

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

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# **Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network**

Evaluation Report

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## 01 | Foreword

The built environment is key to creating socially integrated cities. The Mayor of London wants the city to be a beacon for genuine social integration. This means giving people more chances to connect with each other in positive and meaningful ways; enabling Londoners to play an active part in their communities and the decisions that affect them; and reducing the barriers and inequalities between us, so that Londoners can relate to each other as equals.

Accessible, well-designed buildings; public realm; and the people, communities and services that operate in these spaces are integral to this ambition. London's neighbourhoods, high streets and public spaces provide Londoners with the opportunity to meet people and build relationships with those different to themselves; become involved in their local communities through volunteering, sports or civic participation; and access support and services that help tackle inequality. If we do not plan, design and manage it well, the built environment can serve to separate and isolate.

Local authorities hold vital levers to create socially integrated communities. Through their services, spaces and funding, they can create opportunities for Londoners to share experiences. Through planning and regeneration, they also have a key role in shaping the places that matter most to us.

COVID-19 has further demonstrated the importance of well-designed community space to the health, wellbeing and resilience of Londoners in times of crisis. As we move from response to longer-term recovery, and face the challenges of reduced funding and competing land claims, it is crucial that policymakers keep a laser focus on how the built environment supports and builds a stronger, more socially integrated city that all Londoners can call home.

Over the last four years the Greater London Authority (GLA) and its commissioned partners Snook, New Economics Foundation (NEF) Consulting and London Metropolitan University have made significant progress in this space. From 2018 to 2019 we ran the Social Integration Design Labs, a programme that brought together 17 local authorities that wanted to lead innovative regeneration practices to promote social integration in their local areas. The Labs provided a stimulating space to design, test and share interventions that support a more socially integrated London.

We also published our Connective Social Infrastructure report (2021), which provides an evidence base and best practice examples; and sets out, through actions and design tactics, how policymakers and those involved in the design and delivery of social infrastructure can realise social integration.

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The Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network builds on this programme of work, creating a space for all London boroughs and other social integration and regeneration professionals to share knowledge. This report shows how the network helped to build participants' confidence and capacity to embed social integration principles into their work on regeneration and the importance of cross-sector collaboration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Weekes-Bernard', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

**Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard**

Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice

## 02 | Executive summary

London is one of the most diverse and constantly evolving cities in the world. Its neighbourhoods, high streets and public spaces offer multiple opportunities for Londoners to take part in and lead vibrant social lives, and connect with others. However, the pace, extent and ways in which places and spaces transform can sometimes have a damaging impact on local communities and the way we live together.

Through service provision, planning and regeneration, local authorities are uniquely placed to facilitate connections and help strengthen links between local communities, civil society and businesses to realise the Mayor's vision for social integration. To this aim, the GLA commissioned Snook, NEF Consulting and London Metropolitan University to deliver City Hall's first **Social Integration Design Lab in 2018-19**. The initiative provided space, structured facilitation and one-to-one support to local authority officers and managers from regeneration, planning, community engagement and service delivery teams to think more deeply about how to improve social integration in their boroughs. The Design Lab provided space for reflection, knowledge exchange and experimentation. The evaluation demonstrated there was real value in bringing people together, disrupting the established working culture in planning and regeneration, and framing community engagement as a long-term embedded process in regeneration.

Following the completion of the Design Lab, the GLA commissioned London Metropolitan University to design and deliver the **Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network** in 2020, to continue supporting social integration efforts of local authorities and expand the audience beyond the participating teams in the Design Lab. The Learning Network brought together urban regeneration and social integration professionals, experts and academics to share ideas, innovations and challenges, and develop an understanding of social integration and regeneration across all London boroughs. After a hiatus (March-August 2020) caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and social distancing measures, London Metropolitan University redesigned and delivered the Learning Network as a digital programme between October 2020 and April 2021.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 challenged every aspect of social and public life. It has impacted local authorities financially<sup>1,2</sup> and presented an immediate and understandable need to focus more efforts on supporting vulnerable residents and businesses with inevitable implications on wider regeneration and social integration work. But the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought to light just how important the space around us is, and the extent to which it can either enable or create barriers to local relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2020), [Local authority COVID-19 financial impact monitoring information](#), London: UK Government.

<sup>2</sup> London Councils (2020). [The Impact of Covid-19 on Local Government Finance](#), London: London Councils

and neighbourliness, participation and equality. It also reinforced the significance of social integration by exposing (and exacerbating) long-standing inequalities within the UK.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, in addition to adapting to an online format, the Learning Network shifted the focus to include reflections and lessons from the pandemic response, and to explore thinking and practice in terms of recovery planning. In this sense, the Learning Network not only built on previous work, but it has done so in a radical new context – one characterised by crisis, uncertainty and a total system reboot.

While the Design Lab focused on encouraging regeneration practice to start with a better understanding of how people use public space and built assets through user research and testing, the Learning Network focused on community engagement as an integral part of regeneration, from planning to delivery, cross-sector coordination, and tools for measuring social value.

The principal findings of the Learning Network's activities were that:

- peer learning opportunities should be designed as a mixture of digital and face-to-face interactions
- advancing knowledge and understanding of social integration in regeneration is underpinned by a mix of subject expertise and interdisciplinary perspective, which requires a range of expert facilitators across relevant disciplines
- opening up the conversations and interactions to community organisations and other sectors can support deeper learning on social integration in a regeneration context
- the above, however, should be carefully curated so that the learning space remains safe and allows for open discussion for local authority participants.
- fully developing an active community of practice across social integration and regeneration in London requires further co-design, development and testing of the proof of concept. Ongoing costs need to reflect both the level of facilitation required and the kind of interactions that are most effective (i.e. thematic working groups, knowledge acquisition, training and professional development).

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<sup>3</sup> Nazroo, J. (2020), [Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London](#), London: GLA.

