

The success or otherwise of a project is a product of understanding the human as well as the physical geography. Above all, places must be stimulating for people, and buildings and open spaces must be comfortable and safe. This requires an appreciation of the dynamics of the local community, including:

- local views and initiatives;
- local history and custom;
- the views of other stakeholder groups and individuals (such as developers, landowners, utility organisations);
- organisational or institutional arrangements;
- the policy context.

Design is an essential tool for negotiating trade-offs between different interest groups and securing mutually compatible solutions. The best way to gain the necessary understanding of the above factors, and the potential role of design in strengthening existing communities, is to adopt a public participation strategy that involves a wide spectrum of local interest groups and individuals.

Understand the social dynamics

A community-led review process will address a number of key questions. What are the perceived problems? What is the local image of the place? Can the development complement this existing identity, or does it need 're-imagining'? What behavioural characteristics are distinguishable on the site and its surrounds? Where are the main routes, popular uses and focuses of activity? In order to answer these questions, it is essential to include local people in the design and development process. It is also useful to delve into local historical archives to understand how the place has evolved over time.

Table 2.1 provides an inventory of considerations for undertaking a review of the existing community network and the policy context within which design aspirations are to be taken forward. Section 6 provides references on public participation in design.



Hosting an Action Planning Day during the initial phase of the Brixham Harbour Regeneration Project ensured design ideas were based on a thorough appreciation of the views of local people

