aspire to enhance the beauty of our local areas and pass our cultural heritage onto our successors, enriched not diminished.

Instead of developers forcing plans on locals, they will need to adapt to proposals from local people, ensuring that current and new residents alike will benefit from beautiful homes in well-designed neighbourhoods."

With these changes in the planning system, the role of officers and designers will radically change in the near future as national and local planning policies are progressing towards a more inclusive and open planning system. Significantly increased community involvement and empowerment means new knowledge and skills are needed.

Emerging national policy will soon put community engagement at the heart of the planning process, at the early stages of design. In preparation for this change, Nottingham City Council has recently launched the Community Engagement Guide, a document in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the National Planning Policy Framework. The guide states the city's ambitious expectations regarding public involvement in design and planning processes.

The Co-PLACE ethos was piloted during the development of the Design Quality Framework for Nottingham City with exceptional results. Now the Co-PLACE training programme, a not-for-profit partnership initiative originally based at the Urban Room, aims to bring everyone up to speed with the skills and tools required to meet the new community engagement standards.

Designers, developers, member of the community and public sector officers will find the training programme could be incredibly useful to help them understand the reform and their role in the future. Nottingham City Council can also prepare affordable training schemes tailored to a variety of needs.



How was Co-PLACE created?

Nottingham City Council focused on design quality for over a decade



The City Council was awarded Planning Delivery Fund and prioritised design quality



Design Quality Framework project commenced (May 2018)



Audits showed consultation and participation improvements were needed to increase place democracy and social resilience (July 2018)



A community champion urban designer from Nottingham City Council became ambassador of place democracy in planning, combining the Community Organising ethos with Placemaking tools for application in the planning process (Aug 2018)



The Co-PLACE ethos was adopted by the City Council as the engagement strategy for the Design Quality Framework (Sept 2018)



The Co-PLACE pilot delivery took place during the Design Quality Framework engagement (Nov 2018 onwards - continues to date)

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launches the revised National Planning Policy Framework

Carbon Neutral 2028 ambition and action plan were set for Nottingham City (June 2020)

Rapid, decisive action, broad participation and collective efforts needed to meet the target

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launches the National Design Guide (Oct 2019)

More complex, innovative engagement practices were required

The Co-PLACE concept was launched (Sept 2018)

Community Organisers were invited to collaborate (Oct 2019)

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launches the planning reform white paper (Dec 2020)

Outstanding results: the Co-PLACE concept is developed into a pilot training programme to prepare facilitators for future practice (Jan 2019)

Values and principles of Co-PLACE



REACH OUT



LISTEN



CONNECT



ORGANISE



LEADERSHIP



STRATEGY



ACTION



CHANGE

Values and principles of Co-PLACE



'Reach out' Co-PLACE principle in action during the DQF Wellbeing Design Guide engagement, 2019.

Co-PLACE embraces the Community Organising Framework to ensure that communities are embedded in design and planning processes from start to completion. Participation, accountability, reflection and learning are always at the forefront for all stakeholders to drive towards the best outcomes for all. Power is distributed to support everyone's abilities to act, promoting social justice and building community resilience.

Community Organising Framework principles embedded in the Co-PLACE ethos	
PRINCIPLE	MEANING
REACH OUT	go to people and engage with them in their communities
LISTEN	use dialogue to develop relationships and learn about what things are important to communities to foster better understanding
CONNECT	build bridges and share links, tools and resources to consolidate and strengthen cohesion and to create groups with common interests
ORGANISE	build a power base that is rooted in local democracy and accountable associations of people acting collectively
LEADERSHIP	identify natural leaders, motivating and supporting them and instilling the belief that they can effect change
STRATEGY	identify issues through stories and information learnt from communities, and use analysis, agreed tactics and collective action not just to tackle the immediate symptoms of issues, but also to address the root causes
ACTION	facilitate collective action, from local to national, on the issues that matter most to people, bringing communities together to share resources and engage with power holders
CHANGE	lead change for a more sustainable future, addressing the root causes of injustice and inequality, thereby strengthening democracy by promoting placemaking best practice

What is different about Co-PLACE?



