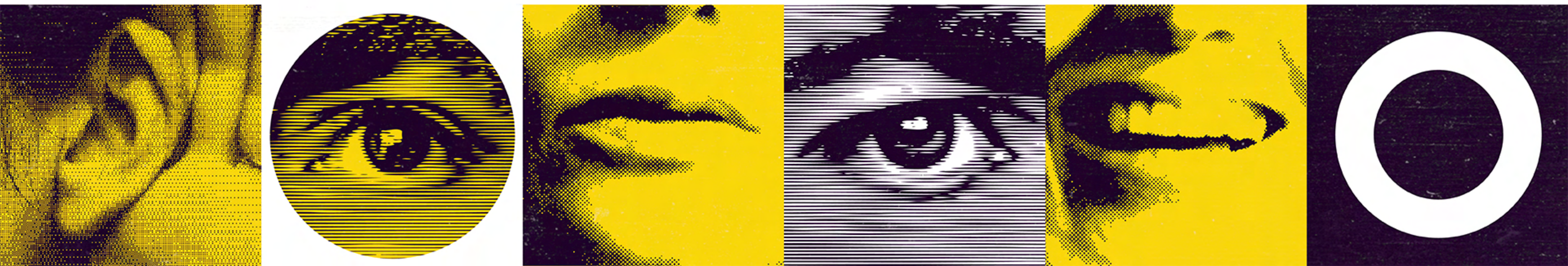


# TRUST, ENGAGE & DELIVER



**REGENERATION**

**WITHOUT**

**TRUST**


**'IS JUST DEVELOPMENT'**

**Community engagement is no longer a planning obligation to be managed** - it is a development strategy to be invested in. Regeneration leaders from across the North explain what that looks like in practice.

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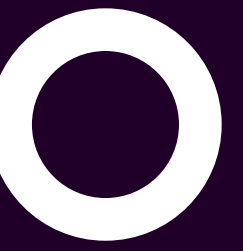
Panel: Chris Barry, Influential; Becca Heron, Manchester City Council; Karen Hirst, Old Trafford Regeneration MDC; Danny Hope, Stantec; Rachel Laver, Rochdale Development Agency; Dominique Murray, MEPC/Federated Hermes; Henrietta Nowne, Landsec; Pete Swift, Planit-IE; Katie Wray, Deloitte and was chaired by Chris Hulme, Influential.





**THE NORTH OF ENGLAND'S  
REGENERATION  
PIPELINE IS AS  
AMBITIOUS  
AS EVER.**

**New stadiums, new neighbourhoods,** and **attractive new public spaces** in urban centres. Yet the professionals shaping these transformational schemes are clear that ambition without community trust is a planning risk, not just a PR problem.



In post-industrial towns and cities, developers aren't working with blank-slate communities – they're navigating a back story built up through earlier waves of renewal that may have displaced people or fallen short on expectations. And the stakes of getting it wrong have never been higher: scheme delays and cost inflation, judicial reviews and call-ins all carry disproportionate risk on projects where viability is already a challenge.

The conversation led by Influential kept returning to a simple but demanding idea – that genuine engagement changes outcomes, not just optics.

Nowhere is that more visible than at Mayfield. At £1.4 billion and 24 acres, it is one of the most closely watched regeneration schemes in the North. For Henrietta Nowne of Landsec, which leads the joint venture, its defining characteristic isn't its scale – it's what shaped it.

**“One of our early joint venture objectives was that Mayfield is a place for all,” she said. “It's not just community consultation badged for a week or a weekend. It's doing things like having 250 students learning about apprenticeships in the built environment.”**

The less obvious forms of engagement matter too. The project's gardener, Mark, speaks to anyone and everyone and has detailed knowledge of the scheme. He's the face of Mayfield, said Nowne: **“He's there every day, and we hear about anything that happens – including suggestions for what's missing – in a heartbeat.”** Groups use the park daily, generating live feedback, with a more formal check-in every six months. **“These projects take a very long time and viability changes. People's needs, concerns and ideas also change. Keeping that constant engagement going is really important.”**

The results are tangible. The Strategic Regeneration Framework originally proposed a six-and-a-half-acre park with buildings around it. Through genuine consultation – including hosting the RHS's first ever urban flower show, which drew entirely different audiences to traditional planning exhibitions – the brief was transformed. The park will now be 24 acres, with buildings within it rather than surrounding it. That shift came directly from listening.