## 03 | Introduction

### Social integration and the built environment

The Mayor of London’s [strategy for social integration](#), ‘All of Us’ (2018), defines social integration as:

*The extent to which people positively interact and connect with others who are different to themselves. It is determined by the level of **equality** between people, the nature of their **relationships**, and their degree of **participation** in the communities in which they live.*

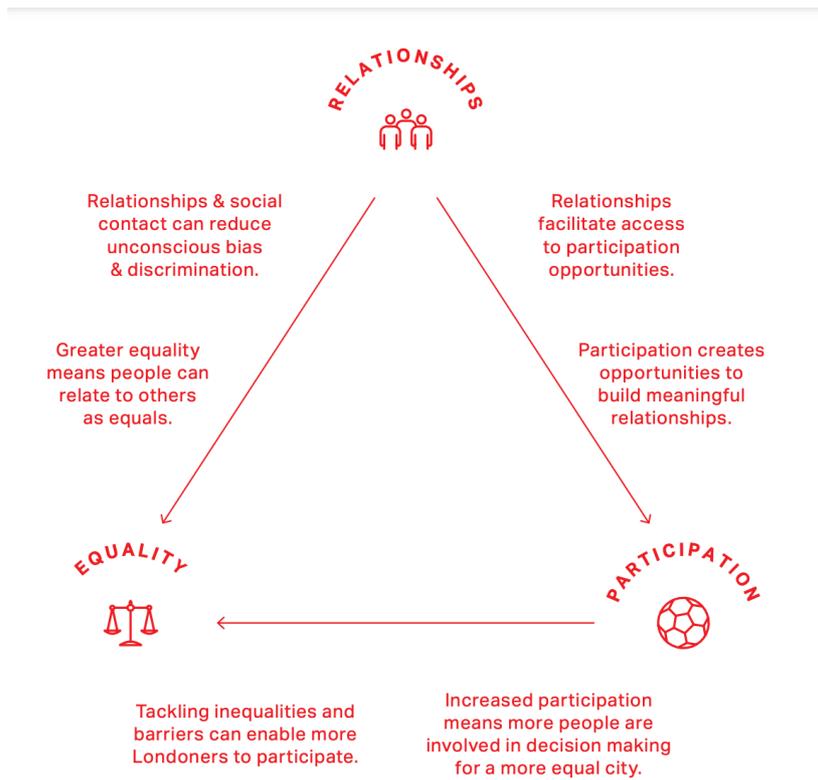


Figure 1 – understanding social integration

London’s built environment is critical for social integration. It can enable, or create barriers against, local relationships and neighbourliness, participation, and equality. Local authorities play an essential role in supporting social integration. They are at the forefront of service provision; they plan and deliver London’s public spaces; and they provide funding and support to a wide range of civil society actors, community groups and social infrastructure operators.

## Social Integration Design Lab

To support the Mayor's strategy for social integration, the GLA commissioned Snook, NEF Consulting and London Metropolitan University to deliver City Hall's first **Social Integration Design Lab in 2018-19** to support local authority officers and managers from regeneration, planning, community engagement and service delivery teams to come together; learn about how to improve social integration in their boroughs; and test ways of embedding social integration principles in regeneration policy and practice. The Design Lab worked intensively with 17 regeneration projects from 17 London boroughs through:

- three day-long workshops of talks, practical exercises and group work covering core principles of urban development practice, social impact and place-making
- assistance for each borough to develop their project, incorporating exercises, approaches and tools from the workshops
- site visits providing additional opportunities to learn from the successes of completed regeneration projects (Social Integration Design Lab Report, 2019).

The Design Lab identified a number of 'key levers' impacting social integration:

- cross-team working – social integration impact requires council-wide coordination
- focus on impact rather than delivery – thinking in terms of what social impact regeneration initiatives can achieve, and how
- co-production – engaging with people as equal partners requires disrupting structures and processes that are considered standard in the delivery of regeneration projects
- leadership and strategy – strategic-level support can effect lasting structural change
- space, time and resourcing – both wider engagement and cross-team collaboration require adequate resourcing, and adequate space and time, for local authority officers to come together, share practice and learn from one another

## Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network

The GLA commissioned the London Metropolitan University in 2020 to continue supporting social integration learning and knowledge exchange across all London boroughs. To this end, we set up the **Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network** in March 2020 to bring together urban regeneration and social integration professionals, experts, and academics to share and develop learning across London boroughs. The aims were:

- to co-design a programme of supported learning and networking with local authorities
- to provide space, time and skilled facilitation to local authority regeneration teams so that they could come together and learn from one another
- to build the confidence and capacity of participants to embed social integration principles into ongoing and future regeneration work
- to increase the confidence of participants in sharing their knowledge with other teams, authorities and delivery partners.

The Learning Network team consisted of experienced educators and facilitators, with both significant knowledge of urban regeneration and social integration, and important pedagogical expertise.



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Communications



**Sheila Siele**  
Intern  
Project Management

*Figure 2 – the Learning Network team*

The team was able to co-design and facilitate a programme of learning where social integration principles, and the role of the built environment, were deeply embedded in every event and in the online community of practice.

Following an extended expression of interest call, the Learning Network accrued 220 participants by March 2021. The participants included:

- local authority officers from 27 London boroughs (see Table 1, below).
- representatives from the GLA and the GLA family.
- individuals from 46 organisations straddling a variety of sectors and disciplines, including arts and culture, community-led regeneration, architecture, charities, and think tanks.

Barking & Dagenham	Hammersmith & Fulham	Newham
Barnet	Haringey	Redbridge
Camden	Havering	Richmond & Wandsworth
City of London	Hounslow	Slough
Croydon	Islington	Southwark
Ealing	Kensington & Chelsea	Sutton
Enfield	Kingston	Tower Hamlets
Greenwich	Lambeth	Waltham Forest
Hackney	Lewisham	Westminster

*Table 1 – participating London boroughs*

*Timeline*

From October 2020 to April 2021, the Learning Network held eight events, bringing together more than 280 people; 23 speakers from 16 organisations were invited, including London borough representatives, GLA officers, Mayor's Design Advocates<sup>4</sup> and community engagement specialists.