Traditional consultation event for the Island Quarter at the Urban Room (see page 27) in September 2018. Material is exhibited for a few hours, members of the public visit and make comments if they so wish.



Co-PLACE open, hands-on, inclusive group dialogue approach at a DQF Street and Housing Design Guides event. Social Eating workshop with communities at the Urban Room in 2019.

What is different about Co-PLACE?

Co-PLACE unites the staunch principles and values of Community Organisers with the resources of the planning system at local authority level to increase place democracy.

It was conceived here in the city of Nottingham to deliver greater participation in placemaking: to offer a real voice to communities and embody them in the design process.

Engagement is the key - not just consultation. Embracing a continuous, collaborative, multidirectional approach builds social cohesiveness and resilience. Input received at the right time ensures that designs are responsive to communities' needs, and not just reflective of the designers' preconceived ideas.

Designers also benefit as, through the engagement, constraints to Placemaking (such as economic or technical) can be explained to communities to foster mutual understanding and respect, and carve out a realistic shared vision.

PP

Traditional consultation

Follows the typical approach:

1. A proposal is created by the design team and sometimes, but not always, the community and other stakeholders are consulted with to offer feedback on the design.
2. Where feasible, designers may use the feedback to make some alterations to the proposals. Equally, they may choose to disregard the feedback and submit the original design proposal to the local authority.
3. Normally, this would be the end of any consultation. On rare occasions, communities may be given notice of any changes.

Traditional consultation can be tokenistic and can lack inclusion.

Co-PLACE

A different, new way of working:

1. Before drafting a proposal, designers engage with the Co-PLACE platform to assess and be informed by communities about their place¹ and to establish which community networks would be interested in engaging further in the design process.
2. A bespoke engagement network is formed by all interested parties and stakeholders for the particular project, and conversations begin to shape a shared vision for the proposal.
3. Throughout the design process, this network informs the design proposals and, together, all parties negotiate design solutions that work for everybody.

Co-PLACE offers true democracy in Placemaking.

¹ Such as current uses and shared memories

From consultation to engagement



Traditional consultation events are often poorly attended or some groups are under-represented. There are limited opportunities for some people to participate, and some might find it difficult to express themselves in such formal environments.



Co-PLACE promotes a continuous dialogue, bringing the placemaking debate to a range of groups and networks in more comfortable and approachable environments.

Continuous engagement is at the heart of the Co-PLACE ethos.

Currently, participation in planning still focuses primarily on providing site-specific, top-down, unidirectional consultation: considering and consulting over a single design in a specific moment in time and space. In best practice examples, participation provides information and opinions from the community to designers and developers to inform schemes.

In contrast to this, engagement is a continuous, collaborative, multidirectional approach that focuses on the process itself rather than being site-specific. Engagement is about what the design, planning and building processes can offer to communities to help them build social resilience.

Whilst consultation tends to be only one event, sometimes with surveys and opportunities to record responses, engagement is a culture of inclusion and equality that is embedded throughout the process to empower communities.

Whilst it remains rare to find good examples of engagement in practice, Co-PLACE looks to redress this.

Table based on the International Association of Public Participation model					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions	To work with participants to ensure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision making	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise	"We'll keep you informed"	"We will listen to you and acknowledge your concerns"	"We will work with you to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made"	"We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate these in decisions as much as possible"	"We will implement your informed decisions"
	Input Zone		Engagement Zone		

The planning system offers opportunities for all of the practices above. Which technique to adopt will largely depend on the size and nature of the project. For example, for a private house extension proposal, consultation only with local residents would normally suffice, whilst for larger, higher impact development, the views of the community are critical.

How Co-PLACE promotes empowerment



Co-PLACE principles were explained at the Planning Officers Society (POS) conference in Nottingham in 2019.

Empowerment is the act of giving power to someone to do something. Indeed, a quick search of the word 'empowerment' will yield hundreds of millions of results, but the very first, from Oxford Languages and Google, offers this example: *'individuals are given empowerment to create their own dwellings'*.

This is at the essence of Co-PLACE: those who are directly affected by the design proposal are EMPOWERED and valued as essential partners in the process and can take their own projects forward.

