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WISDOM OF THE CROWD: HOW PARTICIPATORY DESIGN HAS EVOLVED DESIGN BRIEFING

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INTRODUCTION

''…*It's the metaphor of the dance; and in briefing it's the tango… shifting of leadership all the time…sometimes you are leading and sometimes you are following and you give each other signals, and together that pass off is very fluid…it is about these parties finding a communication method that they are comfortable with – it's like the difference between dialogue and discussion. We are beings that want to dance.''* (CEO of multi-national design firm)

Design has changed considerably over the last two decades, adopting and embracing a wider remit of responsibility and application (Thomson, Sissons and Montgomery, 2012). Instead of being viewed as the sole activity of a lone practitioner, it is now being recognized as more inclusive, with the role of non-designers in the process becoming increasingly important (Murphy 2011; see also Brown, 2008; 2009; Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Some may argue that the lines between designers, clients and users are gradually becoming blurred (Maciver and O'Driscoll, 2010). Consequently, the authors propose that this drive towards participation (and more recently, taking this further – co design) means the design briefing process has also evolved, from a specification document to a dynamic, non-linear, process, which engages the clients, designer, users and other stakeholders in this age of participation. Formerly, the client would present a problem to the designer, and the designer, knowing their "place", would dutifully respond with a solution, using their design expertise to design something with the "user in mind", but not involved. Evaluation would take place at the end of the project, and performance metrics likely to be determined by the client at the outset (Phillips, 2004). Today however, we see a remarkably different client/designer relationship – and we posit that this has had a significant impact on the briefing process, cultivating a more inclusive and engaging learning experience. Designers are now framing the problem and developing solutions with clients and users – and actively involving users throughout the entire process. This dynamic relationship becomes a trade-off between the designer's *Expertise* in design, the client's *Experience* of their business and indeed the user's *Engagement* in the whole process, which the authors propose as the 3E approach. The whole process makes for a "mutually-engaging" briefing experience, which enhances participation and provides a collective learning opportunity.

And so, we propose that the shift towards participatory design (which in itself, is not a new phenomenon) has enabled the evolution of design briefing; changing it from what was once a Request for a Proposal (RFP) given to the designer, to what is now a mutually engaging, dynamic, participative process. This paper will begin by outlining the drivers behind enhanced participation in design projects. We will then offer an overview of the evolution of design briefing, drawing attention to the paucity of literature on design briefing as an interdisciplinary, dynamic process – rather viewed as more linear and prescriptive (e.g. Blyth and Worthington, 2001; see also Phillips, 2004; Royal Institute of British Architects and Phillips, 2008). The paper will then discuss a case study project, (Royds Housing Association, Yorkshire, UK) which provides a rich insight into dynamic participation in the design process. The authors then summarize the features of dynamic, participative briefing as exemplified in the case study, and the conditions conducive to this. The paper concludes with some key lessons for those engaged in the briefing process as well as suggestions for future research.

WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS FOR PARTICIPATION?

Before examining the impact of Participatory Design on design briefing, it is useful to consider the reasons for the move towards participation in design. The authors propose five key drivers:

↘ **Driver #1, Complex, wicked problems:** it is well documented in the literature that in performing their more strategic role (Borja de Mozota, 2003; see also Best, 2006; Bruce and Bessant, 2002), and being recognized as more than just "felt-tip fairies", designers now face more complex, wicked problems (Rylander 2008; Brown 2009; Murphy, 2011). Due to this increasing complexity, they cannot solve these design problems alone – and therefore must collaborate with other specialists. Murphy (2011: 36) provides an overview of just some of the stakeholders that designers may have to interact with in the course of a project. The relationships given in Figure 1 are by no means exhaustive, but merely an illustrative example.
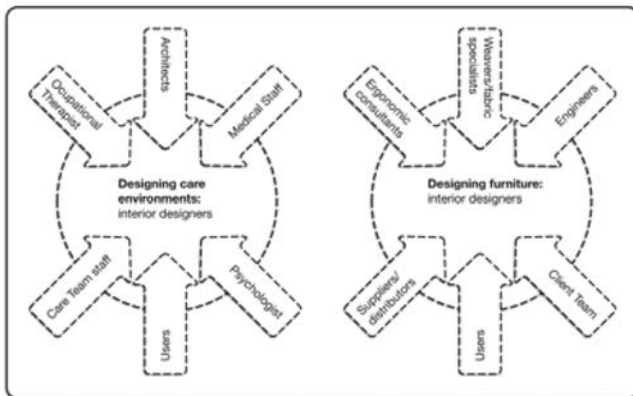
Figure 1: Design interactions (Murphy 2011: 36)

