

4.06 | Community Engagement Strategy



The Michael Faraday School band playing at the topping out of their new primary school.

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Introduction

The London Borough of Brent is a diverse community, bringing together citizens from far and wide, young and old, all with individual aspirations yet sharing a common space. The challenge for this project will be to reach out to that community, in particular as it presents itself in Willesden Green, and to seek not just to inform, but also to engage and to be inspired by the very distinct strands of society that together make this a quite unique place to live and work. Only by doing that will we be able to deliver both a public building and private homes that command the support of the community and sit comfortably within it.

Indeed, the Council itself has acknowledged this ambition in its preamble to the invitation to tender where it describes the future WGLC as a 'building at the heart of its community... actively welcoming people in all their diversity... a really useful local landmark'. None of that can be achieved unless we successfully engage with local people, their organisations and representatives, delivering on our promises and responding where we can.

Working with local communities in this way comes as second nature to Galliford Try. For several years we have recognised that if we are to deliver homes and public buildings that not only meet the aspirations of those who seek to live and work in them but also enhance the existing neighbourhood, then we need to talk to and engage with local people. We have an outstanding record of engagement and public consultation nationwide: by seeking out local knowledge and listening to local opinion, we are able to build a fuller picture and progress our plans accordingly. Working collaboratively, we hope to resolve concern and secure local consent.

That said, it would be wrong to assume that simply by virtue of our approach, the development will be well received. Once built, it is likely that the new cultural centre will be welcomed and appreciated, but along the way

existing buildings are to be redeveloped, one locally listed and another having been built only relatively recently; a high profile community group, the Brent Irish Advisory Service, is to be displaced; and new homes are to be built on scarce parking spaces – all potentially sensitive issues locally. Galliford Try firmly believes that the key to defusing such issues is early and sustained engagement, giving concerned groups every opportunity to meet and to put across their point, while providing the facts and demonstrating the benefits that will accrue. We conduct extensive research to identify the key groups we need to meet and use the latest communication techniques to encourage a debate through various media.

We believe that this will be particularly appropriate in the local neighbourhood, given the predominance of young professionals who may not respond to some of the more traditional forms of engagement. We should also recognise that London boroughs have more than their fair share of national opinion-formers, politicians and journalists living within their borders who enjoy contributing to a good local campaign, and indeed reporting on it; a media strategy will be important.

The engagement activities we undertake would be carefully managed by Remarkable Group, a communication and consultation agency, which supports Galliford Try on other development projects nationwide. The dedicated Remarkable team, which would comprise a lead senior consultant supported by two other project consultants, would act as Galliford Try's dedicated engagement team for the WGLC site.

This strategy therefore covers plans for:

- Establishing dedicated contact and information points for the project;
- Engaging and communicating with a range of key local stakeholders;
- Delivering accessible opportunities for residents and community groups to be fully involved;
- Ensuring information is readily available at all times during the course of the project;
- Creating interest and excitement in the project and encouraging local feedback; and
- Reporting on the progress of the proposals throughout the project.

Strategy

i) Upon appointment

Media Briefing

This project treads a fine line between the benefits that are to come and local concerns as to what is being lost. As promoters of the scheme, Galliford Try would seek to ensure that the balance is in favour of the good news, something that requires a pro-active, honest and open approach. Therefore, as soon as appointed, we would organise a press briefing for the local media (Willesden & Brent Times, Willesden Herald, Evening Standard) to introduce ourselves and demonstrate our credentials, as well as to deliver some of the scheme headlines and head off any potential issues at the earliest opportunity. We would expect the funding of the cultural centre, the affordable homes requirement and the temporary library closure all to be issues of interest.

Brent Magazine Article

However, we are also aware that the Council's own magazine reaches a far wider audience in the borough than the local newspapers. At the earliest opportunity we would wish to contribute an introductory article, in association with the Council, again setting out our credentials and listing the key benefits and timescales of the project. At this stage we would be activating our communication routes via which the local community could talk to us, and we would aim to take space to publicise these.

