

GOOD CONSULTATION

What it looks like

Following our Consultation Supplement in Spring 2016 PLACE we revisit the subject with the views of Perry Walker - a facilitator who has developed a variety of participatory methods- and lives in Hereford. Founder of www.openupuk.org and fellow of the New Economics Foundation, Involve and Talk Shop, which organises face to face events.

I've picked out what seem to me to be two most important commitments that anyone consulting the public should make. If these are not present in a consultation, my advice to people wondering whether to take part would be to steer clear: you'll likely be wasting your time.

Tell people what's up for grabs. This is essential, so that citizens can decide for themselves if they want to take part. Some years ago, I organised a dialogue about mobile libraries in Herefordshire. We agreed a 'statement of influence' Here's what it said:

How will we use what you tell us?

The results of the consultation including comments received through meetings, comment cards and online will be used to inform a review of the mobile library service.



Other areas which will be taken into account when reviewing the service will include

- relevant council strategies including the Community Strategy for Herefordshire and the Cultural Strategy for Herefordshire
- available budgets and staffing
- best practice from other councils
- opportunities for working in partnership with other organisations

Participants were encouraged to engage further and a commitment was made to keep them informed of progress.

What could and what will not change

Certain areas are already fixed and are not up for discussion; others are what we should focus on and this statement was made public:-

Things that can't change

- Budgets
- The number and type of mobile libraries
- A home delivery service will be provided

Things that can change

- The frequency of visits
- Types of use of mobile library van
- Length of stops
- Customer groups targeted by the service
- Locations of stops

Say in advance how people will get feedback on their contributions

To quote a 1999 Cabinet Office report, "A main cause of 'consultation fatigue' is that people are fed up with being asked for their views, without receiving feedback on how their views have been used."

I have come across one really good example of giving feedback, in the form of South Tyneside Council's listening campaign in the 1990s. Here's what they said: "We asked you about our parks. You said restore our parks to their natural beauty. We listened and starting with South Marine Park we're investing £3.8m lottery funding".

Hereford City Centre Improvements

Did Herefordshire Council - Balfour Beatty Living Spaces meet Perry's requirements when feeding back on their consultation? We have previously commented that the original questions were light on detail and background information. Here we print excerpts of the Consultation Feedback Report – April 2016. (Some 65 pages of it!)

Summary comments from the stakeholders on each of the schemes are summarised below for High Town Public Realm:-

"There was broad acceptance and support for the refurbishment of High Town with the main points relating to signage linking not only to the Old Market and High Town but with the Cathedral and High Town for a holistic approach for visitors. Additional planting in High Town was supported as it was felt there was a need to break up the space. Moveable planters were suggested so that the shape of the High Town space could be changed for different events. It was suggested that outdoor staging and a large screen was provided in High Town for watching sporting and other events, which would help make it a more friendly and accessible place and promote evening activities.

The May Fair is a significant event in High Town and reassurance was sought

The "must attend" event for councillors and Council officers!

BYPASSING THE EVIDENCE

De Koffie Pot, at the Left Bank, Hereford.

7 for 7.30 Thursday 27th October.

"we'll be asking how we can respond in a democracy when public perception is at odds with the evidence"

A Green Party Event

on the new surfacing and its suitability to sustain the heavy vehicles used for the fair. A reduction in the number and design of the lamp columns in High Town was supported, but retaining the ability to be multi-functional for hanging poster and decorations. There was a minority view that High Town refurbishment was not needed at this time but majority support for the High Town proposals was clear.

Residents' Parking

8.3 Summary

A wide range of responses were received in response to parking and traffic order elements of the city centre improvements consultation. Responses were received both for and against. The Traffic Regulation Order formal consultation process will allow response and objections to be considered further in the development parking and traffic order proposals."

Respectfully this is not good enough. HCS accepts that this is the report that needed ratification by Cabinet but it is muddled, and at 65 pages too much for most of us to be bothered with.



SOUTH WYE TRANSPORT PACKAGE SOUTHERN ROAD OPTIONS



In a report Perry did for the council in Hammersmith and Fulham, he wrote:
 "Again and again during this research, people said that they wanted feedback from consultation procedures. They wanted to know: what the Council was doing with their opinions; how their views were being taken into account in the decision making process; if nothing was happening, why not; and how they could object to the Council's conclusions or decisions if they still did not agree with them.
 What they did not want was a meeting or survey followed by a long silence on the part of the Council, which they said was what they usually got."

HELP

This additional sheet takes us beyond our budgeted income. We need

- more advertisers to support us and to speak to their potential customers.
- more admin support to cover the regular matters in which we are involved.
- just a little more input from our members – we are only as effective as a society if we all work together.

