

Attitudes to regeneration across the UK:

everything you need to know

A Commonplace data-led report

Commonplace

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What This Report Will Show You

Regeneration: it's happening all over the UK as we speak. The idea of making purposeful changes to the built environment to better an area is something drenched in positive intentions, but can often be met with all kinds of resistance from the public. Why is this the case?

Over the past year, we've been looking into this exact issue. We have gathered over **66,000 data points from 233 Commonplaces** around public attitudes to regeneration in their local area and what exactly they're saying.

Read on and discover

- FIVE REGENERATION TRENDS we've discovered from our data
- Changing public views on regeneration in:
  - London
  - Plymouth
  - Birmingham
  - Manchester
  - As well as UK-wide sentiments
- Strategies to foster more constructive community engagement in regeneration projects.

How This Report Uses Commonplace Data

This report uses anonymised data gathered from regeneration-centred Commonplace engagements in areas around the country. We ran our AI-powered Natural Language Processing (Trends AI) model on text comments collected during these projects to extract the most common topics.

We're aiming to showcase a national conversation about regeneration and how it's possible to create a more positive dialogue with the community around these projects.

Who we are:

- Comprehensive public engagement platform for the built environment
- Used by developers, local authorities, infrastructure, communities, transport
- A platform engaging at scale: 2,500+ projects, 7 million unique UK website visitors

What we bring:

- Interactions about change in the built environment
- Data at different levels - from single project to metropolitan
- Full project lifespan - from pre-planning and risk assessment to post-occupancy
- Example of scale - In Greater Manchester we draw on
    - 525,000 visitors
    - 247,000 contributions (comments or agreements)

1. The Public Wants to Participate

71% of people say that it's important 'to have access to regular updates on planning issues.' [1]



76% want to participate in planning

One thing that immediately jumped out from our findings is that there is a real hunger from local people to have their say on projects happening around them- that includes regeneration projects. Of our polling sample in our Engaging for the Future report, 76% thought that 'people need to be given a greater say over new developments in their local area,' with only 8% saying it was unimportant.

On the question 'I do not know what developments to expect in my local area going forward', 59% of our polling sample agreed and only 14% disagreed.

- More than half of our sample (55%) said 'there is rarely any point opposing a development at the planning [application] stage as it will likely go ahead anyway.'
- When asked whether 'new developments are at odds with what people who live in my local area want', 50% of our sample agreed and only 10% disagreed. Agreements rose to 61% amongst the oldest group (65+), 58% amongst Conservative supporters and 65% for those who live in villages.

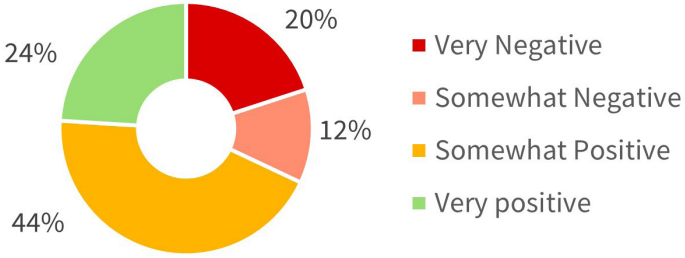
This is why the thoughts collected using more 'traditional' non-digital engagement methods are rife with negativity and often only encapsulate the thoughts of a very small group of the community. The data gathered for this report was done using a 'digital-first' strategy to gather as much information as possible and to create more accessible engagements.

1 Engaging for the future report Commonplace (read here)



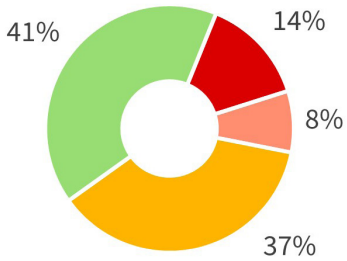
The benefits of digital-first are almost innumerable, but we'll try and count them anyway! To start with, it can lead to more positive data being gathered that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. In fact, in our UK-wide analysis, 66% of respondents were positive about regeneration happening in their area.

% Comments By Respondent Sentiment

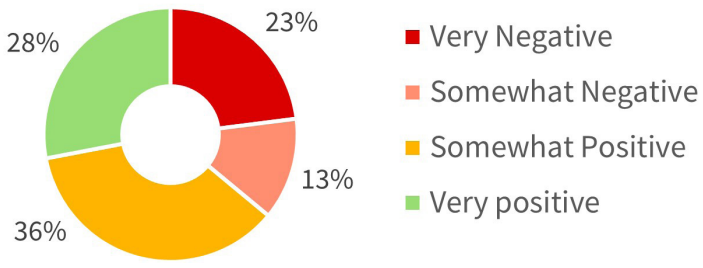


This was also reflected in data gathered from specific areas as well, such as across London.

