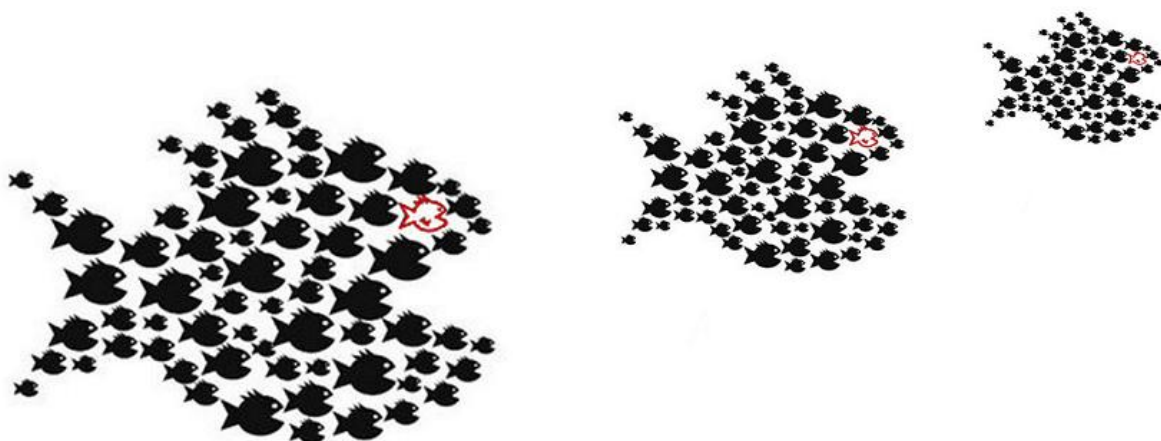# Campaign for a Liveable London
Small Change Event Report
5th November 2013

This Small Change event was hosted by CPRE London in association with Glass-House Community Led-Design. The event forms part of CPRE London's *Campaign for a Liveable London* – which aims to help enhance quality of urban life for London's citizens. The campaign is examining a number of London housing developments and asks what does and doesn't work in terms of neighbourhood planning and design. This event specifically looks to how individuals and communities are making their lives more liveable and examines what local authorities and practitioners can learn from such initiatives. The small change participants include members of proactive groups, local government and individuals directly involved in local, innovative built environment initiatives and interventions throughout London.

List of attendees

Alma Clavin	CPRE London
Andrew Orford	Forest Hill Society
Brian Murphy	Independent
Catherine Greig	make:good
David Clare	Habitat for Humanity Homes
David Janner-Klausner	Commonplace
Deborah Efemini	Lewisham Council
Deirdre Woods	LCNC
Eleanor Hoyle	Lewisham Council
Fiona Howie	CPRE National
Gemma Drake	Mend London
Ivan Tennant	Project B
Joelle Moore	Lambeth Council
Julie Fetcher	Reclaiming the foreshore project
Kelvin Campbell	Smart Urbanism
Kerilyn Tacconi	Central Saint Martins
Leslie Barson	LCNC
Liane Hartley	Mend London
Linda Powell	Lambeth Council
Maja Luna Jorgensen	Glasshouse
Mike Saunders	Commonplace
Raksha Patel	RakDarra Architects
Rosalie Callway	CPRE London

Programme

2pm   **Registration, tea / coffee – Liveability picture share**

2.30pm   **Opening: Rosalie Callway, CPRE London**

2.40pm   **Kelvin Campbell, Smart Urbanism**

2.50pm   **Mike Saunders, Commonplace**

3pm   **Q&A**

3.10pm   **Working group – Story exchange**

- Why did this activity/project take place?
- What challenges were overcome to help the initiative/intervention thrive?

3.40pm   **Group feedback**

Break

4.05pm   **Working group – Scaling-up**

- How can these examples of small change thrive elsewhere, in your neighbourhood, borough and other London boroughs?

4.35pm   **Group feedback**

4.45pm   **Summary and closing**

Liveable City Photos

Participants were invited to bring along a picture which, for them, represented a liveable city. These images depicted a range of community initiatives from London and internationally and included abundant food growing spaces, allotments, art and play spaces, examples of community energy efficiency and eco developments such as passive haus. Emphasis was placed on the community, specifically on places designed for people to come together and people-led initiatives leading to interconnections and hubs of community innovation.

Local allotment, Twickenham

Small Change Speakers

First, Rosalie Callway introduced CPRE London and the Campaign for a Liveable London project. Rosalie emphasised the way in which CPRE has often been viewed as a 'NIMBY' organisation in the media. In reality CPRE does support development but our members are interested in Quality in My Back Yard 'QUIMBY'. They want to see the right kinds of development, in the right places and delivered in the right way, involving local people from the outset. Specifically, the Campaign for a Liveable London is seeking to identify good practice in housing, identifying how to deliver compact and people-centred solutions, as well as to develop practical guidance and policy recommendations to improve housing provision in London in the future.

