Appendix to ARP Blog 5: Focus Group Discussion Part 2 Transcript

Date: 17th November 2025
Discussion Duration: 34.38
Participants: 6 first-year BA Architecture students (anonymised as Student 1-6) and researcher, Kuljeet Sibia
Activity: Role-play exercise simulating a board meeting to discuss a mixed-use development project with competing priorities between inclusive design and climate resilience requirements.
- All participants were assigned roles (Developer, Architect, Local Council Planning Officer, Disabled Resident, Elderly Long-term Resident, Young Person).

Note: This transcript has been transcribed with the help of AI tools and edited by the researcher. Further details and reflections of this process are captured on the blog.

Discussion Transcript

Researcher: A major mixed-use development is proposed in a rapidly changing neighbourhood. The architects and design team are proposing ambitious, inclusive design measures: step-free public realm, gender-inclusive play spaces, accessible housing above policy minimums, sensory-friendly routes, high quality and detailed materials to help members of the visually impaired community, affordable workspaces and a community-led co-design process. However, new climate resilience requirements have been introduced as the project has initial conversations with the planning team which places additional pressure on the project budget. The developer argues that the combined cost of inclusive design features and environmental upgrades threatens the project's viability and delays its delivery. The council is under political pressure to approve the scheme quickly to meet housing targets and sustainability commitments. Community groups hold mixed views. Given rising costs and competing priorities, should the inclusive design proposals be reduced, modified, if so how, or protected? Now that was a really long one so feel free to re-read that. As you're doing that I'd also like you to, oh no it's not in front of you is it, oh god, all right. Take a post-it note and pass it around as I hand you the character that you will be for this discussion.

Student 3: Oh my goodness, this will be fun, oh you did say there would be role play.

Researcher: On your post-it note, could you just write down who you are if you are an architect, a developer, a community member, just write it down and stick it on yourself.

Researcher: I need to now just make sure of course I'm not taking any photos, I have no photos. I'll take one just, okay, as you write and put your little sticker on yourself, I would like you to read through the notes that you have on your page about your character, your position, which nobody else knows because it's your piece of paper. It's your, the architect, I love it. And you can feel free to write any notes down on the piece of paper with your character description on it and we are then going to be in a board meeting trying to make a decision on what we should do in terms of project and we all have opportunity to have our words and have a bit of a rebuttal. Now as you do that you are the person that you are playing, the character you're playing, and that's why on your sheet you have some prompts and you have some conflicts.

Student 1: What do the values, the values mean?

Researcher: Value means what you value. Yeah, and if there's anything, appreciate maybe some of these things, terminologies you may not have come across, ask me now before we get started and that's fine. And if there's anything in the question that you're like okay I don't know what that means.

Student 2: Why does student 5 get to be the architect [laughter].

Student 6: What are we writing on the page?

Researcher: Any notes that you wanted, I imagine. We are now in a boardroom, we've all come together.

Student 4: My English then just verbally or words?

Researcher: And we, I am the mediator between this meeting, so I might bring different people into the conversation, but if you want to say something, yeah I'm just like, well, so the conflict is.

Student 1: So I'm the person that is commissioning?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're the client. But you are also, yeah that is your complex. Someone else will have a different set of values and they'll try and argue.

Student 5: Is this the conflict I'm asking?

Researcher: No, no, no, the conflict is there sorry maybe I should maybe I'll explain a little bit better, apologies. On your sheet that is the title of who you are. The value set out what matters to you, this might be different to you as a person, human being, might be different to tomorrow and Harvey, each of you individually, but that's just to let you know the perspective of the character that you're playing. The bullet points are there as kind of a set of values or how you might construct some of your ideas, so you've come to a meeting and you are here to get them to listen to your perspective, to say this is what I think we should do. The conflict there is to understand almost like the key constraints that you're dealing with that you might be aware of. So you've got some there that will not just be about the design but it might be your role.

Student 5: Okay yeah, yeah thanks.

Student 4: What exactly does the local council get to approve or not approve? Like how much, the local councillor?

Researcher: Oh councillor, oh sorry apologise. Local council planning officer. The planning officer will approve the scheme, so for any scheme that is going forward, a design team, an applicant team which is made up of the designer, the architect and everyone else in the team, will then submit it to the local authority as a, and the planning team, every borough has a planning team, and will then coordinate with them to take it to committee and get approval to say yes you can go ahead, you can't, refuse it or approve it. Yeah, so you've got your priorities. Right anyone in particular want to kind of just start with the journal? Like this is where I'm thinking, maybe who's the, who's the, we'll get the developer to kind of set out where unfortunately, the man, I was going to say.

Student 2: Oh, this is going to be hard, it's going to be very difficult.

Student 1: First of all, I think, are they, well it's just, are the cost, genuine arguments genuine?