Olympic Park



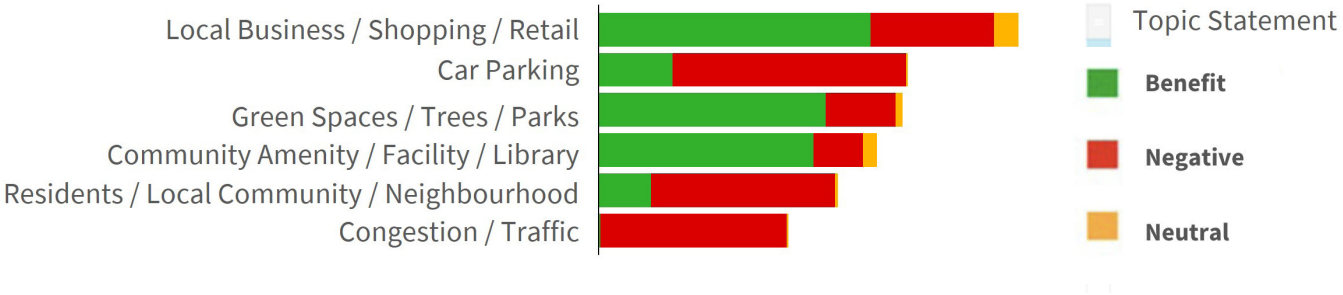
Camden



But what causes such sentiment? That's what we're diving into next…

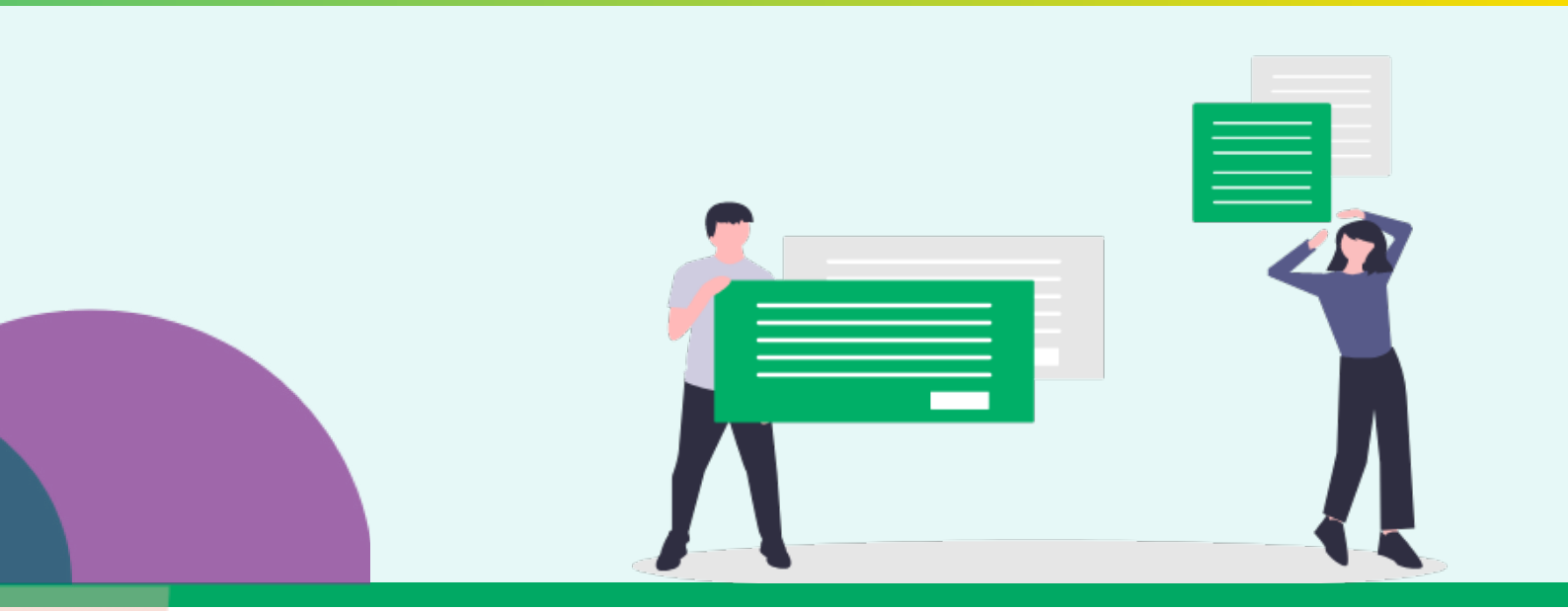
2. Most Popular Regeneration Topics

When we analysed all comments made by the UK public about regeneration projects, the top five most talked about topics were: local business, car parking, green spaces, community amenities and the local community.



UK-wide, we can see that some common trends emerge when talking about regeneration as picked up by Trends AI:

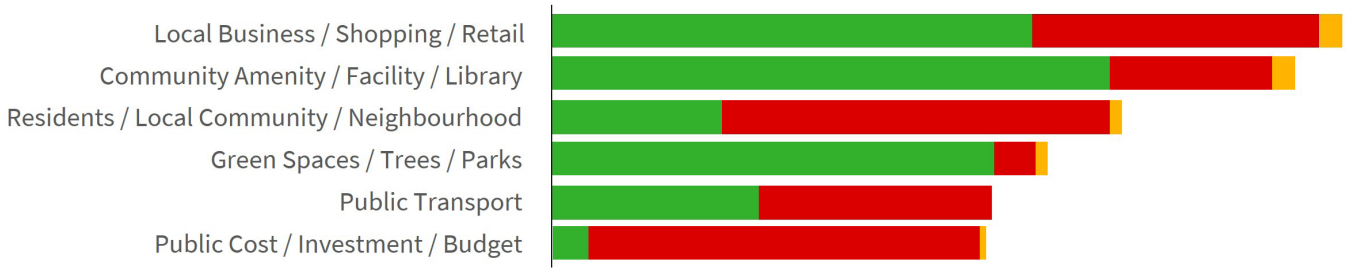
When looking at individual cities, we see a high level of consistency in these top five topics as shown in our deeper dives into Greater Manchester and Birmingham.