Kelvin Campbell (Smart Urbanism) then presented his ideas on the value of small local solutions to large built environment problems. He purported a 'think local act local' ethos. This involves bottom-up activities resulting in demands for top-down change – the concept of *Massive Small*. He argued that bottom-up is more spontaneous and adaptive to change. It promotes self-organisation and connectedness, eventually establishing its own norms. Bottom up forms often occur naturally and quickly e.g. in Southall some 10,000 illegal homes have been built in backyards (some 25% of London's current housing supply). Even these homes in backyards have produced regular forms. Kelvin asserted that command and control doesn't always work. Rather than place-making being too prescriptive, a simplification of rules focusing on general conditions is more fitting.

Finally, Mike Saunders (Commonplace) presented his work on the use of digital tools to promote community engagement and ownership. Mike asserted that we find social interpretation and

aggregation, as well as bottom-up and unstructured processes, from the emergence of internet applications. He talked about the rise of neighbourhood-based internet applications which are stimulating local and individual change. Examples include 'Visualisation - Why Don't We Own This (WDWOT)' in Detroit (an online map of property repossessions); 'Shimer' (an energy saving tool); 'Kickstarter' (a crowd-funding platform for local community projects); and Mindmixer from USA (a community ideas platform). Mike went on to describe the Commonplace platform, which aims to bring together local residents, developers and local planners to improve understanding of neighbourhood needs. Commonplace can be applied anywhere and is available for small community groups to use free of charge.

The stories…. and the challenges

The aim of this first part of the workshop was to capture real-world situations - practical approaches to small change in neighbourhoods. Divided into four groups, each individual shared their experiences of local change along with challenges they have met in implementing that change. Examples of bottom up interventions and initiatives included:

- Meanwhile and pop-up spaces (e.g. Catford Small Projects)
- Digital and technological initiatives e.g. Sim city, Street life and 'Carpenters Connect' in Stratford, Newham- a Wired-up community funding project using local TV with resident voting for regeneration plans
- Urban food growing and permaculture projects
- Initiatives emerging from neighbourhood services and community hubs e.g. schools, local churches, community assets such as the Ivy pub in Nunhead
- Creative spaces through role play and critical champions e.g. Augusto Boal (social justice), Mark Thomas (People's Manifesto); Nick Wates (community planning)

Through identifying some of the challenges and opportunities associated with *small change,* various elements that support similar change elsewhere might be realised. Some key challenges are summarised below.

'There is nothing going on here…'

There is often a public perception that there is little positive local change occurring in London neighbourhoods. This may reinforce micro-thinking locally – being interested in one's own 'doorstep' only. In discussions around the challenges of nurturing locally-driven initiatives and helping local interventions to thrive, participants spoke of the need to change perceptions in order to facilitate local experimentation and innovation. The planning system can allow some scope for ideas generation through local consultations but there is seen to be little space for bottom-up self-generated creativity to enable real changes to occur. There is real value in the freedom to experiment and test ideas out – to see what works and doesn't work - but more physical and political space for experimentation is needed.

Real vs. virtual?

The separation of real and virtual interactions may need to be overcome to enhance place-making. There is a perceived breakdown of a sense of 'neighbourhood' identity, as individuals are conducting

themselves more and more through a digital interface. Use of digital technology in itself may be seen as exclusive in that it will only reach computer literate people. However resource sharing initiatives on the ground, such as Hackney Harvest (a collective who harvest and share fruit that would otherwise go to waste) may face a challenge in sharing and communicating their activities more widely throughout their local neighbourhood. A suitable digital platform can therefore be a useful way to help raise local awareness of a project.

Inclusivity – local change for whom?

Do neighbourhood forums, plans and activities have a middle-class bias? There are always competing needs and layers of complexity for even small-scale local change. Local groups such as the London Permaculture Society, which is associated with the Transition Towns movement, have flourished throughout London. The society provides a design system for community activities at an appropriate scale, and can have more formal links to a Local Authority (e.g. Brixton Council). Challenges exist in terms of inclusivity of these groups however. Similar issues of inclusivity exist in local school activities that focus predominantly on families. Schools naturally provide a community hub. They can link to local parks including through outdoor learning activities such as tree planting and wildlife walks. Schools can link to local businesses through local fetes, as well as other face to face to face community activities. Such links between schools and local residents could be widened and maximised to include other groups such as older people, residents of sheltered housing, the neighbourhood more widely and other members of the local community.

The role of the Local Authority in Small Change

There may be issues of communication, trust and apathy affecting the relationship between a local authority and local community. For example communities might seek access to land and finance to make a change but do not know how best to engage with the relevant different departments of the local authority. Groups may also be unaware of how best to present their ideas to these departments – demonstrating how an action might contribute to the authority's strategic objectives. Local authorities can be a mediator and help facilitate local change but they need to build trust and dialogue, through providing clearer routes and fora to help community actors achieve their ideas, and avoid being too prescriptive.

Macro concerns

Unfortunately local initiatives are often impacted by wider more larger-scale concerns, such as the economic and political climate, and also wider changing trends and 'trendiness'. On-going sources of funding are often required to sustain a process of change including maintenance of spaces or technological upgrading.