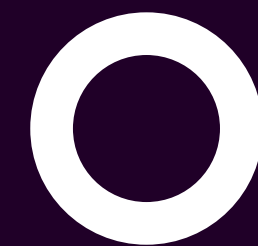
**Katie Wray**  
Deloitte

Katie Wray, Director at Deloitte and a long-standing adviser on major regional schemes, noted that engagement strategy must evolve as a scheme does. At Mayfield's outset, nobody knew it was a place, so the strategy was about creating a name and an identity. Now, as plans have matured, it has become far more local and focused.

She added that clients sometimes assume keeping plans close to their chest will reduce planning risk. In practice the reverse is true: getting out in the open earlier gives more time to address concerns, smooths the path through the planning system, and ensures material considerations are worked through before a scheme reaches committee.

The point about sustained, evolving engagement carries particular weight on schemes where communities need persuading that a development is for them at all.

Rachel Laver of Rochdale Development Agency spoke about Northern Gateway - a nationally significant employment development straddling the Bury and Rochdale border, with the potential to deliver up to 10,000 jobs and £630m of GVA to the regional economy annually.



It is, by any measure, a transformative opportunity. But it sits on green belt land, and Laver is clear about what that means in terms of engagement.

**"We work with the community,"** she said. **"They need to understand what we're proposing and why. It's about creating jobs, GVA, and improved infrastructure. That's not just at the beginning of the process. You talk to people throughout the whole project."** Her conclusion is to the point: **"It is expensive to do community engagement properly. But it's more expensive not to."**

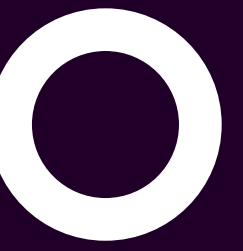


**Rachel Laver**  
Rochdale Development Agency



**GOING TO WHERE  
THE PEOPLE ARE**





• A consistent theme was the importance of **meeting communities on their own terms**, rather than expecting them to engage through developers' preferred channels.

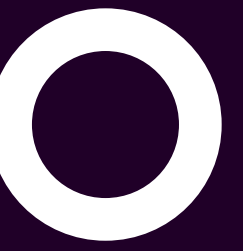
• Chris Barry of Influential recalled pitching a tent at a Manchester school playground during a gale as part of the early Mayfield engagement. **"There was genuine amazement that we'd gone to the trouble, but we had children sharing their ideas and putting them into iPads about what they want to see in Mayfield Park."** It was the parents' questions that stayed with him. **"Is Mayfield for us?"** they asked. **"And you were able to engage at that ground level and say, yes, absolutely."**

Karen Hirst, who leads the recently-formed Old Trafford Regeneration Mayoral Development Corporation, described the same instinct applied to one of the most high-profile projects in the country. **"The first thing you have to do is get to know the community before you start,"** she said. **"Understand the existing groups, find the influencers, meet the ward councillors. That's been my focus for the first four months in the role."**



Old Trafford presents an unusual challenge. The 370-acre regeneration area is predominantly commercial, with the Bridgewater Canal and Manchester Ship Canal running through it but relatively few existing residents. The new Manchester United stadium, 100,000 seats and a global landmark, dominates the conversation. But Hirst is clear that the practical concerns of the surrounding neighbourhoods cannot wait for formal consultation to begin. **"When you talk to the ward councillors, the immediate issues are very practical and about what happens on match days with parking and so on. The Club is putting a dedicated team in place to support the stadium project."**

When consultation begins in earnest this summer, the approach will be deliberately physical. **"We're going to go out to the communities - not just electronically. People want to see a real person they can talk to. And with the diversity of communities around Old Trafford, we'll need to be thinking about language too."**



Pete Swift, CEO of Planit-IE, reserved high praise for the work that went on prior to the development of Everton's new Hill Dickinson stadium, summing up the approach as **"It's not about being spoken to, it's about being invited into the conversation."**



