New approaches to integrated place shaping

The School of Architecture, Design and Planning (University of Kent) collaboration on the Chatham Intra Heritage Action Zone

EVALUATION REPORT

Aug 2024

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Culture Commons

We bring the creative and cultural sectors, the research community and policymakers together to co-design new policy and influence decision makers at the local, regional and national levels.

We work on individual programmes shaped around the needs of our clients and partners, as well as run large-scale open policy development programmes that seek to tackle some of the bigger challenges our sectors face.

We work with local and national governments, sector representative organisations, workforce representative bodies, grant giving institutions and the research community.

Our team is made up of policy professionals, researchers, former political advisors and civil servants who have worked in local, national and international governments and parliaments as well as in the creative and cultural sectors.

We've been having tangible impacts across a range of policy areges for our clients and partners, including:

- Securing uplifts in central government funding for flagship cultural institutions
- Building new policy infrastructures for strategic bodies and sector support organisations
- Informing emergency Covid-19 policy responses by bringing cutting edge research to the attention of UK, devolved and local government decision makers
- Building a coalition of major partners to explore devolution and increased local decision making across the UK
- Advising elected people and their teams on the design and delivery of cultural policy in their areas
- Leading impactful campaigns for change for grassroots organisations and the creative workforce
- Providing analysis on legislation and parliamentary business related to the creative, cultural and heritage sectors

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You can find out more about us at www.culturecommons.uk

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The School of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Kent (ADP) commissioned Culture Commons to assess the impact of ADP's collaboration on the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) located on the Intra Historic High Street in Chatham.

The HSHAZ is an ambitious £95 million UK Government-funded programme led by Historic England across more than 60 sites in England. Its overall aim is enhance the vibrancy of high streets through culture and heritage. The School of ADP contributed to the Intra HAZ through a series of live projects involving MArch and Stage 3 Architecture students over a four-year period.

Alongside supporting and informing students' own design work and studies, the live projects also delivered public engagement activities that brought students and academics together with members of the local community, local authority representatives and professional consultants.

Setting out to evaluate the effectiveness of ADP's teaching modules in relation to the Intra HAZ, and assess the extent to which ADP's involvement had an impact on the stakeholders involved, this evaluation's findings can be summarised as follows:

o The live projects provided an high quality opportunity for both student learning and professional development, exposing learners to real-world design briefs and feedback from built-environment specialists;

o The public engagement aspects of the programme were highly praised by all stakeholder groups involved as platforms for knowledge exchanges, hyperlocal networking and productive conversations that did not previously have an appropriate forum;

o The live projects consolidated synergies between local authorities and the university, providing a testbed for potential collaborations between the institutions with a focus on sustainable practices in place shaping;

o The exchanges that were facilitated by the live projects between students and community stakeholders and the students' final design work were recognised as helping to raise the aspirations of the local community members who engaged and created a safe space for them to reimagine the future of Chatham;

o The exchanges between all local stakeholders – including local authorities, academics and community members – seems to have created an appetite for new approaches to place shaping in the area, particularly through the creation of a physical space of aggregation: an 'urban room';

o University and local authorities stakeholders have identified a strong potential for future idea generation and data gathering in collaboration between MArch students, consultants and local planning authorities.

o The main weaknesses of the live projects were: the perhaps inevitable tension between supporting effective learning experiences on the one hand and delivering design-led experiences with real-world applicability on the other; in the

sustainability of long-term community engagement predicated on volunteers; and the organisation and communication between the School of ADP and the stakeholders involved.

Taking into consideration the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities threats illuminated in this evaluation report, we make the following recommendations:

o   The School of ADP should continue to experiment with applied pedagogical approaches such as those deployed during this programme as part of ongoing curriculum reform
o   The School of ADP should bring more partners to the table and create structures for sustained engagement, improving the representation of communities and ensuring that the risks highlighted in this report are mitigated, workloads are distributed and funding options are diversified to make the engagement more sustainable over the longer term
o   The School of ADP should establish a physical forum of some kind to more consistently cultivate relationships and engagement between current students, alumni, academics, local authority planning teams and the public throughout full planning lifecycles in Chatham
o   The School of ADP should continue to foster community co-design approaches and work with partners, including the local planning authority and developers, to explore options to deliver live project-based work with the community that can have real-world applications
o   The School of ADP could continue to build 'points of engagement' in a 'hub and spoke' model across Medway using physical locations within localities as 'touch points'

Introduction

The School of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Kent (ADP) commissioned Culture Commons to assess the impact of ADP's collaboration on the High Street Heritage Action Zone at Intra Historic High Street, Chatham.

This project sits within a wider set of collaborations between ADP and Medway Council, Historic England and private design consultants, HTA Design.

This evaluation seeks to:

- o   Evaluate the effectiveness of ADP's teaching modules related to the High Street Heritage Action Zone at Intra Historic High Street, Chatham and identify the primary outcomes produced in terms of student learning and professional development.
- o   Assess the extent to which ADP's involvement had an impact on the other stakeholders involved in the project, including faculty, community, local authorities, and professional consultants.
- o   Highlight the key insights that might inform future collaborations between ADP and local stakeholders.

As we developed this evaluation, we identified several secondary outcomes that revealed the project's impact extended beyond its teaching objectives. The report discusses these in detail.

The Project

The University of Kent

The University of Kent moved onto the Pembroke site in 2005. Since 2012, UoK has also had a significant presence in The Historic Dockyard, including the Royal Dockyard Church which was refurbished as the main lecture theatre.

The School of Architecture, Design and Planning

In 2017, ADP was involved in delivering the project 'Sense of Place', a four-day design charrette organised by Professor Nick Grief, the then University's Dean of Medway, in collaboration with Chloe Street Tarbatt and Jef Smith, lecturers at the then Kent School of Architecture. The project involved 30 undergraduate students in a competition to think about how the Pembroke Campus could be better connected to the Chatham Historic Dockyard in the redevelopment of which the University had also previously invested.

Following 'Sense of Place', ADP was involved in three subsequent live projects (2018) which acted as pilots for the three-year programme on Chatham Intra Historic Action Zone (2021-2024) which is the focus of this report. These are detailed in the visual chronology on page 14 of this report.

Through these projects, ADP formed crucial connections with Duncan Bernsten, Senior Urban Design Officer at Medway Council, Liz Moran, the then Director of University of Kent's Gulbenkian Arts Centre and local stakeholders.

In 2019, ADP partnered with Medway council in a funding application for the Intra High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme, a UK Government and Historic England fund programme designed to 'unlock the potential of heritage high streets'.[1] Medway Council, who acted as match funder for the project, earmarked a small amount of funding (£28k over four years) for the School of ADP, with support from the Historic England designated officer.

The IHAZ Project

Intra High Street Heritage Action Zone (IHAZ) in Medway Kent is one site of an ambitious, £95 million UK Government-funded programme delivered by Historic England across more than 60 sites in England.[2] The High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) scheme aimed to breathe new life into local high streets, by regenerating historic buildings and helping to engage local communities through art and cultural projects.

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[1] See https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/regenerating-historic-high-streets/
[2] See https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/

The overall HAZ programme was two-pronged. Alongside a focus on physical buildings and capital redevelopment, the scheme also placed a strong emphasis on projects being developed from the ground up, through community leadership. This strand of the scheme was convened through a cultural consortium delivering events and community engagement activities developed by the project officers.

The Intra High Street Heritage Action Zone (IHAZ) is a £1.6 million project for the regeneration of the area along the River Medway that links the historic settlements of Chatham and Rochester in Kent. The programme ran from March 2021 to March 2024. The Intra Historic High Street, which uniquely connects the two city centres, features a wealth of fine historic buildings, including the early 18th century Master Brewers House and a Synagogue, a distinguished but often underappreciated Victorian building.[3]

For the HAZ strand centred on capital redevelopment, Medway Council have focused their efforts on two historic listed buildings in need of restoration – Chatham House and the Waterworks building – with the intention of creating a 'hub' for the High Street.

The public engagement strand had a strong emphasis on community conversations from the outset. With the help of consultancy support in the early stage, the HAZ project officer was able to establish a solid foundation for expanding these dialogues and building partnerships.

One of the agreed outputs of the HSHAZ was the design of a Significant-led Development Framework which was intended to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document ('The Design Framework'). In February 2021, Medway Council appointed private design consultants 'HTA Design' to prepare the planning document, which has since been adopted by the Council in February 2024.[4] The document provides additional guidance to Local Plan policy, and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

As part of the production of the Development Framework, extensive engagement exercises have been undertaken with stakeholders, the local community, and Council Officers. This included formal consultation from 16th October to 26th November 2023 in order to fulfil the legislative requirements set out in Part 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, and as contained within the provisions for SPDs within the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.[5]

The development of the framework offered an interesting point of connection between the HAZ and the School of ADP which provided "additional engagement and awareness"[6] through the live projects.

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[3] See https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/chatham-intra/
[4] Significance-led Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document – Request for Adoption at https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=72345
[5] See https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=72345
[6] Ibid.

This evaluation work focuses on *Intra*, a research project spearheaded and developed by School of Architecture, Design and Planning at University of Kent (ADP) in collaboration with Medway Council, Historic England and private design consultants 'HTA Design', which centres on the IHAZ.

The Intra project led by ADP

The Intra was a teaching-focused project involving students in 'live projects'.[7] The students were tasked with conducting research, mapping and analysis to develop strategic community-focused design interventions, emphasising both physical and social dynamics.

The project brought together a variety of researchers, students, designers and consultants to undertake research, engage in dialogue about the future development of Intra Historic High Street and develop placemaking proposals. The project was developed through teaching-focused and public engagement activities.

The teaching-focused activities involved three cohorts of students across three academic years, starting with one cohort of Part 2 students from the MArch in Architecture, followed by two cohorts of undergraduate students from the graduating year of the Bachelor's Course in Architecture (Part 1).

The project ran differently for students at MArch and BA levels.

For the **MArch Cohort** (12 students in 2021/2022):

- The project ran as part of Unit 1 with a focus on Intra Historic High Street, Chatham, from Sun Pier to Star Hill.
- Students had free choice of sites they wished to engage with.
- The module was convened through a series of analytical and creative preparatory exercises leading to the main thesis project.
- Students did not formally meet the residents but conducted a series of surveys to collect data.
- Local stakeholders including residents, HTA consultants, Historic England and Medway Council representatives contributed to the briefs, provided presentations and unpublished material to the students, and were invited to attend the critical reviews of students' work ('the crits').
- Students' work was exhibited at the End-of-year Show (June 2022) and in a public exhibition at the Sun Pier House in Chatham as part of the popular 'Chatham Reach Festival'.[8]

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[7] See ADP Intra Project Hub https://www.intrachatham.com/
[8] See https://sunpierhouse.co.uk/exhibitions/the-gallery/a-framed-tale/

For **Stage 3 Cohorts** (110 students in 2022/23 and 98 in 2023/24):

- In both years, the project ran across two design modules, Urban Intervention (Term 1) and Architectural Design (Term 2), plus an integrated professional practice module.
- Students were given the option to choose from three sites identified by module conveners.
- Students met with a panel of residents at the beginning of Term 2.
- Local stakeholders including residents and Medway Council representatives were invited to attend the critical reviews of students' work ('the crits').
- Students' work was exhibited in the End-of-year Shows (June 2023/June 2024) and a public exhibition at Chatham Library.

The public engagement activities organised and delivered by the School of ADP across the three years are summarised in the Table 1.