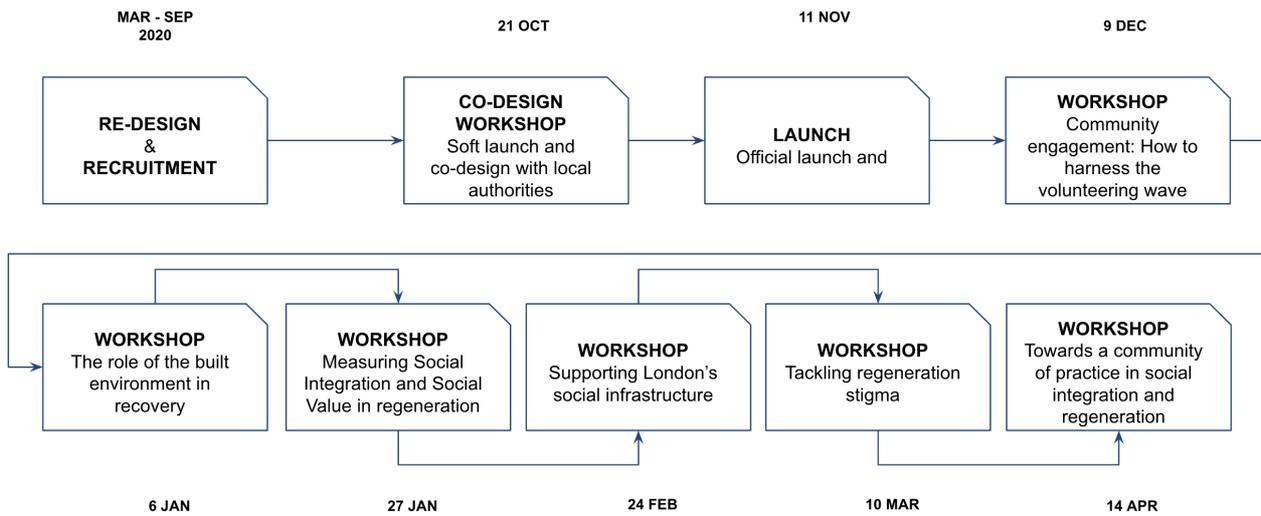


Figure 3 – timeline

*Community of practice*

Additionally, an online platform was established for local authorities to connect with each other outside the programmed events. Providing this space was an integral part of activities, and a direct outcome from the findings and recommendations of the Design Lab. The COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing rules and online working throughout 2020 reinforced the need for a more permanent online community of practice to enable boroughs with a common interest in social integration to network; and share their experiences, challenges, questions and useful resources in order to challenge common issues.

This permanent space, together with shared resources and a facilitated interaction, laid the foundations for a community of practice in regeneration and social integration. Communities of practice are generally established based on common interests, and are supported by a learning community, a process of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, and a drive towards improvement.

<sup>4</sup> The Mayor's Design Advocates are a group of 50 individuals appointed by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, to work on the Good Growth by Design programme, supporting Good Growth across London and addressing the challenges facing's our built environment.

Microsoft Teams was chosen as the most common platform used by local authorities. Between October 2020 and March 2021 the functionality of the platform was tested, as well as the feasibility of permanently maintaining it.

This platform, together with a blog space – [Social Integration & Regeneration @LondonMet Lab](#) – where the Learning Network team shared reflections from each event, set the basis for an **online community of practice** that can be used for:

- formal and informal interactions between members
- sharing resources, tools and knowledge relevant to social integration and regeneration
- sharing news about relevant events, funding and training opportunities
- encouraging participation and a sense of shared ownership of the space.

### *COVID-19 impact*

The pandemic has reinforced the vital role that local authorities should play in strengthening the link between local communities, civil society and businesses. It has also amplified the significance of social integration by exposing and exacerbating long-standing inequalities within London. An acute lack of resources and funding, and increasing demand on services, have marked local authorities' response and recovery work. In times of such great uncertainty and change, providing space and time for reflection and learning around social integration and regeneration was both opportune and essential. The establishment of a dedicated network facilitating reflective learning across local authorities was particularly timely.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to the delivery of the Learning Network. Initially designed as a face-to-face experience, the delivery team had to pivot to an online model that retained the design principles of the programme. However, the concept of a 'space' for learning and that of a community of practice became more important in the digital context.

### *About this report*

This report aims to reflect on two areas. Firstly, it will discuss the methodology underpinning the delivery of the Social Integration and Regeneration Learning programme, focusing on the peer-learning dimension of the work and the principles set out for an emergent community of practice in social integration and regeneration. The report will explore the implications of the COVID-19 context for delivery and will draw lessons in relation to achieving a sustainable community of practice in the future. Secondly, the report will focus on the advances made (since the work of the Social Integration Design Lab) in understanding social integration and regeneration in London, and London boroughs' ability to embed social integration principles into regeneration practice.

## 04 | Learning Network design and methodology

### Community of practice and peer-learning methodology

The **Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network** was set up as a peer-learning opportunity for professionals across London boroughs to come together and share lessons and best practice in an expert-facilitated context. This is done with the aim of building a community of practice for social integration and regeneration. Key to this were the principles of:

- co-design – producing a programme of events that stemmed from needs identified by members of the network
- safe space for learning and interaction – ensuring participants feel safe to share views and experiences in small group setting
- expert facilitation – ensuring that content delivery and interactions are geared towards learning and reflection.

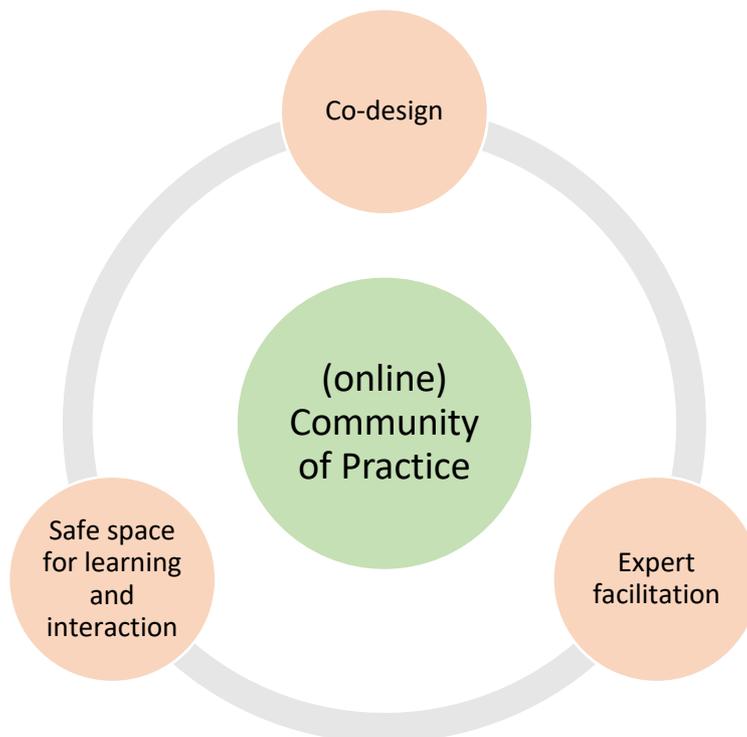


Figure 4 – peer-learning approach and community of practice

## Co-design

In practice, the co-design principle proved to be extremely relevant given the challenging and novel context in which local authorities were developing their work. The Learning Network sought to understand this context; and to identify needs and areas of interest for the London boroughs where support would be needed.

In October 2020, we conducted a co-design workshop that aimed at reconnecting boroughs with the Learning Network; exploring how COVID-19 had impacted regeneration work; and shaping a programme of work that was relevant for boroughs. The theme-based programme of events (see figure 5 – in green) was a direct result of that.

