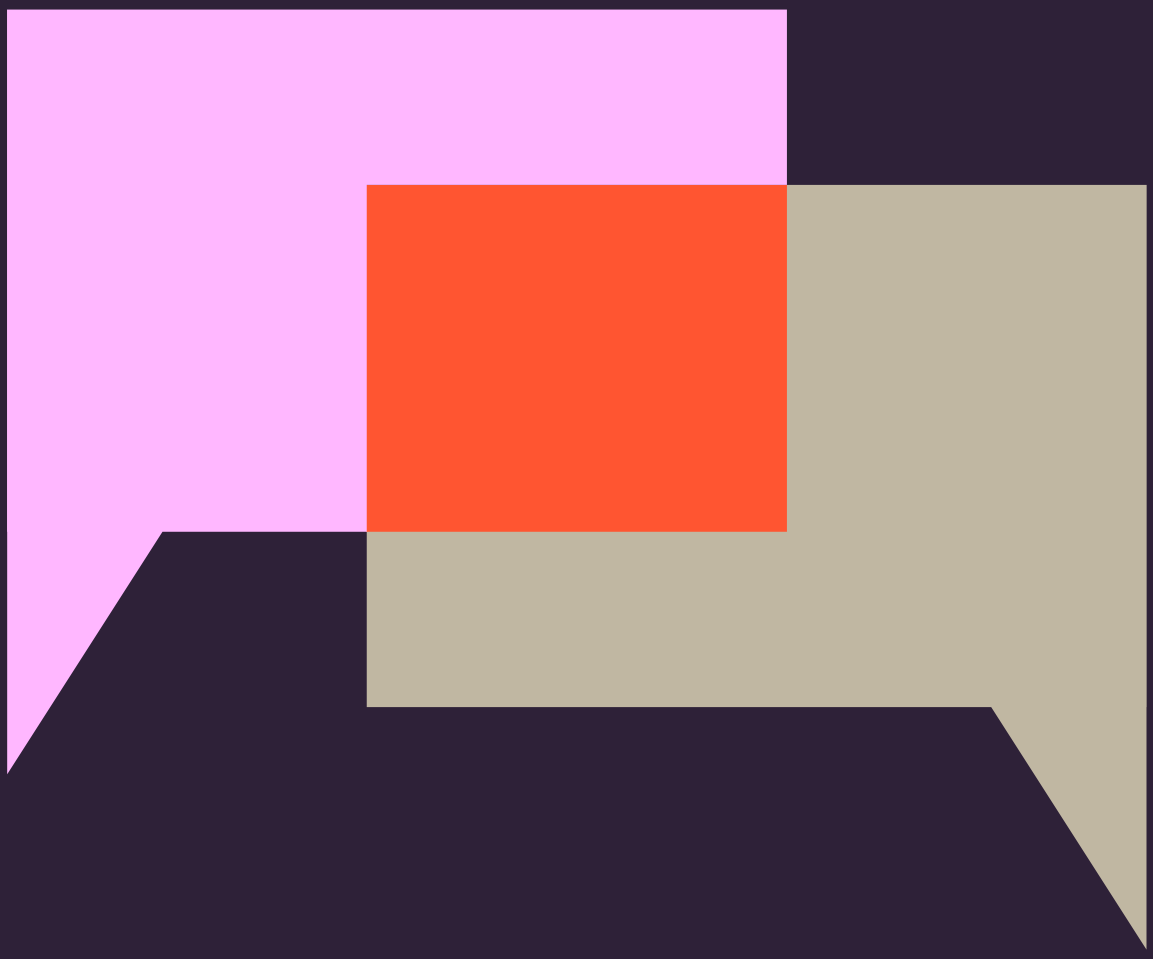
Meeting Place

UKREiiF 2024
Social Value Symposium

Delivering impact, from ideas to outcomes



The perfect platform

A few thousand industry leaders gathered in one place provided the perfect platform for delivering the next instalment of our social value symposiums.