Table 1. Public Engagement Activities

Date	Event	Location
28/9/2021	Launch of MArch Unit 1 Project	UoK
5/10/2021	Site visit with Medway Council and Robert Flood	Chatham
25/4/2022	Students attend Members Event	Gun
13/5/2022	Tour of Chatham with local historian Robert Flood	Chatham
26/5/2022	MArch Unit 1 Crits	UoK
17/6/2022	MArch End-of-year Show	UoK
8/9/2022	Sun Pier House Public Exhibition	Sun Pier House
17/9/2022	Festival of Chatham Reach	Chatham
4/11/2022	Symposium I at St. John's Church	Chatham
12/12/2022	Stage 3 Final Crits (Urban Intervention)	UoK
28/1/2023	Billy Childish at the Little Theatre	Rochester
4/4/2023	Stage 3 Final Crits (Architectural Design)	UoK
22/6/2023	Urban Room Roadshow	Chatham
7/6/2023	End-of-year Show	UoK
30/6/2023	Symposium II at Chatham Unitarian Church	Chatham
1/7/2023	Public Exhibition at Chatham Library	Chatham
25/9/2023	Stage 3 Project Introduction and Site Visit	UoK/Chatham
11/12/2023	Stage 3 Final Crits (Urban Intervention)	UoK
14/3/2024	Site visit to Chatham and Rochester with presentations from local stakeholders at Unitarian Church and QnA with students	Chatham & Rochester
N/A	Stage 3 Final Crits (Architectural Design)	UoK
7/6/2024	Stage 3 End-of-year Show	UoK

ADP's involvement in CIHAZ can be summarised as follows:

- ADP students participated in the HSHAZ as a 'Live Project' over three academic years including stakeholder involvement at crits, public exhibitions of work in Medway and Canterbury, attendance at local Council meetings
- ADP academics initiated and co-organised two Symposium events in November 2022 and June 2023
- ADP initiated and organised the 'Urban Room Roadshow' event held in 2023, in collaboration with the Urban Room Network, and appointed a consultant to prepare an Urban Room Feasibility Study, which is due to be published shortly. ADP has been awarded additional funding from Medway Council to lead on these activities.
- ADP created a dedicated website, publication and online archive of the 3-year project including a repository of ADP student work, and video records of the public participation events.

Chronology

Milestones

30 Stage 3 Students involved in 'Sense of Place' Charrette – University of Kent

ADP involved in bid for the regeneration of Chatham Intra High Street.

ADP's letter of support to Intra Community Trust for Heritage Fund application

Medway Council and ADP put in LUF Application for Civic Forum

Key Public Engagement Activities

Stage 3 End-of-year Show

Stage 3 End-of-year Show

Urban Room Roadshow

Sun Pier House Public Exhibition

Public Exhibition, Chatham Library

Students attend Members event

Symposium I St. John's Church, Chatham

Symposium II Chatham Unitarian Church, Chatham

MArch End-of-year Show

Live Projects

Stage 3: Chatham Historic Dockyard

Stage 3: Blue Ball Car Park

Stage 3: Rochester Guildhall

Stage 3: Urban Intervention and Architectural Design (Term 2)

Stage 3: Urban Intervention and Architectural Design (Term 2)

Launch of MArch: Unit 1

Stage 3: Urban Intervention (Term 1)

Stage 3: Urban Intervention (Term 1)

2017   2018   ...   2021   Jan   Sept   2022   Jan   Sept   2023   Jan   Sept   2024   Jan   Sept

Catalyst   Pilot projects   Catalyst   IHAZ Live Projects   Legacy

Methodology

We have employed a combination of research methods to gather the data that have informed this evaluation. These include:

o   A rapid literature review of the current planning frameworks in the UK, with a particular emphasis on the English context, to draw out insights into the ways in which consultation and engagement with local people currently feature.

o   A review of internal working documents and grey literature associated with the programme made available by the School of ADP, including end-of-year show catalogues, module briefs, publications, project website and webpages.

o   Qualitative 1-2-1 interviews and focus group sessions with several key stakeholders (see Table 2). These semi-structured engagements were conducted in online roundtables which created space for complexity and provided contributors with a degree of flexibility. The questions were tailored accordingly for each stakeholder group, depending on their role in the projects.

o   Synthesising all the above, we applied a logic model (see below) and SWOT analysis framework in order to conduct a systematic evaluation.
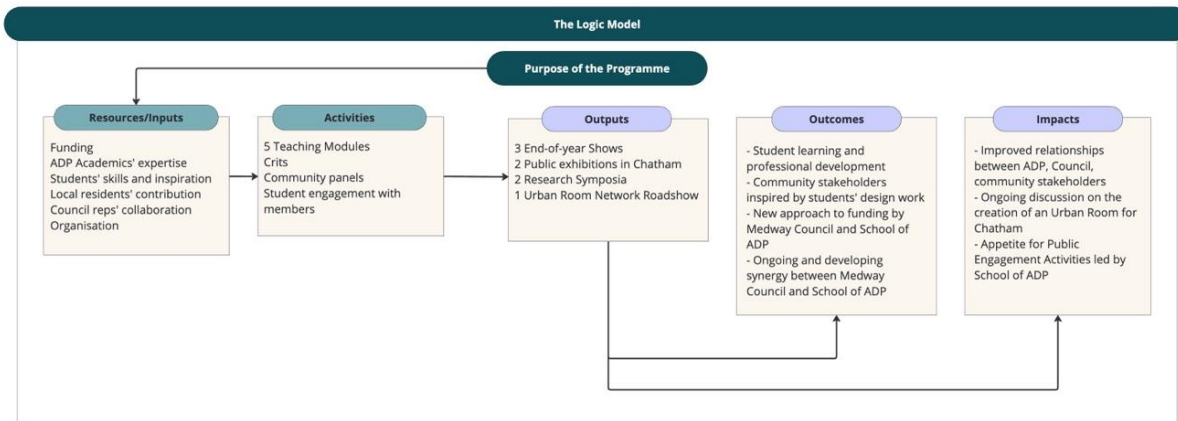
The University of Kent facilitated contact between the Culture Commons team and participants which enabled us to engage with several different stakeholder groups. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the participants we engaged cannot necessarily be considered 'representative' of the wider stakeholder groups that we engaged with nor of the diverse local communities of wider Chatham Intra area.

Table 2. Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Group	Description	No. of Attendees
Community Stakeholders	Members of the Intra Cultural Consortium later transitioned into a charity called Intra Community Trust	6
Undergraduate (Stage 3) Students		7
MArch Students		3
Medway Council	Development Manager; Urban Design Officer; HAZ Project Officer	3
ADP Academics	Module conveners across both Stage 3 and MArch teaching activities	6
Professional Consultants	Consultants appointed for the feasibility study and the Significance-led Development Framework	2
Funders	Historic England Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas	1

With this being a post-project evaluation, the logic model provided the appropriate framework to conduct this study. We started by mapping the stakeholders involved in the delivery as well as the programme's beneficiaries, alongside the resources, inputs and activities organised by ADP across teaching and public engagements. This allowed us to capture the relationship between the live projects and their intended and unintended, short and long-term outcomes and impacts.

The Logic Model

Purpose of the Programme

Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Funding ADP Academics' expertise Students' skills and inspiration Local residents' contribution Council reps' collaboration Organisation	5 Teaching Modules Crits Community panels Student engagement with members	3 End-of-year Shows 2 Public exhibitions in Chatham 2 Research Symposia 1 Urban Room Network Roadshow	- Student learning and professional development - Community stakeholders inspired by students' design work - New approach to funding by Medway Council and School of ADP - Ongoing and developing synergy between Medway Council and School of ADP	- Improved relationships between ADP, Council, community stakeholders - Ongoing discussion on the creation of an Urban Room for Chatham - Appetite for Public Engagement Activities led by School of ADP

Policy Backdrop

In this section we outline some of the theory and recent trends associated with the UK planning system with a particular emphasis on the rise of participatory planning. We focus on the English planning system as this is the most applicable to the University of Kent. We hope this will help us situate the outcomes, findings and the overall evaluation within a wider policy landscape.

UK planning system

The town and country planning system ("planning system") is a framework that manages land use and development. It is a devolved matter across the four UK nations[9] which means that, whilst the broad purpose and functions of each system remains the same, each nation has distinct primary legislation that determines the shape and structure of their system, which now varies from nation to nation.[10]

Broadly, the four nations' planning framework is understood as a 'discretionary system'. This means that, unlike many of the more 'zonal systems' adopted in other parts of the world, decisions governing land use, conservation and development are made on a case-by-case basis.[11] There are benefits and risks associated with both discretionary and zoning-based approaches within planning and urban design theory and the associated literature.

Zonal approaches determine the allocation of site use through detailed zonal codes or ordinances which are considered to de-risk viability and create confidence for the development market by providing up front certainty on what is permitted and what is not. By contrast, discretionary approaches offer flexibility to determine cases on their individual planning merits, which can leave room for increased creativity and innovation; however, this approach can also increase uncertainty and therefore, financial risk to a developer.

In more recent years, successive national governments have adapted the planning regime to move it closer to international models of zoning systems, primarily in effort to reduce barriers to support the delivery of new housing across the UK.

'Plan-led' approaches

To strike a balance between the two approaches, planning systems across the UK have increasingly emphasised the importance of having an up-to-date Local Plan. By law[12], all planning applications need to be made in accordance with a local development plan,

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[9] See https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7459/CBP-7459.pdf
[10] For the purposes of evaluating ADPs engagement in the Intra Historic High Street project in Chatham, we will focus on the planning process in England. Nonetheless, we anticipate that some findings in this paper may have some applicability planning systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
[11] See https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research-rtpi/2020/september/planning-through-zoning/
[12] See section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

unless material considerations dictate otherwise.[13] A local development plan ("the local plan") must:

> **"…set out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well designed places."[14]**

In England, the UK Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that local plans must include an explicit objective to contribute towards sustainable development,[15] as defined under the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs).[16] Of relevance to this evaluation are the commitments made by the UK under Goal 11 to make more cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable:

> **"By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries."[17]**

Plan-led approaches must set out strategic policies for development and specific site allocation. Typically, a local plan is formed of many overlapping documents, including Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for specific locations or policies, and more recently, Neighbourhood Plans. A list of all the individual policy documents comprising the local plan – known as a Local Development Scheme – must be kept up to date and accessible on an LPA's website because **"it is important that local communities and interested parties can keep track of progress".[18]**

This linear process, from plan development through to application, sees Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) within local councils usually divided into two distinct teams that deal with different stages of the planning process: firstly, the 'policy' team which develops the strategic policies and site allocation, and the 'development management' team which is concerned with the process of assessing individual applications submitted and coming to a determination on their outcome.

This two-part planning system provides several moments or 'touch points' for planners and the public to engage and for the public to inform how decisions about planning is being made. While some of these 'touch points' are set out in statute (and are therefore required

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[13] A material planning consideration is defined by the UK Government's Planning practice guidance as "one which is relevant to making the planning decision in question (e.g. whether to grant or refuse an application for planning permission)".
[14] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making
[15] See National Planning Policy Framework, UK Government, p8
[16] See https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981
[17] See UN Sustainable Goals under Goal 11 here https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-11#:~:text=Target%2011.3%3A%20By%202030%2C%20enhance,and%20management%20in%20all%20countries
[18] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making

by law), planning authorities and developers ("the applicants") often conduct consultation activities that go over and above the minimum required by law.

Such activities take place on a project-by-project basis and are often dependant on the working practices of the stakeholders involved in the development, the level of resource available and the overall development timeline. A developer's willingness to conduct non-statutory engagement with the public will ultimately be driven by scheme viability, the working ethos of the developer's leadership team and local authority pressures - including central government-imposed application determination targets and/or timescales.[19]

By law,[20] local authorities in England are required to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which sets out the local authority's plan to involve local people through the 'end-to-end' planning process. The SCI must set out the formal 'statutory' moments that the public should be able to engage in, both within the local place well as the overall development management process – from draft options to application pre-engagements, through to the determination. They must also outline the principles that a council will adhere to in consulting on planning decisions, including how information will be shared and how digital technology might be used.

Participatory planning theory

Planning systems across the world have evolved considerably since the concept of a land regulation systems were established in the mid twentieth century. The Town & Country Planning Act of 1947 established the foundations of a UK wide planning system in the wake of the post-war housing crisis[21]. Between this period and the early 60s, the town planner was seen as an **"ally of democracy"**,[22] working together with central government on a form of planning often now referred to as 'comprehensive planning'.