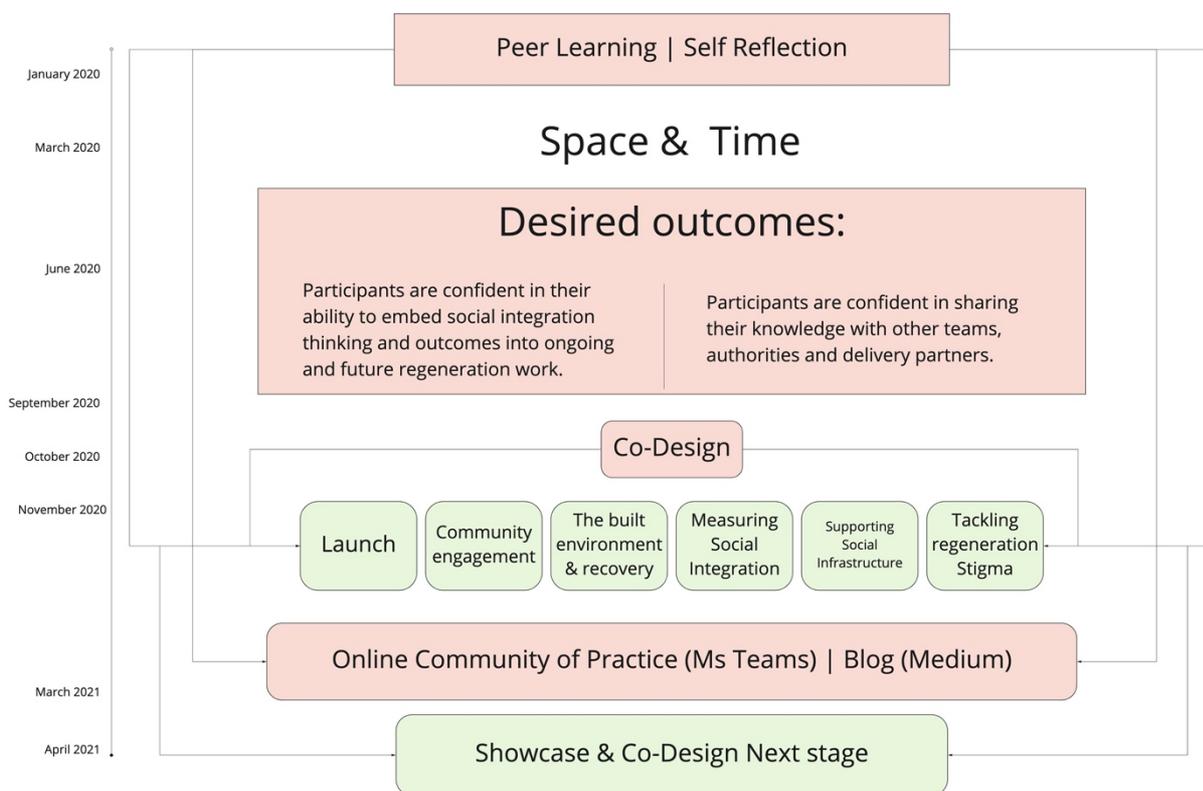


Figure 5 – programme objectives and digital delivery

Whilst the online delivery worked along similar principles, the concept of ‘space’ for learning became more significant. This took the form of a rhythmic programme of engagement (online workshops) that featured three elements:

- information provision – exploration of concepts, case studies of practice, roundtable discussions and panel debates
- small group-facilitated reflection – participants were able to connect the concepts and practice discussed to their own practice and experience; reflect on the relevance of new approaches presented; and fill in gaps
- post-event engagement – our blog posts on [Medium](#) sought to reflect on the events and disseminate information across the network.

### *Safe space for learning and interaction*

The online workshops were delivered through the online MS Teams platform, to which only the local authority representatives had access. The project team took this decision to ensure a safe space for learning and interaction among local authority officers participating. The online community was structured along four main discussion/interaction channels to reflect broadly the aims of the learning network:



*Figure 6 – the online community*

The online platform demonstrated the potential to stimulate discussions and interactions among boroughs. Participants used the platform to:

- introduce themselves to others
- ask clarifications about the events held by the Learning Network
- access recordings and materials from the Learning Network events
- exchange information about projects
- ask the network participants about existing resources (i.e. evaluation frameworks, practical models of community engagement).

The online space created also helped test the potential of developing a community of practice around regeneration and social integration in London. Whilst not sufficient, a shared 'space' for learning is critical and necessary to community of practice building.

Illustrated below are a couple of examples of interaction on the online platform:

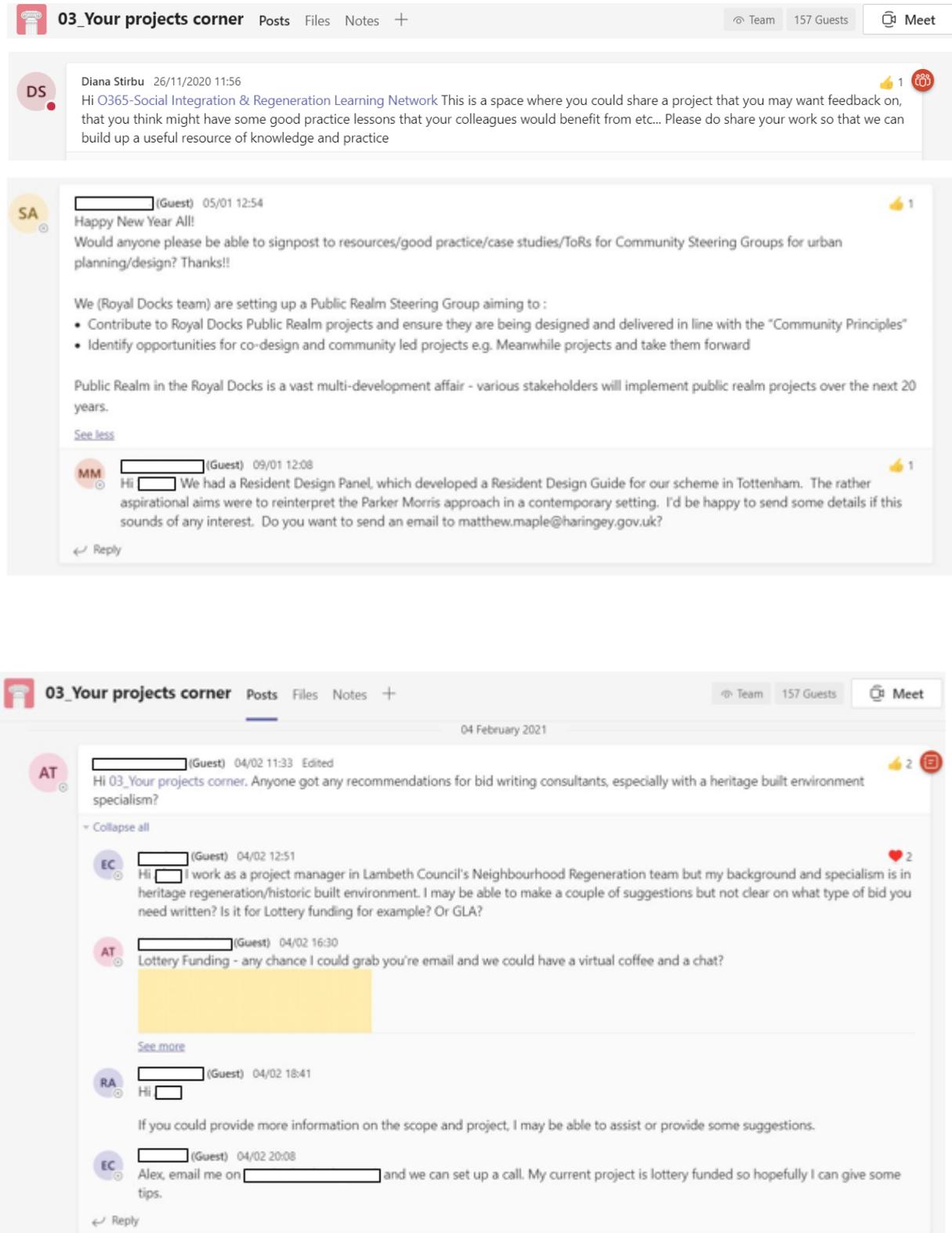


Figure 7 – interactions on the MS Teams platform

### *Expert facilitation*

Expert facilitation is crucial to the success of knowledge exchange and peer-learning initiatives, and to the establishment of a community of practice. The team of experienced educators, policy and engagement specialists, and urban regeneration experts curated a list of keynote speakers and panellists, and roundtable discussions for participants, that could add value to the themes of the learning programme. They also facilitated not only the co-design workshop in which the themes of the programme were developed, but also the small group discussions in each of the online events.

### *Evaluation*

Feedback from participants, gathered after each event, revealed the value added by the events and the online platform to the participants' day-to-day role in social integration and regeneration.

- Events were praised as “*well organised and efficient*”:

*It was good to see that [local authorities] and partner institutions are broadly on the same page, and doing similar projects and programmes in line with the recovery objectives.*

- Opening the online events for community organisations, academics, architecture firms and other voluntary-sector organisations was seen as positive by both local authority representatives and those outside local authorities:

*Being in the voluntary sector, it is a really good opportunity to connect with colleagues from local authorities and learn more about their approach to social integration and regeneration, and hopefully ensure an equal civil society voice!*

- The small group-discussion element of the online events also received positive feedback from participants:

*Small group interaction enables networking and getting to know more of those in the network – looking forward to [the] next session!*

- Overall, the things that worked for participants during the Learning Network programme can be summed up as such:
  - seeing examples from actual regeneration and social integration work in London
  - informative presentations of good practice showcasing social integration examples
  - the range and selection of speakers and the information provided by the sessions
  - space for learning and time to think
  - access to wider perspective on social integration and regeneration
  - time and space for conversation and shared knowledge.

In terms of the online platform, participants identified the main barriers to engagement with the online community as: lack of time to engage; difficulties (lack of knowledge) in connecting; and their own organisations prohibiting access. The overall functionality of the platform was rated 3.3 out of 5 by the participants in the last evaluative workshop organised.

This is relevant, given that the aspiration was to set the basis of an online community of practice in social integration and regeneration. Through the Learning Network the functionality of the platform was tested to consider any further requirements for the full establishment and growth of a community of practice.

### Delivery during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges (synthesised below) to the delivery of the Learning Network. The programme was initially planned as a face-to-face experience; in response to COVID-19, it had to pivot to an online delivery model. This impacted the methodology and delivery to an extent, but the core aims, outcomes and principles remained unchanged.

Challenge	Mitigation and strategies	Notes
Local authorities having to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic	Delivery schedules were pushed back from 31 March launch to October 2020	
Keeping the programme relevant within a changing and challenging context	Between June and August 2020, the project team, in close collaboration with the GLA, re-evaluated the programme to include emphasis on challenges and opportunities created by the new context. The co-design workshop in October sought to incorporate local authorities' concerns and interests in the light of the new context	Focus on learning lessons from the COVID-19 response and shaping an inclusive recovery process
Social distancing measures throughout the whole period	Shifting to online delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online workshops</li> <li>• MS Teams platform</li> <li>• Blog</li> </ul>
Creating peer-to-peer connection in an online space	Adopting a twofold strategy in the delivery: first, half of the time in online events was spent in small group discussions (three to six people per group); and second, we set up an MS Teams channel as a basis for a permanent community of practice	The online platform onboarded participants from local authorities only, to create a safe space for regeneration officers to connect

## Key findings

The following lessons were drawn in relation to the design and delivery of the learning network programme:

- **Delivery online:** the shift to an online programme brought both challenges and opportunities in terms of peer-learning. On the one hand, online events over-structure the interaction between participants, leaving limited scope for more organic dynamics to develop. On the other hand, registering for and attending online events can be very easy and straightforward.

*Conclusion: blended approaches using both online and in-person interaction should be considered to enhance networking opportunities whenever possible.*

- **Expert facilitation:** participants in peer-learning processes generally lead each other in the process of learning by, for instance, sharing best practices. However, expert facilitation of peer-learning programmes remains important in maintaining focus and directing participants to connect with concepts and practice at a more in-depth level. Finding the right balance between theoretical and practical subject knowledge and experience, facilitation and pedagogical skills, and cross-sectoral fertilisation, is critical.

*Conclusion: delivery teams supporting peer learning should have a multi-disciplinary background as well as solid subject knowledge and experience.*

- **Membership:** the Learning Network was primarily focused on supporting local authorities in London. However, the network team, in consultation with the GLA, decided to open the space (online events only) to those from a variety of sectors and disciplines, including community groups, arts organisations, think tanks, academics, architecture firms etc. We found this was a real positive overall. Additionally, cross-sectoral considerations of social integration would benefit regeneration teams – for example, lessons from housing, youth work, criminal justice, etc. Sector-diverse participation encouraged more critical analysis during events, as well as constructive challenges.