↘ **Driver #2, The expanding role of the designer:** In addition, it is well-observed that designers' roles are expanding beyond the traditional notion of "design" as a sole activity (Tan, 2009; see also Han, 2010; Press and Cooper 2003: 199). This has seen them become more adept at facilitating as well as designing – and therefore not only focusing on "design" but on other roles too, such as facilitator, active citizen, knowledge worker and strategist. More notably however, the landscape of the design industry has changed during, and in response to the recession (Murphy 2011), meaning that designers are increasingly working as freelancers (Design Council, 2010) – and therefore find themselves faced with performing more than one role – making them more comfortable with participation, and more likely to bring this to the next project.

↘ Driver #3, More complex funding streams: There are occasions where, with larger projects, or projects of a wider scope – e.g. community regeneration – non-design team members may need to be involved and coached because they are important to the process.

↘ Driver #4, Active Citizenship: The last decade has seen a move towards active citizenship and the general public taking an interest in community issues (Taylor, 2004; see also Taylor and Wilson, 2004; Brannan et al., 2006; Brannan et al., 2007). This is especially true of projects such as the case study, which means that there are more community members and non-designers involved in the process. What's more, the rise of social media has helped to mobilize interest and encourage participation. In addition, during the recession, active participation in community initiatives and regeneration has increased and support sought and gained through social media.

↘ Driver #5: The importance of the user: Designers are now well-informed about the benefits and effectiveness of involving the user in the design process. Today, the processes and methods for engaging and managing non-design team people are becoming more sophisticated and complex (e.g. user groups, consultation, workshops – emerging methods etc). This is further enabled by digital technology (Baumann 2012).

This leads us to question: in the diversity we now see in projects, the complexity of design problems, the blurring of roles and responsibilities and the drive towards engagement and participation, what streamlines these stakeholders and processes when multiple stakeholders are participating? We propose that it is the design brief – or rather the design briefing process that has evolved, and adapted and embraced participation, re-defining briefing as a holistic 'democratic' activity.

DESIGN AND BRIEFING

Murphy and Press (2007) highlighted that early views on design briefing are dominated by documentation and rigidity (see for example Phillips, 2004; Cumming and Malins 2006). Here, we offer an overview of the literature which begins with the brief viewed as a written document; either produced by the client and given to the designer, or a product of a process which is linear and still rigid in nature. We will then highlight some studies which begin to uncover briefing as a more dynamic process – and this is the view which this paper provides and the true and emerging nature of design briefing today, as enabled by, and now an enabler of, participatory design.

Numerous authors have written on the subject of briefing (Blyth and Worthington, 2001; Cumming and Malins, 2006; MacPherson, Kelly and Male 1992; Nutt, 1993; Phillips, 2004; Smith, Love and Heywood 2005). Earlier views of "the brief" (as opposed to briefing) have focused on the brief as a written document (Design Council, 2012) – in some cases given to the designer by the client (Lloyd, Lawson and Scott, 1997).

This view has since evolved to the view of briefing as a process (Phillips, 2004). This process however, is linear, prescriptive and tends not to embrace complexity; focusing

on the production of a written document rather than being an emergent process, which enhances participation. These traditional models of briefing have brought a degree of order to the briefing process, and therefore could be useful in educating clients and designers about briefing in the first instance, rather than them struggling with the complexity of briefing from the start. However, it could be argued that this rigidity could actually stifle a more varied, non-linear process of design briefing (Murphy and Press, 2007).

The literature is rich with authors seeking to establish a simple linear model which can be followed in projects of a certain discipline (Phillips, 2004). A linear approach could be useful in embedding principles, however, could be considered too inflexible. For example, the RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) have stipulated strict guidelines for their 'type' of projects. In addition, RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) has devoted a vast amount of study into formulating their Plan of Work and have stipulated particularly firm guidelines on briefing an architect (Royal Institute of British Architects and Phillips, 2008). However, none of these studies deal with what is paramount; the reality of embarking upon design briefing to enhance participation of all stakeholders; to gain an insight into the client's experience of their business, and for the designer to utilise their expertise in design and managing the process, regardless of discipline, in a complex, rapidly changing, turbulent environment.

