Annex 1: The process of the Community Led Recovery Plan - Voices from the community

Just Space (JS) appreciates the assistance of Sion Lee, a student volunteer at Just Space, for her support of the process and for her analysis paper from which this explanation draws much of its content. Her paper is at the end of this document.

This Community-led Recovery Plan is essentially a distillation of issues, comments and proposals sourced direct from representatives of 60 community groups from across London – particularly the smaller grass-roots organisations. The process was conducted in a systematic and iterative way to achieve the goal of consensus around policy propositions on matters of the greatest concern to these community groups.

The Process - Step by Step:

A series of 10 discussion group workshops whose reports were in turn debated and refined into policy proposals:

There were 2 rounds of workshops with 75 members from some 60 community groups discussing briefing papers prepared by UCL Bartlett School of Planning (BSP) student volunteers.

First round briefing papers were topic-focused, based on recorded interviews (enabled through the UCL DPU course Practice in Urban Development Planning – Reclaim our Spaces project) supplemented by research from other community and institutional sources. Even if the student authors were unfamiliar with these community perspectives, the recordings had conveyed messages from under-represented community voices, which together with some critiquing by JS members, ensured authenticity, Such measures ensured that skewing of scope and content of the briefings by any unfamiliar authors was limited.

Topics with participants sharing common interests/similar expertise: children & young people, participation, racial inequality, transport, green space/biodiversity, care economy, affordable workspace, housing rights & energy rights.

Second round reports from the first round included policy propositions arranged around 5 principal themes that had emerged from the first round, having been whittled down from 9 (*see below) to make the process more manageable: co-production, visibility and agency, resourcing communities, co-operative infrastructure, lifetime neighbourhoods.

Reports were exposed to free-flowing discussion stimulated by polling to rank issues and propositions alongside open ended facilitation, striving to arrive at a collective understanding, agreement and consensus despite the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences.

General points and threads running through the discussions arising included:

Terms such as co-production and lifetime neighbourhoods are being misappropriated or neglected. These need clarity and defining given their fundamental and foundational significance for Just Space.

The inter weaving nature of the inter-relationships of themes (with a request that they be visualised).

The pervading need for accountability and measurability in the formulation and delivery of services and policies by authorities. And that this is coupled with 'user autonomy' whereby recipients of such actually get to shape the services and policies.

There is a sense of urgency and emergency to drive positive change with a repeated emphasis on visibility and agency, and resourcing of communities to sustain grass-roots organisations and counter austerity/Covid in a digital world that has accelerated disadvantageous changes.

Third round: assembling of the Recovery Plan by a small 'editorial' group of Just Space members for presentation and discussion by the Just Space Network and thence for a public launch. The Network prioritised and identified resources for actions and implementations arising from this Community-led Recovery Plan and calls for collaboration and support from wider alliances of community groups and other networks.

* The 9 overlapping themes that had been generated from the first round of workshops were:

  1. Co-production - fundamental & foundational for JS; early engagement from the start; local authority misappropriation a problem.

2. Visibility and agency - necessary prerequisites; how to be recognised; how to be representative.

3. Resourcing communities - crucial to achieving other themes; not just financial, e.g., community spaces; social enterprises

4. Co-operative infrastructure - coops v coalition as governance basis for community action; embracing business sector & university issues.

5. Lifetime Neighbourhoods - reflecting belonging to area and its people; condemning displacement & unaffordable housing; N.B. concern over becoming exclusive areas.

6. User Autonomy - bottom-up self-determination; accountability; urgency.

7. The Human Rights City /Caring City.

 8. Covid accelerated 'lifestyle' changes.

9. Digitisation.

Sion Lee's analysis paper poses the following question: Are there necessarily two different approaches to distilling policy propositions from communities?

One that assumes that there are different and divided communities with perhaps un-reconcilable multiple voices and experiences; and that these have to be amplified into responses that generate a wide-ranging but fragmented set of bespoke policies. Just Space's view is that this is often the most applied assumption, one which leads to a profound misunderstanding of the capabilities, needs and aspirations of community groups and a misdirecting of policies, plans and programmes.

Or as another way – the 'plural'/'pluriversal' way as one speaker terms it - which harnesses their different knowledge bases and value judgements. By using an empathic understanding of each other's lived experiences and common interests a collective vision and coherent set of policies can be deduced.

It is this later course that Just Space has used to arrive at this document. We believe that it is the plurality of voices that contributed to discussing and writing the policy proposals which make this an authentic reflection of pressing multi-layered and longstanding needs of London's diverse communities and their collective vision of proposals required to start to address them The need for safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing, green infrastructure, buildings and spaces for communities to meet and work in; the need for long term structural change and for diverse new support networks which positively change the way relationships and engagement are undertaken.

Just Space, April 2022

This document and the Community-led Recovery Plan can be downloaded at
JustSpace.org.uk/recovery

A SHORT REFLECTIVE ESSAY FOR JUST SPACE - Preparing the Recovery plan

Written by Sion Lee, a student volunteer at Just Space

Reflection of the process

1. Briefing papers and the first round of workshops

Briefing papers were drafted by student volunteers based on recorded interviews with Just Space members and other resources both from community sources and other institutional sources. Each paper focused on a specific topic area, such as young people and children, participation, transport, green space, etc. Just Space's interview recordings allowed the briefing papers to be fundamentally community-orientated despite the authors being students often without experience in the voluntary sector nor community action. At the same time including information from secondary sources such as reports on Mayoral initiatives and research conducted by larger institutions encouraged members to express their critical insights in the workshops. Following the first round of workshops, workshop reports for each session were created by student volunteers, including policy propositions based on the discussions that took place.

