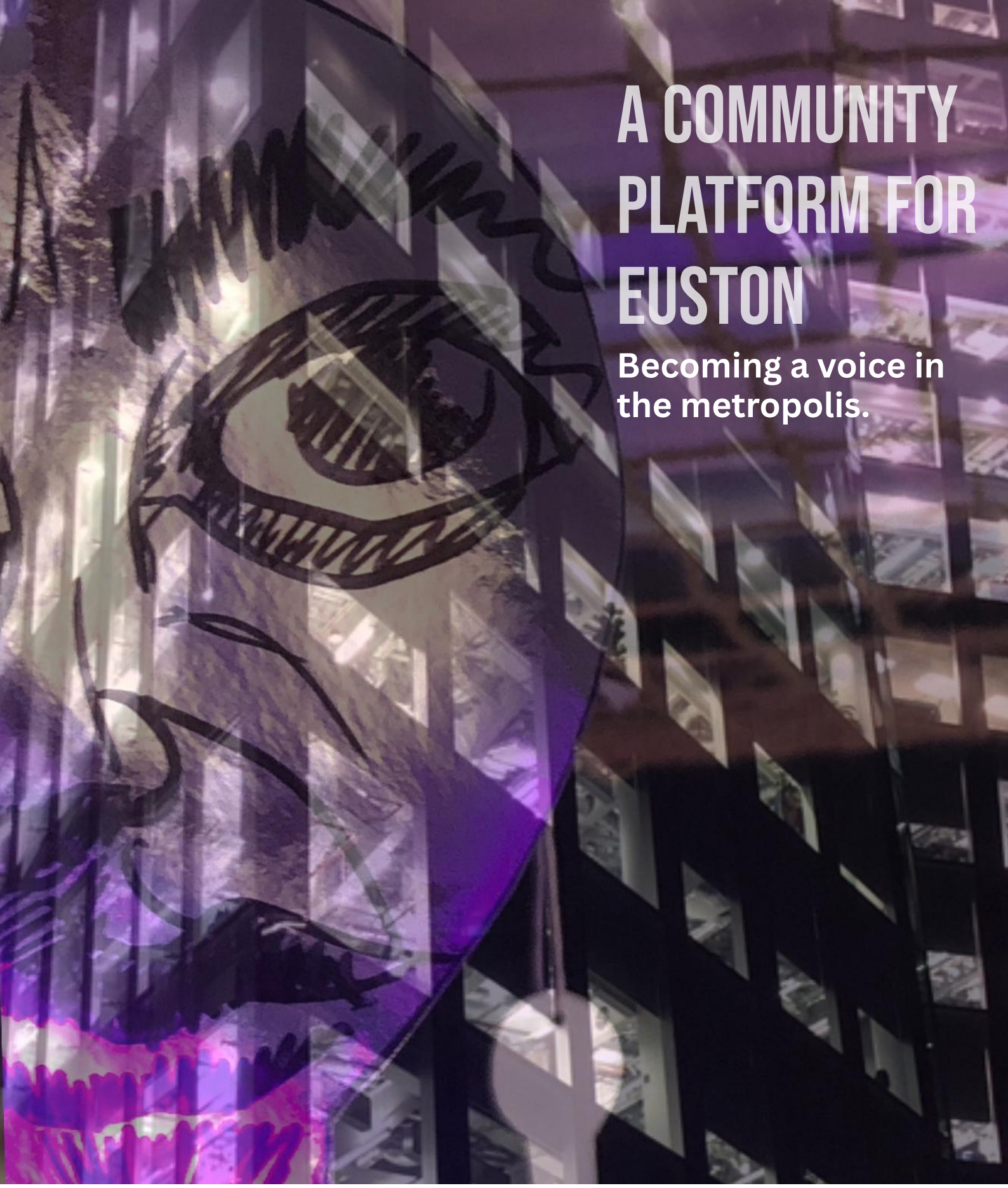


A COMMUNITY PLATFORM FOR EUSTON

Becoming a voice in the metropolis.

JASON LEMAN

November 2025

CITIZEN NETWORK
FOR A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE MATTERS

BACKGROUND

The HS2 Euston development has created potential for new housing and public realm around Euston, with plans being shaped by public and private bodies, including the London Borough of Camden Council. The Old Diorama Arts Centre (ODAC) was commissioned by Camden Council to deliver a series of workshops and events around housing delivery in the Euston area, as a piece of community research. One of the aims of this work is to support the community voice. ODAC commissioned a workshop from Jason Leman, neighbourhood democracy lead at Citizen Network, to explore building a platform for the voice of residents.

Euston sits at the heart of three wards (shown on the right): St Pancras & Somers Town; Regents Park; and Bloomsbury. Each of these wards **include different communities and have different profiles**, including around age, health, ethnicity, and deprivation. The nature of development is a priority for many residents. However, their priorities differ. For example, some residents' groups orient around the protection of heritage, whilst others focus on affordable housing. Between and within communities **there will be a multiplicity of viewpoints about what happens next**.

ODAC is an anchor organisation in the area, being a cohering hub for creative enterprise and community groups. Other organisations also act as physical and social hubs within the area, including the Somers Town Community Association, the Hopscotch Women's Centre, the Third Age Project and the Bengali Workers Association. There are also Tenants Associations, a timebank, and many other organisations present. Wider networks, such as the Camden Community Centres Consortium, offer an opportunity to share good practice and experience across groups. These bodies create a strong existing foundation for developing and building community voice.

The next sections of this report reflect the voices in the workshop, including my own as facilitator. These sections consider: who has a say over Euston; the foundations, supports and refinements of a platform for voice; and the final designs presented at the workshop. There is then a discussion of the workshop outcomes and potential for giving a voice to Euston.

WHO HAS A VOICE IN EUSTON?

The workshop considered two questions exploring who shapes what happens around the Euston area.

Who has most say?

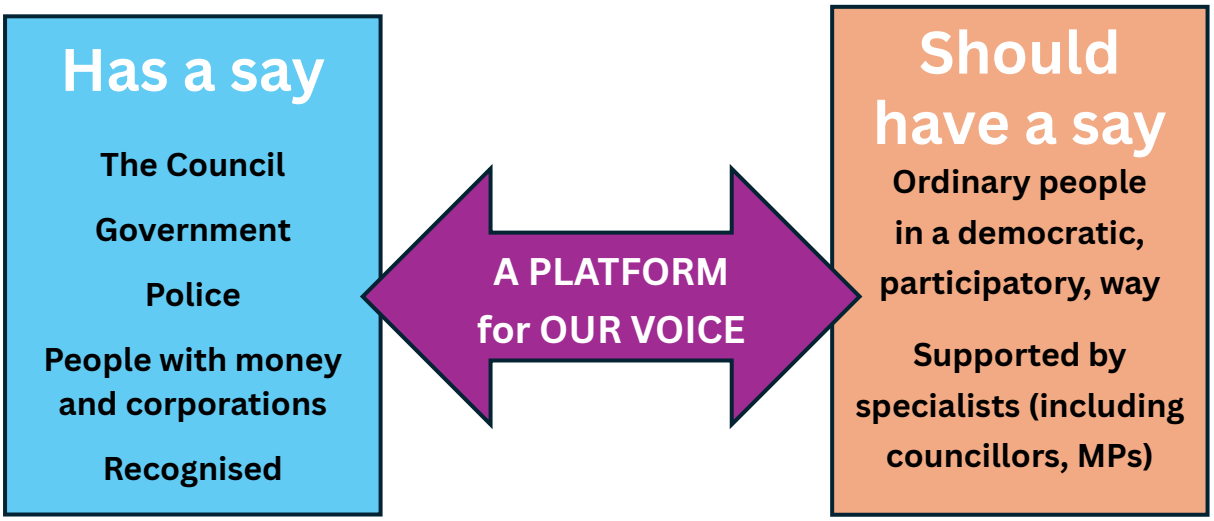
The first question considered who had most say over the area – whose voice was loudest. The workshop concluded that **Camden Council is the main body shaping the Euston area**. However, it was pointed out that **the Government has ultimate power** over what Camden Council does, **with the police enforcing** Government law. People with money, and in particular big **corporations**, **have a greater say** over what happens in the area than ordinary people. People also only have a say if they are **recognised by the system** – if they have a postcode they have more power.

People at the workshop spoke about who had most say in the area (©Alice Horsley).

Who *should* have most say?

The second question considered was who *should* have most say over what happens in the area. The workshop concluded that ordinary people should have the loudest voice. It was important that this was **done in a democratic and participatory way**. It was thought that specialists should help, **supporting ordinary people with their knowledge**. For example, the regulations around drainage when considering a planning application. This supporting role should extend to Camden Council, Government, and other organisations in the area.

The role of the platform is to amplify the voice of ordinary people and to shift the role of Government and Council to one of supporting ordinary people in shaping their area. To enable people themselves to take part and have a voice.



