

Carriageworks Consultation 2011: What worked?

At the final Stakeholders Group, there was a brief discussion about what made the Carriageworks consultation a success. This is an analysis of the key elements.

The Context

People have been working on this for a long time: SPU has enabled the a coherent vision for the area which has been adopted as planning policy (SPD 10). This is in the context of a highly politicised area, going back over decades (e.g. Full Marks bookshop in the 1980s), and the more recent riot, anti corporatism, and the growth of alternative groups over the last 5 years. Add to this mix a wonderful, Grade 2* listed building that captures the imagination, an archetypal wicked developer, and an active community: “all the ingredients for a great plot”. Beyond Stokes Croft, there are many initiatives in Bristol that support the development of something different, and creative in the area. This supports the approach to change with this difficult site, and for a sensible and coherent discussion about what this should be.

This is not the first time that the buildings have been tackled, but there was also a view that “this time it feels much more energised” and this gave people more hope.

What were the factors that contributed to this energy and optimism?

The Process

The consultation was clear in its purpose and its time-table. It was very well designed. Because there was a clear end goal, the consultants were able to shift direction, and adapt to local circumstances as the process unfolded.

The consultants acted as independent brokers, and this enabled a higher level of trust in this process from the outset. They were very creative in their approaches. The materials were well designed and so very engaging; there were some particularly bright ideas, e.g. the tee shirts, the vox pops, and Pedal Walla. Nothing was ruled out, e.g. taking the Boards onto the street.

Bristol City Council played a genuinely enabling role, supporting, making things happen, and funding but not seeking to control or direct. There was a good budget and this enabled the creativity and quality within a well designed process.

There was a very committed core “Contact Group”, whose members provided a link between all the elements of the process. They each contributed an enormous amount of time and created connections within a range of communities. This role lent credibility to

the process, and enabled a wide range of views to be expressed and brought into the process.

The process and the time scale was transparent throughout. The communication was clear. Nothing was hidden: even all the minutes were publicly available on the website. This made is a very inclusive process. It was a grass roots consultation from the start.

The People

The Carriageworks Action Group brought together a very wide alliance of residents and organisations, many of who have been working on this issue for a long time. It represents a very skilled group with varied perspectives. The approach of the group has been to allow discussion: there is not a fear of debate, and there were some heated discussions! Keeping an eye on the final outcome meant that we always came to an agreement in the end, and kept working together. The Action Group became “more than the sum of its parts” and this enabled some constructive work and for a wide range of views to be brought into a cohesive vision.

This inclusive, transparent and energetic partnership helped even the most cynical to have confidence in the process, and that something will actually happen this time.

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