Traditionally, consultation would take place by the design team or the local authority hosting a meeting of interested parties to discuss a proposal, allowing people to voice their opinions. This would then be fed back to the full team and the consultation would likely end there.

Empowerment is far more than this.

A long term, on-going process of engagement allows the facilitators² to LISTEN to the motivations and goals of all participants. From this understanding and through DIALOGUE, the participants are then guided towards tools and strategies that will facilitate them to be able not only to voice opinions and concerns, but also to take ACTION to steer the proposal forward, in terms of both WHAT happens and HOW it happens.

The Co-PLACE ethos looks for opportunities for empowerment throughout the design and planning process.

² For example, officers from the local authority or designers, all of whom need to be suitably qualified in community organising and engagement.



Community group Nottingham Good Food Partnership was empowered by Co-PLACE to produce the Wellbeing Design Guide, a critical piece of planning guidance to deliver the Carbon Neutral 2028 ambition for the city.

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the ambition

Delivering Co-PLACE

Nottingham's Urban Room was the hub for Co-PLACE at 38 Carrington Street from 2018 until 2019, when the Coronavirus Pandemic put all face-to-face engagement programmes on hold.

The Urban Room

"Every town and city should have a physical space where people can go to understand, debate and get involved in the past, present and future of where they live, work and play. The purpose of these urban rooms is to foster meaningful connections between people and place, using creative methods of engagement to encourage active participation in the future of our buildings, streets and neighbourhoods."

The Farrell Review (2014)

At the 2014 National Urban Design Conference, hosted in Nottingham, discussions took place about creating an Urban Room in the city. Contributors to the vision included Historic England, Nottingham City Council, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the University of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham and Derby Society of Architects, the Urban Design Group and local architects, surveyors and social enterprises.

The designation of the Nottingham Heritage Action Zone, supported by Historic England, presented the opportunity to turn the vision

into reality, and so, in March 2018, Number 38 Carrington Street - Nottingham's Urban Room - opened to the public.

The Urban Room was located in a historic building within a regeneration area that links the railway station with major retail zones. The premises offered a renovated former shop with a ground floor space for exhibitions and events and a basement available to hire for workshops, meetings and events. Nottingham City Council funded the running costs for the period of the Heritage Action Zone project.

The Urban Room was a fundamental vehicle for the delivery of the Co-PLACE programme: a neutral space with an inspirational and creative atmosphere that helped people relax and gave them the confidence to participate in activities, given the friendly and welcoming environment.

In the wake of the 2020 Pandemic Crisis, during the first lockdown, the Urban Room evolved into a virtual platform to continue to serve the community and provide ongoing opportunities for the delivery of Co-PLACE.



Social Eating workshop at the Urban Room during a Design Quality Framework event in 2019.