Researcher: So that's for you to know isn't it, but you might put different, but anyone else like to go first? Maybe you know what, we started off with the architect saying that they're putting this, would you like to?

Student 5: Yeah sure,

Researcher: You can be, but also sorry but there are prompts on there, you can be as honest as you want about the things that you're struggling with and the position that you're coming from.

Debate Begins

Architect (Student 5): Okay, so I'm guessing that I'm pushing over, I'm pushing for this design, so that's my standpoint. Okay. I think that despite the budget that's been kind of announced, there is a way that they could, that we can go about it to still follow through with our initial objective which is to put forward inclusive design.

Researcher: Do you think that we should go ahead with it regardless of the battle between it in climate and inclusive?

Architect (Student 5): I think it's to put it, I think we need to work from the standpoint that we had which is initial design, regardless of, I think within all design and any design there's barriers, there's conflicting factors and so on. So it's important to not kind of bridge out towards those factors too much, in this case this climate resilience, otherwise our standpoint may kind of change from inclusive to climate which is not the objective here, I'm guessing. While I do recognise that it is like a major barrier here, I feel like there's still a way we can kind of do what we set out to within the constraints.

Researcher: That's the architect. Would anyone like to second it or oppose it?

Developer (Student 1): I think you have to back up the architect because I think we were set out and as a client I think we wanted to build this development to be inclusive. So I think there needs to be from the council, I think there needs to be some viable arguments against what we are doing that is against, before we discuss which we should, if we should reduce it or modify it in any way. I think it needs to be outlined by the council how what we are doing is not being climate, not good for the climate, and if there's any specific part of the development that would need to be changed drastically first before we think about modifying the inclusivity.

Researcher: That was a question directly for planning?

Planning Officer (Student 4): Well, sorry, could you repeat your question?

Developer (Student 1): I think before we discuss about whether we should even reduce or modify, I think we need to know first what the council wants as a result of the modification. As in, what would, what climate benefits do you want to claim to

the communities that you have done within this project before we talk about reducing?

Planning Officer (Student 4): Well, I'm here for the public interest of course, so I would say that definitely inclusiveness should be in the centre. To reduce the material costs, as it says it's high quality, may reduce them and not have that as a centre and still maybe design the place. All the elements in the workspace. So I wouldn't say we should lose any of these. I was just wondering if it's possible to maybe adapt regarding costs and time limitless and may reduce our, as it was set, the high quality and detailed materials, which I know is part of the design obviously, but in order for the council and everyone to approve it, it might need to be a bit more realistic.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): I think the council, because it says like the council want to approve the design, I guess because they are in political pressure to approve the scheme that is accessible. I think if they're then going to introduce resilience requirements that are going to affect another person, I think there needs to be some sort of

Researcher: Just to clarify, it's not that they need to approve a scheme as accessible, they need to approve a scheme.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Regardless of that, and it was the council that introduced the new climate resilience requirements. I think still, I think the council needs to be involved more with the developers and I think there's money to be spent in areas like this. And if, I don't think it should be the community that suffers due to new climate requirements because it seems quite backwards for the climate requirements to be made to like, I mean the climate, everyone's affected by the climate, but I don't think people's living like situations should be negatively affected because they're trying to improve a different aspect, especially that this could be like quite a remarkable development if it is taking into lot of accounts that usually aren't taken account. I think it is a bad look and not the act, the responsibility of the council to kind of just chuck out new policies and not actually be involved in how that affects developments like these. As a disabled resident and access advocate.

Researcher: What we're hearing is that you're saying that inclusive design is more important and actually you're blaming the council for bringing in a policy.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): I don't think it's more important, but I think it's irresponsible to think that.

Researcher: Would you like to explain maybe from some of your prompts why?

Disabled Resident (Student 3): I think that it's wrong, especially for this specific development that is, people who are not necessarily usually represented in a development, this is the development that has to suffer because of a new policy, regardless of whether there's other developments. Especially this one, it seems like this is the chance to have an exemplary development that is including like minority groups, and I think especially a development like this should be supported by the council if they're struggling to cover all of the policies that they're being set out, especially if it is known that sometimes council policies can be quite unrealistic if they're quite detached from the actual industries that they're affecting. So I think maybe the councillors and the planning officers need to be more involved in the process so they can understand how important these like features are in the government.

Researcher: That goes back to your point, you are a local council member and you have a policy, policy has to be met before you can then approve something.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Yeah, go.

Young Person (Student 2): I think that the, since the council needs to approve a scheme anyways, why is it that this scheme that isn't okay with, like if they're going to, if they're going to, if they need to meet new climate resilient requirements, then why can't we adapt the design to meet those requirements? Why do we need to come up with a whole new, like we have to reduce everything, get rid of all of the all of the design part of the development? Why can't we just change the materials we're using?

