Case study: West Howe – Vision for Regeneration

This case study outlines how local people on an estate in Bournemouth were involved in preparing an action plan for regenerating the neighbourhood, driven by the desire to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

Project name: West Howe – Vision for Regeneration
Location: Bournemouth
Organisations involved:
Bournemouth Borough Council
West Howe Regeneration Partnership Board
Design Council Cabe

Background

West Howe is located on the north westerly edge of Bournemouth and is a neighbourhood of around 10,000 people, built in the 1950s. It suffers from multiple deprivation. It is made up of semi-detached and terraced houses, and low-rise blocks of flats, with much space between homes and the streets. Featureless green spaces remain unused, and hard landscaped areas such as garage courts and parking areas are under used. The area has been designed primarily for movement by cars and doesn’t encourage people to walk or cycle for short distances. Outdoor spaces and community facilities are unattractive and in need of improvement. It is typical of many neighbourhoods throughout the country.

Top tips

– Work with whoever you can and develop networks: people come forward if they think they are being listened to. Find a few people with real interest who have much to contribute and are prepared to put in time.
– Involve local people from the outset, before opposition sets in, if possible.
– Include ward councillors and portfolio holders to get local political support.
– Use visual mapping materials to analyse issues, what is valued and where there are problems.
– Direct contact between residents and designers is essential for exploring realistic opportunities and options, raising aspirations and building trust. Designers can identify solutions that would not be thought of by officers or residents. This can be very enriching for all.

The opportunity

Local Public Health officers had identified higher than average health-related problems in West Howe and linked this to inactive lifestyles. In 2014, Design Council Cabe (as part of its Active by Design programme) was appointed to work with local residents, the Council and local stakeholders to create a vision for change for West Howe, aiming to:

– capitalise on the area’s existing assets
– improve residents’ health and wellbeing
– collaborate with, and empower, the local community.
What they did

The first step was to appoint twelve local resident ‘Ambassadors’ to help develop a vision, some initial proposals for the area and an action plan for the future. The Ambassadors visited successful places nearby for inspiration, and then led walkabouts through West Howe involving residents of all ages and Council representatives. The aim was to look objectively at their neighbourhood, including what worked well and where there were problems.

A draft vision statement was produced based on the outcomes of this work. This information was exhibited in several popular local venues to encourage wider discussion and support; more than 250 people participated. The opportunity for new homes was seen as an essential next step for longer-term change.

The resulting Action Plan identified projects that could be taken forward in the short, medium and longer term. These included:

– recognising the potential for small scale housing projects to make better use of garage and backland sites
– creating a new heart to West Howe through infill development
– providing an accessible and attractive new park.

Design Council Cabe then helped to translate this information into a physical regeneration vision for West Howe. This document made a commitment to ensuring residents continue to be involved in the design of future projects.

What happens next

The central area of the neighbourhood is being scoped as a potential infill site for new homes, linked with the opportunity to make improvements in the immediate vicinity of the site. This could include improving safety and creating more useable open space around the existing flats for play, growing and socialising.
Challenges

– Overcoming problems related to the original layout of the estate, which have often been compounded by piecemeal change and adaptations since, including prioritising space for cars over those on foot and cycle.
– Need to overcome a historic lack of trust between residents and the local authority.
– Avoiding raising expectations when work will take time, possibly years, to proceed, particularly at times of financial constraint.
Solutions and lessons learned

- **Seeing is believing:** It is important for people to see and hear how different places can be when they have been changed as a result of local people working closely with designers.

- **Local people are an invaluable source of information:** With support and guidance they were able to perform essential mapping and analytic work of the area.

- **Invest in a community development officer:** Support from a dedicated community engagement officer was integral as they had good relationships with community representatives.

- **Creating different design options:** Understanding the options is crucial for developing a vision, and essential for unlocking opposition.

- **Involving local residents had many social and personal benefits:** It helped build trust and respect, developed confidence and was an important learning experience for all, in addition to longer-term benefits to health and wellbeing.