

## THE CONVERSATION OF CONSULTATION



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Every estate and housing scheme in the country has different needs, different challenges and the people who live there have different experiences to draw upon. As an architect, it is all too easy to approach the project and “think you know everything about design”. It’s actually about the people who live there and the use of space around them. Those who have the history and experience are the ones who can really help inform and be part of the journey to a fuller and more fruitful design solution.

This is where we feel we can make a difference: client see how we stand out from other architects with an ability to listen, to open the conversation with residents and be approachable. We get just as much from a one to one chat in the community centre as we do from our paper and web based surveys.

With detailed consultation and engagement, we find out what the challenges are, what the current issues are and why they exist. The needs could be social, structural, about security or aesthetics. Our discussions influence the design development enabling us to explore more options with an open mind. We work on option appraisals, feasibility studies and design solutions that capture this information coupled with our own experience and expertise in housing design.

There are times the conversations can be confrontational, not surprising these are people’s homes, but listening to the real concerns and getting the input from the community creates a collaborative ideology. We work to design buildings for the people who will spend their lives there, improving that experience is key.

Our experience has taught us that the terminology and language that we use to communicate is also really important. Words like “regeneration” have become stigmatised and are associated by many with gentrification. It’s about renewal, re-enlivenment and improvement. Established communities should be nurtured and should feel supported and informed throughout any option appraisal process.

We pride ourselves on bringing an impartial approach to estate renewal and on gaining the trust of different resident groups. This includes the young or the elderly, those who speak another language or those who’s mobility is restricted. We appreciate that speaking up in public meetings can be daunting for many people and our aim is to be as accessible as possible during the design process and to have an open conversation with diverse people to inform the design throughout.

At Hunters we help clients find a sustainable and deliverable design for the people who live in their estates.