Researcher: Because it costs more, it costs more. So our dilemma here is that as a team, and I'll be, I'll be the cost consultant for all of you, is that what we have budgeted on this project, right developer, my client, was for inclusive design, great, we're doing a great job. Then somebody came, we went to a meeting and a planning officer has said we've got this policy, so until you meet this policy we can't give you planning permission. We looked at the books didn't we and we said well if we do that then we can't do what we want to do for inclusive design, and now that's where we are, trying to weigh it up. And we've got, we've got an architect who stands really firmly about their position on design, we've got a resident who backs that up, they have a planning officer who's, you know, probably telling us that I need to get you to meet the policy. So what does it mean to meet the policy? Is you've got to get and meet the climate suggestions that I'm saying to you, even if I do agree that it needs

to be inclusive as well. We've got developer who we're going to come back to, and we've got a young person and maybe, what's your position on that?

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): So I'm not even thinking about the climate, I'm thinking about that I think this whole development's just gonna like not consider me and it's gonna push out people like me who've been here forever. I feel like my demographic is overlooked and no one's considering all people. And I'm kind of afraid actually of what, what kinds of people are this, these safety features will attract, inclusive future, yeah sorry. Yeah inclusive features, I'm scared, I'm afraid if you will want to come into my area once those are in place. And I've, I've got personal experience of some safety concerns and with my peers as well who've also experienced some concerns.

Young Person (Student 2): Sounds like a Facebook comment.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Yeah, are we allowed to ask what we're concerned about?

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): I have experienced some safety concerns, I can't, I can't go into too much detail.

Young Person (Student 2): Disabled people will be a threat to you? They're going to run over you?

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): Yeah, my values are. Stability, safety and my neighbourhood identity, I want those to be considered in the design.

Young Person (Student 2): I feel like the sort of architecture that already exists is to old people's tastes and that, and that bears little consideration for young people. Most of the architecture that exists today was probably built in the 1980s.

Researcher: Hey, that's not that old. [Jokingly to build rapport]

Young Person (Student 2): Built in the 1950s to 80s. And that was, that was, to be fair, that was 30 years ago. So I feel that those, when that architecture was built, people in these demographics were just ignored and pushed to the side and the average building was, was built in mind with the demographic that the elderly people are now part of. So they have architecture which, and also they are going to benefit from this, from this design. It's, it's going to have a lot of, elderly people are, are also part of the disabled community as you get older, are you, as you get older your, as you get older it's known that elderly people need mobility aids or sometimes different levels of mobility aids. Having ramp free access would be

good. Also gender inclusive play spaces, those would attract little girls and sort of like they're harmless demographics. I don't understand what kind of criminals you think.

Researcher: I think it's got heated between the community members, right? As a planning officer, what you're, you're observing this, what, what you say to the?

Planning Officer (Student 4): I was gonna say, how is it possible to reduce our costs from the material type of site and still keep up with the design of the architect? Because the disability, just, you know, an exclusive scheme, scheme, it's like that's not an option, otherwise we're not, our housing targets.

Researcher: Do you as an architect think that that's not an option?

Planning Officer (Student 4): Well, I mean, we hired her because we need an inclusive design. I would know if that's a question.

Architect (Student 5): I think personally, I think,

Young Person (Student 2): Do you know what you're doing?

Architect (Student 5): Yes I do. I do. I think it's just hard to work within these constraints, you know, and I have one to my right saying this design is not going to be for them. So right now I'm just. [laughter]

Researcher: You've literally been dropped into the exact position of an architect with a community member blaming you personally.

Architect (Student 5): So first of all, let me take your points. This is design, so it does not exclude you, doesn't single you out. You will still benefit from most of these inclusive features, depending on how much we have to compromise, especially with material, because the face of this design is inclusivity. So if we have to compromise on certain aspects of the design, I think that the overall inclusive face may kind of decrease, and it may kind of go from something that we initially made and designed to something that we had to now kind of limit because of the constraints like budget, the resilience.

Researcher: Is the budget really a constraint?

Disabled Resident (Student 3): This is what I was going to say. I think that as a resident, I think, I think there is a, I think there should be a breakdown of cost. I think the, when we talk about, I am actually not elderly, you can't even address me correctly. No, I think when, I think it's quite obvious with a lot of developers and big

businesses when they talk about costs, I think you need to, profit needs to be a conversation. And if you're a developer who really wants to be dealing with an inclusive design, I think it would expose a lot of your kind of motives towards that if you're, if you're like claiming to be a developer who wants to like champion inclusive design but you're not willing to, a bit of your profit to meet requirements. I think that kind of poses questions on the, like genuine, how genuine it is. And then I also think it's irresponsible for a planning officer to say now we've got these new policies, you need to make your design less the quality less, because if we're talking about housing as well, you think like quality of housing, that is a very big part of developments. And I don't think a council should be trying advocating for a developer to make the quality of the housing worse. And then I also think, and then the same thing, like also if there's a development that was complete and you've imposed a new policy on that development and you can directly see how that has affected the, if it was possible before and not possible now, I think it's first of all just like obviously you can see that there's been an effect on your policy and there's also an opportunity for a council to be championed in some way if they can make an example out of a development that they helped meet all of the requirements for and they have this development that is serving the climate requirements and servicing the users that use it. I think there is an opportunity for the residents to feel like they've been considered and also for the council to look like they've really thought about what they're doing instead of just making the architect compromise their design which in the first place was made to make the designers like positive as it could be.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Agree.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Yes, but do you though?

