

Public Voice Common Ground

Summary
February 2024



Public Voice Common Ground – Summary

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The pressures on our public realm, our communities, and the complexities of working cross sector to address them are universal. A 2019 survey involving 20,000 participants in England concluded that a minimum of 120 minutes per week of ‘recreational nature contact’ was associated with good health and wellbeing.

A thriving public realm is somewhere people want to live, work, and spend time. It is good for the economy, community wellbeing and environment.

Public Voice: Common Ground was a pilot project commissioned by the States of Jersey to understand how its public realm could be improved. The pilot and its insight were presented as an example of best practice at the British Irish Council’s ‘Placemaking in Practice’ symposium, Cardiff, September 2023.

The pilot developed from earlier research to improve Jersey’s Public Realm that was part-sponsored by the government’s Economy Department (Gibb 2022). This analysis illustrated St Helier as the priority, with a consensus for more green space, trees and places to hang out with no agenda. The Public Voice: Common Ground pop-up sites were based on these priorities.

Purpose

- To deliver public realm improvement based on what’s needed.
- To lead relevant public engagement that enables this.
- To facilitate co-creation and value to all public realm stakeholders.

2,100+

community voices

9

public realm interventions delivered

30

co-delivery partners

1/3

government

& 2/3

business and community funded

98%

In 2022 98% pupils at Springfield School had no green space at home.



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Public Engagement Methodology

The engagement priority was to engage as many demographics as possible - particularly those not generally engaged with culture, politics, or community. This required a complex series of public engagement events working with many partners.

A mixed method approach combined qualitative and quantitative data and analysed this in the context of specific environmental and community secondary data:

Online Surveys

The survey was anonymous and self-completed in English, Portuguese and Polish. One aim of the survey was to reduce barriers and distrust. The survey assimilates demographics data by understanding how, where, and how long residents have lived in Jersey.

Interviews and discussions

The online survey was supported by face-to-face interviews and discussions. The discussions incorporated interviewee-led insight with reoccurring, open questions. This revealed a community-led set of themes that added richness to data from the other methods.

Temporary sites – a living lab approach

Co-designed, co-funded, and co-delivered with partners across sectors, the temporary pop-up sites were designed to engage the public and show what is possible.

Chalkboards asking visitor feedback were monitored daily. Changes in behaviour, site use and dwell time were also recorded.

“Good public realm is a human right. It needs to be about people, not just buildings. It needs green spaces... there needs to be a re-education back to walking and away from the car”.

St Helier resident and care worker



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Earthworks, Pop-up Park

Workshops and events

Free community workshops and events were held at the sites throughout the pilot. These engaged a diverse audience using art as a common language. All who took part were on an equal footing, regardless of ability, age, language, or background. Shared activities nurtured positive wellbeing, community connection, conversation, and discussion. Making and creating slows down thinking and enables the mind to reflect differently to direct questioning.

When people are having a good time, they are more likely to stay. This allows more time to communicate. For example, a 10-year-old at a drawing workshop said he ‘wanted more malls.’ He later explained more specifically ‘we need to stop taking away all the fun stuff and putting up all these flats.’

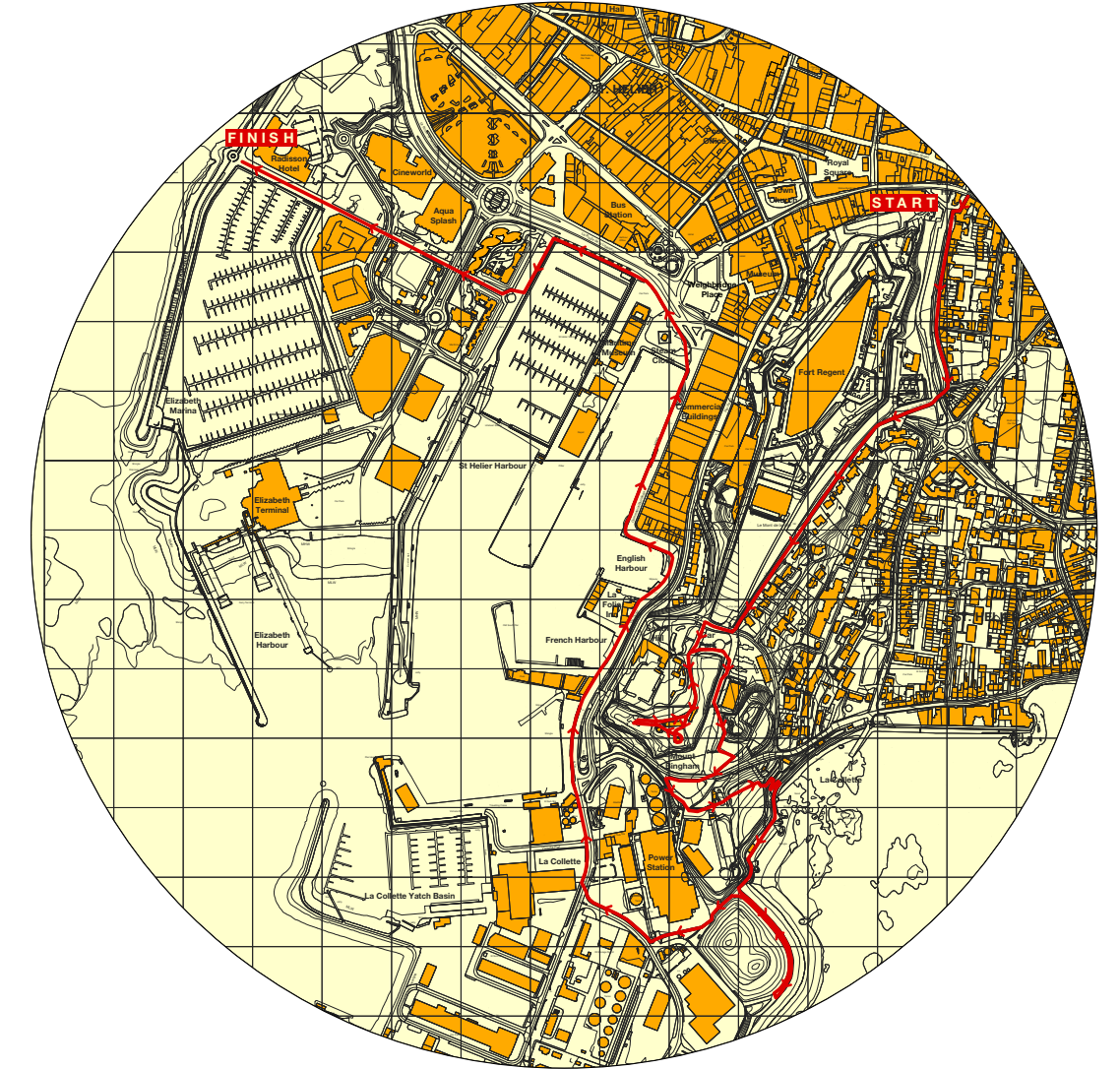
The main workshops were:

‘What does Wonderful look like for St Helier?’, **Children’s Day.** A drawing workshop asking participants to imagine what would improve St Helier for its people.

Earthworks, Pop-up Park. A 2-day clay workshop facilitated by London-based artist Jo Pearl. Local potters and the Jersey community built an imaginary clay scape of a St Helier where everyone wanted to live, work and spend time.

Lé Galvaûdeux (Jèrriais for ‘the wanderer’). A public art commission by Public Voice: Common Ground. A walk by Jersey artist Tim le Breuilly was illustrated by artist/ film maker Marc Medland. The walk inspired all to look at St Helier through new eyes. The artist gave a guided walk and print workshop, and all were encouraged to share what they discovered to Instagram.

In Jersey, community data had not been collected in this way before. The data is analysed in the context of the 2023 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) report, relevant government strategies and global research on public realm and placemaking.



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Results

- Over 2,100 (2%) residents shared their insight to Public Voice: Common Ground. Having such unusually large community engagement illustrated the urgency of creating better public realm. Anonymised data gave all views equal value. Mixed and multiple methodology enabled a level of insight not possible through a survey method alone.
- Interviews and discussions engaged nearly 500 locals. These included students, mental health charities, Portuguese, business and disabled communities. This method had the impact of raising the percentage of youth engagement to 23%.
- The pop-up park created a multi-use space with lawn and planting in a previously hard landscape. Total dwell time increased 5-fold in a 30-minute period. 97% said they wanted the grass to stay.
- The pop-up perch created seating for 35 out of 4 car parking spaces. 98% said they wanted more public places like this in St Helier.
- Over 160 islanders took part in the Earthworks workshops. This resulted in interviews, films, and photography. It led to further clay workshops and a proposal for a community pottery studio.
- 62 children took part in the drawing workshop at Children’s Day. The insight ranged from more ice cream to outdoor pianos, chess, and dog parks. The resulting drawings were exhibited in empty shop windows in the high street.
- Communities developed from the events. These including an honorary site-guardian at the Pop-up Park and an outdoor screening championing local film makers at the Perch. Hundreds of artworks were inspired by Lé Galvaudeux, leading to exhibitions at a pop-up gallery at the Waterfront and in empty shop windows.

“I like the Skate Pk, even tho’ I’m not a skater. I went to see what it looked like. People are doing stuff. We need more like this”.

Year 12 student



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Together, all the findings collected by Public Voice: Common Ground provide a unique understanding of what matters to the community. After rigorous analysis, the re-occurring data themes revealed 4 priorities:

1. Green and wild space for the community.
2. Traffic and access.
3. Social infrastructure – urban seating and places to come together.
4. Entertainment, culture, and community.

These are evidenced further within the main report.

Conclusion: from words to action

The pilot engaged and inspired through relevant, specific, and meaningful public engagement. It enabled co-operation between government, business, 3rd sector and community and delivered value through co-creation and shared resource.

It illustrated what is possible through temporary intervention, leading to further investment by business and public sector in public realm improvement.

It led to new cross department collaboration between government departments such as I&E, policy, and economic development. It served as a case study for more public seating trials in parking spaces and an intention to review the design of public green space by landowners. It has resulted in reassessment of the Percentage for Art policy and related SPGs and the creation of a Public Art Commission to advise government and business on public realm improvement and commissioning.

Most importantly, the project acted as a guide through the process of relevant, inclusive public engagement - identifying problems and supplying a basis for better decision-making regarding the public realm. It illustrated the value of effective methodologies of public engagement in creating spaces that enable communities to thrive, and cities to develop sustainably.

“If every park had a drop-in centre, there would always be a queue”.

MIND client

Public Voice Common Ground

www.publicvoicecommonground.co.uk

Photography by Rod Bryans

Our partners