Introductory Newsletter

As part of our strategy for engaging the community, Galliford Try will be conducting its own research into the various groups, associations and other bodies that work with residents in the local area, as well as identifying the residents themselves. The community can help us in that respect by directing us to the local groups that are important to them. We would therefore, upon appointment, seek to issue a two-page introductory newsletter to residents and businesses in the neighbourhood, communicating the key principles of the scheme, detailing the means by which they can talk to us, and including a pre-paid reply

comment card by which they could direct us to local representative groups or provide their own contact details as someone wanting to take an active interest. Given the supposed antipathy towards more housing locally (according to the consultation that has taken place), the rationale for the new homes would need to be stressed clearly at this point as well as the New Homes Bonus that Brent would benefit from.

We are aware that the Council already has an extensive Community Directory online and we would look to both use this and also draw on the knowledge of officers at Willesden Green Library to help us prepare as extensive a community group database as possible.

Static Display

Subject to availability, we would wish to maintain a static display within the current Willesden Green Library for an initial two-week period, providing the same information as detailed above. In fact, throughout the pre-application process we would like to establish an information point in the library, and for so long as it remains open during the construction phase, with a notice board highlighting forthcoming events and perhaps access to both a computer and phone so that people could check the website and call the information line for further help.

Establish Methods of Communication

From the outset, a free phone information line will be made available to anyone wishing to discuss the project, which will be manned during office hours. In addition, it would be our intention to provide a number of other ways of contacting the project team, reflecting current lifestyles, which are discussed in more detail below. We would provide the community with details of our dedicated project website, our Facebook page and our Twitter account, all of which would provide an opportunity for individuals to comment on the project and contact the team.

Translation Services

Galliford Try acknowledges that many different languages are spoken within the borough, although according to the 2001 census this is less so in Willesden Green than in other parts. We would therefore propose also to

make available our website, newsletters and consultation event materials in the two most widely spoken languages (other than English) in the Willesden Green and Brondesbury Park wards.

ii) Pre-application period

1-2-1 Meetings

Having gone beyond the introductory stage, and mindful of the March 2012 deadline for submission of a planning application, a fairly rapid series of 1-2-1 meetings with affected neighbours and community groups would need to take place. We would envisage these occurring over two-three days in early November, with each person or group allocated up to one hour for an informal discussion over initial plans, including questions and feedback. An 'affected neighbour' would be someone living close by who could be reasonably expected to be affected by overlooking, traffic, parking, etc. Our experience has shown that local residents can be a fantastic source of pertinent information on the area and have enabled us, in many cases, to avoid problems and improve our eventual offering. We see these 1-2-1 meetings as an information exchange and an opportunity to have concerns raised and fears allayed.

We would prefer to meet representatives of groups and associations who could then report back to their members and encourage them to attend our public events and visit our website, but we accept that there will also be an ad hoc requirement to attend meetings of the groups themselves. We intend to develop a presentation template for such occasions. Examples of groups that we would target include:

- Residents associations
- Traders associations
- Chamber of Commerce
- Local schools
- Neighbourhood Police Team
- Disability groups
- Religious organisations
- Ethnic support groups

The traditional format of meeting may not be appropriate or customary for some of the ethnic groups in Willesden Green. Our

research (as mentioned above) will provide details of the advice centres and advisory services that operate in the locality for minority groups; by approaching them, we hope to be able to contact hard to reach groups. For example, within 100 metres of the site lies the Bosnia & Hercegovina Community Advice Centre which should be an early contact; the Brent Irish Advisory Service of course is situated in the existing building.

Area Consultative Forums

If we can use existing structures that work, rather than create new ones, so much the better as people are naturally more comfortable in familiar surroundings. Galliford Try would therefore look to establish contact with both the Willesden and the Kilburn and Kensal Area Community Forums (given that the site sits on the border of the two wards) with a view to being present at the quarterly meetings to provide updates and respond to questions. It is acknowledged that the forums meet infrequently and that there could possibly be just one meeting before submission of an application, but we would look to continue involvement with them throughout the development phase leading up to completion of the project.