Greater Manchester



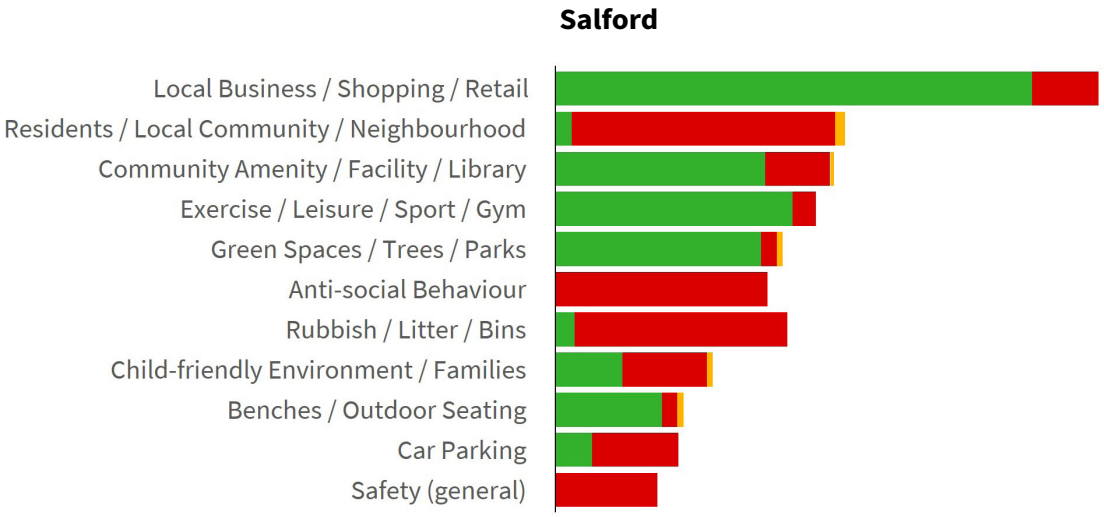
Birmingham



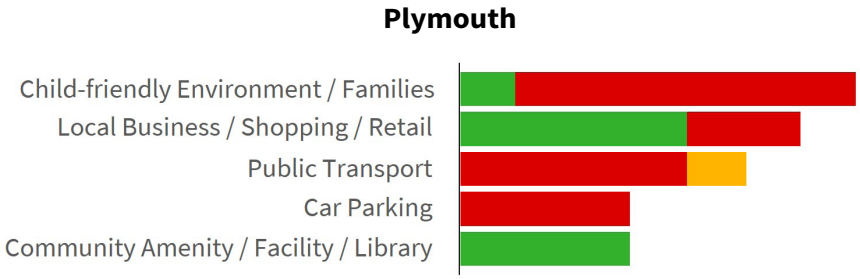
Note: Generic opinion= no specific topic mentioned

However, when we zoom in again we can see that the most popular topics change from place to place and create a different hierarchy of needs. Communities in the Salford area of Manchester have a unique set of priorities when it comes to regeneration.

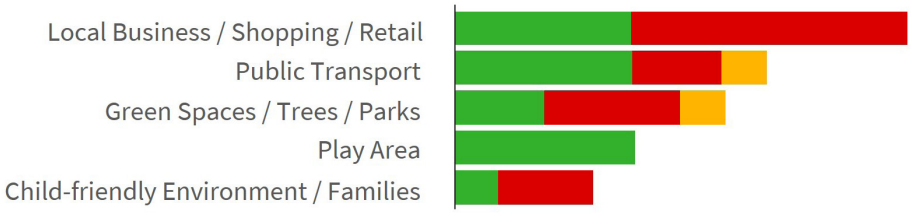
There are a couple of particularly noticeable anomalies in Salford compared to the rest of Manchester. Salford respondents do not have a positive view of community and neighbourhoods, and proportionally, anti-social behaviour is a much more significant problem compared to the other areas.



We also noticed this when taking a closer look at themes and sentiment in two different areas of Plymouth:Budshead and Southway.



Most popular topics and sentiment, Budshead



Most popular topics and sentiment, Southway

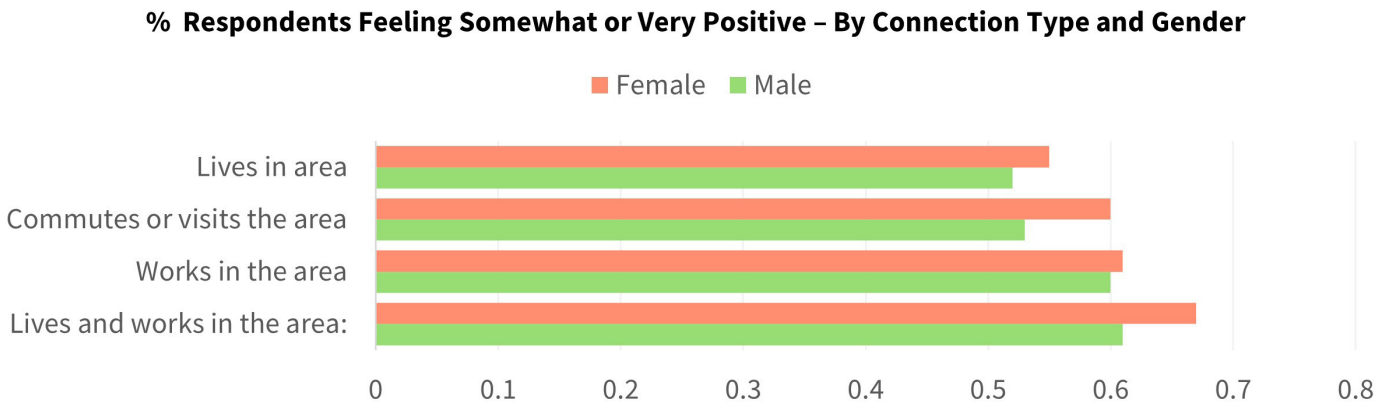
The motivations behind these sentiments can be influenced by several different factors, ranging from the demographics within the community to the social and economic state of the area. While UK and even city-wide trends are crucial to consider, it's important not to assume all areas will share blanket opinions and to do everything possible to understand the reasons behind their answers.