*Conclusion: a key element supporting deeper learning on social integration is opening the conversation to other sectors and encouraging cross-sectoral learning.*

- **Safe space for learning:** the MS Teams space, however, was kept for local authorities and GLA family organisations only, given the primary focus of the Learning Network. However, if the aim is to create a wider community of practice around social integration and regeneration, including other organisations would be advisable. However, careful curation and facilitation is needed in order to maintain the premise of a safe space for learning.

*Conclusion: while preserving local authority-only channels on MS Teams, there should also be a wider channel where a more diverse group of organisations come together.*

- **The development of an online community of practice:** the aim of this programme was to set up and test the basis for a community of practice around social integration and regeneration in London. To this aim, the following occurred:
  - The general introductions channel was well used by participants along the lines set by facilitators (introducing oneself and answering two other people).
  - The news and events channel was mostly used by moderators to publicise the Learning network events. Participants engaged with this to ask for clarifications about the event and, on occasion, posted about events of interest. This is something to be encouraged, and the aspiration would be to co-create a joint calendar that showcases events of interest for the cohort. This would require additional resources for moderation.
  - The repository grew in time, with links to available resources made available for the participants. With additional moderation and prompting, this channel could also feature resources posted by participants.
  - ‘Your project corner’ aimed to encourage professional interactions between participants. Participants used this to ask their peers for resources and examples of best practice – for example, guidance for setting up terms of reference for community steering groups, bid writing and existing frameworks for measuring social value.
  - Generally, interactions on the MS Teams platform were highly linked to moderators’ input and prompting. Moderation therefore needs to be properly resourced in future iterations of the programme.
  - The use of multiple platforms such as MS Teams and Zoom can confuse participants. Platform integration – e.g. video tool use for the event, a repository or wider engagement – might mitigate that confusion.

*Conclusion: the MS Teams platform, while generally easy to set up and use, does require a high degree of facilitation to make it an effective tool of engagement. Ongoing costs would include: scoping research to find suitable and useful resources to share with the community; facilitation of thematic working groups within the community; general communication and engagement with participants; curation of a calendar of relevant events for the community, etc. Further work is needed to co-design, develop and test the proof of concept, including work on fully costing the maintenance of an active community.*

To make the online community of practice viable and sustainable in the long term, consideration needs to be given to:

- better understanding the need for shared space for regeneration and social integration professionals
- auditing alternative hosting platforms and different models of existing community of practice in urban regeneration, place-making, etc

- setting up a steering group that consists of interested boroughs, community groups, experts and designers, and supports and offers direction to the community of practice.

## 05 | Advancing learning on social integration and regeneration

This section outlines the advancements in our learning on social integration and regeneration from the work of the Social Integration Design Lab.

The Social Integration and Regeneration Network significantly advanced learning around social integration and regeneration; and successfully engaged with the lessons learnt and recommendations from the Design Lab. In particular, the Design Lab recommendations emphasised the need for, and value of, providing space and time for local authorities to come together, share practice and learn from each other.

There were significant differences between the Social Integration Design Lab and the Social Integration and Regeneration Learning Network:

- the Design Lab programme was project-focused and provided one-to-one assistance for boroughs in supporting them.
- the membership of the programme was much more limited (only 17 boroughs)
- the context of the Social Integration Learning Network was dominated by the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, therefore a lot of the focus of the programme was on impact on regeneration work, implications for social integration and recovery.

Yet the programme managed to build on the Design Lab by supporting boroughs to develop and advance their knowledge on social integration and regeneration; and advising them on how to bring these two concepts together theoretically and practically.

Social integration principles and the role of the built environment were deeply embedded in the Social Integration and Regeneration Network co-designed programme of learning (see figure below).



Figure 8 – programme objectives and digital delivery

## Snapshots: peer-learning programme

### Community engagement and regeneration

**Speakers:**

*Presentations*

- **Mel Stevens**, Director of Programmes, the Democratic Society
- **Grace Williams**, Programme Manager, OPDC
- **Jan Ackenhausen**, Principal Urban Designer, OPDC

The first workshop discussed community engagement models, principles and their application in regeneration projects. Various collaborative modes of community engagement (i.e. ‘co-design’, ‘co-production’, ‘co-creation’) were presented. Participants also explored the practical application of these in the context of large-scale regeneration projects such as the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC). The panel discussion emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic has been an important inflexion point for a fundamental reimagining of engagement that included a more open-ended, informal and bottom-up approach to relationship-building. Engagement teams were able to make use

- 
- **Anna Shamoon**, Senior Engagement Officer, OPDC
- of a strong tradition of community ownership; and, through working with housing associations, to extend engagement beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to encompass traditionally under-represented groups.

*Panellists*

- **Sue Sheehan**, Participation Team, Camden
  - **Fiona Crehan**, Senior Programme Manager, High Streets & Town Centres Growth Team, Tower Hamlets
  - **Sarah Atkinson**, Community Relations Manager, Royal Docks
- One of the most important lessons from the panel discussions, as well as the small-group discussions, was the importance of local authorities maintaining this momentum beyond the COVID-19 and ensuring that the recovery process is one of building back better.
- 

**In focus – case study 1:**

**Community engagement in large-scale regeneration projects – OPDC**

The OPDC was established by the Mayor of London in 2015 and serves as the local planning authority and regeneration agency for a 650-hectare site incorporating sections of three boroughs (Brent, Ealing, and Hammersmith & Fulham) in West London. The OPDC has taken some innovative approaches to engage local communities in their work. These include:

- The use of an artist-in-industry residency to engage with local employees and explore the relationship between the built environment, heritage and local communities.<sup>5</sup>
  - The use of co-governance structures, such as a [Community Review Group reflecting the diversity of the Old Oak and Park Royal area](#) – to help assess planning applications for new developments. The Community Review Group adds local knowledge and ‘locally rooted interest’ to the process.
- 

<sup>5</sup> The Great Place Scheme is a three-year programme celebrating culture and heritage of the area.

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**Case study 2:*****Camden's participatory initiatives***

The London Borough of Camden's participatory initiatives include the use of citizens' assemblies and working much more proactively beyond traditional relationships with the voluntary community sector, businesses and institutions, towards a more person-centric model.

*"[The COVID-19 pandemic was a] perfect call to action. In a way, it mobilised masses of individuals to help other individuals to build those neighbourhoods, community connections that we think are really important." (Sue Shehan, Participation team)*

The greater impetus to engage citizens and mutual aid groups resulted in the council 'taking a backseat' and allowing itself to be led by community-sourced priorities. Engaging where these groups are, and in their own rhythm, empowered them and provided a platform to discuss their own areas of interest.

