

Alton Community Panel Meeting Notes

Meeting 3 – 10 Jun 2025



Main aim of the meeting

- (i) ensure Members have the knowledge of the Renewal activity they feel they need to be an effective Panel
- (ii) start to develop a resident-led Design Brief for the proposed Village Green in Danebury Neighbourhood

Panel members: Albert Balogun, Sandra Claringbould, Asma Choudhry, Tatiana Dobрева, Charles Einloth, Amanuel Gebrekidan, Nusrat Mahmood, Orleen Mcintosh, George Mills, Cameron Qali, Jane Pavitt, Jo Playford, Angus Robertson. **Plus, apologies from:** Nasharn Johns, Simone Johns

Others at meeting: Kate Batchelor (Programme Manager), Jo Baxter (Community Engagement & Cultural Coordinator) and Anna Singleton (Head of Alton Regeneration) of the Alton Renewal Team, Lucy Smith from architects HTA, Third Party Chair Daisy Froud.

A. Updates from the ARP Team

1. **Ballot communications and publicity.** Anna and Lucy thanked the Panel for their feedback on options. This is now allowing them to brief the designers who are developing resident-facing ballot imagery and materials.

ACTION: ARP Team to prepare a short feedback report of what was said by Members.

- **Ballot organisation.** The ballot voting area has now been confirmed as the whole estate. The ballot will be open for three weeks, starting 22 September. At the 16 June Council Cabinet meeting a formal decision will be taken about whether to proceed, after which more info will be available on next steps. **Post meeting note:** all recommendations were 'adopted' by the Council and the ballot will go ahead as planned.
 - **Voter eligibility?** As per GLA rules, votes are limited to (i) tenants named on a social tenancy agreement, (ii) leaseholders/ homeowners who've been living in their property for more than a year, and (iii) private tenants and people in temporary accommodation who've been on the housing register for more than a year.
 - **Panel role?** If the Panel see this as a priority, detailed info on the process can be shared at a future session, thinking with Members about what wider residents need to know. In response, several Members felt that as the ballot outcome is not something over which the Panel has direct influence, maybe we shouldn't dedicate significant *meeting* time to it. More efficient might be to share some advance reading, then use a short amount of meeting time for questions and feedback?
2. **Planning training/skill-up.** Members had said they would like to gain more knowledge of planning processes. ARP Team suggested a 1hr additional session soon with the Council's Engagement Planning Team. Most Panel members felt this would be helpful.

ACTION: ARP Team to liaise with Members re. a date for this.

B. Questions/thoughts from Panel Members

1. **Other meeting spaces?** Are there alternatives to the current rather cramped one? Jo shared its plus points: (i) we can leave kit there in between meetings, (ii) it's close to Phase 1 of the renewal, and (iii) it has disabled access. Other spaces suggested are the Manresa Club Room and the Methodist Hall.

ACTION: ARP Team to explore options.

2. **Agreeing meeting topics.** The Panel would like more input into agendas. Given (i) relatively short monthly meetings and (ii) the scale of the renewal, and many topics that *could* be discussed, it makes sense, and would be more empowering, for (a) agendas to be informed by Panel priorities and by better understanding of where they can have real influence, and (b) to have a shared forward plan of what will be looked at when.

ACTION: Meeting 4 to focus on agenda-shaping. The ARP Team and Daisy will prep an infographic timeline setting out possible areas and moments of Panel influence over 2025-26 to enable that conversation.