3. Context Is King



Local residents give more scrutiny to the regeneration scheme itself while commuters and workers tend to focus on other issues.

A key factor in how people feel about regeneration is their connection to the area, i.e. whether they live, work or commute through.



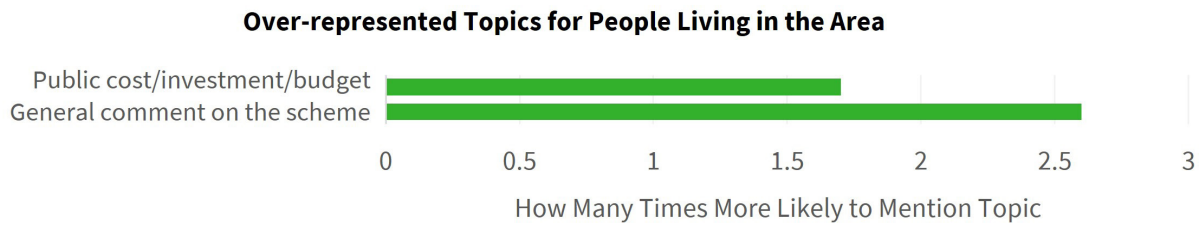
If we look at the UK-wide dataset shown in the chart above, those who live in the area are the least positive, whilst those most positive either work or commute near the regeneration project. It's not surprising given that regeneration will most likely improve the lives of those who both live and work locally the most.

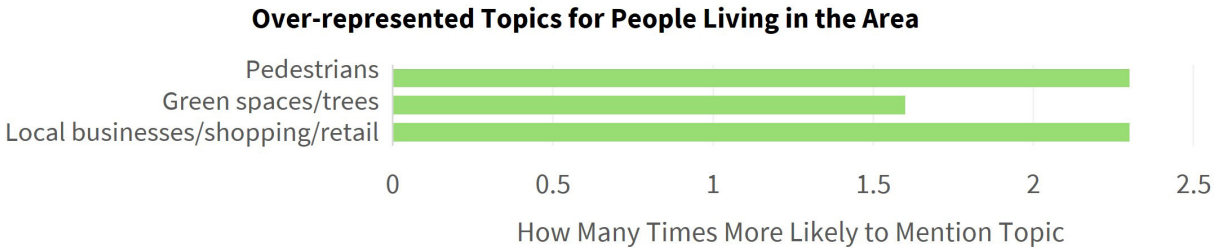
Local residents also give more scrutiny to the scheme itself while commuters and workers tend to focus more on specific issues such as the impact on local transport and mobility. One reason for this is that people who commute through an area will often reap the benefits of the regeneration happening while experiencing less disruption compared to those who live there.

We can see this reflected in the more specific areas we looked into as well.

Greater Manchester

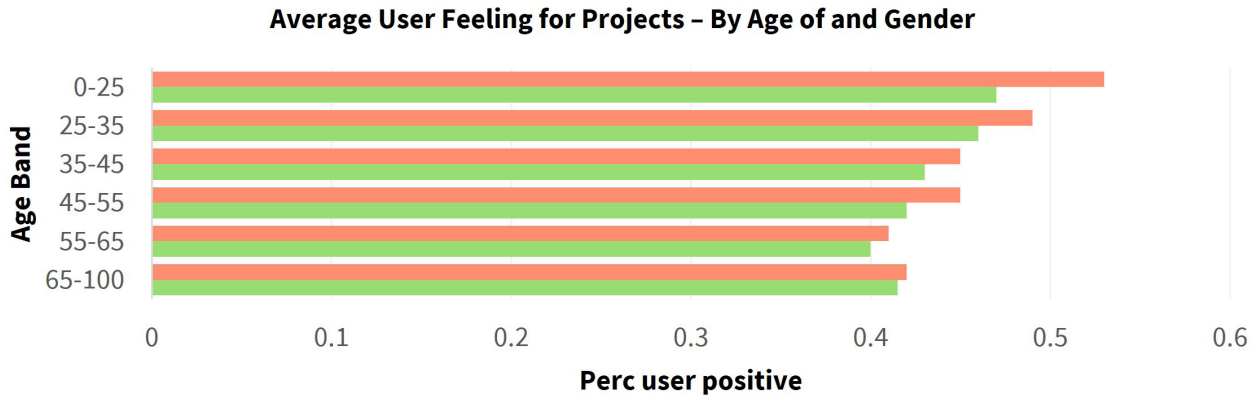
Discussion topic dependant on relationship to area





If we look at Greater Manchester, local residents give more scrutiny to the scheme itself and its financials, while commuters and workers tend to focus more on specific issues or improvements they might benefit from.