Your committee is requesting help - call anyone of us to discuss. Thank you – John Bothamley, Chairman - 01981 580002 – john@johnbothamley.co.uk

This supplement funded by Talk The Talk, promoting good communication skills throughout the Country in schools and colleges. Professional trainers inspiring us all to speak to each other and communicate. Information from www.talkthetalkuk.org the dynamic, Hereford based, charity moving the need for better communication skills up the education agenda.



CONTROVERSIAL MATTERS

Here we consider controversial matters that an educated society ought to be able to resolve in an honest and open way. We know that democracy is the best that we can hope for but its application often stalls. We must continue to discuss and debate but the committee of Hereford Civic Society pleads for more transparency and a respect of the rules.

At national level why does Communities Secretary Sajid Javid overturn Neighbourhood Plans he doesn't like? In Herefordshire why do Councillors vote against the opinions they expressed to grant themselves planning consent? If the establishment continues to ignore the rules.....

Blueschool House (161565)

This application was fully described in PLACE Summer 2016 (p6). It refers to the existing planning office and a proposal to turn it into an industrial looking building on our premier boulevard.

In spite of spirited presentations by Steve Kerry, the Hereford City Council clerk and John Bothamley, chairman of HCS, the planning committee granted consent for Herefordshire Council's own building on 14th September 2016.

Clearly a political decision as most councillors spoke against the proposals.

- "poor option" Cllr. Baker (Conservative)
- "not ideal" Cllr. Holton(Conservative)
- "can do better" "only a marginal improvement" Cllr. Swinglehurst (Conservative)
- "not the building we would want" "medium term solution" Cllr. James (Liberal)

And then voted in favour of consent! The ward councillor, Polly Andrews, reminded the meeting that money was available "although this is not a planning matter"; so why did she mention it? Cllr. Baker reminded the meeting that there was no political whip.

Some relevant facts:

- A clapped out building and a proposal that almost the entire planning committee condemned during debate.
- Only a four page Design and Access statement – less information than is usually required.

- No reference to the conservation area.
- The ESG report for the development of Blueschool Street entirely ignored.

This decision is clearly wrong for the City. It is classic Hereford short termism, a vision abandoned for doubtful financial benefit. This is vandalism on a grand scale – an industrial building on Hereford's best city centre site.



This is not a joke

Planning officers have been on a Colourisation Course to assist them in deciding the colour of the new cladding. (Only those in the public gallery found this highly amusing, councillors took it all most seriously). It involves considering the colour of local buildings and then some magic formula suggests "on the red spectrum". HC is spending money on this sort of indulgence using a "consultant" whilst slashing spending on essential services. We try not to condemn officers who have limited opportunities to defend their actions but this extravagance is unacceptable.



What are we afraid of?

Gated communities – what's it all about?

Europe and Japan are different from the rest of the world where gated estates for the middle classes and rich are endemic. High levels of crime against the person and property would prey on one's mind if asked to live in Karachi or Rio. To have to unlock a six foot gate to reach one's house seems alien to most Brits but asked to work in Pakistan or Argentina guess most would opt for the perceived safety of the gated community.



But now they are coming here to Hereford. The just completed Nell Gwynne refurbishment (142315) has gates and a high brick wall. A new application (162264) in Hafod Road wants them. It is about fear, but is it rational? There is a huge difference in the social fabric of many countries compared with European ones. Here we relate to each other, we converse, we depend upon a trust between each other whether we are buying a service or receiving help. This depends upon trust between each party. This basic tenet of our society must not be eroded further. Already we buy tickets on line and self-serve in supermarkets and many communicate almost exclusively by text. Physical barriers to our ability to interact is another

step into a lonely private world.

Research in America suggests "huge social and economic changes have led to a loss of kinship networks and local communities, and in turn to increased fear of others and a perceived need for segregation and withdrawal. It is harder to feel confidence and trust in the rootless, urban world in which a "void yawns at the spot once occupied by 'society'" (Bauman, 2001, p.112).

One child wishes for higher walls, another for armed guards at the gates. Women repeatedly mention fear of kidnapping and argue that gated life allows their children to be children. Ironically, these same children have enormous fears. (Setha Low. 2003 Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America)

We all know the influence of America – do we really want that kind of society here? These apparently small gestures of a gate across a small cul de sac are just encouraging distrust of our neighbours. We must hold together respecting and working together with each other.



National Planning Policy Framework

Para 61. Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

Promoting healthy communities. Para 69. The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities. Local planning authorities should create a shared vision with communities of the residential environment and facilities they wish to see. To support this, local planning authorities should aim to involve all sections of the community in the development of Local Plans and in planning decisions, and should facilitate neighbourhood planning.

Planning policies and decisions, in turn, should aim to achieve places which promote:

- opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, including through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres and active street frontages which bring together those who work, live and play in the vicinity;
- safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
- safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas