

Thornton Education Trust – TET Dialogues

TET's monthly informal webinars are an online space for professionals to share knowledge, learn from others and highlight good practice in engaging children and young people in urban design.



February 2023:

Designing Better Homes for Young People: ‘How can we design homes with young people where they can grow and thrive?’

The home is our first and most formative experience of the built environment. At a time when the UK - and many other countries – face many urgent housing problems, how can we ensure that young people’s voices are best considered when designing and building new homes, especially on a large scale across neighbourhoods? What do young people really need in the design of homes? And how can we harness their innovative and creative ideas to make better homes for all?

Our monthly TET Dialogue webinar highlighted examples of best practice from built environment and cultural professionals – including winners of the Inspiring Future Generations Awards – who are leading the way in engaging young people in looking at housing, and creating homes with and for young people.

This event featured short presentations from expert speakers, with a chaired panel discussion and Q&A.

Speakers

- Abigail Batchelor, Associate Director, Karakusevic Carson Architects (Chair)
- Toni Dyer-Miller, communications professional and formerly Engagement Assistant, Karakusevic Carson Architects
- Mark Southgate, Chief Executive, MOBIE
- Dr Bonnie Kwok, Principal Urban Designer/Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Manager, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
- Helena Thompson, Artistic Director, SPID Theatre

For more information, see the highlighted weblinks throughout this document.

Key questions for discussion in the webinar:

- What experience of the design of the home have young people shared: what does ‘home’ mean to them in terms of its physical aspects, space, layout and design? What essential features (in physical terms) do they think a home should have? How do they understand the position of the home within a wider neighbourhood?
- What fresh perspectives can young people bring to challenge preconceived ideas in the design, management and creation of new housing and neighbourhoods?
- How can professionals bring these perspectives to bear in terms of wider policies and industry practice in housing design and among housebuilders at scale?

Summary:

Introduction

Abigail Batchelor

In introducing the webinar, Abigail highlighted how a key focus of the work of [Karakusevic Carson Architects](#) is on designing and delivering council housing for rent. The practice is constantly looking for new ways to work with young people to understand how they feel about their current neighbourhoods, how they might like to imagine them changing, and what their priorities are.

Toni Dyer-Miller

Toni gave us her firsthand experience of co-designing her neighbourhood in Brent as part of the regeneration of St Raphael's Estate and as a community engagement coordinator, working for Karakusevic Carson Architects. She imparted her advice on how young people can and should be involved in the process of designing new homes. She highlighted how, often, young people might not think that consultation events are their concern, yet major projects can sometimes take a decade to complete, so it is likely that the end user will be the young person who was there at the beginning of the process. She emphasised that the key is simply getting the attention of young people and then encouraging them to attend consultation events. Messaging is critical and it is best to use a form of wording that is actually directed at them. Using the tools of social media to identify a specific geographical location and specific age groups, and then tailoring adverts for young people to attend events is also important. Adding incentives for young people, who are often working alongside studying, is also advisable: this could be a paid internship, as Toni herself was offered. Lastly, using arts and culture in ways that are most interesting to young people outside the design process itself can be a great way to gain their attention.

Mark Southgate

Mark brought his perspective of engaging young people in generating design ideas for housing and some of the themes that have emerged from their entries to [MOBIE](#)'s design challenges, and in ensuring we give young people who want to enter our industry the skills they need for future home design. MOBIE stands for Ministry of Building Innovation and Education and was founded by architect and TV presenter George Clarke in 2017 to improve the quality of homebuilding in the UK and to get young people excited by this area of work and how they can change the industry. Mark described and shared entries from some of the more than 12 design challenges that MOBIE has undertaken with young people across the UK with a variety of organisations, from government to private companies and charities. Key themes have started to emerge that relate to young people's concerns, including sustainability, healthy living and wellbeing, adaptability and flexibility. What has become clear is that young people really focus on the end user and their specific needs, questioning, for example, if the user will be a single parent or a vulnerable person – something that is not always present in thinking about housing among professionals. Affordability is also at the heart of their agenda. Mark also touched on some of the education programmes that MOBIE runs, particularly in modern methods of construction of homes, and highlighted some of the successful alumni who have gone on to study built environment or interior architecture subjects at university. The key lesson learned, he said, is to keep your brief as open as possible, and then young people will come with the most amazing creative ideas.