Comprehensive planning was concerned with the physicality of the built environment and placed an emphasis on the design and layout of the physical environment. At a time of a highly interventionist post-war UK Government, the planner was seen as the expert technocrat at the helm of mass land zoning and comprehensive development projects.[23]

By the 1960s, urban theorists based in the US began to question the approach of comprehensive planning and the new environments that were being created. Famously, Jane Jacobs's 1961 work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* drew attention for the first time to the impact of monocultured towns and cities, stressing the need to reconceptualise them as living and breathing ecosystems dependant on the relationships

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[19] By law a local authority, has between 8-16 weeks to determine an application depending on the size and requirements of the site – unless a 'planning performance agreement' setting out a longer timeframe is agreed at the outset.
[20] See https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/20/section/13
[21] The Modern Law Review, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan., 1948), pp. 72-81
[22] G.E Cherry (1996)Town Planning in Britain since 1900: The Rise and Fall of the Planning Ideal
[23] The 1940 Barlow report and the subsequent 1944 Town Planning Act provided sweeping powers to local authorities to engage in the redevelopment of 'blitzed' and 'blighted' land.

and connectedness of people within them: **"It is not boundaries that make a district, but the cross use and life!"**[24]

Aided by the wave of protest and radicalism of the 1960s and through to the 1970's, the planning professional was repositioned by leading theorists who began to explore the *role* of the planning system itself, asking who should – or could – be involved in it. For example, moving away from the all-knowing technocratic understanding, theorists such as Goodman (1972) and Davidoff (1965) argued that planning practice was a form of social action, and planners could therefore act as **"advocates"** for marginalised communities in issues of land use and development.

It was arguably Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation'[25] that paved the way for how we understand participatory planning today. Arnstein suggested that 'informing' and 'consultation' were merely rungs on the latter of **"tokenism"** and true **"citizen power"** participation involved **"delegation"** and **"partnership"**. This idea has remained at the core of participatory planning and urban design theory throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

British planning theorist Patsy Healey strengthened the concept further still in her work on 'Collaborative Planning'. For Healey, collaborative planning was not just about empowering citizens, but placing an emphasis on the process of the system and, like Jacobs, understanding the network of **"social relations"**,[26] and **"systems of meaning"** that are constructed and held within a place.

Healey further argued that spatial and environment planning has a role to play in building up the **"institutional capacity of place"** and could become a site of social change and integration:

> **"Spatial planning efforts should therefore be judged by the qualities of process, whether they build up relations between stakeholders in an urban region space, whether relations enable trust and understanding to flow among stakeholders."**[27]

Recent trends

Across the early 2000s and into the 2010s, the concepts of 'New Urbanism'[28] and 'sustainable development'[29] dominated urban design and planning theory.

New Urbanism rose as a design movement that rejected the notion of single use sites and instead celebrated mixed use developments that were well designed, integrated

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[24] See J.Jacobs, The Life and Death of Great American Cities, p132
[25] See Sherry R. Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224
[26] See P.Healy, Collaborative planning, Shaping Places in fragmented societies
[27] Ibid., p71
[28] See the Charter for New Urbanism, https://www.cnu.org/who-we-are/charter-new-urbanism
[29] See Mensah, J., & Ricart Casadevall, S. (2019). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review. Cogent Social Sciences, 5(1).

connected and made for walkable neighbourhoods. The Bruntland Commission of 1987 introduced the 'triple bottom line' concept which became closely connected with a new sustainable development movement connecting the environment, the economy and social outcomes which only re-enforced updated design principles further.

A rising housing crisis instigated the UK Labour Party's reform of the planning system in the early 2000's, with Dame Kate Barker urgently commissioned to address the national shortfall in housing. The 'Barker Review' proposed that local authorities **"should allocate more land to be released for development"** and for the planning system to have a greater awareness of housing **"market information"**.[30]

The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 by the then Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition represented a significant push towards locally empowered planning practices in the UK.

David's Cameron's 'Big Society' political project[31] and the generalised shift towards civil action across the country set in motion a broad-based reorientation towards 'the local' across the domestic policy agenda. Spanning 14 years of successive Conservative Party administrations at the UK level, we've seen the introduction of new **"legal powers and new opportunities"**[32] to give local communities the ability to influence and control development – perhaps most notably through the Neighbourhood Planning regime and specific instruments such as the Community Right to Bid/Buy.

2012 saw further significant reforms to central government policy and planning guidance. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was the start of an attempt to significantly speed up and de-mystify the planning process for the public. New government policies advocated for a plan-led approach based on an underlying **"presumption in favour of sustainable development"**.[33]

In 2013 the UK Government commissioned architect and urban planner Terry Farrell OBE to undertake a review of architecture and design of the built environment. In 2014, the Farrell review set out 34 recommendations for uniting built environment professionals and local communities in a richer understanding of place-based development. One relevant recommendation from the review set out:

> **"Every town and city without an architecture and built environment centre should have an 'Urban room' where the past,, present and future of that place can be inspected… These 'place spaces' should have a physical or virtual model, produced in collaboration, with local technical colleges or universities and should be funded jointly by the public and private sector"** – Farrell Review, Recommendation 1B.1

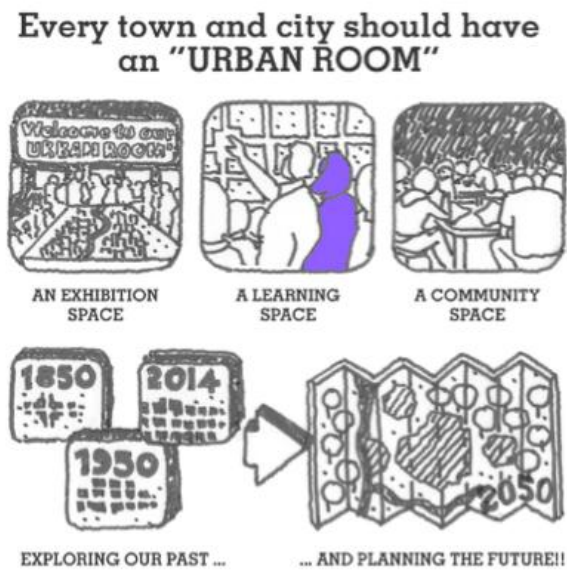
[30] See teview of Housing Supply, Kate Barker 2004, https://www.thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/1878/barker.pdf
[31] See https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech
[32] See guidance on the full list : https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youve-got-the-power-a-quick-and-simple-guide-to-community-rights/youve-got-the-power-a-quick-and-simple-guide-to-community-rights#were-helping-communities-to-take-control
[33] See National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 11.

The Urban Room

The initial aim of the urban room concept, as set out by the *Farrell Review,* is to connect the teaching and practice of the built environment with the local places they are part of, encouraging built environment professionals to understand themselves as *"championing the civic"* and *"helping to shape villages, town and cities through education and outreach"*.[34]

Every town and city should have an "URBAN ROOM"

AN EXHIBITION SPACE   A LEARNING SPACE   A COMMUNITY SPACE

EXPLORING OUR PAST ...   ... AND PLANNING THE FUTURE!!

Although the Urban Room as a tool is not a legal requirement within the UK planning system, it has proved to be popular amongst built environment schools in leading universities and pioneering councils and community engagement practitioners.

An Urban Room Network was established in 2015 by *Urban Room Folkstone* and the University of Sheffield, the latter of which were the first to develop an urban room programme, 'Live Works' supported by their School of Architecture. The network now works to bring together best practice in the field and, with a healthy membership represented by 2024, the network advocates:

> **"Every town and city should have a physical space where people can go to understand, debate and get involved in the past, present and future of where they live, work and play. The purpose of these Urban Rooms is to foster meaningful connections between people and place, using creative methods of engagement to encourage active participation in the future of our buildings, streets and neighbourhoods."**[35]

An Urban Room can therefore be briefly described as a physical space where communities can engage in the development of their built environment and physical space. While all urban rooms are different, the Network sets out four defining principles:

- o A focus on shared built environment
- o An open door
- o Exploration through creative activities
- o To be 'on site' – located in the places being discussed

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[34] See The Farrell Review recommendation 1B.2 https://farrellreview.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Executive-Summary_The-Farrell-Review.pdf
[35] See https://urbanroomsnetwork.org/network/

Blackburn opened the first official Urban Room in 2015. There have [been 23 projects](#) since then, with now 11 live Urban Room projects across the UK, with several more in the pipeline. Urban Rooms can be hosted by several built environment stakeholders, including local authorities, Universities, community development groups and creative practitioners. Although there have been a few examples in Edinburgh and Belfast, the majority of the Urban Room projects have taken place in England.

Case Study: Blackburn is Open

o Blackburn Urban Room was part of the *Blackburn is Open* (BIO) creative regeneration programme held between October 2014 – July 2016. It was led by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwD BC) in collaboration with Hemingway Design Consultancy and other local stakeholders (including the Business Improvement District).

o The Urban Room was located in two empty shop units on the local high street, and was open to the public three days a week. The aim was to increase **"awareness of, and participation in the future designs and functions of the town centre"**.[36]

o The project was funded by a partnership of Arts Council England, BwD BC and private sponsorship. Activity included a month-long annual events festival, 'First Thursday events nights' and become a space to both host Council meetings and for communities to pop in and experience art exhibitions and engage in conversation.

o A collaboration with Sheffield University's School of Architecture enabled post-grad students to develop design research. The students took over empty properties in the town to creatively engage local businesses, residents and young people on the heritage, geography and encouraged skill-sharing exercises to gain a deeper understanding of the town's potential.[37]

Application in practice

From a brief analysis of the foundational theory associated with approaches to participation, as well as trends in planning reform in England since 2004, we can make two observations that are relevant to this evaluation:

1) How the public engages with the planning process matters

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[36] See Urban Room Network, Urban room tools kit, Blackburn is open http://urbanroomstoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/URT_Stories_04-UR-Blackburn_FINAL.pdf
[37] See https://www.hemingwaydesign.co.uk/blog/blackburn-open-blog/

There is a clear distinction between tokenistic consultation methods and those that establish true partnership and delegation programmes. The role of the professional planner and built environment professionals within a dynamic and ever-changing system may be better understood as arbitrators of partnerships as opposed to 'detached' technical advisors. *The 2014 Farrell Review* grounds this theoretical approach in several proposed practices by strongly underlining the role of practitioners within the built environment to become champions of the 'civic' through **"volunteering, championing and enabling"**.[38]

Both Patsy Healey's seminal work, and the design principles of New Urbanism, attests to the importance of fostering unique relationships and networks in a place. Healey's work stresses the importance of the quality of the process rather than outcomes alone. There is a clear role for the planning system to play in supporting **"the institutional capacity"**[39] of a place and – as underlined by the *Urban Rooms Network* – in fostering meaningful connections between people and places.

The importance and fragility of this form of institutional capacity must always be considered by built environment professionals, local institutions and third sector groups hoping to 'engage' communities in programmes.

2) When the public engages is equally important

As explored above, the nature of a plan-led discretionary planning system generates a number of important 'touch points' for engaging with local communities.

Firstly, with decision making often weighted towards the Local Plan, and in light of planning reform that continues to shift the principle of development to the front end of the process, we can surmise that it is important to include local communities as early as possible within the planning process.

This being said, the nature of the 'end-to-end' planning process means that the road to permission, and indeed, completion, is a long one – including the approval of both outline and reserved matter applications. Furthermore, issues regarding the built environment last well beyond, and out with the planning process in of itself – including issues relating to long term use, maintenance, adoption and management. This suggests that points of consultation need to be considered more holistically and take account of the whole end-end-planning process as well as the life cycle of built environment projects.

Further considerations

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[38] The Farrell Review recommendation 1B.2, p15 https://farrellreview.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Executive-Summary_The-Farrell-Review.pdf
[39] See P.Healy, Collaborative planning, Shaping Places in fragmented societies

Local authorities across the four nations and regions of the UK are facing a series of unprecedent pressures. For the financial year 2024-2025 the UK Government at the time agreed to provide 19 councils with support to manage financial pressures via the Exceptional Financial Support Framework, with six of these council's now having handed in Section 114 notices. [40]

Local planning authorities continue to be asked to perform from central government, while their expenditure on their services continues to drop.[41] According to The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI):

"under-resourced national planning systems have been struggling to deliver on their expanding array of duties and traditional roles of policymaking, development control and enforcement"

Against this backdrop, anything above the delivery of purely statutory services is incredibly difficult to sustain for local planning authorities, local government officers and elected councillors. As Culture Commons' other work on 'devolution' and increased local decision making has demonstrated,[42] cuts to local authorities have had a severe impact on the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. This will be an important consideration that must be kept in mind when moving through this report and when devising recommendations.