The workshop was asked whether a community has one voice or many voices, and how it can have one voice on an issue. It was agreed that the **community has many different voices**. Different people, different communities around Euston, different voices even in one block. To include different voices means **going to where people are**, knocking on doors, leafleting, advertising in newspapers, and asking people for their views. One person at the workshop said they would be unlikely to answer the door, so online conversations were important. Another noted that drawing felt more comfortable than speaking. Another that being amongst friends gave confidence. To include difference meant allowing people different ways of expressing themselves and for that to be in different places. Not just through speaking up but also **through social media, drawing, writing,** and **friendships with trusted people**.

Having a voice also needs people to **become their voice**, becoming confident in putting their point of view across and making choices. This means supporting people to challenge what is around them. It also means using our voices in a way that **invites the other person to speak and then listening**.

A person at the workshop spoke about the need to use our voices in a way that allows others to also speak (©Alice Horsley).

The ideal was to find a consensus where everyone agreed and the area could have a collective voice. It was pointed out that if people are involved in a democratic way, then even if a person didn't agree with a decision on one issue, they might support the next decision. This speaks to the concept of ***consent*** – that if a decision-making process feels reasonable and fair, people might consent to a decision even if they didn't completely agree. There were some issues that united people in the area – littering, bad housing, anti-social behaviour. But even when an issue did unite local people, **their collective voice was not listened to and not heard**.

After talking about who had a voice and how different voices could be included, the workshop then turned to designing a platform for these voices – a platform for the community around Euston.

DESIGNING A PLATFORM

A platform for a community voice needs three things: **Foundations** – the underpinning organisation or structure; **Supports** – essential elements to a platform working well; **Refinements** – things that make the platform better fit community values. The workshop considered these three elements in turn.

Five Foundations (plus one)

Five possible foundations were presented in the workshop. People were also able to propose their own foundation if they wanted something different. These foundations are listed below with a link to an example or further information for each one.

1: An organisation already here in our place.

2: A new mutual organisation like a Community Benefit Society.

3: A community council with statutory powers and elections.

4: An independent local party formed by local people

5: A neighbourhood forum or board for local organisations.

The discussion on foundations orientated around the power held by the foundation organisation or structure. There was value in the role of existing organisations and bringing them together. However, without additional powers or additional money there was a question to what those organisations could do. Structures like a community council or an independent local party seemed to offer the possibility for having more power to speak up.

Five Supports (plus one)

Five possible supports were presented in the workshop. People were also able to propose their own support if they wanted something different.

1: A neighbourhood fund or budget that can be spent in the area.

2: A community space where people can meet and organise.

3: Public services working with communities, alongside residents.

4: Staff to help this happen and carry out other roles.

5: Participatory processes, involving people in making decisions.

There was agreement that all the supports would be positive for a platform. The two most important supports were having money and having ways for involving people in decisions. Without a budget it would be difficult to make things happen. Without involving people the platform would not be properly democratic.

Five Refinements (plus one)

Five possible refinements were presented in the workshop. People were also able to propose their own refinement if they wanted something different.

1: Time-banking or a Local Economic Trading Scheme.

2: A Citizen's Jury or Assembly that carefully considers an issue.

3: Including different people and interests not represented.

4: Developing campaign skills, also organising and public speaking.

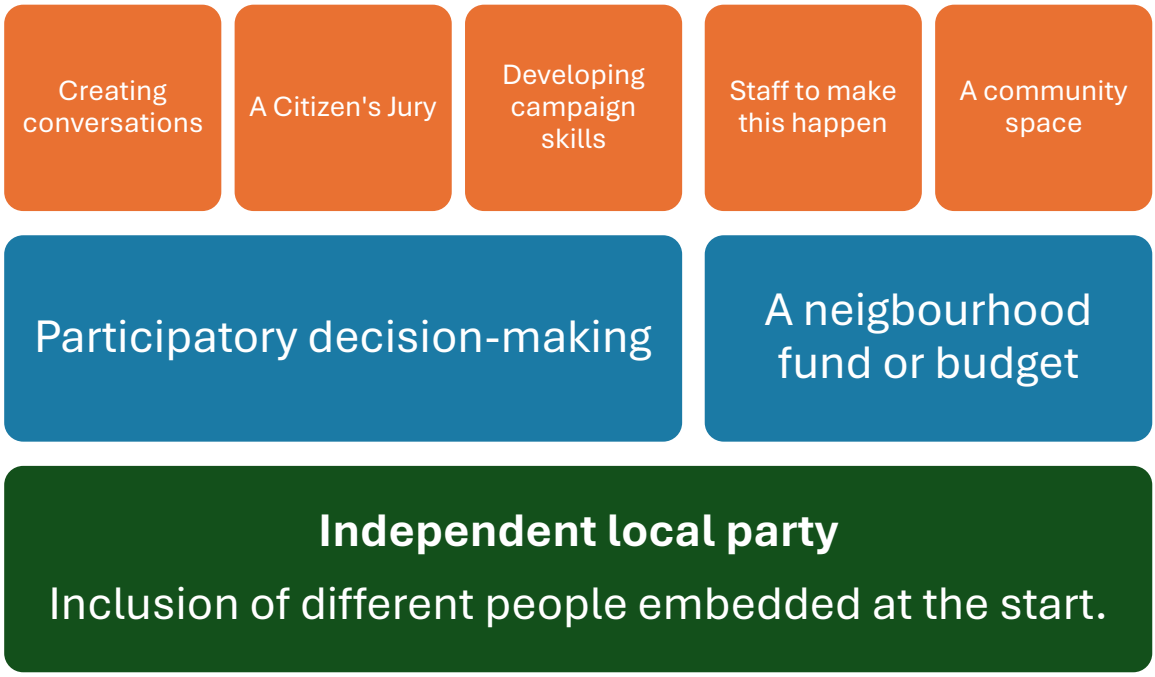
5: Creating conversations about issues in everyday places

There was agreement that including different people was very important. Supporting the development of skills was also essential as the platform developed. Some people liked the idea of a Citizens Jury to discuss an issue.

DESIGNS

Three groups each designed a platform using foundations, supports and refinements. The different designs are shown below.

1. The Inclusive Independent Local Party



The main platform for community voice in this proposal **is an inclusive independent local party**. Different voices will be proactively included at the start, this acting as a foundation for the platform alongside being a local party. Multiple participatory mechanisms, including a Citizens' Jury, will **support conversations in the community all the time** rather than just at election time. The aspiration is for **everyone to be involved**. The third layer of support is a neighbourhood budget and staff, with a community space that provides a place where people can meet. Finally, there is support for developing campaign skills for local people so they can **get their voice heard**.

There was discussion in this group about whether the foundation should be an existing organisation, such as ODAC, or a new organisation. For some, community centres were a place of supportive inclusion that could be the foundation for a platform. For others, these are more a meeting space and not a platform for voice. There was not consensus about this point.

2. A Community Powered Platform

The aspirational aim for this proposal is to have a **Community Powered Platform**. It will grow from the development of a Community Council and from neighbourhood forums or networks. An existing organisation or organisations will provide some necessary infrastructure. **Networks or forums already present in the area will be strengthened and new ones built**.

The platform **will need different supports to create the space and capacity to make things happen**: the community space, community participation, the neighbourhood fund or budget, and the staffing. Given the borough council and public services will still hold a lot of the power, they will need to **work collaboratively alongside** the Community Powered Platform.

A lot of those present in the workshop were community champions, whose role already involves creating conversations. **Creating conversations is an important part** of the proposal. One refinement in the proposal is the focus on **taking action together**, maybe in collaboration with residents, the council, or just as the platform. A second is to have '**Citizen Officers'**, who will be volunteers across communities and bring the voices of specific communities (such as the LGBT community) into the platform. Different communities and neighbourhoods will be heard in the platform. This aim is to **always have the voices of everybody heard**, or at least try to do this as much as possible.

3. A community council run by a local party

This proposal looks to an **independent local party standing candidates to a new Community Council to enable new voices**, with a structure designed by members to prioritise this inclusion of new voices. It is important that the council won't get bogged down with the same councillors always being in power. The role of a community council as a statutory consultee on planning and with **the capacity to respond to planning matters** is important. A part of this would be the use of participatory decision making. The aim is to involve new voices in shaping the area.

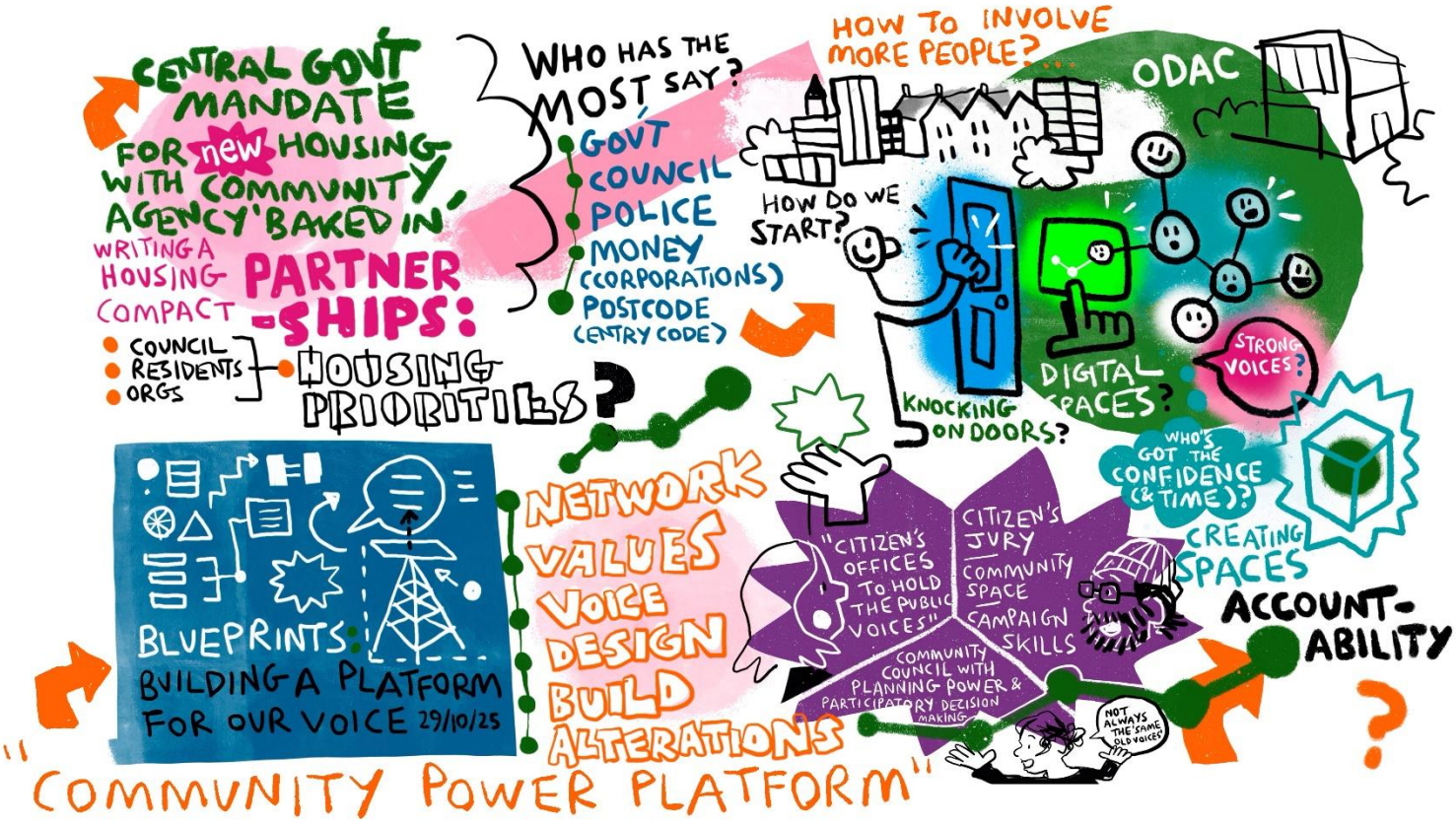
The platform would also be structured to **value and empower volunteering**. It would emphasise the value of skills-development and building relationships that happens naturally with volunteering but also empower volunteers through participatory decision-making in the community council. Alongside Community Councillors and volunteers, a Citizens' Jury would run, considering issues in an ongoing basis to keep new voices coming through.

The group was concerned that participation can be a big demand on people and for this reason there would be lower entry kinds of participation, such as voting. Participation would also include the developing of campaign skills, with a focus on not just becoming a 'talking shop' but creating practical actions leading to change.

BECOMING A VOICE FOR EUSTON

As a person in the workshop said, **we sometimes need support to 'become' our voice**. There is no coherent platform for a voice for Euston but several organisations and many people that could play a part. To become an independent clear voice for the area would take more development and confidence. The conversation about housing within the current context is important but one of many ongoing conversations. The advantage of a platform would be **an ongoing community voice that would shape the future of the area**.

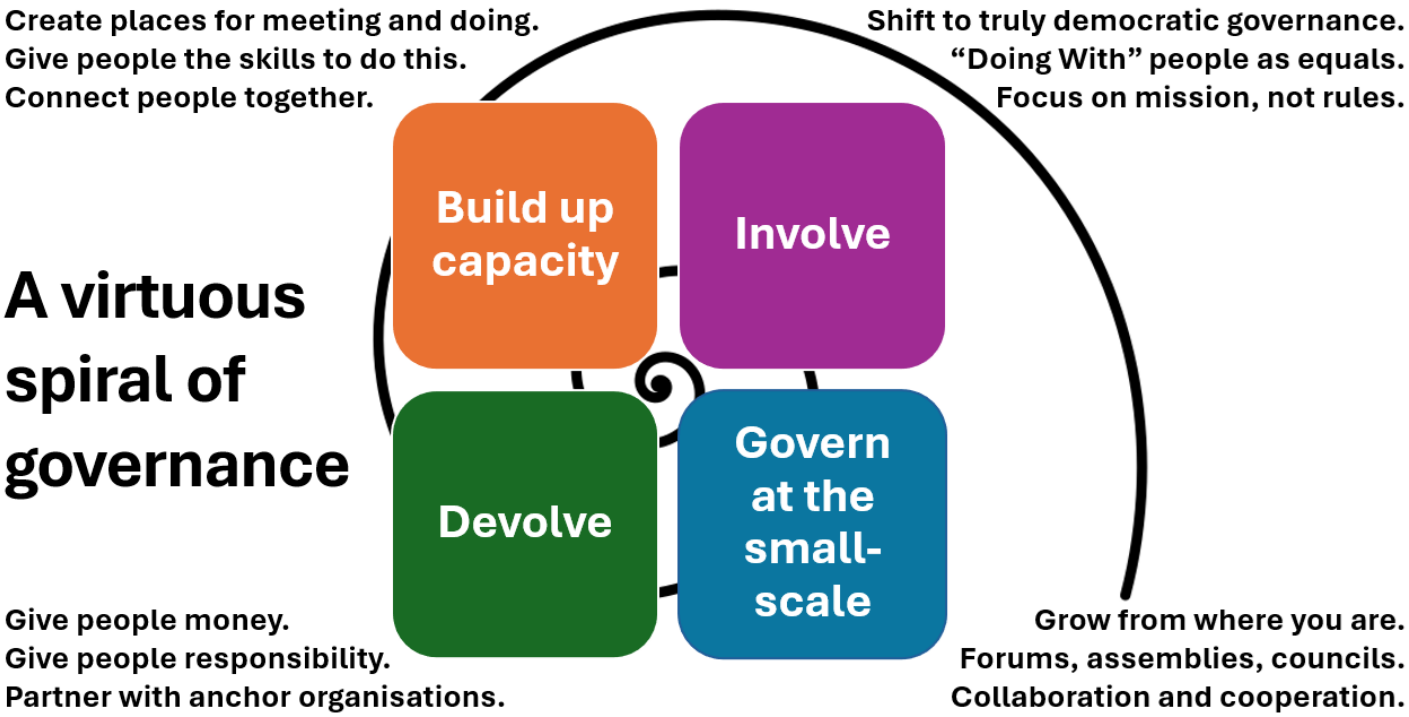
Each group had different kinds of conversation, came to different conclusions, but with some common threads. All three groups valued having **a funding stream or statutory powers**. All three wanted **inclusive participatory decision-making**, with support for creating conversations that involved new and different voices. Having spaces to meet, discuss and do was also important, alongside support for **developing campaign skills that led to action**.



Joshua Knowles drew together the themes of the workshop, capturing the discussions around who has a say, how to involve people, and different platforms.

The diagram below sets out a virtuous spiral of governance – where a community gains an independent voice. This is a continuous process to:

1. **Build** civic capacity - spaces, skills, relationships.
2. **Involve** people alongside public services in co-production.
3. **Decide** locally on grants, regulation, actions.
4. **Devolve** more responsibilities, assets and money to the area.



In building a virtuous spiral towards a platform for community voice, it is important to imaginatively consider what networks, organisations and activities are already present in the area. Building on what is already strong, keeping the process open and inclusive, can help bring partners in and reach more people. The suggestions below seek to reflect this ethos.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Training new campaigners and community voices

The development of campaign skills and new community voices came up as an important factor in the workshop. There are several ways partner organisations could do this, for example:

- Commission training sessions based in a local organisation that builds a community of practice around building campaign skills and voice.
- Create community campaigning and leadership opportunities, linking across partner organisations, including mentoring and internships.
- Hold one-off practical workshops, using local expertise, on skills related to campaigning and community voice. This could include public speaking, social media skills, campaign skills, group building.