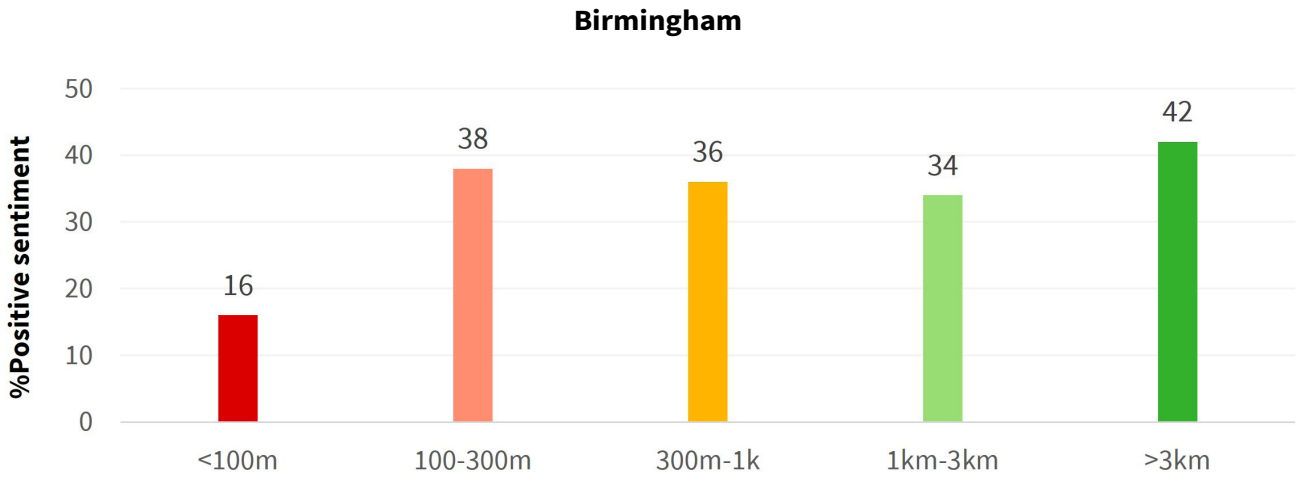
There are also differences when comparing age and gender as well with those younger tending to be more positive towards projects. This is shown at the national level below.



This is why it is essential to cast your engagement net as wide as possible and gather the views of the entire breadth of the community: age, gender and other demographics must be as proportionally as possible to get the most accurate view.

4. Support In Relation To Living Distance From The Development Site

Although people who live nearest to the regeneration site are by a long way the most negative, you don't need to go far away from the site for that to change dramatically.

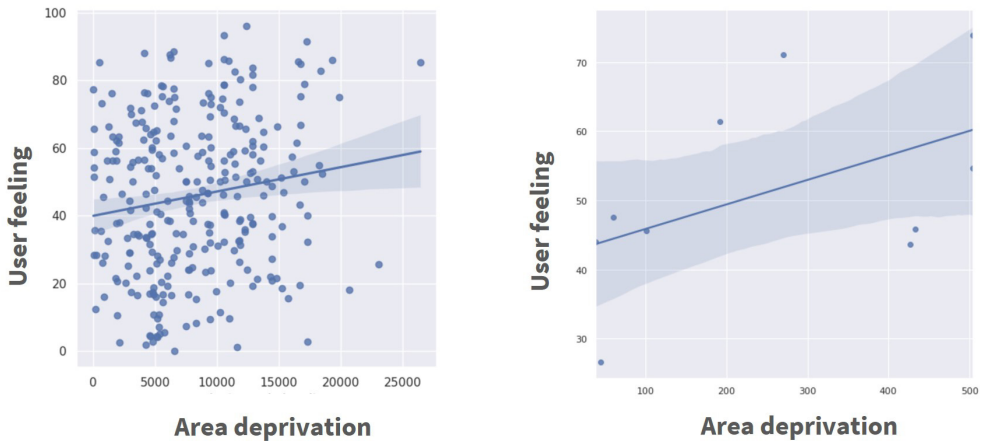


Take a look at Birmingham's data. By moving more than 100m away from the site, people are more than twice as positive as those who live within 100m of the site.

It's remarkable how often the enthusiasm from visitors and commuters surpasses that of the residents, and tapping into their insights is vital for any regeneration plan. Just consider this: locals endure the inconveniences of development more than those passing through, yet the influx of visitors and the vitality of incoming businesses can ultimately breathe new life into the area.

5. People In More Deprived Areas Are More Positive About Regeneration

Plotting our UK-wide data against multiple indices of deprivation[2], we see that there is a positive correlation between positivity and deprivation: meaning that people living in more deprived areas are willing to accept change through regeneration.