Peter Phillips (2004) has sought to bring order and structure to the process of design briefing, which again, is useful, but favours the linear progressive model and the production of a written specification. In his work, he suggests numerous headings under which project information must be assembled, such as project background, business objectives, and budget. These are undoubtedly key pieces of information, which are core to the development of the design brief, however Phillips' work, in the sense of briefing, has a number of limitations. For example, his work is mainly concerned with the graphic design industry with an in-house design team. As more and more design projects move towards becoming inter-disciplinary, crossing the boundaries between graphic and interaction design, interior design and branding, the process needs to be more flexible in its application. Therefore, the fact that Phillips' work is based on his experience of one discipline suggests it may be difficult to apply his principles to an interior design project, for example. In addition, the fact that Phillips' work is mainly based on the work of in-house design departments suggests that his principles may not take account of the

more problematic role, which an external design consultancy may have. Consultancies face a more challenging situation, as the information surrounding their client's business is not as freely available to them. They have to make more of an effort to 'get under the client's skin' and to probe into the culture and values of a new organisation for each project they undertake.

In addition, Phillips places great emphasis on the design brief as a finished document, however, the process is also important (rather than the end result); the interaction between client and designer which occurs during the briefing process, the shift in leadership, the mutual knowledge creation and exchange, the journey of mutual education and enhanced participation which drives the content, and is the crucial contribution to participation, regardless of discipline. Phillips' work is a meaningful contribution, however, it does contrast with the case study, which will be shown as more informal and an internalised form of explicit knowledge, rather than a raw and explicit form, like Phillips' approach.

Another key contribution to the literature on design briefing is the vast research conducted by Blyth and Worthington (2001). In the discipline of architecture, their work has brought much desired order and structure to understanding the design process. They emphasise the need for continuous feedback and evaluation and the iterative process of design and briefing, which suits the very nature of architecture—large building design projects must be rigidly planned and structured. Their extensive work is highly commendable and relevant to the discipline of architecture; however, their linear models and principles cannot as easily be applied to other design disciplines.

This would suggest that a wider, more flexible approach is needed to suit inter-disciplinary design projects, but also to facilitate broader application of the briefing process as a means of enhancing participation and providing a collective learning experience. The work of Nutt (1993) in the field of facilities management certainly outlines the limitations of "traditional" briefing. Nutt (ibid) acknowledges the similarities between facilities briefing and the RIBA Plan of Work, in the respect that both begin with the *"identification of the client's requirements, as expressed in the core business philosophy, its corporate strategy and mission statements"* (Nutt, 1993:29). However, Nutt (ibid) suggests that traditional briefing has limitations, in that one cannot predict the future, and therefore it is necessary to find ways in which to be comfortable with this uncertainty. She proposes that *"continuous adjustment to briefing arrangements will need to be put in place to support a*

dynamic management process with which to face the future as it unfolds" (Nutt, ibid). This clearly embraces the idea of the future being uncertain, and that any briefing process must be flexible enough to cope with the unknown.

Similarly, other significant authors in this field have made valid contributions, which move away from the traditional modes of the written design brief, and focusing on the process, iteration and participation. For example, Tomes, Oates and Armstrong (1998) in their research, outlined the need for designer and client to both participate inclusively. They suggest the briefing process moves iteratively through the 'verbal to visual translation' whereby business objectives are expressed visually and verbally through the process by designer and client in order to reach an agreed design brief for sign-off.

Tzortzopoulos et al. (2006) conducted research into designer and client interactions on healthcare projects. The research provides some insight into the business-related requirements that inform the design brief and activities in which the client and designer should engage (such as definition of business operations and stakeholders), in order to gather client business-related information pertinent to the design brief. This study is helpful in guiding novice clients rather than novice designers.

The brief discussion on design briefing forms a useful framework from which to consider design briefing in a more collaborative, participatory, emerging sense, as proposed through the case study.