Connecting training to transferable skills and practical impact should generate broad interest. Supportive networks, peer mentoring, and encouraging people into (and supporting within) community leadership roles would help support people to step forward. Leadership roles could include 'Citizen Officers', proposed in the workshop to be non-elected people with a role of holding conversations (for example, Kitchen Table Conversations) and advocating for their part of the community. This role is similar to the Bolton Council Peer Navigators Scheme and could both embed diverse voices in council processes alongside communicating with residents.

Creating 'One Euston'

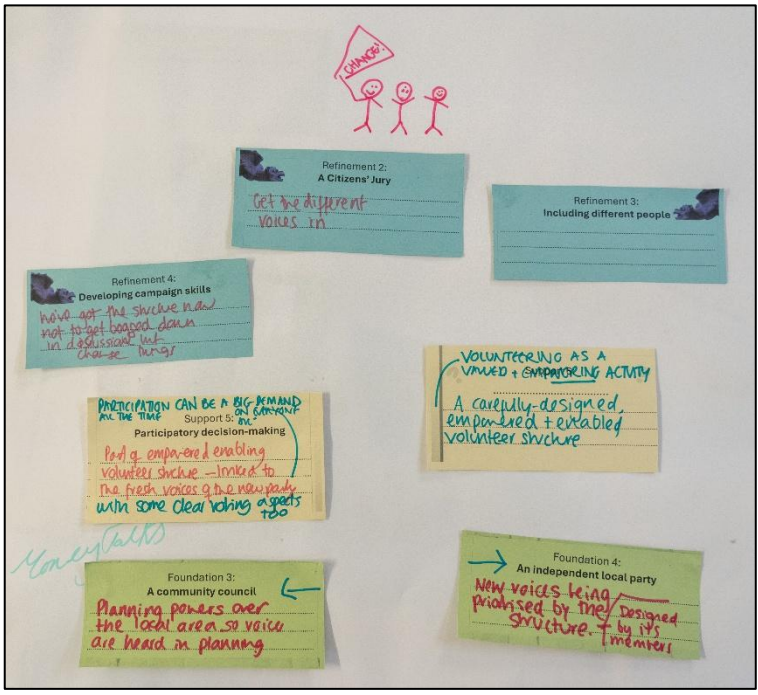
A closer integration of the organisations active in the area, with or without a Community Council, could support collaboration and sharing resources. The One Kilburn model could be explored as one to follow for the Euston Area. 'One Euston' would prioritise supporting and developing community voices, whilst encouraging collaboration across all partners in the area. It would be a way of sustaining the current partnerships built up around the current Euston development.

One opportunity could be the involvement of corporate partners and local philanthropy to support activity generating social value. Social value is increasingly a corporate priority and receives corporate donations. The need for greater linkage between corporate bodies and community is evident

around Euston and would benefit from this kind of investment. This money could be held by One Euston, or a credit union, or the Council. Different models of funding could support both ongoing community work and enable small scale activities, for example Spark Grants and Pop-up Grants.

A movement towards Euston Community Council

There was interest across all three groups in the workshop in a community council for the area. A community council would be a statutory consultee on planning matters and could independently raise funds and support community activity. A community council also has the potential to be a collaborative partner, strengthening the network of organisations in the area, alongside being a citizen-led platform for campaigning.



One of the designs in the workshop featured a community council alongside an independent local party.

Camden Council would need to undertake a Community Governance Review to establish the case for a community council. Whilst the council could take this step on its own, it is suggested that a group gather the approximately 1500 signatures (7.5% of the electorate) required to trigger a review. A petition could be a catalyst for conversations and activity, along with embedding community ownership of the process from the start.

With a constituency of around 20,000 people, a Euston Community Council could have an annual budget of £1 million (an additional cost for council tax payers of around £100 per year) to spend in the local area, independently controlled by local people. A community council has the potential for significant impact in the area; for example: hiring specialists to support community voice; giving grants to voluntary groups; and, managing community assets, However, the impact, ethos and energy of the council would in large part be determined by the movement around it.