Planning Officer (Student 4): I think I'm standing under a lot of political pressure here.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): What's more important, people's lives or your reputation? Yeah, also you as well.

Developer (Student 1): I think that the council needs to be, since their priority is to get the scheme out as possible and that is one of their main pressures is to meet that housing target. For me to be able to change the budget is not my decision personally, it's the investors that I have backing me. And if I have to go and change the budget and the architect won't let me or hasn't found a solution to what the council wants, I would have to go back to the, an appeal for a higher budget which

will take more time and then that will lengthen out the project to the point where we might make it, we might do a development that happens in two years past the date that we wanted it to be, and it also turns out to be of a less quality. So I think that the budget has to stay and, well.

Planning Officer (Student 4): And what if we reduce something in our design, for example don't integrate workspaces? Because at the main focus I think we still have the community and we want to have a community that is very inclusive. And I think workspaces can still be separated, that's just a personal portion I'm bringing on the table. And I'm asking the architect and the developer if you could imagine redeveloping your initial design with, of course, a discussion with our disabled and elderly and young residents, so we could reduce maybe some materials used for those workspaces and also maybe reduce the time spent for the building process. Is that something you can imagine?

Architect (Student 5): I can, but I think the question I'm going to ask is how much do we want to prioritise this climate resilience first of all? How much do you want that to take up of the design? Because there's a few demographics in this entire inclusive design measure, so if you want us to take away from those and kind of integrate the more climate-based requirement slash policy that you're putting out.

Planning Officer (Student 4): We'll just have to set priorities here. **Y**es, I think affordable workspaces.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): But if the design was community-led and the community wants affordable workspaces, why do you think you know better than the community?

Planning Officer (Student 4): I didn't say I know better than the community, I'm just saying the budget is tight.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): But yeah, so you know the budget, but you're not one who is spending any money. So I think you can, you can acknowledge that the budget is tight, but you're not willing to help out with the budget anyway.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Well, I have no idea what's going on with the budget.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): But you know that your new, you know that your new policies have increased the cost.

Researcher: Okay, thank you for that. We've just got a couple more points here.

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): Since it's a community-led co-design process, that's where we should be going back to with the architect and me and my old friends and new friends. We should be coming together and thinking how we can adapt this in like the community interests but with these new pressures put on and how we can like adapt that.

Young Person (Student 2): Why did you not include the disabled resident?

Planning Officer (Student 4): It's because not everyone in the building will be working, for example, these two.

Young Person (Student 2): Young, like retired, you're not going to use the affordable workspaces.

Architect (Student 5): Sorry, can I just ask your age if you don't mind?

Young Person (Student 2): I am a teenager so.

Architect (Student 5): Okay, so let's assume from 15 to 18?

Researcher: 19 still a teenager.

Architect (Student 5): 19, okay. You're in work then, are you not?

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): I'm only 60's.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Wait, is she retired or is she elderly?

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): I'm relatively old.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): No, would you be like, you could be elderly. Elderly is not necessarily past retirement age necessarily.

Elderly Long-term Resident (Student 6): No. I think we should go back to modifying design, but like, you know, not just leaving it to the architect to have to figure out the solutions.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Of course not. I mean, again, I'm all in. I'm for the public interest.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Just repeating yourself.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Maybe our developer can I have a word again?

Disabled Resident (Student 3): Yeah, but what are you going to do?

Young Person (Student 2): Why don't we get the ideas and plans for the current thing before the climate resilience requirements got introduced? Can we take those plans, those designs, because I'm assuming the architect already has planned and put in a lot of work into the design. Can we get those designs and maybe get a few people from different demographics in this group and see how they react to those, if they like it or dislike it, and anything they dislike, we can just get rid of?

Planning Officer (Student 4): I don't think it's that easy, because you're just re-representative of the community. You can't just speak for the whole community.

Young Person (Student 2): I'm saying getting different people from different demographics.

Planning Officer (Student 4): Oh, right, okay.

Young Person (Student 2): Never listens to me.

Researcher: You have become a classic planning officer very quickly, and a classic developer, kept quiet.

Disabled Resident (Student 3): I think the cost breakdown is a big part of it as well. Developer.

Researcher: Okay, all right, we are at time.

End of transcript