Dr Bonnie Kwok

Bonnie spoke about her work in the youth engagement service at [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning](#) in engaging children, young people and families in the creation of new homes and neighbourhoods in Cambridgeshire. This service offers youth engagement workshops, work experience programmes and apprenticeships, and outreach projects around high-level, strategic projects such as masterplans. She showed how the National Planning Policy Framework policies specify the importance of engaging people at all levels, including children and young people. The

work in youth engagement is also underpinned by a framework in the form of the Cambridge Quality Charter for Growth, which focuses on four 'Cs': community, connectivity, climate and character. Bonnie highlighted the Northeast Cambridge Area Action Plan, the vision for which is to create 1,300 homes, 40% being affordable, and with three new schools among other facilities. It was considered very important to get the children who currently live locally to have a say on the types of homes and neighbourhoods they want. As the site is large (182 hectares) and time was limited, it was decided to develop a video tour/virtual walkabout which they asked children to look at and identify the three most important elements to them, the types of accommodation (houses, flats, etc.) that they liked, and the facilities that they would like to see. The results showed that most children in this area preferred houses, and were not averse to multistorey buildings. The second exercise was to ask the children and young people to design a bench for the development, with the winning design in the competition – which involved councillors, developers and other project partners – being actually constructed. This information directly informed how to better plan spaces in the neighbourhood and forms part of the statement of community involvement. The children's work was also celebrated in an exhibition. Bonnie emphasised how important it is to celebrate this work to get real buy-in from the whole community.

Helena Thompson

Helena spoke about the innovative work of [SPID Theatre](#), which makes art that advocates housing justice. The organisation focuses on giving young people a voice because they are at the leading edge of artistic activism. It runs four free programmes, the flagship one being its award-winning Estate Endz project which works with young people in innovative and creative ways of looking at social housing. The project aims to bring living history to life, challenging the stereotypes around social housing and celebrating the history of estates. SPID Theatre aims to give young people a platform, via video and other creative art forms, to show other people how they value social housing. The organisation tries to make the connections between housing justice and other big issues, such as waste, climate justice, social justice, as these are the issues that young people are most interested in. Home is where social justice starts, and engaging people in any kind of dialogue over how those homes are planned is extremely valuable. Helena has found that asking young people to get involved in a consultation or find out about architecture is not particularly appealing to them, especially these ones who need it most tend not to have the time, even if it's free, to get involved. Working with high-profile partners such as the British Film Institute (BFI), as SPID Theatre is doing, and museums and theatres is much more likely to be of interest to young people with little free time or resources. Young people are born activists, says Helena, so they have an appetite for social change.

The presentations and audience Q&A discussion highlighted some common themes and lessons learned, including:

- Young people can give great contributions, but the key often is just finding practical ways to encourage them to be physically present in the spaces where these contributions can provide valuable insight
- Be as open and transparent as you possibly can, when you ask young people for their views – they will be happy to come forward with them, but not if they feel constrained or they consider that the project is a 'done deal'
- Early engagement is key, as is an underpinning structure such as a youth engagement framework aligned with planning policies
- Rather than focusing on architecture, or even design, use culture and other creative art forms – video, dance, poetry, for example – to bring young people into the conversation and

to empower them to contribute effectively: do your research to find out what they are actually interested in

- Collaborative working across boroughs – by engaging councillors, committees, officers and senior managers – and having a long-term vision are critical to successfully embedding children and young people’s views in planning policy for new neighbourhoods
- Use a simple language or visual tools as children have very different capabilities, even if they are in the same age group, and these are often the most powerful and effective methods
- Be brave in asking open questions and see what young people have got to say – as a professional you will often get back far more than you expected and this can translate into real action in the form of policy or skills development.

What next?

How do we take this forward this discussion? Capacity building is a key goal of TET. TET encourages practitioners to encourage others to join the monthly conversations, to connect people in their own networks, to share knowledge and resources, and to contribute their ideas about how they can make change happen. TET is a platform to signpost best practice and show the value of architecture education initiatives to stakeholders. For more information and to get involved with TET contact:

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