A suggested process is set out below for how a Euston Community Council might be established:

1. A core group of partner organisations and individuals discuss and plan the initial steps.
2. The core group holds a series of discussions about forming a Community Council and what area would be covered. A council covering the wards of Regents Park and St Pancras & Somers Town appears to have the strongest case for defining a coherent community but communities bordering this should be considered.
3. If there is felt to be broad support for a Community Council, a public meeting is called to form a movement for Euston Community Council.
4. The movement gathers petitions and to draws up proposals for the Community Council to Camden Council.
5. Once the petition meets its target it is submitted to Camden Council, which will then start a Community Governance Review consultation, where the movement would submit its proposals.
6. As the review and implementation may take over a year, this period should be used to form a community vision for the area.
7. Once the timescale for the establishment of a Euston Community Council was agreed, another public meeting would set up an independent local party, having the community vision as its manifesto.

An independent local party, emerging from but still linked with partner organisations, would play an important role in maintaining the ethos. 'Euston Community Council' would follow in the footsteps of the successful Queens' Park Community Council and could be a similar scale to the independently run Frome Town Council and could learn lessons from their experiences.

The Queen's Park firework display, run by the Community Council in association with the borough council, is a highlight of the calendar.

CONCLUSIONS

Proposals written on paper can easily over-estimate how much people with busy lives and many priorities will step forward, but just as easily can under-estimate the capacity of a community to create real change. The will and interest for change was evident in the workshop, though this highlights how **any proposal needs to achieve concrete and practical outcomes**. This might mean money to spend on community projects, the power to influence decisions, or support to change personal circumstances. The proposals above imply change happening at different paces, from days to decades. That needs **long-lasting community institutions that can be a platform**, sustaining that activity, alongside continually developing community leaders in an ethos of collaboration and participation.

The above suggestions could be implemented alongside any one of the designs for a community platform. However, high ambitions for control over shaping a place would need to be tempered by the valuing of small, concrete, changes to help the many and diverse residents of the Euston area become their voice.

Presenting on a group proposal for a platform that would support community voice (©Alice Horsley).

APPENDIX 1 – WORKSHOP REFLECTION

This section talks about the format of the workshop and reflects upon it. The 'building a platform for our voice' workshop was adapted from Citizen Network's 'Neighbourhood Playbook' method for stimulating neighbourhood conversations and my own 'Build Your Own Party' workshop. It also drew on design methods for considering scenarios. The workshop had four stages:

1. Discussion about who has voice, what voice is, and what values are.
2. The community platform game!
3. Discuss how the platform would deal with challenges.
4. Share platform and discuss next steps.

The workshop format was successful but with some caveats. Step 1 involved too many conversations for participants. The discussion could start with one about diversity and inclusion of voice. Then move to discussion about who had a voice in the area and who should have a voice, then moving to the game.

The community platform game had on-screen prompts and printed cards. These cards had the foundations, supports and refinements, with space for participants to make notes on them. There were also examples on the back. The examples were difficult to grasp for some participants. It would help to have a way of making them easier to practically think about. The workshop included relatively complex themes and imagined futures. This relied on engaged participants and co-facilitation by experienced attendees.

The deepest discussion was around foundations and this was continually returned to. The examples of supports and refinements were useful to illustrate different practices – sharing learning and best practice within the workshop. However, discussion around supports and refinements would generally only be useful in planning next steps, where prioritisation might become clear (i.e. which supports or refinements would help bring about change). This stage lost some engagement, with focus only regained as each group needed to present their model to other groups, where there was a clear endpoint and there were movements towards coherence / consensus. However, the relaxation of the session around the mid-point before a focussed task may have been helpful, giving room for eating and chatting. It is not clear if a discussion around challenges and next steps could be usefully progressed in a future version. As the first in a series of discussions, this workshop was well placed to stimulate further discussion.

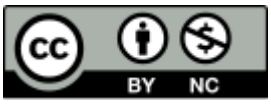
Many thanks to **ODAC** for hosting and to everyone who attended and contributed to the workshop.
Any errors and omissions in this report are my own.

Front cover is created from artwork participants at ODAC for the Blueprints festival of housing along with a photo of Regents Place, which houses ODAC.

Thanks and credit to Alice Horsley for photographs from the workshop and to Joshua Knowles for live drawing the workshop.

Dr Jason Leman is a campaigner and academic exploring the role of the hyper-local in democracy. Jason is neighbourhood democracy lead at Citizen Network. His academic study focuses on independent local political parties, town and parish councils, and the (actual and ideal) character of democracy at a local level.

Citizen Network works to connect and support global efforts to build communities that welcome, support and activate full and meaningful citizenship for everyone. we treat someone as a fellow citizen when we welcome them into our community in a spirit of equality.
Everyone can be an equal citizen.



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