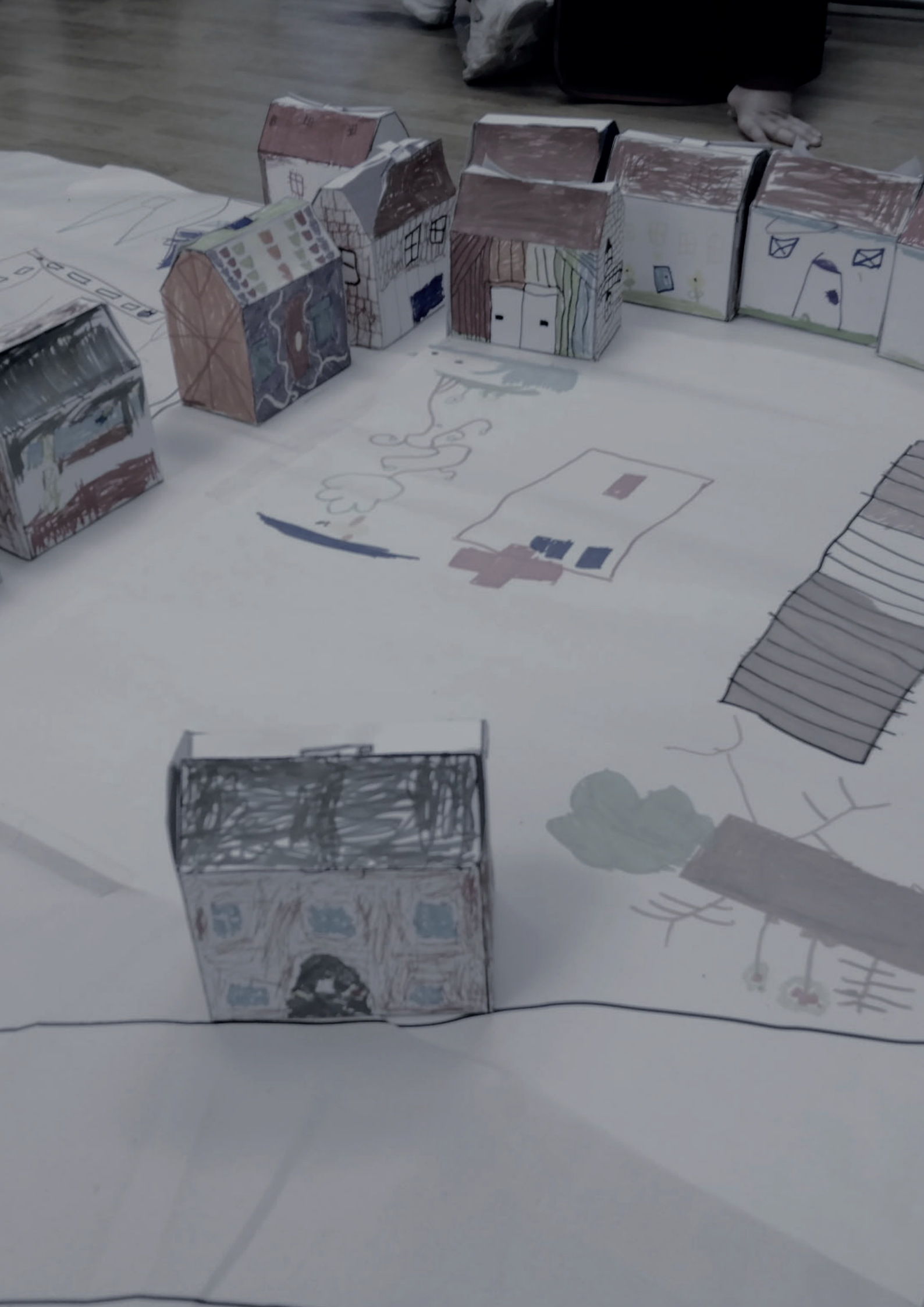
Nottingham Urban Room shop front during an event in 2019.

Social eating

During the Design Quality Framework engagement project (see page 30), Social Eating - where event participants prepare and share a meal together - was implemented as a tool to collect data and to generate and strengthen social networks. Local growing networks provided the produce and catered for informal meals that helped to generate a relaxed and communal atmosphere where participants felt confident and at ease to discuss potentially sensitive issues.

Feedback from these sessions repeatedly reflected the success of this approach. Participants said that sharing a table with food was a powerful way to bring people together.

This test was critically important to showcase how existing social assets and tools like Social Eating can be integrated successfully in planning processes.



Coming next

Co-PLACE booklet part II: bringing communities, authorities and industry together to deliver better places details some of the tools and strategies applied during the Design Quality Framework. This second publication goes into more detail about the delivery of the Co-PLACE ethos and how to put it into practice in a Local Authority with limited resources.

The Nottingham Design Quality Framework publication goes into more detail regarding the engagement programme, the results of the events and how these informed the writing of the guidance and the planning of the engagement in the long term.

Nottingham City Council is now incorporating the Co-PLACE principles more broadly across

various departments, with increasing examples of the benefits of this way of working.

The Community Engagement Guide of the Design Quality Framework, available at <https://www.dqfnottingham.org.uk/community-engagement-guide>, sets some key criteria that aid the delivery of this type of engagement ethos, highlighting critical actions to ensure best practice during the design and planning phases.

The Heritage and Urban Design team at Nottingham City Council would be happy to support other authorities, businesses, communities and organisations aiming to adopt the Co-PLACE principles or looking for further training and development in this area of expertise.

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