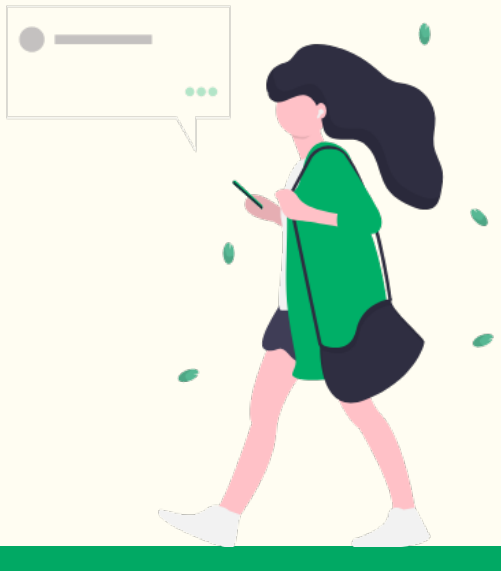


We can see how deprivation affects positivity towards regeneration projects in data from the West Midlands[3]

Deprived areas often face numerous social and economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, crime, and poor infrastructure. Residents in these areas may see regeneration projects as a source of hope for improvement. The prospect of new investments, job opportunities, and upgraded facilities could contribute to a positive outlook. We can see this reflected in the topics brought up specifically in the Salford area when compared to those from the surrounding Greater Manchester areas.

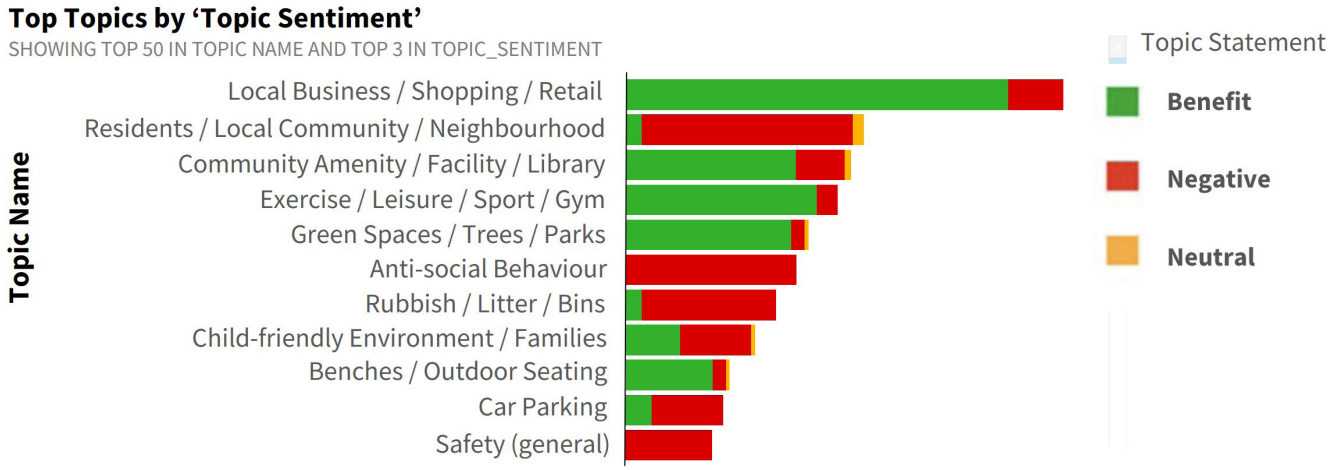
2 We measure deprivation by 3 level dimensions deprivation as measured by the 2021 Census

3 Salford data



As measured in 2019, Salford was the 18th most deprived local authority area in England out of 317. It was also the third most deprived district in the city region.[4]

When compared to Manchester, Salford respondents are more likely to be positive about investments in facilities and the physical environment, but they are also more concerned about some social aspects of the local community.



Local business / shopping / retail: 88% comments positive Vs. 62% for Manchester
Green spaces / trees / parks: 91% comments positive Vs. 78% for Manchester
Exercise / leisure / sport / gym: topic 6x times more likely to be mentioned than Manchester

Respondents had lots of ideas and suggestions to further invest in the local area, to build more facilities, activities, leisure.

4 ONS data

"This sounds like a great approach. For the live/working and leisure zones in particularly, I think the plan needs to focus on development and initiatives that promote economic activity all day (ie evening and night time economic activity)"

"With Graystone action sports being an indoor skate park in Salford, Salford Quays would be an ideal place for an outdoor skate park to help build for the future and make a future Olympian from Salford."

Comments directly from the Commonplace project.

Salford respondents are **2.6x more likely** to mention concerns relating to residents / local community / neighbourhood, compared to Manchester respondents.

They are also **2x more likely** to be concerned about Anti-social behaviour, and 3x more likely to mention a topic of Rubbish / litter / bins, compared to Manchester ones.

"In principle, this is a good idea. In recent years the large influx of youths engaging in antisocial behaviour on the bridges and in the quays has made life unpleasant for residents."

"I am positive about the proposals but the main issue is on nice sunny days, anti-social behaviour around the quays is rife."

All of these comments and figures are a good reminder for developers to not neglect the S in ESG (Environmental, **Social**, Governance) when planning and implementing a regeneration project. Those in Salford don't just want new houses, but improvements to local areas so they can feel happier and safer as a community.



Find out more about putting the S in ESG around UK Housing in our 2023 UKREIIF talk!

Epilogue: Data Techniques And Tips For Regeneration Engagement

Respondents who add a long text comment are 2X likely to express a negative sentiment.