User Consultative Forums

We note that the Council already uses these forums to encourage the users of specific services to have a say about the service they receive. We would like to explore with the Council the possibility of setting up a forum for future users of the Cultural Centre which could bring together both future users and providers of services, as well as the Council and Galliford Try, to have an exchange of ideas. It might also be appropriate to invite ward members to attend as representatives of the wider population. We could use the introductory newsletter to find enthusiastic participants and would be looking to bring people with us on the journey to a brand new facility and hopefully identify supporters for Planning Committee; for example, should Sure Start be offered space in the new building, then its own users should be canvassed for support. We would aim to meet on a monthly basis.

Public Exhibitions

Inevitably, there will be a need to hold a public exhibition when the wider community has an opportunity to view the scheme and provide input and feedback. We would not expect the plans we display to come as a surprise, having undertaken a concentrated series of 1-2-1 meetings and group presentations. However, we need to reach out as widely as possible and, assuming that a number of people we have already met will be there, we would hope that many of them would act as advocates for our scheme.

We envisage two public exhibitions, the first (early December) displaying our initial proposals and inviting comment and the second (early February 2012) with worked-up plans prior to submission, primarily for information. Invitation would be by newsletter as part of a series (see below). Feedback forms would be provided to encourage participation; these, together with copies of the display material, could be provided in alternative languages as discussed above. Each exhibition would be held over two days to allow sufficient time for everyone to attend – one day of which would be a Saturday.

This is an ambitious timetable and is subject to progress on the design and feedback from the 1-2-1 and forum meetings that we have proposed. Mindful of the tight deadlines, we might need to focus on just one public exhibition either in early December or mid-January (outside the Christmas period) and then follow this up with a pre-submission newsletter to the community. This would still allow us to present final plans to local residents and stakeholders and would give a further opportunity for feedback. We would look to discuss these finer details once appointed.

Website & Social Networks

There will be those who cannot attend any of our more traditional formats for communicating information, or indeed choose not to. It is therefore our intention to set up a website which would communicate all the latest information on the proposals, together with copies of newsletters and exhibition materials which could easily be downloaded. It would also offer a comment facility and could provide links to the Council's own website if desired.

The website would go live to coincide with the issuing of the introductory newsletter. To complement the first exhibition, all information that would be developed for display would be uploaded to the website on the day of the event. An online library of information would be created allowing interested parties open and easy access to all relevant documents and plans. For instance, an online set of FAQs could be developed to be placed online for the benefit of residents and interested parties. A version of this could be placed in a downloadable PDF for ease.

But again, websites do not provide sufficient interaction for some, which is why we are suggesting a full social network platform be established. This would be a significant commitment in terms of resource on Galliford Try's part, to provide a fully-monitored Facebook page and Twitter account, but we believe that it is integral to building support for the scheme. We are not pandering to a current trend but looking to provide a service that people will comment on and talk about – which hopefully will allow us to monitor conversations and opinions about the project that would otherwise take place offline, steering them in the way that we want, as we respond.

Newsletter Series

Starting with the introductory edition, newsletters could be issued at irregular intervals to coincide with engagement events. These would include both public exhibitions (December, February), submission of the application (March) and decision on the application (June).

Media

As with the earlier introductory work, we would need to be pro-active throughout the pre-application period, ready to respond to media inquiries and to generate positive publicity from our ongoing engagement. Press releases would be issued in advance of each consultation event; adverts would also be placed. We would also seek to use the Brent Magazine to advertise our forthcoming events, subject to timescales.

Elected Stakeholders

Given the nature of the proposals and the

importance of the project, it will be vital to ensure that key stakeholders are engaged from the earliest opportunity, helping to develop positive working relationships and an understanding of concerns and issues.

The Galliford try team will meet with key local representatives, enabling early discussions to be held around the forthcoming proposals and of equal importance, the supporting consultation process. From this initial discussion, regular contact would be maintained directly throughout the course of the project.

