

# Skills in Community Engagement

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# What do we mean by Community Engagement?

- **Community** takes many forms
  - Community representatives eg councillors
  - Voluntary groups eg civic societies
  - Self-help groups eg residents associations
- **Engagement** takes many forms too
  - Consultation eg seeking response
  - Liaison eg giving information
  - Assisting eg giving advice and resources

# My Professional past

- Academic Research 5 years
  - Local Government 27 years
  - English Heritage 3 years
  - Own Practice 6 years
  - Newcastle Diocese 3+ years
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- 40+ years of doing professional stuff

# Professional Community Engagement

- In Local Government:
  - I mainly Liaised/consulted
- In Private Practice:
  - I mainly advised and informed
- This mainly involved the following skills:
  - communication/informing
  - drawing out consensus
  - explaining processes

# Voluntary Community Engagement – a different ballgame!

- My current voluntary activities:
  - IHBC
  - Civic Voice
  - a £325k community project
  - a Neighbourhood Plan
  - two Town Teams
  - a Civic Society
  - Church Support Officer (with pay!)

# Voluntary Community Engagement – a different skill set too

- Enthusiastic and inspirational
- Optimistic outlook
- A dedicated listener – a user of silences
- Capacity and resource building skills
- Work ‘with’ and not ‘for’ people (NOT a consultant!)
- Sensitive to the dynamics of groups
- Resource programming skills – getting the ducks in a row!
- Knowledge and experience of ‘political’ structures
- Technical skills in funding and place-making

# Voluntary Community Engagement - Some memorable experiences

- Some ordinary people are doing extraordinary things!
- Misunderstanding of ‘where I am coming from’
- ‘Blackleg!’ – ‘taking my job!’
- Talents come ‘out of the blue’! (Joining the dots?)
- Recognising limitations
- ‘Pecking order’!
- ‘We tried that in 1973 and it didn’t work!’
- ‘Professional baggage!’

# Voluntary Community Engagement - Challenges!

- Time managing your volunteering – matching your volunteering with your spare time
- Fund-raising in a voluntary context – in a time of financial ‘competition’
- Resistance to change and the value of exemplars – few community projects are wholly unique!



# A Second Life?

- They say you only get one life! Try some volunteering in the community and get a second one!
- David Lovie