In July 2024, a new Labour Party led UK Government announced their intention to reform the planning system further to deliver on a new national 'Mission' to build 1.5 million new houses and develop a clean energy infrastructure by the end of a first parliamentary term.[43] In general, these plans will bring into scope previously 'green belt' and 'grey belt' areas in order to maximise opportunities for site allocation for a series of new towns.

There is currently an open consultation taking place on proposed reforms to the NPPF, with an update anticipated before summer recess 2025. In is anticipated that this will outline the degree to which new housing will need to be delivered by local authorities themselves or via the UK Government's own 'new town' delivery mechanisms. Either way, bringing the public into decision making processes associated with master planning and development delivery as work in this area ramps up will be key to taking the public with them.

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[40] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptional-financial-support-for-local-authorities-for-2024-25
[41] State of the profession in 2023, https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research-rtpi/2023/november/state-of-the-profession-2023/#_Toc149742862
[42] See Culture Commons project here: https://www.culturecommons.uk/futureoflcdm
[43] See the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves MP's speech here https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-rachel-reeves-is-taking-immediate-action-to-fix-the-foundations-of-our-economy

INFRA

SWOT Analysis

In this section, we share findings from a SWOT analysis of the University of Kent's IHAZ programme. We draw out key findings taken from across focus group sessions with the stakeholders outlined in the Methodology section earlier.
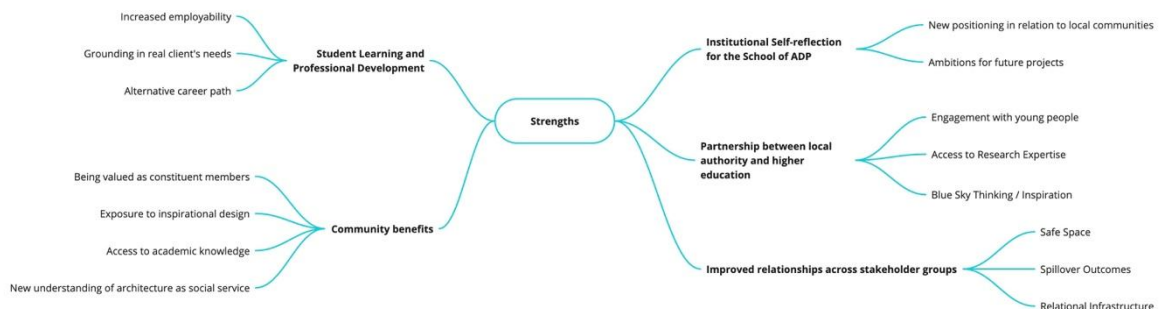
In all the conversations we had with different stakeholder groups involved (including undergraduate and MArch students, faculty teams, community members, and representatives of Medway Council), **it was clear that the IHAZ project led by the School of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Kent had several positive outcomes,** albeit its value was articulated in different ways.

Student Learning & Professional Development

For students, the project had a tangible impact on their **learning and professional development.**

For the Stage 3 students, this was linked to the opportunity to work on a 'live' project, **responding to the needs of clients**.

> **I think this experience was very valuable [...] It just helps us understand how to appeal to clientele because, obviously, this is a service-based profession, so apart from the technical skills that we would need, you know, in designing, at the end of the day, we are catering to people. And so it just helped us understand the how do you attend to the needs of the people that we're designing for.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

Students felt the advantage of being able to **build on the knowledge they had accumulated of the local area from previous module activities**. They particularly enjoyed how the modules progressed from strategic planning ('Sustainable Urban Intervention' in Term 1) to building design ('Architectural Design' in Term 2), which enabled them to **mobilise knowledge acquired in the first module and apply it to the second.**

I'll say that understanding a community – like an existing community – and talking to them and seeing the place, and then designing based upon that has been very useful. And it's kind of…what we would expect to do in practice.
(Stage 3 Student)

While recognising that the scale of engagement with community members and clients would be significantly more extensive on a real-world project, students nonetheless acknowledged the value of learning how to **'ground' their design work in real people's needs** and based on thorough research.

I suppose it was handy and valuable that we could speak to the client, as in the person who'd be paying for the job, and then the client, as in the end user. It's kind of given me an insight for some of the projects I'm doing…*So it was just a good insight to then approach this one with the balance needed to appease both sides.*
(MArch Student)

Students also highlighted the value of learning how to **mediate between clients and end-users**, how to **conduct investigative work** prior to developing a design, and how to **connect their architectural practice to policy and planning**.

I think the projects came out richer for that [preliminary research], a lot more reasoning, and, you know, you could really justify why you've done something, because you've really taken a deep dive into the research.
(MArch Student)

A student who had graduated from the MArch programme and who had since acquired some professional practice experience in an architectural firm was able to comment reflexively on **how the learning they had acquired through the project could be applied**.

When you compare it to working in professional practice, I think there's a line to which the interactions we did wouldn't be enough to warrant the sort of scope of intervention that we were designing for, but it's a result of [the fact that] you've got nine months to go from start to finish, versus professional practice where you've got much longer more often than not.
(MArch Student)

Stage 3 students were also invited to attend a Dialogue Session with politicians at Medway Council where they could **listen to the professional consultants** presenting their proposals to elected members. This was intended to give students **exposure to the decision making process** for their own professional development.

Some of us did get to attend a council meeting where we met some of the stakeholders. So that was quite a good opportunity. But obviously, it was only one event, but it was still quite useful to be given the opportunity to do that.

Further, the students emphasised how they felt the module had **supported them with their overall employability**. For example, they described the learning from this module as 'another tool on their belt' emphasising how applicable it has been to workplace experiences.

> **To build on that like and to offer a possibly slightly more cynical view, it meant that when I was applying for jobs, I was able to demonstrate a degree of practical engagement with live projects. And it was a distinguisher. [...] Another tool in your belt.**
> (MArch Student)

They also emphasised how the module had **opened new career prospects**, particularly in understanding how policy and frameworks apply to architecture.

> **I would say that the value has been, as I said earlier, this third path, and trying something unique, in a sense, I would say. And it definitely is something that I've taken with me since, both in terms of the direction I've taken after Uni, but also in how it supplemented my work, and the fact that, you know, if I need to do a bit of research on policy or planning, I can jump right into that, and I know how to do that. So it's added another tool to a toolbox, apart from just technical design and design theory.**
> (MArch Student)

In one case, a graduate is now **developing their interest in wider built environment professions** as a direct result of the project.

> **I think it definitely shaped the direction that I have taken since, kind of in a, you know, approaching the architecture course as a subject, you know, it's always like, Oh, it's about design or about technical study, right? That's usually the kind of dividing line of what kind of person you see yourself as, but it's kind of created a third route to go into, looking in policy and framework and planning and those kind of things that might not necessarily get exposed to as much sticking to more kind of traditional routes. So this provided a third path.**
> (MArch Student)

Community Benefits

For community members, who we define here as people living, working or regularly visiting the Chatham area, the project delivered on several fronts.

Firstly, it provided a space where the community's **views on Chatham Intra were listened to, their lived experiences were valued** and **their perspectives actively sought.**

When [the students] asked me to give my opinions...[I] thought 'gosh', so I did feel that my views were appreciated – or they were sought anyway.
(Community stakeholder)

Community members were first consulted by one of the Stage 3 module leaders to help co-design inform the module brief in a 'bottom-up' way. Later in the process, Stage 3 students engaged the community in an informal panel set up and facilitated by the academics, where residents and students were able to participate in a **'vibrant dialogue' about the aspirations for, and issues associated with Intra**. As one of the residents described it:

I feel that our job, in a way, was to help the students to get inspiration for their designs and so was delighted to see some of the ideas that I gave them had been taken on board for some of the designs that I saw at the crits.
(Community stakeholder)

Iterative in-person critical reviews of students' work ('the crits') provided further moments of engagement with local residents. During the crits, students would present their developing concepts and design and local stakeholders would be invited to critique it or ask questions.

It's been really clear at every crit that I've been to, and last year's end-of-year show as well, how much they've listened to the community.
(Community Stakeholder)

From our exploration of participatory planning theory explored above, we have stressed the importance of involving communities early in the context of the UK's 'plan-led' system, when the principle of development is established at the planning policy stage. It is therefore positive to see the student engagement with the community, particularly when this aligned with the development of the design framework, **involving individuals in early conceptual design work associated with the plan making stage of the planning process.**

From the University's point of view, the value of local knowledge became increasingly central to the project as the relationship between the School of ADP and local residents developed.

I suppose the first edition, with the MArch, probably followed Unit 1 tradition, which was very interested in place, [...] in bringing a reading of history into the present by a form of architectural archaeology, [...] But they weren't explicitly about stakeholders, and I think that's if there has been an evolution through the editions of the projects it's been an increasing interest in in the people that are residents of Chatham and all the other stakeholders.
(ADP Academic)

In return, it appears that the students' work **exposed the community to new inspirational designs and fresh perspectives** on their ways of thinking about the history and value of their area, giving a fresh perspective on their town.

> **having [the students] come into the area, look at some of our vacant sites with young, new eyes, and come up with ideas that possibly none of us have even thought about is good for us as a community...they have given us ideas and the Council ideas that we might be able to use when development actually does take place.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

The creative use of materials made for a real connection with this community member, who **felt their contribution had then been valued and integrated into the student's design**. One student's project to develop tiles for the paving that would enhance an understanding of local history was well received due to their tangible quality. Given the predominantly online, paper and technical plan-based consultation used in planning today**, the tactility of this example appears to have added value to the engagement.**

> **What really struck me was its use of materials, because I must say, when I did my walk around, I did point out different aspects of materials that gave you that visual and almost tactile interest in a location. And this chap had really, really, really thought out his use of materials to the point of even creating his own little tiles, where he embedded in the tiles materials found on the site and it was also incorporating the little bit of historic floor to a former chapel that had been there.**
> (Community stakeholder)

They felt that the students had **played a role in raising aspirations for Chatham** even if designs were not felt to be entirely feasible.

> **The very fact that somebody proposed a different way of accessing something makes you think, 'Ah, something new, something original can be done'. We don't just want to sort of replicate or make a pastiche of what's going on already. Let's do things differently.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

> **I've enjoyed meeting the students a lot and looking at the ideas and concepts they've come up with. A lot [of their ideas] are daft, and some of them are inspired, but they've been part of the journey. We've all been on this journey together.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

The programme has clearly provided locals with a **new understanding of how built environment specialists can be understood as providing a kind of civic service** and **support community wellbeing** beyond producing aesthetically appealing design.

> **We were thinking of planning and development as all about money and designing buildings, but they were taking on the actual needs of the people that occupy this particular location, and I was impressed, and, yeah, and encouraged and very surprised.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

On the other hand, the project appeared to **create a platform for community members to access leading academic knowledge** and engage in dialogue with students and highly experienced academics. In this regard, public engagement activities were particularly praised by the community members:

> **One thing I've really taken away from this is that I've learned so much from the visits to the university, from working with the students and from being asked to give my opinion on things when I don't have any expert knowledge. I've learned very quickly on some of that. But I really have learned a lot from the students. Definitely, some eye-opening bits of things that I wouldn't have thought of in, you know, the design of buildings, the design of space.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

> **From my perspective, yes, I learned from some of the design concepts [the students] produced, that's been brilliant, from the symposium we did.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

> **There is knowledge there that is of practical use. And actually, I'll quote something very personal, which you may not even know, but my house is now being monitored for solar gain by a PhD student from University of Kent as a result of a casual conversation between my wife […] that's something practical, which can really be a benefit to us all.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

University of Kent Outcomes

For the academics involved in Stage 3 modules, it was clear that the project's objectives were, first and foremost, pedagogical in nature. Set up as a teaching-focused educational project, the modules aimed to equip students with the tools to progress in their learning and professional development.

However, the faculty also emphasised that the collaboration with local authorities and community members in Chatham produced several benefits that they had not anticipated. These could be summarised as a **new understanding of the relevance of the work of the School for local communities** and, further, a new position for the School as a **hub for research-informed strategic advice**.