BACKGROUND TO THE CASE STUDY

The area covered by Royds Community Association (RCA) consists of three local authority housing estates: Buttershaw; Woodside and Delph Hill. They are situated alongside one another to the south west of Bradford in west Yorkshire, UK. There are around 3,500 houses with an estimated population of 12,000. The estates are characterised by poor housing and flats built during the 1950s; lack of community facilities; high crime rates and barren open spaces.
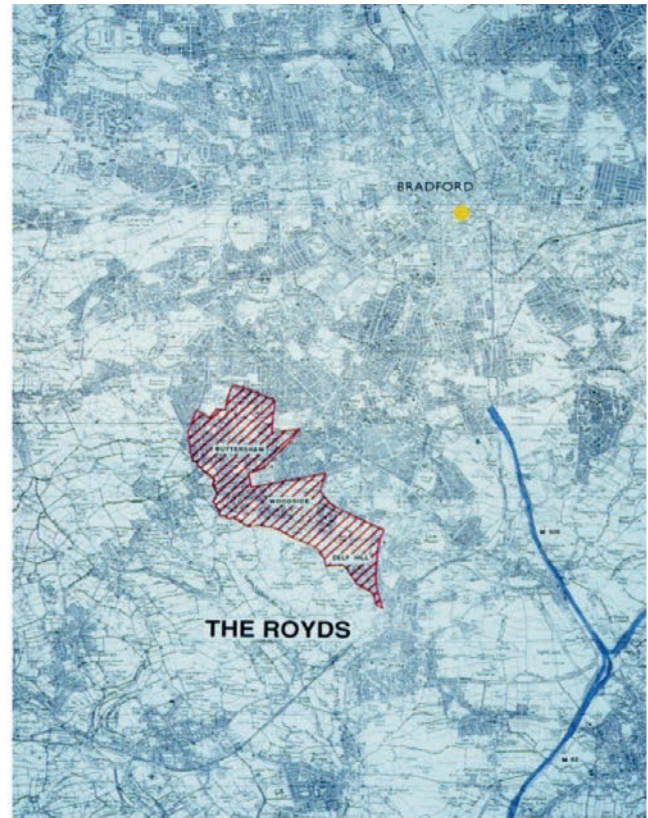

Figure 2: The three Royds housing estates
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

Figure 3: Typical 1950's Dwellings on the estates
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

The RCA was founded to improve the existing housing stock and to radically transform the physical, economic and social infrastructure of the three estates. The three resident associations initially had wanted to regenerate the estates but the local authority had insufficient funds to embark upon the redevelopment. The residents association suggested to RCA that a partnership be established between the local authority, Brunel Housing and the developer Keepmoat Plc. It was this partnership that was key to attracting a mixture of public and private funding for the massive regeneration programme. In 1995 RCA successfully secured £31m from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and with contributions from RCA partners and other agencies, the total spend of the programme between 1995 – 2002 was £108m.

Having secured the funding from both private and public sources, RCA were committed to creating a sustainable community where the local residents were involved from the outset in identifying and contributing to achieving their future needs. Their goals were to:

↘ Take action to address poor housing quality through the refurbishment of houses and replacement of flats.
↘ Identify and reduce problems associated with drug abuse and prostitution on the three estates.
↘ Make significant improvements to the social and physical infrastructure of the estates – roads; parking; shops; health centres; upgrading community centres; improving schools.
↘ Provide facilities for both recreation and leisure activities.

DESIGN 'BRIEF' DEVELOPMENT

At the very beginning of the pre-briefing stages, PC Stephen Town (Bradford District Architectural liaison officer, ALO) became involved in consultation and refurbishment of the three housing estates. A tripartite working partnership was established between the ALO; Tony Dylak, Director of Royds Housing Association; Webb Seeger Moorhouse (architects); and importantly the residents themselves. Crime was of a major concern to all stakeholders with the Royds Housing estates suffering from chronic levels of high crime and anti-social behaviour. In 1995 the Royds area had a burglary rate of 138 per 1000 population, which was on average more than five times the UK national average. With this in mind, the multi-agency partnership chose to approach the re-design of the estates using Secured by Design (SBD) principles to significantly reduce the opportunity and

occurrence of criminal activity.