Following on from successful events in Bristol, London and Manchester, we took over The Department at UKREiiF for a fast-paced session that uncovered what it means to deliver long term social impact across the planning, consultation, procurement, construction and operational phases.

The morning kicked off with a keynote from Chris White former MP and author of the 2012 Social Value Act. Understanding the roots of a policy that has shifted the landscape when it comes to social impact was critical in shaping the conversations that followed.

Chris White pointed out that there is no clear definition or strict measurement and reporting strategy in policy. This is because this limits the ability to adapt, evolve and deliver bespoke approaches.

With this in mind, the delegates in the room shared best practice, lessons learnt and creative ideas for how we can deliver impact at each stage of the process, while exploring what the industry could be doing to change the landscape.

Procurement

Firstly, we asked whether the procurement process presents an exciting opportunity to deliver social impact and if current tendering requirements are fit for purpose.

Our key challenges to the industry were:

- **Understand what you want**
  Clients, planning authorities and development teams often have a social impact question within the tender or application process. However, there isn't always clear articulation on what the local needs are and therefore the priorities within the delivery plan. Without someone to drive this from the top, the delivery of commitments can slip down the agenda and there isn't a clear reporting strategy in place.

- **Set clear aspirations**
  We know that to deliver impact we need to drive diversity and reflect the needs of local communities. The procurement and tendering process needs to reflect the key local aspirations, allowing the development team to respond directly with a tailored approach. Generic language, too strong a focus on internally focused initiatives and the ability to report on activities that you are already doing, can lead to a distrust in the process and in some cases, a lack of aspiration to truly connect with local people.

- **Develop strong partnerships**
  When local authorities, developers and project teams work together we know there is greater chance of success. The same can be said for collaborating with local organisations, volunteer groups and charities to help deliver social impact commitments. Building these partnerships at an early stage through any procurement strategy will ensure positive outcomes in the long term.

- **Use planning as an enabler**
  The process of determining planning applications can often seem to take place behind a smoke screen with uncertainty about the way responses are evaluated or reviewed against one another. By making the process more open and transparent, sharing best practice, and having a consistent evaluation approach in place we may be able to demystify the process and ensure that tender responses speak to the requirements of local authorities, and more pressingly, local communities.

- **Measurement**
  While there is acceptance that measurement frameworks and metrics are here to stay, at least in the short term, there is still a need for training across the sector to help ensure that these tools are stewarded carefully and consistently used in the correct ways to demonstrate meaningful impact.

Planning and engagement

The groups then went on to discuss how we can deliver social impact during the planning process. We shared our 'pebble in a pond' idea, noting that there is a ripple effect that comes from our site and that our work on the ground impacts not only the building, but the spaces in between and society at large.

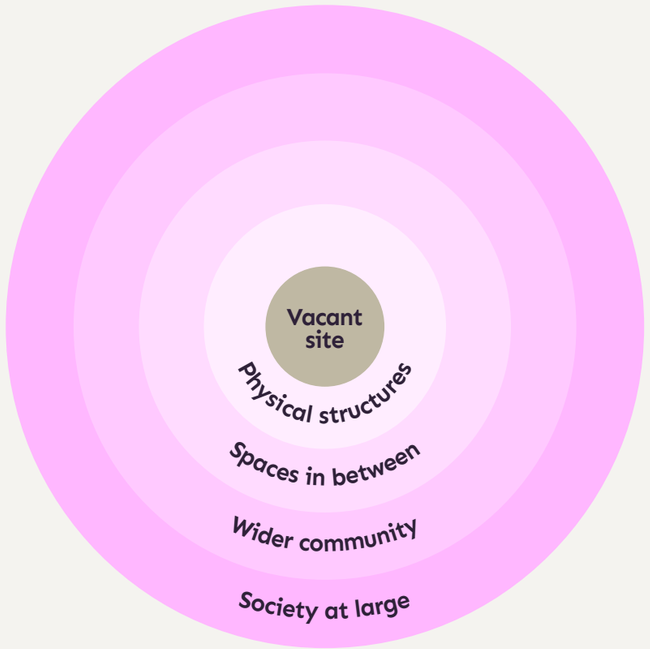
Critical to successful engagement is speaking to the right people at the right times, as well as knowing when to hand things over to local communities. Specifically, we discussed what it would look like to enable peer-to-peer engagement, leaning on local advocates to take ownership and drive an idea forward.