Scaling-up Small Change

In considering how to scale-up *small change*, various opportunities were examined and further challenges were identified that need to be overcome. The following ideas were suggested:

Capture local intelligence

If an idea comes from a community themselves, they are more likely to be motivated to make a change happen. The integration of old and new aspects of community and built fabric can occur by

identifying and overcoming the old guard remit i.e. those actors less willing to accept change. In doing so, an honest dialogue about bad practice needs to take place, along with facing tensions around inclusivity and gentrification. This will assist the process of an honest open exchange about the potential risks of change. Creating a platform to share success stories would enhance opportunities for further innovation and learning. It is also important to engage with those champions for change who are passionate about their local area. There is a role for artists and others to stimulate a 'safe' creative space for sharing/ enabling/engaging e.g. Augusto Boal used role play to test local solutions by showcasing a problem and inviting the public to input ideas – he addressed issues of social justice and gender equality. Nick Wates (community planning) also used role play. Mark Thomas uses comedy and political activism to promote change (People's Manifesto). Design by Consensus is a similar role play tool used by Glass House in community-led design processes.

Link the real and the virtual

Digital media isn't everything but does play a part in opening things up people and places to new ideas. Use of multiple media/modes of communication creates wider opportunities for deeper engagement. Connecting up these two 'worlds' around common issues may also help to overcome confusion between online communities and urban neighbourhoods.

'Achieve a perfect storm' - embrace flexibility and uncertainty

There needs to be the capacity for the local authority and the community to adapt and respond openly to each other with confidence. Place-making is an emotional process as it directly affects people's lives, but working with those emotions can offer a means to start a conversation about moving from micro-issues to wider neighbourhood concerns. Local authorities must be open to the community seeking to live in a different way and be flexible and responsive in enabling innovation e.g. by adopting 'a common sense approach' to health and safety and planning guidance. In being open to local change i.e. 'achieving a perfect storm' - all parties are open to a rare combination of events that can stimulate local innovation or even local disruption.

Have a clear logic

This involves asking what works well and matching opportunities with desire. There needs to be clear local logic for something to happen. Planners / developers need to pro-actively seek out and talk to local people and share the boundaries and context within which they are working in. This can produce a rich response e.g. in Catford town centre, Lewisham council are encouraging an open debate and seeking to engage people who wouldn't normally get involved.

Be experimental

Experimentation may be short term or become permanent. One can also experiment e.g. in meanwhile spaces, to test the potential for greater permanence and community benefit. The current use of the term 'temporary' in terms of local land use(e.g. pop up spaces) can be changed to reflect a more dynamic and reflexive process – allowing for iterative learning and testing out what works (or does not work)and why/how.

Chunk it – one step at a time

Projects often try to be all things for all people – you can only do so much. For small change to be successful it is important to act incrementally, and proceed in small steps. Breaking change down into more discrete manageable chunks can assist in managing peoples' expectations, energy and time.

Open process, knowledge and data

Local authority data can be used in innovative ways by creative practitioners and the local community. Local authorities can play the role of facilitator and mediator between communities, developers and designers, supporting better partnership working. Lessons include – avoiding being territorial; sharing knowledge openly; seeking a wide & inclusive demographic group; establishing an open network. It is important to be clear about the timeframe of the project – it may last just for a short time, but this is ok! Carrying out asset mapping and community needs analysis can capture data which may be of wider use to the local community. Equally a map of the 'community assets' could benefit local innovators in bringing positive change to a local area.

Create a community of praxis

A community can be encouraged to achieve their own aspirations and 'practice' their ideas. Local services such as schools and churches can contribute to this process through maximising their reach in the local area in an inclusive manner. Local authority community officers can provide important facilitation / support roles – providing a platform for small change engagement. They can help set up a project but local authorities need to avoid being too prescriptive and allow community actors the freedom to develop their own ideas. They can point groups to resources and funding e.g. using powers of the Localism Act to help communities acquire local assets. In London boroughs such as Lewisham, local assemblies are allocated funds at the ward-level to support locally-generated activities ([Lewisham local assemblies](#)). In terms of facilitating change, study visits can also help open up ideas and creativity. Local authorities can encourage the involvement of local businesses in design and funding. They can also work with unofficial neighbourhood planning processes, recognising more informal community processes and designs. If necessary such plans can become formally recognised as Supplementary Planning Documents for a local area.

The way forward – *Achieving a perfect storm*

This workshop has begun to identify what *'small change'* might look like for the Campaign for a Liveable London. It has unearthed stories from engaged individuals on how Londoners are making their lives more liveable. Furthermore, our participants identified how these innovations overcame challenges and might be scaled up. Lessons include: the importance of being flexible; embracing uncertainty; creating platforms to link real and virtual exchange of knowledge and ideas; being allowed to experiment and make mistakes; 'chunking' change into manageable parts; and creating communities of praxis – joining up theory and practice. These experiences are useful insights into enabling a rare combination of people and events to flourish. These insights will further inform CPRE London's Liveability framework, which will be used to examine the dimensions of liveability in a number of London's neighbourhoods.

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