2. Overlapping themes and the second round of workshops

- *Methodology*

Five common themes (co-production, visibility and agency, resourcing communities, co-operative infrastructure, lifetime neighbourhoods) were brainstormed by Sion Lee and Richard Lee, based on the policy propositions that emerged in the first round of workshops. Using these themes as the starting point, four workshops with Just Space members were conducted to discuss the overlapping themes that cut across the policy propositions. The four workshops were set up to ensure that everyone interested could participate in the discussion, considering people's different schedules and availabilities. A voting system was used to initiate conversations about people's priorities and thoughts on the five themes identified, and how to improve the suggested policies. The first workshop used menti.com, an online presentation tool that allows people to access the presentation slides to vote. Although menti.com provided flexible ways to vote such as allowing voters to rank different options, it was not an accessible tool for all as it is a platform outside of

zoom, where the meeting took place. The second and third workshops used the polling function embedded in zoom, which was more accessible and user-friendly both for voters and facilitators, despite the function being limited to multiple-choice voting, rather than a ranking system. The fourth workshop used a platform called Jot Form, which allowed for a ranking of the policies and this did help to guide the discussion. [https://www.jotform.com]

Overview of the workshops

Over the four workshops, one of the points raised by many of the participants was the lack of clear definitions of the five themes prepared prior to the workshops. This is particularly important regarding terms such as co-production and lifetime neighbourhoods which seem to have become empty terms that different stakeholders can bandwagon on. Therefore, clear definitions of the terms need to be stated to demarcate the community interpretation of these terms. Moreover, the definitions must also clarify how to measure whether we have achieved each. What are the signs to look out for to determine whether we have achieved these themes? It may also be beneficial to create new jargons to distinguish community interpretation of these terms from how they get used in other contexts. Furthermore, several members commented on the inter-relationship of the different themes and used it to explain which theme should be put into action with a priority. For example, many understood sufficient resourcing of communities as the building block for other themes. Hence, a diagram of the five themes would be useful to visualise the inter-relationship of the themes.

Among the other themes suggested, accountability, user autonomy and urgency/emergency were reflected potently in many of the policy proposals across the topic areas. It was underlined that accountability and user autonomy emphasise measuring the impact of community actions and policy instruments. User autonomy also enables more input from those who are on the receiving end of community efforts or policies, allowing them to shape the actions taken for them by someone else. Urgency is another relevant theme that is particularly important for the *recovery* plan. As the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and revealed the existing inequalities and issues that have been continuously undermined and *put-on hold*, a sense of urgency is crucial to take meaningful actions.

3. Assessing the methodology

The briefing papers prepared by student volunteers acted as bouncing boards to

encourage community members to freely express their opinions as critics giving feedback, rather than collectively laying out ideas on a blank sheet of paper. Nevertheless, it must be noted that how the written materials initially facilitated the conversation indicates significant intervention by the student volunteer, who can potentially skew the dialogue by limiting the topics to be discussed. This is also the case for the five overlapping themes identified prior to the second round of workshops. The multiple re-drafting of the briefing papers and the overlapping themes based on feedback from some of the Just Space core members prevent this to an extent by ensuring that the written materials reflect different approaches. Furthermore, to identify any gaps in the written materials, the workshops need to be facilitated in a way that encourages community members to contribute their insights outside of the framework provided by the student volunteer.

The first round of workshops and the second round of workshops were facilitated differently. Since the first round of workshops were organised by topic area, the participants in each workshop shared common interests and had similar expertise. The discussions were more coordinated to follow the briefing papers, and this is also due to a lot of the information in them being sourced from the participants. On the other hand, the second round of workshops had people of different interests and expertise and were more flexible. The experimental nature of these workshops also led to many questions by the facilitator to be open-ended. The polling function used to start discussions were effective in encouraging participants to justify their choices and values. This discussion that is driven by justification of one's priorities were effective in revealing the divergence in people's opinions. This led to active debate where people were able to confirm their common values, convince each other of the significance of specific issues, and also recognise the differences in their opinions and how these can be pronounced clearly in defining each theme.

4. What can Just Space do?

The second round of workshops hint towards what seems like a dilemma between working out broader visions that overcome the multiplicity in community voices and amplifying specific experiences of different communities. But do they have to be exclusive of each other? Rather than thinking of these two as polar pathways for Just Space, a plural/pluriversal view needs to be deployed. Contrary to the policymaker rhetoric around communities being divided and facing contestations within themselves, the differences in our experiences and opinions are what is crucial and valuable about the platform Just Space has. By comparatively reflecting on the first and second rounds of workshops, I suggest that the active debates were the most interesting and beneficial part of this process.

My impression was that although people presented different knowledge bases and value judgements, they were all here to make their and others' lives better because they ultimately belong in the same "community". In this sense, the "community" is conceptualised to be here (where I am) and everywhere (where others are) at the same time, as the connections between different social groups and local communities are built by a general motive to make "our" lives better. Hence, to achieve such a collective goal of the community, "I" need to understand and amplify "someone else's" very particular experience. However, in working towards this improvement, "we" need to work towards a vision that "someone else" and "I" continuously conceptualise together. Therefore, the discussions that represent very specific experiences must lead to the discursive shaping of holistic visions of the community as a whole, and this can emerge out of active debate which Just Space can enable.