...the possibility to go out there and talk to people and present in very simple ways, our research projects was, I think, a great opportunity. We created a link with local authorities, a link with residents and organised groups of residents.
(ADP Academic)

We are seriously considering developing a research platform that can actually provide this strategic advice with regards to extending historic cities like Canterbury, Folkestone and Chatham in the Kent area. So probably that is [what] the future looks like that we build on.
(ADP Academic)

Partnership between HEI and local authority

For representatives of Medway Council that we spoke to, the project had been very productive in several ways.

It had **helped the local authority engage young people in a dialogue** – a demographic that they had historically found hard to reach. The involvement of the students in members' meetings was described as refreshing and 'challenging' in a constructive way, contributing to creating a more collaborative cross-party environment.

Members have really enjoyed having the students at those sessions, partly because the younger population have been one of the harder-to-reach groups, and the harder-to-reach people for us, certainly as the authority. So what the students and the university have given is an access to a constituency, [...] that we really needed to see.
(Medway Council Representative)

The students have challenged us all, I think, and said, 'What if?' and 'why couldn't you?' and [...] 'Why are you making decisions like that?'. And I think that's been, that's been really helpful as well.
(Medway Council Representative)

I thought there were some real tensions between different councillors, and they had to behave themselves, [...] They were mixed up, it was nice, because they went out as break-out groups, and so you had some fairly headstrong councillors from one side and the other side that ended up on the same team, so to speak, and looking at different ideas and different projects.
(Community stakeholder)

When asked to clarify how the project helped to reach young constituencies, the Council representatives explained this was achieved through the **students' engagement work with local residents**. Particularly in the first year of the project, the MArch students were asked to **carry out surveys and interviews to understand the community and the**

locality they were designing for – a level and a kind of approach that the **Council does not have the resources to carry out.**

> **It's not that the students suddenly brought whole loads and loads and loads of youngsters to the symposium or to other events – that was still populated, generally by the elderly, more retired in the population – but it was on the ground, walking around. […]. That's where they spoke with and met them [the youngsters] sometimes it was on the street, sometimes it was having coffee, sometimes it was having a beer after, sometimes it was conversations that were happening on a Saturday when they went to look at their site. Sometimes it was through email.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

> **I think some of the added value that we had from the students was sort of breaking down some barriers with the community that we'd already done work outside. But then, I think particularly the first-year group that we had that was post COVID, and were going out talking to people on the streets, rather than doing more formal sessions like we did the last two years. They were probably talking to people that we didn't get to talk to because they were stopping people in the street and asking questions.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

The **relevance of the briefs** prepared by the faculty was also thought to have enhanced the usefulness of the outcomes:

> **The master stroke he [the Stage 3 Module Convener] had was to start to think about service design, not just physical design. And we did this in a mixture of Intra and Chatham, […] and that's so on message for where the council is. How do we design new services for this community? […] It meant those briefs were super relevant for what we are facing as a council. […] And of course, the students discuss those services out there. I mean, imagine that, if we, as the Council, could capture that more and have young input into the design of our services. I mean, it's extraordinary.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

The first year of the project coincided with Medway Council appointing the London-based design consultancy, HTA Design, to develop a Significance-led Development Framework. HTA began work on the development framework in 2021 "in parallel" with the MArch students' module, as both the students and the HTA consultant described their projects in separate interviews.

As with the community stakeholders, the work of the MArch Students was said to have offered **blue sky thinking.** While some of the students' designs were deemed not deliverable or at times not applicable in the historic environment as professional consultants and funders have admitted, it was recognised that their contribution in terms of **idea generation** was incredibly valuable to the final development framework:

I think in running parallel… it was really quite helpful [...] They [the students] were freer in their ability, because it was student projects so less constrained, and in that sense that they were… able to provoke our thoughts and our reactions [...] so they did stimulate us in kind of different directions, which was really quite good.
(Professional Consultant)

Despite initial concern that presenting residents with students' work – by nature more creative – alongside professional work might have been confusing for the community, the process was described by HTA consultants as **creating a "generally positive energy throughout" that "provoked conversation" among the stakeholders**.

Bringing in lots of different creative inputs is just a positive to the process. You've got to work out how you'll distil it down in the end, which is difficult or which actually could have been difficult, but it wasn't.
(Professional Consultant)

In another interview with Historic England, this has been described as **creating a "safe space"** where ideas could flow outside of the rigid parameters that professional consultants have to observe and be a **"source of inspiration"** for the final framework.

Some of these ideas were probably a step too far to ever be deliverable, and some of them actually from historic environment were harmful. But it's just all about expanding people's perceptions of the art of possibility, and as part of that, doing it in a collaborative way, and using the tapestry of the historic environment as your inspiration and your foundation, which I think is really invaluable.
(Funding Partner representative)

The creative process developed through attendance at the crits by the HTA consultants, among other stakeholders, and public engagement activities where **students' work was presented and discussed.**

I think there was a bit of a synergy in the graphic outputs. I think we inspired some of their graphic outputs, but some of the standard was really beautiful and thought-provoking and definitely influenced us.
(Professional Consultant)

Medway Council, which was closely involved in both the consultants' work and the students' live projects, recognised how the **students' research and designs played a role in facilitating conversations with the community**.

It was useful also for the design team, for HTA, who were leading it [the framework]…because they were seeing in front of them things tested that they were kind of dreaming might be possible, but weren't quite sure. Now we all know there's a lot of slippage with student work, and this is not a deep piece of research

that's super qualified. It's what I refer to as informed speculation…It has a real value as part of the process of understanding, of communicating with the community, and of then responding…
(Medway Council Representative)

Capturing the extent to which students' ideas fed directly into the framework proved challenging because a great part of the impact of the live projects was found in intangible outcomes, such as anecdotal evidence or informal conversations. One particular example illustrates this well: a local resident who owned several high-street buildings and, inspired by students' work, eventually sold her property portfolio to a developer who is now working with the Intra Community Trust to help develop proposals for the heritage assets and sites.

So there were really tangible moments where that happened [students' work inspiring real redevelopment projects] and it influenced her perspective on what she should think about her estate. What that was doing was feeding into the framework. It was coming full circle into our dialogues and at the symposia. So, it's sort of multifaceted.
(Medway Council Representative)

The Council representatives recognised the School of ADP as having the ability to occupy a delicate space within the local ecosystem and contribute to the success of the project by bringing high-level expertise and supporting the students to deliver inspiring design projects.

They had an ability to sit in a political space and be responsible and in a way…behave appropriately, because it is necessary in these situations…The faculty have been experienced enough to be in that space and marshal the students.
(Medway Council Representative)

The words 'trust' and 'responsibility' were used to describe the 'partnership' that the project has strengthened between the university and the Council.

The university have been involved for four years, and […] have been actually very consistent as well, which I've really appreciated.
(Medway Council Representative)

Improved relationships

We also observed that **new relationships and networks were being built throughout the project between the stakeholder groups.**

From the conversations we had, it seemed that the students' engagement work and the public activities had **created the infrastructure for relationships to flourish**.

I think the relationship [with UoK] has enabled us to connect together the work on the development framework that Duncan and the team have done there, the conservational study side of things as well...Talking to some of the university people about urban rooms, for example, I thought that was really useful.
(Community stakeholder)

It enabled us to get to know each other better, the role of the planning department, the HTA, getting to know them, and some of the other parts of the council. So because the students were around, because [Stage 3 module convener] was around, I have this perception that it helped us get to know each other better. [...]. So I think there's that side of things as well, the very fact that the university was here enabled a dialogue that might have not quite happened in the same way.
(Community Stakeholder)

HE [Higher Education] can be the glue and the driver.
(Community stakeholder)

For the faculty, the project had helped them fulfil a key role within this local community and create **connections that are starting to produce spillover outcomes** beyond the teaching activities.

We consolidated a relationship with the people, with the residents and the local authorities. And I have organised a couple of events this year, a symposium on food security and a workshop on climate emergency. And I have had people coming from Chatham, from local authority, from Medway Council, they've been invited. They were happy to come. So there is a relationship that is ongoing and that I think has created an impact in that they're more receptive to what we have to say as academics.
(ADP Academic)

For Medway Council representatives, one of the successes of the project was that it had **opened up a channel of communication with local stakeholders**.

There's a legacy within the community of those people who now feel they can have a dialogue with the council, through the council, with other people, with people in the midst, and…they have a voice, and they can have more of an impact.
(Medway Council Representative)

For the funder, the live projects had created a safe space where the university and the community could come together and learn from each other. This was described as a **"connection [that] builds inspiration on both sides"**.

Where I saw local community members engaging, they always seemed really excited to be able to talk to the students and to hear from them and pleased that they were participating. (Funding Partner representative)

Weaknesses
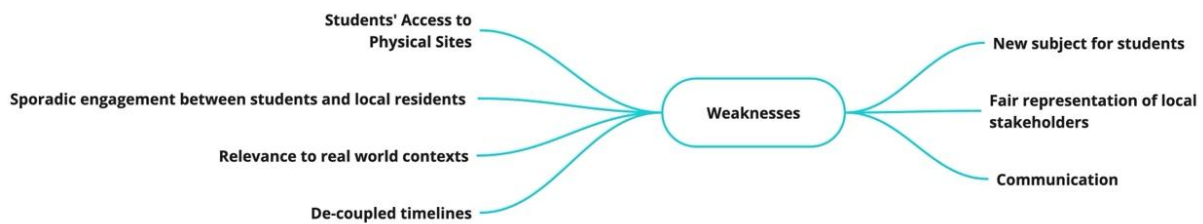
Students' access to physical sites

A key challenge identified by students was **a lack of access to both physical sites and publicly available, detailed information about them.**

Physical visits to the sites were difficult because most of them were not open to public, although the academics explained this was linked to the rationale behind the selection of sites. In the case of Stage 3 modules, for example, empty car parks or abandoned buildings were chosen because they were easy to delineate on a map and would allow students to exercise their imagination more freely.

> **Some of the sites, were quite hard to like access. They were more like private.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

> **We couldn't really access the inside of the building. So much of it was just like looking at the exterior, which is quite hard as you can't see, if you need to know, like the structure of the inside.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

While one student recognised that working on Chatham was interesting because they did not know much about it beforehand, they also **lamented a lack of information on the sites they were designing for.**

> **I'd have to look for ages online just for pictures of the building that I wanted to repurpose... I didn't feel like I could just go visit, take my own pictures and come back...So a lot of it was kind of either guesswork or just you felt like you were working with something you didn't fully understand sometimes.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

Sporadic engagement between students and local residents

Across all stakeholder groups, there was a consensus that the project would have benefitted from more sustained relationships between the students and the community members.

While community stakeholders attended crits and end-of-year shows, Stage 3 students reported having no sustained contact with residents after the panel held at the beginning of the second module to the point that this created a sense of disconnect from the live project.

A lot of the time, it felt much more academic, and I kind of forgot that it was a live project sometimes, because we weren't that involved with the Chatham Intra stakeholders. So I think having more involvement with them during the design process would be helpful.
(Stage 3 Student)

Students suggested that **more engagements with local residents at the beginning of their modules could help inform their strategic planning**, which could perhaps be followed up by **additional visits to Intra throughout the modules.**

We had two site visits, one per term, but they were both at the beginning of the term...but it felt like it would have been a lot more useful if we had one at the beginning, and then one maybe halfway through the term...because then you have more of an idea of what kind of building you're designing, what elements of the site you're going to use, and what parts and not, and you can take more kind of specific information from the site.
(Stage 3 Student)

It would have been good to have more community stuff and public meetings at the beginning of the project, which maybe the third years had because they did a project after us, but they didn't really take the opportunity and didn't go to the discussions. Maybe an emphasis in the future of really making sure that you go to those things, because that's where the kind of value of this setup is, in a sense, where you get to have the engagement and the discussion and see what the real conversations are.
(MArch Student)

On the other hand, community members and Medway Council representatives also suggested that **more ongoing contact with students would be beneficial to see how their work progressed**.

The one thing I would have liked to have done differently is have more engagement directly with the students. So although we met sort of a couple of times a year, sort of a more ongoing dialogue in between, and either with myself or with, you know, engagement between them and the community, much more touch points.
(Medway Council Representative)

The idea of a **buddying system** was discussed as a way to provide more structured and sustained contact between students and local residents, but it was also acknowledged that

this would likely be entirely reliant on voluntary activities that may not be sustainable over the longer term.