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**Case study 3:*****Tower Hamlets' engagement with local communities and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic***

Tower Hamlets relied on important assets available to engagement teams in the local area, including a strong tradition of community ownership. This was invaluable in generating citizen participation in regeneration projects.

*"When you start talking about making changes and improvements in their neighbourhood, the great thing is we have lots of people coming forward saying, 'I want to have a say in this. I want to be involved,' which is fantastic." (Fiona Crehan, Programme Manager, High Streets & Town Centres Growth)*

The team worked extensively with small and clearly defined public groups (addressing factors such as restaurants, residents and heritage). Through working with housing associations, engagement was extended beyond the 'usual suspects' to encompass traditionally under-represented groups. An ongoing focus is maintaining this momentum beyond COVID-19.

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## ***The role of the built environment in recovery***

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<p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <p><b>Presentations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shona Scales</b>, Senior Project Officer for Regeneration and Economic Development, GLA</li> <li>• <b>Daisy Froud</b>, Mayor's Design Advocate, GLA</li> <li>• <b>Ayesha Malik</b>, Kingston Town Centre Area Regeneration Lead, Kingston</li> </ul>	<p>The second workshop was dedicated to an overview of the London Recovery Plan (LRP), the city-wide response to a Grand Challenge identified by the London Recovery Board. The Plan sets the basis to not only restore confidence in the city but improve its economy and society. The built environment plays an important role in social integration, as well as in the efforts of recovery (i.e. The High Streets Mission, Building Stronger Communities Mission in the LRP, etc). Participants recognised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the need to engage with landowners and businesses</li> <li>• the need for more green spaces</li> <li>• the importance of including communities (not just companies) within the 'green mission'</li> <li>• the need to discuss the value of specific initiatives, such as 'mapping' cultural infrastructure and social connections in order to secure cultural awareness within recovery.</li> </ul> <p>Building back better, and differently, needs to tackle development practices such as the establishment of exclusionary gated communities. This is consistent with the message of 'needing to bring the community with us'.</p>
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<p><b>In focus – case study 4:</b></p> <p><b>Kingston Town Centre area regeneration</b></p>	<p>The strategy to regenerate Kingston town centre has been shaped by the stark economic context. Sales are starting to improve in the Kingston Business Improvement District, but larger retailers continue to struggle. Key objectives for the strategy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a recovery and reinvestment pipeline of physical projects</li> <li>• developing strong and extensive partnerships with key town centre stakeholders</li> <li>• defining Kingston's ambition as a place in which to invest, build and do business (in the short- and long-term).</li> </ul>
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Key deliverables included a programme of COVID-19 recovery projects designed to deliver rapid physical outputs and outcomes over the next two years, and utilising the Economic Recovery

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Task Force partnership to attract resources, support and investment. Consistent with the London Recovery Plan, the repurposing of spaces and community hubs sits at the heart of the strategy.

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### ***Measuring social integration and social value in regeneration***

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#### **Speakers:**

#### ***Presentations***

- **Barney Cringle**, Senior Associate Director, PRD Solutions
- **Barry Fong**, Senior Research and Statistical Analyst (Social Policy), City Intelligence Unit, GLA
- **Caroline Wilson**, Director of Inclusive Economy and Jobs, London Borough of Islington
- **Alex Talbot**, Regeneration Officer, London Borough of Croydon

The relationship between regeneration initiatives and long-term impact can be a tricky one. Therefore, there is a need to be able to measure whether regeneration contributes to or hinders social integration outcomes. In our third workshop we provided an overview of the freshly launched Social Integration Management Toolkit by PRD Solutions and the GLA, as well as a practical case study and considerations of measuring social value in local contexts. Discussions highlighted the cost carried by social value requirements in procurement, as well as the importance of ‘monitoring by design’ to be presented as a means of instilling a culture of social value, as well as encouraging compliance. Some of the lessons we drew from the group discussions emphasise:

- the need for consistent and standardised approaches to measuring social integration and social value
- the need to speak to communities, and capture ‘heard and unheard’ voices
- the need for social value strategies to be ‘grounded in the community’. Communities can help with the process of measurement, bringing in extra intelligence, thus ‘selling’ evaluation services back to the local authority.

#### **Case study 5**

#### ***Islington’s principles to community wealth building:***

- ***Whole-systems approach***

Islington’s approach to community wealth-building is based on a strong commitment to social value, keeping wealth within the local economy, and giving local people more control institutions and assets. The emphasis on ‘local’ also applies to jobs, with greater security and progression routes. Community wealth-building entails a broadly owned supply chain – one that ‘gives back’ – while working to regenerate biodiversity and meet net-zero carbon targets. In doing so, Islington can ‘use its levers’ as an employer,

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- *Place-based work built on local and broad ownership* buyer, landlord, investor and leader. The Affordable Workspace Strategy has already secured approximately 4,000 square metres of space. The strategy provides ‘peppercorn rent’ (low/nominal amounts) in return for specified social value (often in the form of start-ups and early-stage micro-businesses).
  - *Opening up economic opportunities.*
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### **Supporting social infrastructure in London**

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#### **Speakers:**

#### **Presentations**

- **Shona Scales**, Senior Project Officer, Regeneration, GLA
- **Ellie Howard**, Senior Project Officer, Regeneration, GLA

Following the GLA’s launch of the [Connective Social Infrastructure](#) report, we sat down with a range of local authority practitioners to discuss how local authorities can support social infrastructure in London. The report’s more expansive redefinition frames social infrastructure as a range of services and facilities that meet local and strategic needs, and contribute towards a good quality of life. They facilitate new and supporting existing relationships, encourage participation and civic action, overcome barriers, mitigate inequalities, and together contribute to resilient communities. Alongside a more formal provision of services, there are informal networks and community supports that play an important role in the lives of Londoners.

Participants in the workshop explored the implications of this in small-group discussions, highlighting the importance of drawing attention to existing efforts, and gaining a better understanding of the infrastructure(s) these resources address. Recommendations included a GLA audit on this topic, to identify what works and what can be built on, to provide a platform for future research.

Discussions addressed the current lack of consensus in how social infrastructure can be ‘mapped’, and how specific nuances can be captured (some barbershops, for example, provide important social infrastructure; however, it isn’t necessarily true that all barbershops are social infrastructure). Participants spoke of the need for the planning process to adopt a more holistic view

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of social infrastructure (i.e. seeing formal and informal types as part of a whole).

More broadly, key questions were identified, such as the connections between the formal and the informal. These connections – and their impact – were acknowledged as complex, but vital to understanding “what is happening on the street.”