The resident's representatives on the Board of Directors were particularly keen to voice the views and opinions of homeowners and residents of the three estates. In order to create a comprehensive and flexible design brief the Board decided to adopt a series of creative and unique ways of soliciting the views of stakeholders. Tony Dylak explains:

"… *we established a very strong series of mechanisms working directly with the people who were involved, the tenants. We also did front room meetings, as it were, so somebody would say, I want a meeting in my house, so we'd say, well get the ladies round and we'll meet in your front room. You get the biscuits on and we'll be round. We did road shows, gosh we must have done road shows about six or seven times a year, and we'd take the plans out and people would be able to identify their own house and their own area and we'd say, we haven't got to this bit yet, but what's proposed, is this. No, I don't like, what do you - the neighbours think, and we all agree we don't like that. […] Right, ok and we'd leave it out and we'd get people's*

Figure 4: A resident Director and planner discussing proposals with resident (Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

Figure 5: Two resident Directors discussing proposals with a resident
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

The travelling road shows visited a variety of different locations around the three estates, in schools, local parks and playgrounds, providing a forum whereby the design brief / feasibility proposals could be displayed, discussed and commented upon. In order to raise public awareness of these 'events' they also offered complimentary attractions such as face-painting and bouncy castles for the children to enjoy. There were several of these events proving both popular for the children and successful for Royds Housing Association in soliciting vital and much needed input from the residents.

Figure 6: Children's activities during the consultation road show
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

ROYDS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: URBAN CODES

In conjunction with the series of consultation 'road shows', the Royds Housing Association were working closely with Webb Seeger Moorhouse (consultant architects) developing a design document that captured the views of the residents whilst also creating a masterplan for the regeneration of the area. The Urban Codes (1995) document in essence was an organic design brief that was continually developed by the architects, reflecting the views of residents and other key stakeholders. Tony Dylak (2004) explains:

"… *we developed something called Urban Codes and they were developed by consultant architects through a huge amount of consultation and basically, the Urban Codes document stated the kind of external developments, so physical features such as doors, windows, roofing, chimneys, fencing, all that kind of thing. Urban codes also very cleverly introduced things like lets get rid of thickets; passageways; particularly unlit ones, unmade ones, ones that had a bad reputation; so Urban Codes said principally, we'll get rid of them."*

The Urban Codes document aimed to embrace the vision of the regeneration plan, with particular emphasis on quality (in terms of materials and workmanship); sustainability; aesthetics (appearance of dwellings; and the housing estates); and the reduction of criminal activity that blighted the three estates.

In conjunction with the development of the Urban Codes, PC Stephen Town (ALO) worked very closely with the Council, Housing Department and residents to develop a more specific 'technical' brief that focused on specifying more technical 'secured by design' features of the dwellings. In particular he focused on reducing the high levels of burglary on the estates by identifying the causes of burglary and implementing measures that would make it difficult for the offender to break into the dwellings. Tony Dylak (2004) comments:

"…*Obviously burglary was a key issue. Burglary and repeat burglary was a key issue with people that they wanted to see addressed. The terror, particularly for old people, of being burgled seven or eight times a year, sometimes by the same people, not being able to get insurance on their property – that was a major issue that they wanted to see addressed.''*

By drawing upon research undertaken by the local Police and conducting extensive consultation with the residents,

Stephen Town managed to source window frames with limited apertures complete with locking mechanisms. The windows were certified to the BS 7950 standard (Windows of Enhanced Security) which were able to withstand considerable physical abuse and tampering in an attempt to gain unlawful entry. The door frames were designed to withstand attempts to force entry, and when tested could hold secure for 20 minutes. The residents on the Board of Directors were sceptical about the security attributes of the window frames; approaching Tony Dylak to conduct an 'experiment' to see if a 'burglar' could actually break into a house fitted with the security enhanced windows and doors.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

On a macro scale, the residents were involved right from the outset in the briefing stages of planning community facilities on the three estates. New facilities that were being planned or refurbished included playgrounds; a new community centre, healthy living centres and educational facilities.

Figure 7: Residents showing initial plans and a sketch model of new community facilities
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

Figure 8: Recently completed community centre
(Source: Royds Housing Association, 2001)

As a result of their direct involvement, the residents decided upon and agreed on the strategic placement of key community facilities.