Relevance to real world contexts

Stage 3 Students and community stakeholders highlighted that they would have liked the **projects to have more 'relevance'**.

Some students **described a feeling of disconnect from the live projects**, as if the work they had been tasked with doing would not necessarily have an impact.

> **Sometimes our projects didn't feel very relevant. I guess they weren't actually going to happen or have any influence. They just felt like a bit of fun or, you know, so I think maybe having something that would have more influence, or maybe more realistic in a way, would be more engaging… because the live projects felt quite separate from the academic work.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

> **We were given a brief to design a building based on the theme of health, and then we were given like cool sites to choose from. So that felt a little bit disconnected from the live project. Obviously, it was to do with Chatham Intra and we got to know the residents, to understand the site and how to build for the site, but it didn't really feel like it was doing anything towards the live project itself, if that makes sense.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

On the other hand, **while local residents appreciated the inspiring designs of the students, they also would have liked to see them more grounded in real-world parameters, such as realistic** budgets, resources and planning restrictions:

> **They [the sites selected for the students' brief] were a bit, a bit of an abstract selection, really. So they'd have a zone which straddled two plots and another zone which didn't, yeah, which is a bit of a plot. So they were, they were selected in that way. So they didn't quite fit in the way that it would work in reality.** (Community stakeholder)

With regard to realistic parameters for the students' briefs, faculty members also shared their reflections on the **challenges to balance the intricacies of real-world planning processes and academic teaching,** at a stage where students' creativity and ambition have to be encouraged and nurtured:

> **I think the other difficulty you have when are trying to make an impact…in space making and place making is the fact that there is an economic mechanism that is currently in place that is very difficult to permeate, from an academic research perspective, in a way that space is managed by a combination of developers who have different amount of power in different kinds of settings, usually in the UK**

> **recently, this power has increased tremendously, with planning departments becoming passive spectators or just enablers of plans that rely less and less on master planning frameworks.**
> (ADP Academic)

Interestingly, one student and one community stakeholder articulated, in separate meetings, the idea that **briefs could be centred on specific buildings in response to more grounded 'commissions'.**

> **I think if the brief was more specific to what they wanted, and maybe that if we all get allocated one site...maybe the site the community most wanted to change, for example...if we had to focus in more on what [the community] wanted, instead of maybe like doing...what we wanted, or like what we wanted them to have, if that makes sense.**
> (Stage 3 Student)

> **Just to have someone look at this church building and see what could be done to make it more functional, more amenable to the users of the building, to make it more desirable for other people that can use it just that sort of thing.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

De-coupled timelines

While we heard positive evidence of the students inspiring the thinking behind the development framework led by HTA, we observe that the overlap between the development of the framework and teaching modules only happened in the first year. It appears that the lack of real-world applicability (as expressed above) has been caused by the **de-coupling of ADP module timelines from that of the development process**. While it is unlikely to be able to completely align institutional timelines, continued engagement between all those involved in the regeneration process could have helped ensure that the students, and therefore the engagement with the community, was consistently contributing to a 'live project'.

> **If we were more thoughtful about it, starting again, I think we could have aligned survey work and analysis work and community engagement work, and they could have actually been used to inform our process more.**
> (Professional Consultant)

However, the HTA consultant and the ADP academics raised concerns about accountability and ethics, emphasising that appropriate protocols need to be in place for the Council and the University for students to conduct official research in this way.

Unchartered territory

Both MArch and Stage 3 students acknowledged that the content of the modules was somewhat **untraditional and unique, making initial engagement with the subject matter slightly uncomfortable.**

It was really tough, because it's a completely different thing...completely different to what you expected going into it. So there was a greater learning curve.
(MArch Student)

While both groups recognised its value, they also emphasised for some students, it felt **like the live project was getting in the way of spending time on honing more traditional architectural design skills:**

I think there was quite a lot of friction with the policy stuff and then mapping and stuff like that that we did... because a lot of people just wanted to go straight into the pure design aspects of it. So when there's this kind of slow burn of going through all these planning theories...It didn't work for some people.
(MArch Student)

The academics also showed an awareness of how **challenging the modules could be** for students.

This is a difficult task...First of all, [in terms of] the students registering what we're requiring.
(ADP Academic)

We are going against the current of architectural thinking completely...So we feel we're very much in the minority now, and that's not easy, because we have first of all to convince the students of the necessity of thinking about design in a completely different way – a design that is first of all... the very idea that the design should entangle and should actually harmonise itself, not with the internal aspiration of a designer, but it should harmonise with the local, normative and typological conditions.
(ADP Academic)

Fair representation of local community

Linked to the above, **representation was raised as a consistent concern by academic staff, students and the community** alike. While Chatham was described as having diverse communities, this was not entirely reflected in the local stakeholders who engaged with the live projects.

You talk with people that are motivated as the majority will not speak. The silent majority will not be vocal. But it is true, we had the very motivated group of people that helped us immensely. But they're not representative of the several layers of society, of the local society.

The barriers of this were mainly identified in the volunteer nature of stakeholder involvement. In fact, the group of **volunteers engaged in the community engagement activity with students was mainly made up of retired people or people in part-time employment** who had capacity to dedicate time.

I think you get people that are interested come along. Maybe there should be a way of getting to people that appear not to be but may well be [interested].
(Community Stakeholder)

Generally, the people we spoke to at the church... it was a fairly good range, but not great. The demographics didn't fully represent what you'd find in Chatham. There were no younger people.
(Stage 3 Student)

Communication

Both **internal and external communications were identified as one of the project's weaknesses** across all the stakeholder groups.

I went to various different meetings that students were at, and on different occasions took students on walks through the area, but from then on, I haven't really been that engaged with it if I'm absolutely honest with you.
(Community Stakeholder)

Students reported **a lack of clarity around the relevance of some of the events they had been invited to** as mentioned above. MArch students and community stakeholders also reported that it **would have been beneficial to be kept informed about the developments of the project.**

This is probably the first interaction I've had regarding the project since leaving uni. So I suppose just being kept in the loop, I suppose, a bit more, whether that's a newsletter or something like that.
(MArch Student)

Wider dissemination around public activities was also seen as something to improve in the future – a view shared by several stakeholder groups, including the academics.

...'comms' in terms of promoting events, trying to get word out more widely to local community, strengthening that engagement, and then promoting the events that we have done. I don't think we did. We probably could have done that better, but we didn't really have that much support with it.
(APD Academic)

Opportunities
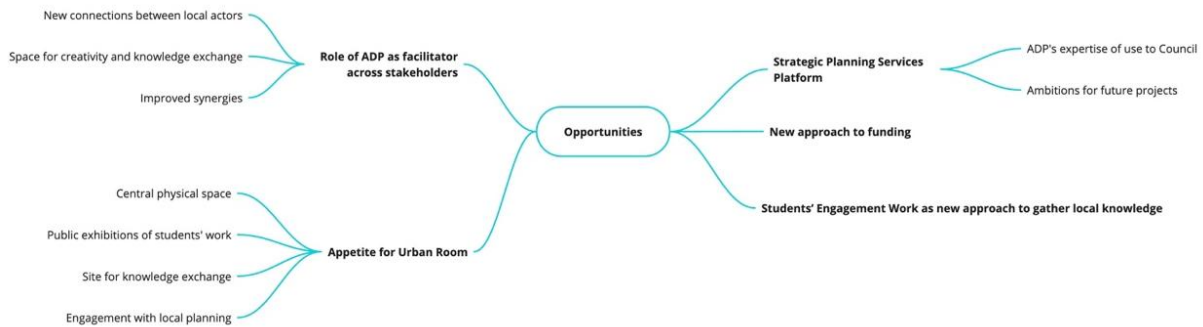
Role of ADP as facilitator across stakeholders

Building on what we identified as the strengths of the project, the School of ADP seems to have **created a space of dialogue and exchange between local actors who were not previously well connected.** This was recognised by community members and Medway Council representatives alike, alongside the ADP academics. There is an opportunity here for the School of ADP to **build on these connections and continue to hold and cultivate this space of dialogue and creativity, becoming a key actor within the local cultural ecosystem.**

As a result of this collaboration, the School of ADP signed a letter of support for the Old High Street Intra Cultural Consortium's application to the Architecture Heritage Fund Development Trust in September 2023.

The project **alerted the community stakeholders to the potential benefits of the faculty's expertise and the students' enthusiasm**.

> **You can't just look at one thing without connecting it to the others. In my view, they connect together. And that means, for me, the university is actually part of the ongoing journey... We're looking at buildings, and we're looking at making a difference in the area. And it seems to me that the long-term relationship with the university should be part of that...I started as cynical and I'm a convert, and I believe that there's a relationship that needs to grow and continue.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

ADP Academics highlighted how **the project addressed a gap in communication among stakeholders, creating opportunities for joined-up thinking.**

> **To me, the most challenging bit in order to then create, generate any sort of impact is the fact that there's very little dialogue and connection between several stakeholders. So you have the residents, and you have the several departments within the local authority and during the summer festival, but also talking with people from residence, it was clear that the housing department didn't talk with the**

> **public health department, didn't talk with urban design department, […] so there were so many ideas that need to be implemented and discussed from a multiple perspective, and only when you do that, then you understand what are the real opportunities there.**
> (ADP Academic)

For Medway Council representatives, **the role that the School of ADP can play locally moving forward has real potential compared to the short-term services that private consultants can provide**.

> **The partnership ability of the university and the council as both public sector bodies with a shared interest in these ambitions means that the engagement is very different. It's much longer term. […] The fact that we've got the Docking Station here happening as well, means that there's a solidity to what we're able to do, and people aren't going as soon as the fee is gone, they're not going to disappear. And I think that so our ability to apply for research funding, to be able to apply for these other things, to be people who are interested in place, and this community on the ground, and all of that in a partnership is quite special, actually**
> (Medway Council Representative)

Urban Room

The main legacy of the project, as proposed by ADP, is that of establishing an Urban Room in Chatham as a central 'hub' for public participation in placemaking. The idea was presented to community stakeholders, Medway Councillors, and local leaders through the Urban Room Roadshow Workshop (2023), a dedicated event organised by the School of ADP in collaboration with the Urban Room Network.[44]

Although more than one participant admitted that the concept was unclear to them, the residents we spoke to were clear that **they would support a physical space** where, for example, students' outputs could be exhibited for longer periods of time, providing exposure to new ideas for other local residents beyond the self-selecting group of engaged people involved with the project directly.

> **There's got to be engagement. And yes, this may be where a sort of urban room comes into it, but I agree with Alex – I'm not sure what it looks like. I definitely do think though it's not a virtual thing which is what I've heard suggested.**
> (Community stakeholder)

The community stakeholders saw the potential for having **a community space to think about the future of Chatham more broadly, as well as for the university (students and faculty) to come and share their knowledge.**

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[44] See https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/ksa/2023/07/05/ksap-and-medway-council-successfully-host-the-first-urban-room-roadshow-workshop/

...I have not been able to make it down to any of the end-of year shows...[they'd] be really lovely to see. I mean, that's where an Urban Room would be brilliant in the area, so the end of year shows could be displayed...so that all of the locals, so not us, but just the general public, could go in and go, 'Oh, that's amazing. Look at that. Oh, look, that's students that come up with these ideas'
(Community Stakeholder)

This echoes the ambition of the academics who also expressed a view that one of the roles of a university as an anchor institution is to share, not to gatekeep knowledge: for them, an **Urban Room could be the site of a critical exchange of knowledge facilitated by the university.**

On the one hand, it could be a place where local knowledge is translated into something design consultants, especially architects, and landscape/urban designers can then turn into design projects.

I think it [the urban room] is a way for a school of architecture to do one of the missions that every school of architecture should have – the one of being out there in the real world and contributing to the improvement of the quality of the built environment, and so having an outpost in the city where we can meet with people and talk about ideas.
(ADP Academic)

On the other, a space where students and researchers **help local residents meaningfully engage with local planning.**

There needs to be another mechanism for widening participation in this and helping make it accessible, because the planning system is very opaque, and people don't understand what their agency might be in it, or how to intervene.
(ADP Academic)

For Medway Council, the **Urban Room concept was identified as having the potential to act as a 'civic forum'** where local people could interact with the policy priorities locally, but also where the council could hear directly from residents on issues of most concern to them and feed this into local planning.