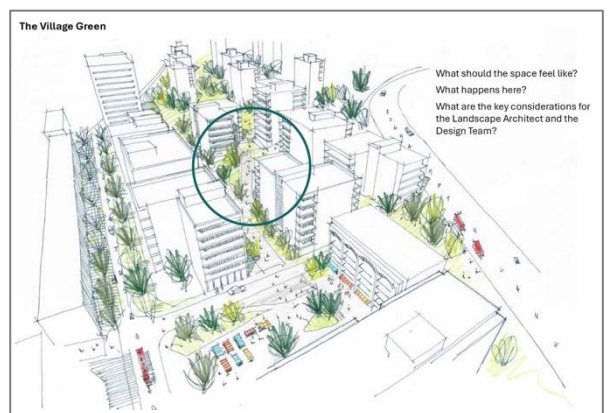
3. **Understanding renewal funding streams.** There are still questions about details of funding that the ARP Team’s written answers to Panel questions don’t yet fully capture. e.g. the relationship of the ARP £5million from the Council’s General Fund to the bigger funding pot.
ACTION: Prepare a funding infographic or similar. The ARP Team will aim to find a way to communicate this better e.g. a simple infographic, maybe combined with info from **B2** above.
4. **Possible Panel influence on housing regeneration and masterplan designs.** If the ballot is in September, how much opportunity will there be? The ARP Team clarified that the scheme voted on will be *reasonably* detailed: enough for people to make an informed decision. But it will continue to evolve. In the months leading up to the planning application in Summer ’26, and then beyond, there will be ongoing opportunities for influence, including co-design.
5. **Possible Panel influence on Block A (Family Hub).** Block A is not part of the ballot, will have its own planning application before the end of 2025, and is currently at concept design stage. While big picture decisions have been taken, there is still plenty to be shaped, and it’s important to take the time to get it right. The Panel could certainly feed into the design and planning process.

C. Developing a Design Brief for the Village Green in Danebury Neighbourhood

See slides/handouts shared at the meeting for full detail.

Anna and Lucy introduced the concept of a Design Brief: **a document prepared at the start of a design process to communicate the vision, the priorities and any requirements for a project**, as well as information on the timeframe and budget, and on any features or constraints of the site. It is **used to help appoint a Design Team** – when teams pitch for work, they will usually be scored on their initial response to the Brief - and **then as guidance for the development of designs** as the project gets underway.

Over the next couple of months, the ARP Team are preparing a Design Brief for **the Village Green – one of two significant new open spaces for Danebury Neighbourhood alongside a nearby Community Square**. The Square will be an area suitable for events and markets. The Green will offer softer, greener community space surrounded by housing. This Brief will then be used to help appoint landscape architects.



In order **to help create the Brief for a successful space in residents’ eyes**, the Team asked for Panel views on:

- **Features + Activities:** what physical elements should it contain, and what should people be able to do there?
- **Character + Qualities:** what should the space *feel* like?
- **Priorities or Challenges:** are there specific things that the Panel feel the landscape architects should understand, or think particularly carefully about, when working up designs for the site?

The Panel worked in three small groups. Their notes, and the conversation that followed, have been **combined by Daisy into the Emerging Community Brief For The Village Green on Pages 3 + 4**.

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday 15 July, 4.00- 6.00pm. This will focus on looking at potential significant areas of influence for the Panel within the renewal and work out with Members what they see as the priorities to spend time on, in order to set out a clear advance plan for future meetings. As suggested by Panel Members, discussion at the meeting might be followed up with a digital poll, as we did with the ballot comms options, to confirm priorities.

EMERGING COMMUNITY BRIEF FOR THE VILLAGE GREEN

- 1) **Overarching message:** this space needs to be **inclusive and welcoming to everyone on the estate, offering something to all residents, of all ages, but not try to DO everything.** That's a real design challenge to the architects and wider ARP Team, and involves careful thinking about:
 - **How this space relates to other open spaces in the masterplan**, particularly the Community Square. What is best located where? e.g. on the Square, or at Downshire Fields.
 - **Access and signage:** how will people find the space, know that the space is for them, understand what it offers and what it is for, and see how it connects to other spaces?
 - **Its name:** 'Village Green' suggests it's not for everyone on the estate, but for a smaller group of residents. A better name might be "Roehampton Green" or "The Heart of Roehampton".
- 2) It's important nonetheless to note that **this is a space surrounded by housing.** This means:
 - It **may not turn out to be a suitable place for noisy activity like sports**– the Panel debated the example of basketball courts - but (a) **those are needed somewhere accessible and safe on the estate**, (b) there needs to be **enough of them** – young people *need* to burn off energy, and (c) there **needs to be something engaging for teen residents in this space.**
 - Features to **support neighbours informally meeting and chatting** e.g. seating – circular benches? - **as well as collective activity** e.g. several BBQ areas, and herb, fruit & veg gardens – maybe one per block?
 - **Features to support evening use**, as many residents come outside later in the day.