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### ***Tackling regeneration stigma***

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#### **Speakers:**

#### ***Roundtable participants***

- ***Dinah Bornat***, *Director, ZCD Architects; Mayor Design Advocate, GLA*
- ***Raja Moussaoui***, *Senior Policy Officer, Culture at Risk Office, GLA*
- ***Binki Taylor***, *Partner, Brixton Project; Member, the Mayor’s Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm*
- ***Sarah Hitchcock***, *Senior Regeneration Manager, London Borough of Croydon*

In our fifth event we explored the theme of regeneration and social integration, through an open and honest discussion that addressed some of the inherent challenges in balancing economic imperatives with social integration considerations in regeneration. The aim of the roundtable was to explore how to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into planning and policy; and how to hear about ways that diverse communities are kept central to neighbourhood renewal. Some of the key lessons include:

- the importance of engaging people on their own terms “as experts in their local area”
  - the benefits of having intelligence research and data to identify demographic shifts, or losses in certain types of city space, in building a case-by-case approach
  - the (often) lack of local plans and local vision that people can connect with (their voices have not been heard)
  - the importance of establishing a baseline of what a specific population looks like so as to understand “the voices that [are] getting through” and those that aren’t
  - long-term perspectives on engagement, and calls for capturing a plurality of voices (including young people)
  - the need for honesty and transparency in detailing what consultations can and cannot influence.
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**Case study 6:****London Borough of  
Croydon's community-  
empowerment approach**

Local authorities can support and empower local communities to claim agency in the regeneration process. This includes providing guidelines, training and co-production. A crucial challenge is:

*“hearing the same voices, the ones who are connected, the ones who understand how local authorities work, are the ones who understand how to engage with the local authority and work that system... to get their views heard”.*

In responding to this challenge, what can help is establishing a baseline of what a specific population looks like, and corroborating it with response rates for surveys and other consultations. This can support an understanding of “the voices that [are] getting through... and whether they're really reflective of the people who live there”.

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## Advancements in learning

The Learning Network contributed to the advancement of understanding of social integration in regenerations in the following areas:

- **Social integration impact requires** not only cross-team working and coordination across councils, but **cross-sector coordination, cooperation and exchange of practice and learning**. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of local communities, businesses and the voluntary sector in building resilience and responding to crises. Through the Learning Network it was clear that local authorities play an important role in harnessing community mobilisation and supporting community resilience. Examples of initiatives that cut across sectors include housing, youth engagement and youth justice.
- **There will be tensions between social integration and regeneration** – developers and local authorities have a role in working towards social integration. Balancing economic imperatives with considerations of social value has always been a difficult task for local authorities. The COVID-19 context and the exacerbation of existing inequalities add another layer of complexity. These tensions can be mitigated by meaningful engagement with and empowerment of local communities, and by early considerations of social impact of regeneration initiatives.

- **Social integration impact requires continuous exploration and a better understanding of social infrastructure dynamics**, applicable in the response to, and recovery from, the pandemic. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to designing and embedding inclusive engagement with local communities in regeneration initiatives, as well as in reimagining the role of high streets, town centres and public places in recovery.
- Social integration and social value are interlinked concepts. Whilst shifting the focus from delivery (what we do) to impact (why we do it) is critical to regeneration initiatives contributing positively to social integration outcomes, so too are the **frameworks of measuring social integration and social value**. Throughout the Learning Network programme, participants were able to discuss the value of a comprehensive toolkit for measuring social integration outcomes, as well as broader aspects in relation to social value. Participants noted that adopting default tactics for embedding social value requirements in the procurement and commissioning of regeneration projects often results in the project value being raised by developers.
- **Social integration is dependent on a thorough understanding and consideration of the local contexts and places**, including institutions, communities, geographies, cultures and attitudes. For good practice, and to scale up innovative approaches to inclusive regeneration, local authorities need to better understand institutional, community and cultural barriers, and enablers to meaningful engagement within the communities they serve. The concepts of “local”, “place” and “place-making” become paramount.
- **Social integration requires a better understanding of application of community engagement**. Embedding a participative mindset in regeneration practice is not sufficient. In the Learning Network we explored the importance of understanding the full spectrum of engagement, and the importance of aiming for meaningful participation and engagement. **The context of recovery will require not only co-production with communities but also co-creation** (allowing community voice in re-imagining the future of our high streets and town centres). The aim of building back and building better transpired in many of the events.
- Additionally, **scaling up** is dependent on a critical mass of design solutions (frameworks, guidelines, toolkits) that have been available to all local authorities, and that have been tested and adapted to suit the needs of local contexts.

## 06 | Conclusions and recommendations

The lessons from the Social Integration Learning Network could be synthesised below:

Peer-learning approach and the community of practice	Expansion of social integration knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The value of structured peer exchange – facilitated discussion among peers is one of the most valuable outcomes.</li> <li>• Value in expanding the network to community groups, academics and urban designers. Participants found that opening up the conversation (through events) supported deeper learning and more critical analysis of topics explored.</li> <li>• Digital delivery offers many advantages, but wherever possible the use of blended methods should be considered. Participants found that whilst digital delivery eliminates some of the barriers to participation, the lack of unstructured interaction between participants limits the development of professional connections and collaboration.</li> <li>• Challenges and opportunities of the pandemic – a crucial moment. Participants recognised that this inflexion point invites structural, cultural and policy transformations to happen.</li> <li>• Inspiration from good practice. Participants found that good practice examples of social integration in regeneration, within a challenging context, can inspire and promote learning. Sharing these lessons across a learning community can be supported by regular participant engagement, and by more permanent engagement platforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh perspectives on familiar topics are needed; therefore, there is value in opening conversations on social integration with other sectors, especially given the recovery context. A cross-sectoral approach to social integration will benefit advancing knowledge and understanding in regeneration context.</li> <li>• Social integration requires better exploration and understanding of social infrastructure dynamics, local contexts and places, community engagement tools, and impact.</li> <li>• The recovery context prompts a shift from co-production to co-creation. Participants emphasised the role of the diverse social infrastructure in responding to the pandemic; and that building back rests on including local communities in the process of recovery.</li> <li>• Inherent tensions in regeneration, such as balancing social and economic considerations when reshaping public space, can only be mitigated by early considerations of social impact and of communities' views.</li> <li>• Social integration and social value require new tools to measure impact and better reflect softer measures of social integration. Participants found that lived experiences of residents need to be better integrated in evaluation.</li> <li>• Participants found that community engagement can act as a golden thread through regeneration, supporting diverse and inclusive co-productive approaches to regeneration.</li> </ul>

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