What we really should be doing is finding a way where the Civic Forum becomes the portal through which consultation of projects and so on is undertaken.
(Medway Council Representative)

If you imagine that the area-wide design code grows from the bottom up through the Civic forum, including co-creation, [...] and then top down we have a policy team that's considering the boundary, how, you know... relates to our local plan and everything, and [...] where those meet, effectively, is area-wide design code.

Strategic planning services platform

Both the council representatives and the academics seemed to share the ambition of **expanding this project beyond (but not past) teaching-based activities towards research-focused collaborations**.

Medway Council was clear that the School of **ADP's in-house expertise could be of great benefit to the Council.** For example, it could be applied to a more systematic analysis of the data the Council regularly gathers.

> **I think there is a data part to this work, which the university can do very well. […] We use our data. They give us certain things, but we don't really analyse our data. There's a whole thing about monitoring the work we're doing, […] But I think we need to find a way of funding it. […] And I think it would help support some of our colleagues to have people who knew how to data crunch and knew how to create new perspectives.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

> **I think [the reason why] the university is so important in this is because years ago, the council would have been the repository, when I was here, 30 years ago, the repository of all the knowledge about the town, […] And it's not really the same now. […] I think that so of the university as a kind of repository, as a holder of the cultural knowledge.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

And also towards **more interdisciplinary efforts**…

> **There are those other aspects that we can begin to contemplate as well and bring to bear…So what happens if we bring some planning students in? What happens if we bring some apprentices in? What happens if we bring some graphic designers?**
> (Medway Council Representative)

> **The more I look at these things, the more I think interdisciplinary collaboration and partnership is just fundamental. You cannot have one single voice or organisation. You may have a stronger voice, and that's a different thing [...] And it's how you empower those voices, because a lot of it is about the governance of those voices once they're all together, and then how the governance structure empowers equally or in a particular way.**
> (Funding Partner representative)

Beyond the intended outcomes of the teaching activities, the successful partnership with the university has also demonstrated **potential for future more ambitious collaboration**.

> **As a local authority, and indeed all those around the country now, have been charged with producing area-wide design codes…The work we're doing in Chatham and have done in Chatham and Intra…and the Civic Forum has an ability to be really important for how that comes about, yeah? How the area wide design code comes about…It's likely that we need to have a cluster of town [design] codes.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

For their part, the **ADP academics expressed ambition and interest to be part of conversations on master planning**.

> **The potential impact of a research project would be to operate very carefully between master planners, local authorities in order to make the case for a Master Plan and provide strategic direction for one. But it's a difficult ask because the space for doing that actually tends to be invaded.**
> (ADP Academic)

Nevertheless, they recognised **there are complexities in entering this space**…

> **Hoping to make a research impact sometimes is in conflict with the interest of a competitive company that's actually offering similar services like master planning advice, etc. There is a gap in the fact that master planning is sought, but not as systematically as we would hope, and entire areas are developed, are being developed in a piecemeal way, so the university could fill that gap by providing strategic advice to companies, perhaps developing masterplans or helping local authorities realise the importance of master planning.**
> (ADP Academic)

Adding another perspective on how the university could provide services to the community, Medway Council envisioned the **students working on real development projects in future iterations of the project**. One of the community stakeholders also shared this view, suggesting that students might work on 'real commissions'.

> **There's some extraordinary opportunities in the meanwhile space […] we could be actually talking about things that can actually be put on the ground. Now that's a big next step, and as I say, it's all about innovating and taking it to the next level, but it may well be possible, because we're landowners and developers and we have an ability to control phasing and all of that. It's a big challenge financially**
> (Medway Council Representative)

This was also mentioned from a pedagogical perspective by one of the academics:

> **So I wonder if it would be interesting for the students to kind of go and find clients in Intra who would commission them, as it were, to create projects that they would like to see and sort of start from there. Whereas at the moment, we kind of start from an academic agenda. So we have big titles, big headers, such as sustainability, well**

> **being, etc, and then students will have to start from there, from an academic idea, whereas it would be interesting if they started with the residents, and used one of them as their client, and then probably invite them into the school for crits.**
> (ADP Academic)

New approach to funding

Through the project, Medway Council and the School of ADP tested **new ways to work in synergy, applying for different schemes and pots of funding towards a shared goal.**

> **Chloe and the team there have been actively making applications for research funding to support the journey, as much as we are searching for money through our channels, and so that sort of real partnership helps bring those things about, because it's quite a lot of heavy lifting.**
> (Medway Council Representative)

Appetite for Public Engagement Activities

The **public engagement activities** were identified by all the stakeholder groups as a **highlight of the project**.

One of the MArch students had been engaged with the first symposium and found the experience stimulating and inspiring because it gave them the opportunity to **connect with local stakeholders and hear from professionals**.

> **For example, at the end, when we went to a symposium, and we've had these projects presented from other designers and, you know, urban planners and stuff like that. In a sense, they're doing the same project where they responding to the framework and sort of brief of what is in the city. So kind of having, you know, your project presented, but airing it and seeing what is happening in the real world parallel to that is quite valuable as well.**
> (MArch Student)

For the community, the highest value of these engagements was the opportunity to be **exposed to academic research and be invited to enter a dialogue with specialists while bringing local issues to the fore of the discussion**.

> **That symposium, in the Unitarian Chapel there, I thought was quite a pivotal moment, because we could suddenly see a more joined-up picture… I felt that was where things started to join together in my head, properly, about how we could do things…we're looking at buildings, and we're looking at making a difference in the area…I'd like to see more dialogue. That symposium last year, I thought was the beginning of something. We could do more of that.**
> (Community Stakeholder)

Similarly, for the academics, the **public engagement was an opportunity to gauge local appetite for academic research** but also to **tune academic research to the needs of the local communities**.

We asked them if they were interested in us presenting the projects, and in them telling us what they thought was useful for them, so give us the feedback to then be able, with that feedback, to develop our research in a more useful way that matches what they feel are the underlying problems of the area. And so we organised this event at the end of June. We had seven researchers presenting, Nikos was one of them, and on each one looking at a different research area.
(ADP Academic)

For the funder and the private consultants, there was real **merit in how the School of ADP had used different platforms to engage the community**, but also took part in community events to establish rapport.

The number of different events and the different vehicles to communicate and access people that the school of architecture used was really impressive.
(Funding Partner representative)

The Architecture School, in terms of their connection to the project, went over and above the basic tenant of their engagement. They were an active participator in a lot of the forums locally.
(Funding Partner Representative)

What I thought was really interesting and really positive is how it feels the community welcomed the university into its fold, which I wasn't sure that they would do.
(Professional Consultant)

These events also became **tangible opportunities to consolidate relationships with local stakeholders** and create a **space to discuss the future of the built environment in Chatham**.

The presence of something physical of really high order is very hard to replace…When you put that material in front of people, it gives them confidence that, 'Wow, something is really happening', and someone is making an awful lot of effort to be in their space, and it's subliminal.
(Medway Council Representative)

Students' engagement work as new approach to gather local knowledge

Particularly in the first year, the MArch students were asked to carry out surveys and questionnaires to collect data to **understand what changes local communities might want**, drawing on academic literature.

So we did a lot of public engagement. I remember a lot of stopping people on the street, putting out questionnaires and that kind of thing.
(MArch Student)

We did this exercise where we would approach someone with a blank sheet of paper and we asked them to draw… I think it was like their journey through Intra. So any landmarks to them that stuck out, and it just gave us another idea of how they visualise Intra, rather than just a set amount of questions. So that's quite an interesting one, getting like a variety of those and overlaying them and seeing Intra in that way.
(MArch Student)

The value of this kind of engagement was recognised and highly praised by the local authorities:

The benefit of that, for us, is that we weren't having those conversations. So when we were at those events [the crits], we were hearing some of that stuff for the first time
(Medway Council Representative)

The academics also highlighted the **quality and richness of the students' engagement with local residents** as something that professional practice cannot achieve with equal depth, due to time and budget restrictions.

[The launch of the framework] really opened my eyes to the value of what our students are doing […] Because what our students were doing was actually doing this demographic analysis and community engagement. And then they were developing social briefs. And then they were synthesizing their physical analysis of the place and their social analysis of the place, coming up with new [typologies], coming up with approaches to retrofit programming and massing and financial viability and the social environment of sustainability as a whole integrated entity. And that is not happening on the ground, in practice.
(ADP Academic)

MArch students have this capacity to see magic in the most mundane things, because it is a kind of abstract exercise in a way, they can strip away the things which perhaps, as professional consultants, you don't have the fee to do. You can't indulge in projects in the way that MArch students can indulge in their own projects, because they're time rich, cash poor. And the magic that came out of that probably did alert everyone to the kind of potential for what superficially was very was just a bunch of heritage, old buildings, […] that should be saved, not for the sake of it, but on some form of measured assessment. […] I think that's what architecture students can do the way that professional consultants can't.
(ADP Academic)

Threats
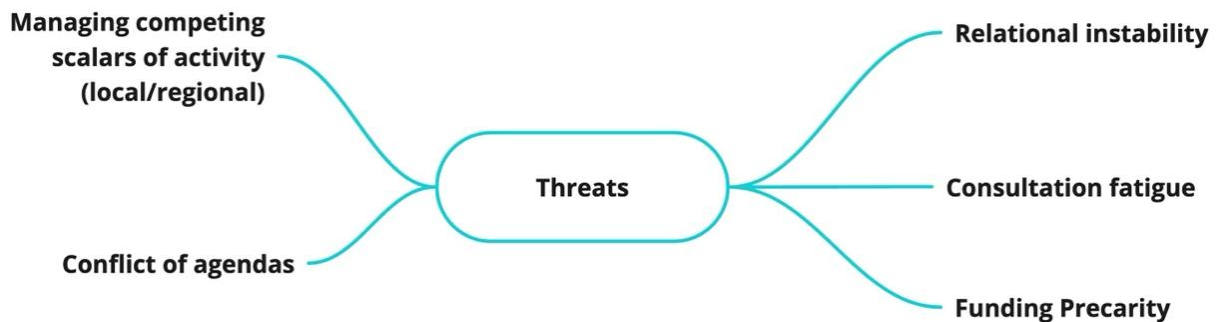
Managing competing scalars of activity (local/regional)

The University of Kent[45] and the School of ADP have a **demonstrable regional presence** with a stated ambition to be active across all parts of Kent.

> **As a school, we have not only local role, but the regional role and broader role. So we want to make the case that what we have…our know-how is not dependent on a specific contingency, but it is a toolset that can make an impact in many different conditions.**
> (ADP Academic)

It is one of the reasons that the **School will be turning their attention from the Intra Heritage Action Zone to pick up a new live project elsewhere in the region** to take students through the final year of their undergraduate studies.

> **…what better way to show that [we're thinking regionally] than actually diversifying your projects so that the students also might see…different catalogues at our end-of-year show and the exhibitions they can see [are a] constantly developing portfolio of projects and ideas.**
> (ADP Academic)

Balancing the hyper-local and place-specific activities such as those we see in the programme with more regionally orientated objectives could be a challenge; without a plan to balance this, the School could end up **spreading itself too thinly across distributed projects** and **'moving on' from projects and crucial community relationships that may well benefit from the long-term support** that an anchor institution like a university is almost uniquely placed to provide.

Conflict of agendas

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[45] See https://www.kent.ac.uk/about/our-partnerships

On the one hand, for Stage 3 Academics, **the project was pedagogical in nature and did not set out to have a wider community impact**. If it had had an impact on the community, this was considered an 'added bonus' by some of the academics.