There's more to community engagement than simply gathering the data. There are multiple factors to consider when interpreting what has been gathered as well. For example, when we look at UK-wide data we see a few sentiment trends. Respondents who mention specific locations in their comments tend to focus on the negative aspects and respondents who add a long text comment are twice as likely to express a negative sentiment.

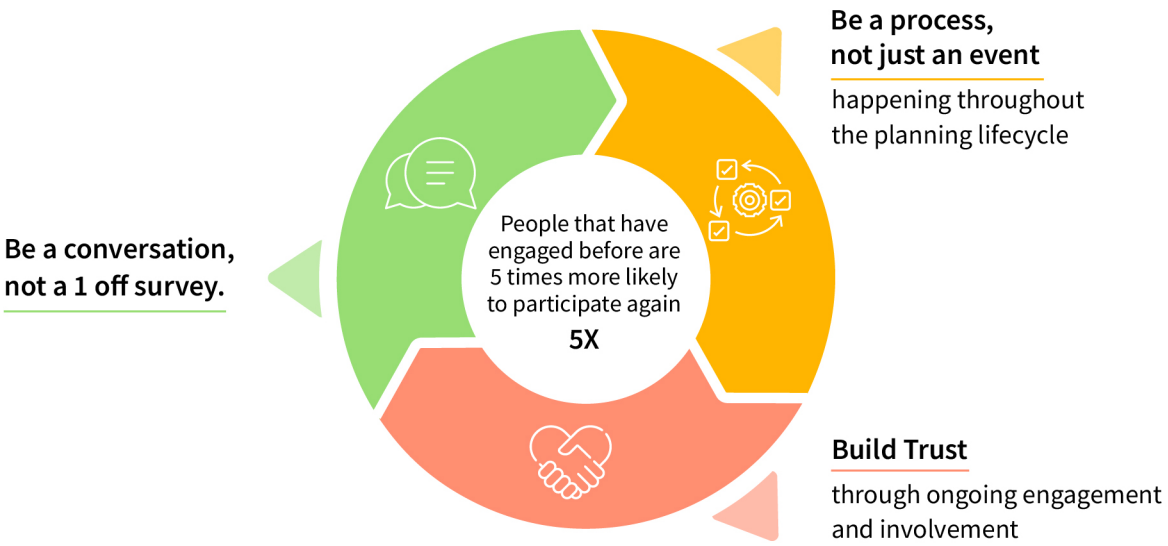
This can be for a number of reasons:

- Closed questions provide limited response options, narrowing down the range of possible answers. In contrast, open questions allow for a broader spectrum of responses, which can include negative opinions, criticisms, or uncertainties.
- Open questions allow individuals to express complex emotions, concerns, or frustrations that might not be adequately conveyed through closed questions. People may use open-ended responses to elaborate on their negative feelings or experiences in more detail.
- People are also much more likely to write a response if they have an issue or a complaint. There is little point in leaving a comment if they are happy with the way things are developing.

It's important to remember that negative responses do not necessarily mean that respondents have negative feelings about the project as a whole. After all, people who are happy to see regeneration will still comment on things that need to be improved as well as their own thoughts on how it can be done (even if they highlight what they perceive to be failures with the developer). It's crucial to study answers closely to see

what actionable things can be done to resolve these issues. These methods should then be fed back to show that you are listening to these concerns.

It's an opportunity to make real positive changes in the community and is why closing the loop on any project (including regeneration) is **vital** for building trust. It shows that the comments left are part of an ongoing and effective process.

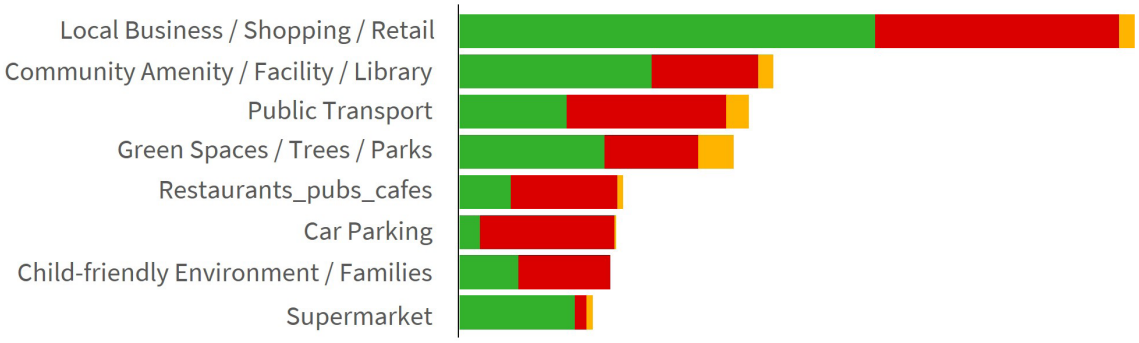


The type of question itself can also affect sentiment and topic discussion. We can see this reflected in the Plymouth data, when comparing sentiment from open and closed questions.