SUMMARY OF CASE

This case example has discussed the significant and important role of the residents in determining a new all embracing vision for the Royds estates, that not only aims to reduce crime but to create a social and environmentally sustainable future for the residents. Firstly, the input of Stephen Town, Architectural Liaison Officer, has been considerable in terms of driving consultation and the engagement of residents; secondly, Tony Dylak, Director of Royds Housing Association, his vision and ability to listen and support the wishes of the residents has been immense. Combined, it is suggested that the design briefing stages was the catalyst for change and the mutual sharing of vision. The design briefing process provided a platform for all stakeholders to envision a future for the estates, providing a common ground for residents, the police, housing authorities and architects to meet, discuss and implement the wishes of everyone that embraces a crime-reduced future. Referring back to the central focus of this paper, the 5 key drivers for participatory engagement are clearly explicit within the case discussion. Firstly, the designer's **role** within the initial briefing stages embraced a **wider** remit of responsibility. They carefully orchestrated a series of planned events to both appeal and entice the residents to the consultation 'roadshows'. Secondly, with the opportunity to meaningfully participate and be an equal part of the consultation process, the residents responded wholeheartedly to expressing their requirements

and ambitions to reinforce positive changes within the design and development process. As such, this then leads us to the issue of **blurring boundaries** between the various domains of knowledge, which traditionally remained distinctly separate and isolated. With the erosion of these perceived 'boundaries' by the residents, they actively engaged through all stages of the project duration, often contributing specialist knowledge and experiential understanding of complex design considerations.

CONDUCIVE CONDITIONS TO DYNAMIC, PARTICIPATORY DESIGN BRIEFING

Through exploration of the literature and empirical evidence, it could be argued that five key elements (or discreet variants of) are often found within 'dynamic' participatory design briefing; these may be surmised as follows:

1 – Design leadership: Design leadership is the ability to take an idea from inception right through to full implementation. However, leadership is the skillful 'art' of ensuring integrity and intent of the original idea is maintained and embedded within the final designed outcome (Cooper, Wootton, Hands, Daly and Bruce (2002). One key element of sensitive and intelligent leadership activity is the ability to reach out and engage diverse audiences under the aegis of one collective vision and unified purpose (Cooper et al, ibid).

2 – Flexible process: taking an idea from A to Z requires the ability and confidence of the design team / or sponsor to critically reflect on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the approach to the design 'task'. Through the utilisation and adoption of a flexible and 'fluid' design briefing process 'change' can be accommodated for and embraced as new information arises through continual dialogue, understanding and reflection. The necessity of a dynamic, bespoke process which adapts to the context further reinforces the need for engagement rather than following an off the shelf process or 'going through the motions'.

3 - Clear purpose: This is crucial for the avoidance of project 'creep'/ambiguity right at the initial stages of the design project. Clear purpose could be considered the manifestation of strategic intent providing a firm 'focus' to obtaining long term strategic objectives throughout all stages of project duration are met.

4 – Culture (energy, enthusiasm): Through clear and sensitive 'leadership' and the encouragement to take risks, all stakeholders within the briefing process can significantly contribute to the overall success of the project. By fostering a culture of creativity and enthusiasm, the benefits are considerable both in tangible and intangible outcomes.

Again, one key determinant of this philosophy is through successful design leadership, and also the use of creative research methods.

5 – Designerly methods to engage the masses: design is both a verb and a noun. 'To design…' is equally as important as the designed outcome at the end of the project. The design team has many diverse and dynamic tools and techniques at their disposal to use throughout the differing stages of the design process. Through the careful combination and deployment of these techniques, invaluable information can be gleaned from a variety of differing sources (to read more about appropriate design methods in the literature see Sanoff (1983, 1991; Hanington and Martin, 2012).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has outlined some of the core principles of dynamic briefing as a result of participatory design. While this is only one case, it is useful to outline these principles to lay the ground and to inform future research. These guidelines will be useful to clients and communities wishing to be more involved in projects, designers who find themselves needing to engage with diverse stakeholders, and for project managers who may be overseeing budgets or process. In addition, it is anticipated that future research will explore the impact of co design on the briefing process, as there may be some potential for further change when hierarchies are not present and the non-designer and user is equal to the process, rather than 'brought in' when and how it is deemed appropriate.

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