Given the importance of the project, contact will be established with senior members of the council at Executive member level ensuring they too are well informed from the outset. In this respect, early outreach would be undertaken with the Leader of the Council and the Executive members for Regeneration and Major Projects, Customers and Citizens and Environment and Neighbourhoods. In addition, the GLA representative and local Members of Parliament will be approached with a view to an individual briefing.

iii) Post-Decision

All too frequently, developers walk away from local communities once permission to build has been obtained. This is not Galliford Try's approach: we believe that by continuing to communicate with all relevant external audiences through the construction period of each scheme, our – and our client's – reputation is maintained and enhanced, ensuring a positive legacy is left behind once construction work is over. We believe this particular element of work is a natural extension and progression of the communication undertaken during the planning application phase.

The benefits of continuing communication activities post-planning consent and through the build phase are:

- community expectations are fulfilled during the construction phase;
- the council's and Galliford try's corporate reputations are enhanced – ensuring a positive legacy with the local community is left behind;
- clear communication lines are maintained,

ensuring consistency from pre application through to the construction phase.

- angry site neighbour situations are avoided.

The activities we would undertake, and the channels we would use, would not be dissimilar to those during the pre-application period:

Construction works newsletters

An initial post-decision/construction works newsletter would be issued, containing full details of the approved scheme and profiling the Site Manager, including their photograph to help provide a human face for the project while helping to build confidence locally.

The core of the newsletter would feature a milestone chronology of future works which would help neighbours to understand what elements of the project were happening when and providing them with prior notification. For instance, the chronology would detail when any demolition activities were planned to start and how long they would last and when any service diversions would be installed, so far as was known at that point. Furthermore, information about health and safety, site staff and parking and other matters which often can become issues on site could be communicated.

In our experience, as projects move forward, matters do not always proceed as planned and neighbours will need to be notified, sometimes at short notice. Should this be the case, then we would look to issue swift flyers to affected households.

'Contact us' fridge cards

Alongside the first post-decision newsletter, we would issue small 'contact us' cards; these, which would feature all appropriate details, could then be kept by local residents and pinned to fridges for future referral. The benefit of this facility is that we can manage any residents' issues and if necessary, co-ordinate any meetings required to resolve matters.

Social media

The website, Facebook page and Twitter account would all remain open – as of course would the information line – and would shift their emphasis to delivering construction related information and timescales. We would hope to have attracted sufficient 'followers' and 'fans/friends' so that the tables could effectively

be turned, with the accounts being used by us to disseminate useful construction-related information and to generate interest and excitement around the approaching opening of the cultural centre.

Consultative Forums

We would undertake to continue to attend the quarterly meetings of the Area Consultative Forums to provide construction updates, and also to provide the Users Forum with monthly progress reports, working to generate interest in the final product.

Local schools

Once work has started on site, we would look to liaise with local schools, inviting them to visit the project and to learn about the risks of attempting to play there. We could ask them to design safety posters for external notice boards which could also be made available for the community to use. Subject to liaison with the Council, it should also be possible to run naming competitions with local schools for some of the new buildings.

Media relations support

With relationships firmly developed during the pre-application phase, we would expect to be able to call regularly the local journalists to offer newsworthy stories on progress. This would be a great opportunity to develop positive press coverage and, once again, encourage a build up of excitement around the opening ceremonies.

Contact banners

To further ensure that local people know where to turn should they have any questions, concerns or comments, we will put up contact banners on site. The banners would feature all the main channels of communication and would then be placed in a prominent place on the site for the duration of the project.

Joint Working

Our strategy has referred almost exclusively to the engagement that Galliford Try would seek to undertake in preparation for submission of the planning application. However, for many residents, the distinction will not be made and they will view this as the Council's project. It will be important, therefore, to implement

this strategy in cooperation with the Council, each notifying the other of forthcoming press releases and engagement activities that bear on the site, and where appropriate working together publicly. For example, when plans are displayed at the public exhibitions, and attendees have queries regarding the scope of the works and the services to be provided in the Cultural Centre, it would be advantageous to be able to pass such queries to a Council representative.

Pupils from Islington Academy talking about what their new school means to them during the topping out ceremony.