Top topics by closed questions

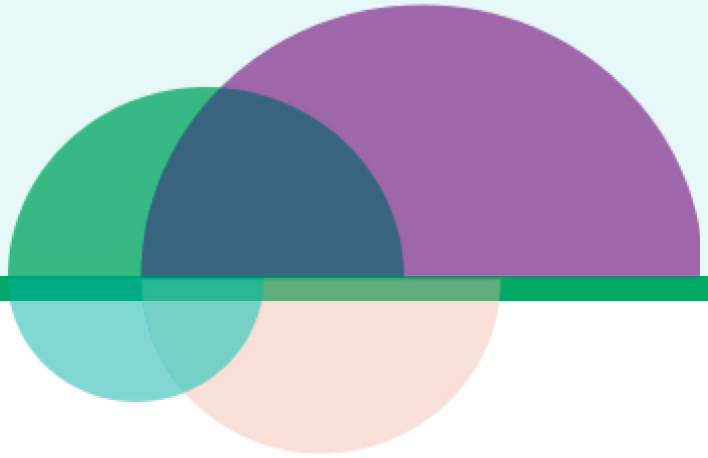


Top topics by open question



Green space was a much more popular topic from the closed questions compared to when respondents could freely write their own answers. Having both options in an engagement gives a chance to see the full spread of people's wants.

6. Conclusion



So, what is the top advice you can take away from this data to run your own engagement?

- **Context matters:** Who responds and where they live relative to the regeneration has a large impact on sentiment
- **Plan engagements:** Use digital tools to ensure you reach a large sample, and that you target the right people
- **Understand negativity to gain support:** Negativity is not a problem when discovering community needs: it harnesses people's passion for place, and presents an opportunity
- **Map-based feedback can gain a shared understanding of needs:** Use this to position regeneration benefits and 'close the loop' by keeping people involved to maximise support.
- **Scope of engagement:** This affects support those living closest will be most negative
- **Spread the geographical net:** This will generally speaking, produce more positive responses
- **Top topics of feedback include:** amenities, green space and feeling of community
- **8. Ensure that these topics are prominent in visual, mobile-first engagements:** As of 2023, around 93 percent of the UK's total population use mobile internet so don't miss out![5]
- **Carefully plan the structure of all engagements to gain support:** Open questions at early stages; more structured and fewer open questions at later stages.

5 Statista

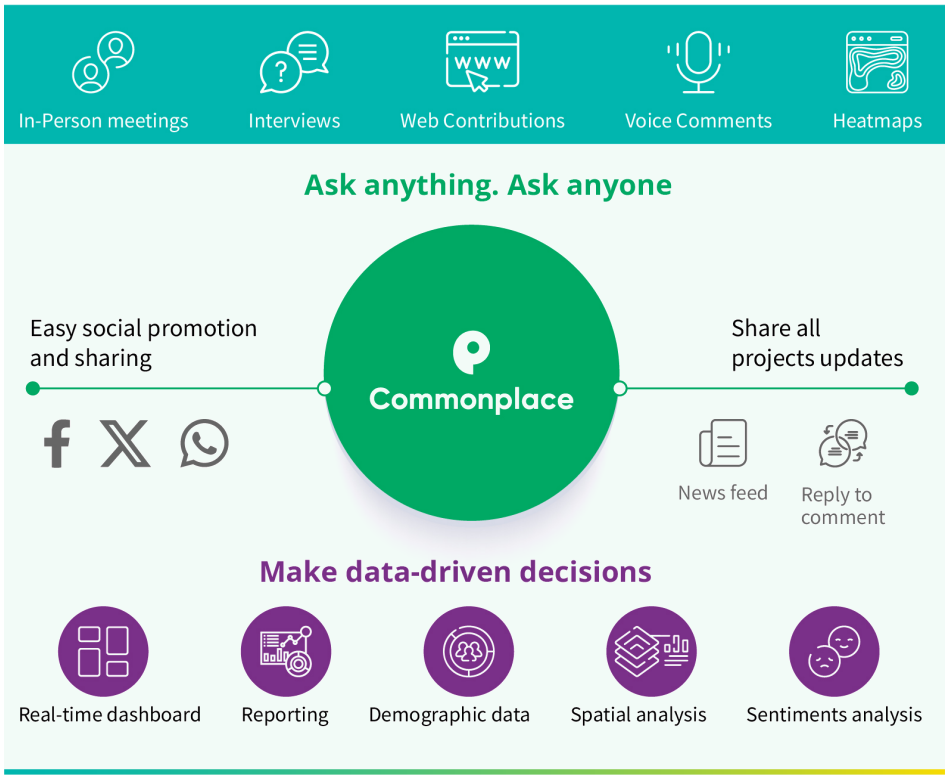
Who Are Commonplace?

Commonplace supplies websites for local community engagement that are used by local authorities, communities, private developers and other organisations to inform the public about plans and also gather feedback. **We are both a platform and a service:** with tools to gather the most meaningful data possible while also being available to support and guide all customers throughout their project's lifecycle.

Commonplace data is distinct in that there is a huge number of respondents who are self-selecting. This is because Commonplace is fundamentally an engagement tool, aiming for wide community participation.

It provides rich insight, but it is incumbent on policymakers to access other data if certain demographic groups are under-represented. The Commonplace dashboard provides real-time data that facilitates this additional activity.

We also offer ongoing customer success support once projects are launched. Our dedicated team will be there with best practice advice and weekly check-ins to make sure that the information gathered is the best possible for any given project.



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Appendix: Footnotes

1. Engaging for the future report Commonplace (read here)
2. We measure deprivation by 3 level dimensions deprivation as measured by the 2021 Census
3. Salford data
4. ONS data
5. Statista



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commonplace.is
+44 (0)7492886747
hello@commonplace.is

@Cmnplace
@Commonplace.is
@Commonplace.is
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