Dominique Murray, Estates Marketing Director at Federated Hermes, described a similar philosophy at work across the company's portfolio. At Wellington Place in Leeds - a predominantly commercial development that had historically felt inaccessible to inner-city communities - the team worked with the local bus company to bring young people from city-centre schools into the space, and organised mentoring that showed them careers across all levels. **"We've just hit our 7,000th young person mentored,"** Murray said. **"It's about making the effort to bring people in and say this is for you. This really is for you."**

At NOMA in Manchester, a decision to open Altogether Otherwise - a free community space - reframed the estate's relationship with the city. **"It was about opening some space and saying, come and use it like your village hall,"** said Murray. **"Drawing people in, as well as going out to them."**

The same approach is already underway at Crompton Place, a four-acre site in Bolton town centre about to undergo a £250m mixed-use transformation. The former 1970s shopping centre is being redeveloped into a residential-led neighbourhood featuring up to 340 homes, a 110-room hotel, 80,000 sq ft of workspace and new leisure spaces. Federated Hermes MEPC was only appointed at the start of 2026, but community engagement has already begun. **"We're starting to talk to the people on the ground,"** said Murray, **"creating those partnerships to make sure we're hitting the hard-to-reach areas - engaging with everybody, not just the surface level. Which areas have deprivation? How do we bring those people in?"** Boots, she said, are already on the ground. **"It's about being there, meeting the right people, and not taking a hands-off approach."**



# GETTING INCLUSIVITY RIGHT





**Danny Hope**  
Stantec

**Henrietta Nowne**  
Landsec

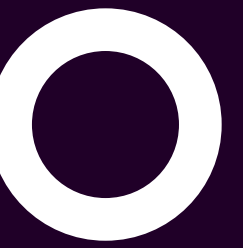
The conversation turned, towards its close, to inclusivity. Becca Heron, Strategic Director of Growth and Development at Manchester City Council, referenced Collyhurst - a Manchester neighbourhood with a community that has lived through regeneration projects that failed to progress - as an example of where engagement must go deeper than a mere public consultation event. **"It is literally going from house to house to understand housing needs and how they can be incorporated into the next phase."**

Swift noted the complexity of diverse communities within a single geography. **"There isn't always one community. There are communities within communities - language, orientation, faith. If you just turn up with English boards in Birmingham's most diverse areas, you've probably excluded 60 or 70% of the people you came to speak to."**

Laver, whose work on Northern Gateway spans some of Greater Manchester's most deprived communities, returned to the basics: make consultation materials people can actually read. **"The average reading age in some communities is eight. All the consultation material has to be in really simple English."**

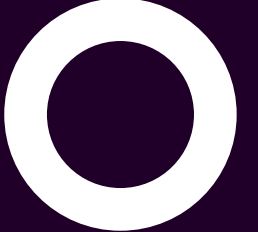
Danny Hope of Stantec described a dual role for technical consultants in the engagement process. Research Stantec commissioned through YouGov around the incoming new towns programme pointed to three consistent community priorities: wellbeing, positive environmental impact, and quality of design. Translating those priorities into reality, he argued, is where firms like his earn their place. **"We get to describe technical information to the community in layman's terms - what it means for them - and influence the quality of design: nature-based solutions, climate resilience, all of those things."**

That responsibility extends beyond the drawing board. Stantec has worked with Manchester Life's apprenticeship scheme, bringing people through from community engagement into employment. **"We've ended up giving jobs to people as a result of that,"** said Hope. **"It's about being a socially responsible business - going into schools, inspiring people into engineering disciplines. Hopefully showing them it's for them too."**



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# FROM COST TO CORE BUSINESS

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Perhaps the most telling sign of how far the industry has shifted came from Murray's description of how bids are now assessed.

**"There's a huge weighting in bids now on how you're engaging, how you're reaching hard-to-reach communities."**

Pete Swift offered the observation that on large scale projects, engagement should be in the budget from RIBA stage 0—to-10-years post completion.

Wray's closing observation cut to the heart of it. The long-term community engagement strategies on schemes like Mayfield and NOMA have not just supported planning applications - they have become the social strategy of those places. **"A really good engagement strategy should actually be the strong threads of your long-term social strategy, with a life of its own."**

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## influential

If you'd like find out more about inclusive community engagement, please contact **Chris Hulme:**

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