> **This was a teaching educational project, so the priority of this project was to help our students learn. It's the student learning that comes first in our mission. […] In this particular case, we're very interested in the ongoing involvement with the area, and this may well be developed into a full-blown research project that has impact built in. But our energies, our mission in this particular case, and our energies were directed towards training our students and conversing with them and in a way that is enriching for them, but also… if we can have a benefit to the locals, to the way they think about the project, that would be an added bonus, as opposed to one of the objectives of our involvement.**
> (ADP Academic)

On the other, the ADP's involvement in the development of an Urban Room for Chatham seems to point to an opportunity to **develop continued commitment towards the town**. Without a clear articulation of the School's intentions with project legacy and ongoing activities, **confusion could be caused which could lead to a breakdown in trust amongst local communities.**

> **Even though, you know, you always wish to have an impact, and even in an educational project, there may well be a good impact, the mapping of that impact, measuring it, etc, requires considerable funding and allowance of time, putting in place mechanisms that have not yet been provided.**
> (ADP Academic)

Relational instability

A lot of this work rests on good interpersonal relationships – between the school and Council, between the school and the community. While this is always the case in place-based work, **the relational dimension poses a potential threat to its sustainability**. Without an institutionally backed plan distributed amongst teams rather than individuals and long-term funding (see below), **connections may be lost and embedded work could come to an abrupt end, again leaving communities feeling 'let down' by the School**.

> **What they [community stakeholders] want is that this dialogue goes on, continues beyond the Action Zone funding window, which is very challenging, but so far we managed. So we managed over these two years, we consolidated a relationship with the people, with the residents and the local authorities.**
> (ADP Academic)

For the community stakeholders, **a long-term commitment on behalf of the university is crucial:**

The point that A. made about continuing the relationship with the university is absolutely imperative, and he and I are both so passionate about maintaining a relationship...One of the things that we are really, really sore about is losing university from Medway towns. Because you've probably been told already that last year the University of Creative Arts closed down...Unless you've been to university yourself, or you go to a university campus, you might not know that there are students in the Medway towns, but it was really very good actually seeing students on the streets, in our buildings, in the libraries, talking to people, yes, so, you know, this is that bridging the gap between various other things.
(Community Stakeholder)

Consultation fatigue

As identified in the Weakness section, we note that the timings of the HTA development framework and resulting ADP module engagement meant that ongoing work with the community did not feature concrete a sense of 'real world' applicability. While this work has gone a considerable way to generating relationships between all stakeholders as identified extensively in the Strengths section, the risk of **'consultation fatigue' should be flagged as a potential risk for future engagement.**

Ongoing consultation without key evidence of 'delivery' can diminish appetite for community engagement over the long term and risk impacting the good relationships and trust developed by the work of the programme.

Funding precarity

Both Medway Council and the School of ADP recognised that **funding was one of the biggest challenges of the project** and de facto the main barrier to its development.

One Medway Council representative acknowledged that **the project carries great potential but at the same time its innovative nature makes it difficult to find appropriate funding for it.**

It's not recognised within the REF exercise [Research Excellence Framework], it's not recognised within typical measures for research. And I think we need to change that, so it's both sides of this. Because if we could do that, I think we really will be delivering on what the government is charging us with, which is about extending democracy. [...] We're being opportunistic with the opportunities that arise, [...] But if there was some way of making it just a little bit more structured...
(Medway Council Representative)

Summary Findings & Recommendations

From setting out the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats associated with the project, we can already see several themes emerging that give rise to a variety of potential next steps for the project and the wider pedagogical approach that the University may wish to adopt.

The recommendations below are set out in a series of 'bricks' that can be stacked on top of one another and are designed to help University of Kent ADP team capitalise on the learnings from this evaluation in strategic ways.

| **1**
 Continue experimenting with applied pedagogical approaches | The 'live' learning aspects of the programme have clearly generated a number of positive outcomes for academic staff and students alike – ranging from the development of applied skills like engaging with clients and experiencing feedback on briefs, to enabling stakeholders to view architecture differently within the wider built environment profession. There is clear evidence here of the benefits of vocational learning and outcomes that clearly could not have been achieved through desk-based activity alone.

Students observed that 'real world' experiences had helped ground their work and truly get to grips with the needs of the people that we're designing for, suggesting that students weren't just refining their own practical skills, but also better understanding the role of the architect and planners in an increasingly complex web of relationships between stakeholders operating within a place. This speaks directly to recommendation IC.2 of the UK Government commissioned Farrell Review:

"Everyone's house, street and school are designed by somebody and we need designers and plannings to understand the needs of diverse communities they are for and to be engaging with them more whilst studying."

This is not simply about supporting more practical skills based learning or better career pathways across the built environment (although these are stressed), but for teaching increased awareness of the interdependency between the built environment professions and civic society at large. |

Observations made by participants during this evaluation process suggests that this type of learning did indeed develop amongst students enrolled in the modules covered and to this extent ADPs objective to provide new learning opportunities to students was met amply.

ADP should continue to develop experimental pedagogical approaches such as those deployed during this programme as part of ongoing curriculum reform.

Additional value could be added to the teaching outcomes through early engagement with stakeholders (including the with the community and local authority) on the focus and scope of the modules. Clarifying the potential contribution of student's work to the outcomes of live development projects alongside better coordination between delivery timelines could ensure that modular learning outcomes and assessment better reflect the scope of activities and engagement undertaken and provide students with some of the relevance and impact they craved, whilst also ensuring more read-across between community engagement activities to reduce the sense of 'consultation fatigue' we picked up on.

ADP should develop an ongoing evaluation framework to capture and respond iteratively to any outcomes that arise from new pedagogical approaches that are deployed in programmes of this kind in future.

2

Establish a forum to cultivate ongoing relationships & engagements

From the observations made by both the students and the community members, we see evidence that new relationships, networks and capabilities been developed throughout the project lifecycle.

We also see strong evidence of the University of Kent's role in facilitating and mediating relationships between the community and wider stakeholders in the area, such as the local authority and private sector consultants.

One of the strongest findings we have made centres around the clear value that both faculty staff, students and the local community place on the new relationships that

developed between them during the programme – which has clearly fostered 'new ways of seeing and being' for all involved.

We've also surfaced evidence that students were making new connections in understanding their civic impact, as well as developing wider pathways into and through built environment professions. Our findings show that students are keen to participate in more focused activities on specific site plots to build on the wider scheme activities they have already engaged in, demonstrating a real desire from students to be involved in helping to deliver on the aspirational vison for the space they have helped create.

For the community stakeholders we talked with, the programme has clearly enabled them to engage with the built environment in a more concerted way and consider their relationship to local space right at the beginning of the of the development process. Many commented that the 'physical visibility' of the programme had impacted their own perspectives and understandings of their local community and the built environment in which they live. This ranged from simply noticing students working out in the community to having opportunities to physically engage and connect with building materials associated with the heritage and identity of their locality. In-person activity was felt to be particularly beneficial for students as well as the community and both groups reflected positively on the visibility of the symposium events in being able to provide an opportunity to share their work with built environment specialists and local authority representatives in the room.

This kind of qualitative evidence speaks to the change in 'ways of seeing and being in the world' that planning theorist Patsy Healey sees as the hallmark indicators of evidence of the development of institutional capacity in a place.

Time spent generating and investing in relationship building associated has clearly been time well spent. There is now a risk that the relationships and potential for developing a sense of civic agency fostered by the

university could be lost without ongoing engagement mechanisms being put in place.

Many of the Weaknesses we have identified underline in this evaluation support this concern: the inconsistency of relationships, lack of communication with both community members and students during and after the delivery phases of the programme, and the sense of potential consultation fatigue from decoupled partner timelines suggest a new sustainable programme infrastructure is required.

Lastly, 'when' community engagement takes place is of vital significance within England's plan-led discretionary planning system (see pg. 25 for more on this). Whilst it is clear that early engagements with the community was robust at the start of the programme, there are several steps in the development process before tangible outcomes will be seen by local stakeholder groups.

ADP should work with local partners to establish a physically anchored forum that enables the ongoing development of relationships of stakeholder in Chatham and provide local communities, students and alumni with a platform to continue engaging in ideation associated with future phases of planning and development in the wider area. We advise that an Urban Room could serve this function well.

3

Bring more partners to the table

We are mindful that continued facilitated engagement between the stakeholders involved in this programme so far beyond that which has already taken place and that would span an end-to-end planning process would require considerable time and resource from all stakeholders – including the University of Kent and the local planning authority. As set out above, we've also acknowledged the demands that are currently placed on local planning authorities.

ADP should ensure that any new forum for ongoing engagement (e.g. an Urban Room) is developed by a consortium of partners from the area so that risks are mitigated, workloads are distributed and funding options diversified to make the forum more sustainable over the longer term.

This could include continued involvement of existing community wealth building groups, such as Civic Engagement Working Group at the University of Kent or other parties with a stake in the ongoing social, economic, creative and cultural life of Chatham. This will enable other local term stakeholders to support the growth of institutional capacity building in place and could allow the University to weight its focus on its primary pedological objectives while maintaining its role as part of the civic community but without the pressure of maintaining the all programme infrastructure in isolation.

In particular, partnering with organisations already connected to more isolated and marginalised parts of the community could help draw an increasingly representative mix of residents into the programme – something that all stakeholder groups called for in one way or another throughout our evaluation activities.

Lastly, partnering with creative, cultural and heritage specialist organisations in the area could help add depth and expertise to heritage and identity-based work – drawing on, for example, stories, installations and performance based arts to support the community (both past, present and potential future) to initiate and develop ideas while informing site based design work, such as design codes or detailed master planning.

As we see from the 'Blackburn Is Open' urban room collaboration (see pg. 25), the fusion of an urban room project with ongoing community and creative festivals in Chatham could open up additional options for public grant funding and private sponsorship whilst initiating more creative ways of engaging and inspiring all stakeholders involved. Internal crosscutting initiatives, particularly between ADP and the School of Art within the University of Kent, could help to facilitate this integration between these sectors locally.

4

Foster further community co-design

The community members we spoke to communicated a tangible sense of pride and enthusiasm for having been able to share their own local knowledge and lived experiences with students and professionals as part of this programme. Nonetheless, we have not yet amassed enough evidence to suggest that this led to increased empowerment or sense of agency amongst community members per se. This is an important finding because we consider this to be vital steps on the 'ladder of participation'.

Some of the comments we heard about a lack of 'real life' application of some of the design work speaks to the feeling amongst some community members and students that the programme was in some ways a 'simulation'.

We understand that community inputs to HTA design, achieved through the work of students, only took place towards the beginning of the teaching module. This means that community input was not being fed through towards tangible or deliverable outcomes for much of the consultation process. This represents a considerable risk to any ongoing sense of community agency and could affect the community's willingness to engage in such projects in future. Tokenistic engagement-based activities can, over the longer term, fatigue the willingness for communities to engage in participatory programmes – even those beyond the built environment such as participatory budgeting or council forums.

ADP should work with partners including the local planning authority and developers, to explore options to deliver co-designed project-based work with the community to ensure real-world applications.

There are a number of statutory mechanisms already available to local communities that could give rise to continued design, development and the long-term development of the IHAZ - including options for Neighbourhood Planning, Neighbourhood Development Orders or Community Ownership approaches.

5

Develop a 'hub and spoke' model

We note that Recommendations 1 and 2 could be seen as somewhat contradictory. To continue to strengthen and test the concept of the pedological approach we can see the benefit of applying the 'Intra approach' to new sites, communities and locations across Medway and the wide Kent area, to bring freshness and inspiration for students and staff alike. Yet, we have also identified the importance of maintaining a continued presence in Chatham in Medway for the duration of development lifecycles.

ADP could develop a hub and spoke delivery model with the hub anchored in Medway (perhaps as part of any physical Urban Room infrastructure that may emerge) and spokes that actively build new partnerships with development projects across the region.

This approach, particularly when supported by other likeminded hyperlocal anchor partners (see Recommendation 4), could enable ADP to maintain long-term relationships that have already been fostered in Chatham while opening up further work and fresh learning opportunities for their students across the region. There's a chance that closely connected events, site visits and shared learning across hubs could also foster a sense of 'bridging capital' between community groups in Medway.

Furthermore, if considered as part of new strategic support from Medway Council and other key stakeholders (e.g. Creative Estuary, Kent County Council) this approach could form part of the strategic regional engagement opportunity for communities and help wider planning consultation efforts – such as the local plan development and the wider Thames Estuary Production Corridor development work that the University is already a partner within.