CHARACTER AND LANDSCAPE

- 3) Overall the space should feel **calm, relaxing, inviting and scenic.** This could be achieved by:
 - using **softer, natural, textured materials** rather than concrete or hard surfaces – this would have a visual impact, but would absorb sound to reduce noise impact on nearby homes
 - **a meandering layout** rather than straight paths, offering a journey through the landscape
 - **seating integrated into the landscape**, as well as **grassy areas** to sit on
 - **natural play** (e.g. logs, water, boulders) instead of traditional hard-surfaced play equipment.
 - **water feature/s:** ideally something sensory and interactive, child-friendly - for summer play - and integrated into the landscape (like Japanese gardens). *The Panel note these can be costly to install and maintain; maybe one would be better located in the Square?*



- 4) There should be **different zones/ areas for different uses: balancing quieter planted spaces with more active ones**, located in ways that minimise noise to residents, **for exercise and play.**
- 5) **Trees should be carefully balanced with open areas.** Trees are important, and the Panel are interested in what species will be planted, but (i) **the space should not feel too enclosed**, (ii) there should be **ample grass for sitting on the ground/picnicking** and (iii) **the tree canopy should not be too dense** – people should be able to look down into the space from homes.



PLANTING

- 6) The Panel would like to see:
 - **Colourful, seasonal planting** - offering different character and visual interest over the year.
 - Planting that offers **vibrant views for residents** looking down from windows and balconies
 - **Sensory planting**, offering a range of textures and smells, including herb gardens.
 - **Community kitchen gardens** close to blocks, for growing fruit and veg
 - **Resilient planting**, (i) able to withstand the changing climate and seasonal weather extremes and (ii) easy to maintain.



OTHER DESIRED FEATURES

7) Wishes from the panel include:



- **Areas for children, young people and adults to play and exercise** e.g. outdoor gym, bike or skate park, basketball court (*unless these are ultimately agreed to be better located elsewhere – see Points 1 and 2*)
- **Lighting:** essential for safety and confidence after dark. Ideally this would be subtle and ambient: uplighting and pavement lights rather than glaring streetlamps.
- **Public art**, building on the Alton's tradition of this, that **reflects the community and "celebrates the new"** e.g. a plinth for rotating displays by local artists, or a mini statue or sculpture with long-term presence.
- Some kind of **shelter/canopy** for sun and rain, **signage and noticeboards**, **drinking fountain/s**, and a **dog park/areas** – there are many dogs on the estate and this causes issues with dog mess and safety in shared spaces.

PRIORITY AREAS REQUIRING CAREFUL CONSIDERATION AND SKILL FROM THE ARCHITECTS

These will need to be explored as part of the design process in conversation with residents.

- 1) **Getting the balance of uses right:** between active and calm ones, and with a mix of features to offer something for everyone, while not trying to make the space all things to all people.
- 2) **Balancing safety with access and connection:** the space must be safe for children – with barriers or buffers so they can't run into roads – and for adults, with clear sightlines. It should make a welcoming, open impression - not enclosed or cut-off - and feel linked into the neighbourhood, with clear routes in and out, and a clear connection to the Community Square.
- 3) **Inclusive access:** while softer surfacing, and meandering routes, are preferred to hard concrete and straight lines, this needs care and imagination to ensure disabled residents can enjoy it fully too, including being able to navigate the change in level across the site.
- 4) **Balancing sunlight and shade:** the Panel will want to see modelling of shadows cast by the housing blocks nearby, and be confident that there is enough sunny space, while also having the option of localised shade on hot days.