The opposite of being a light touch approach from the developer and consultant team, this would require a large amount of investment of time, money and resource to ensure that local leaders are fully empowered to share updates on the scheme, facilitate workshops and gather local sentiment. Development teams should also research existing events such as fun days and fairs, to capture the views of a wider audience who might not engage in a more formal setting.

There is also increasing appetite for smaller roundtable workshops to explore pertinent issues such as accessibility, safety and equitable design. This is about resourcing the groups that can be overlooked in traditional consultation approaches, favouring the 'hard to ignore'. Flipping that model on its head and using creative avenues to engagement will ensure that everyone has their voices heard.

Pebble in the pond

visual repersentation



Construction and operation

Finally, we turned to the delivery phases. This can often feel like the space where the greatest social impact can be delivered but where many of us have the least control. Squaring that circle can feel impossible, particularly when you are still in the procurement phase and cannot see the longer-term picture.

The need for stewardship and accountability in delivering on the commitments made at an early stage is key. However, so is the ability to flex and adapt. As projects progress there will be changes in need within local communities, new priorities and unforeseen pressures.

Our system must be able to meet this challenge and ensure that, rather than falling by the wayside, the construction and operational phases deliver impact and can report on the good work done.

During construction the group wanted to see greater focus on:

- Ensuring pro-bono work is integrated into contracts, focusing on sharing resources and skills to support local charities and organisations.
- Making apprenticeships part of business culture, meaning they are easier to mobilise and become an integral part of a project delivery and success.
- Tailoring contracts for SMEs that reflect their scope of influence and empower them to deliver impact that is proportional to their contract size. This will help to prevent a feeling of commitments feeling burdensome rather than motivating people to do good.
- Focus on on-site skills training centres and offering insight days to close the skills gap. This could help to improve recruitment locally when people can see a physical space that they can go for training and suits more flexible working patterns.
- Amplifying diverse voices and improving the visibility of role models in the industry. This will help encourage young people, people from the global majority and women into the industry and demonstrate the broad range of careers in construction that aren't soley focused on manual labour work.

During the operation of development there should be focus on:

- Diversification in operational models to allow for greater impact. This might include letting spaces to SMEs, creating incubator spaces and championing a mix of uses. This level of adaptability as well as having different groups and organisations working alongside one another will deliver long-term impact and be responsive to local demand.
- Greater sharing of knowledge and best practice to ensure that we can all reach a higher standard. There is still the notion in the industry that we should keep much of our best work secret. The social impact space is starting to change this, and we need to encourage greater pooling of resources, sharing of ideas and peer reviews of strategies to ensure that we are delivering impact for communities.
- Creating models for long-term stewardship that adapt with the space. We are moving beyond short-term development with buildings that are designed to last much longer and meet higher environmental credentials. Our stewardship models need to match this, and we should set in place strategies that ensure the management and maintenance of spaces so that they can continue to deliver long-term impact, rather than falling into disrepair or no longer meeting local need.

Moving the conversation forward

This is a conversation that is ongoing. Our symposiums are designed to get people thinking, to take away some of the secrecy and to open up discussions between the private, public and third sector to see how we can address some of the challenges the industry is facing.

Far from having all the answers, we want to keep the dialogue going. Please share with us your thoughts and ideas, your projects and your visions for how we can deliver long-term social impact that ensures the built environment is a force for good.

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