

Trust is an important ingredient of establishing rapport. We know that trust in the planning system is at rock-bottom. Trust is built over time and all our evidence shows that longer involvement also leads to more constructive engagement with wider, more strategic planning projects: 66% of responses on Commonplace are supportive or neutral to the plans being consulted.



The planning system should view engagement as a conversation not a survey, a process not an event.



We strongly endorse the Government's 'digital-first' approach to giving the public maximum access to information, while allowing them to decide for themselves how much or little involvement they want. But digital-first should not mean digital-only: part of the digital opportunity is the ability to identify gaps in engagements in real time, so that resources can be better targeted at people who might otherwise be excluded.

An important learning from our research is about language and identity: in our focus groups we found that certain concepts or phrases resulted in us talking either at cross-purposes or in specialist language that people simply did not understand. Two examples illustrate why this is a problem: Firstly the phrase 'taking part' in planning was often interpreted as taking a leading role that people felt unable or unwilling to do. Secondly, the phrase 'levelling-up' is not something that most people in our Middlesbrough focus groups had even heard of. When the meaning was explained, they didn't like the implications that there was any levelling up needed in their towns, for which they feel an intense civic pride.

We write this report in the midst of the Covid pandemic lockdowns. Despite the gravity and desperation of this crisis, we have seen a surge of interest and connection to communities and local neighbourhoods. Throughout the course of 2020, 1.5M people have engaged in 750 projects on Commonplace around the UK.



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There has never been a better time for the planning system to establish a framework for the kind of continuous conversations that can harness this enthusiasm to make better decisions about places that benefit everyone.

5. Data shows how barriers can be overcome through open and ongoing engagement

- **There is demand to be tapped using digital engagement.**

Over 2.5M people have visited and read Commonplace engagements, resulting in 1.5M responses.

- **People want to be involved longer-term in connected conversations:**

87% of Commonplace respondents want to be notified about other local engagement opportunities. On average, a Commonplace respondent contributes 6 times.

- **Responses are higher from an already engaged community.**

People who have previously engaged in a consultation by reading or interacting, are 5 times more likely to participate again by adding or agreeing to a comment.

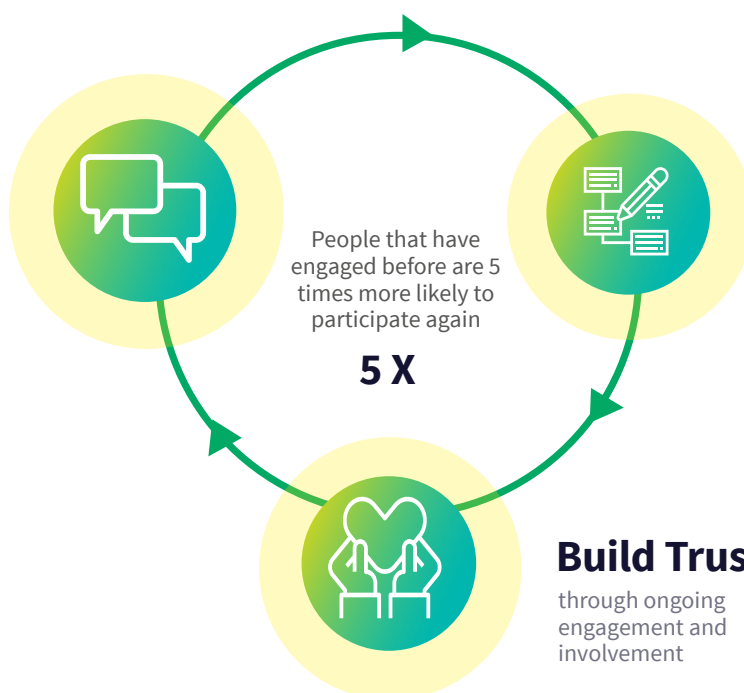
- **More people respond when they see their neighbours responding:**

people are twice as likely to add their own comment when there are many other comments (more than 1,000) to read, as if there are few comments (25 or less). The openness of Commonplace offers a 'social proof' of the process. This resonates with the insight from our polling that people trust neighbours highly when it comes to deciding whether to support a planning proposal.

- **Open, longer-term engagement is constructive:**

When people participate via the Commonplace platform, their responses are constructive: 66% are actively supportive or neutral to the plans being consulted. There are several examples of this trend in case studies throughout the report.

Be a conversation, not a 1 off survey.



Be a process, not just an event

happening throughout the planning lifecycle

Build Trust

through ongoing engagement and involvement

Part 2

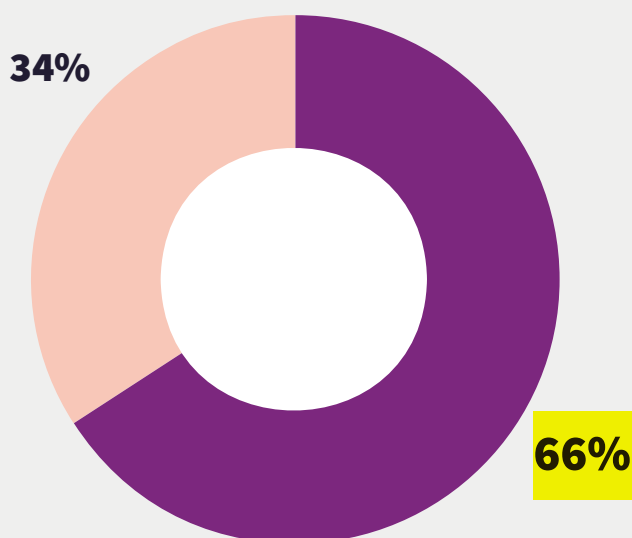
Overcoming barriers to engagement

Appetite to engage

There is a huge and unmet appetite in communities to engage

People care about the future of their neighbourhoods and they want to be part of determining their futures. Particularly in focus groups, people speak about their civic pride and how much the places they live matter to them. A large majority (76%) of the polled sample thought that ‘people need to be given a greater say over new developments in their local area.’

People want to have a say, and when they feel their voices are influencing change, they remain engaged. On our platform, 70% of people who engage via a Commonplace project have never taken part in a planning decision before, 87% of people who engage on our digital platform want to be notified about future local engagement opportunities – and engagement levels are considerably higher and more constructive: **66%** are actively supportive or neutral to the changes that are put before them.



% of respondents actively supportive or neutral

Study of 211,650 responses to plans and design proposals on Commonplace over the past 12 months

- Yes
- No