



BARNSELY'S CREATIVE CONSULTATION PLAYBOOK

PRIDE IN PLACE
LED BY YOU - BACKED BY UK GOVERNMENT



**BARNSELY
CIVIC**

How should it be used?

The plays and case studies gathered here form a starting point rather than an exhaustive list of options and we recognise the great work being done across the country, and within the borough by local groups, community organisations, and the voluntary sector.

We recommend that the playbook is utilised, adapted, and built upon over time, and we encourage organisations to think about creating their own tailored playbook to meet their needs.



Getting Started: Playbook Fundamentals

- **Purpose & People:** Understand who you are engaging, what you are asking and why.
- **Connect:** Work with community leaders, local groups, and key organisations to learn from their experience, and connect with the right people in a way that works for them.
- **Access & Inclusion:** Devise plays that optimise access and inclusion. Think about project design, personnel, language, accessibility needs, and translation where needed in order to allow all contributions.
- **Collaborate & Co-produce:** To reach marginalised or distrustful communities, work with trusted community partner organisations and local artists, in both the planning process and in the consultation itself.
- **Feedback & Foster:** Report findings and close the loop. Amend and adapt. Keep building relationships. Learn, listen, and iterate.

“In our community, there’s quite high percentage of neurodivergence and mental health scenarios, and that needs to be recognised; how prolific it is and how we ensure that people are included without them actually having to be there in person”.

Routes to Inclusion

Creative approaches offer an alternative mode of engagement and can encourage participation of hard-to-reach demographic groups or those unlikely to take part in traditional consultation. Routes to inclusion are threaded throughout the plays and case studies contained within. It is worth considering which approaches work best for your target aims.

- Work with established and trusted groups
- Create a new group
- Use your own networks
- Meet people where they are; at drop-ins, pop-ups, community cafes, leisure sites etc
- Do a call out
- Create an at-home version
- Ask people themselves how they want to be heard



“Leaders of organisations are a trusted mouthpiece for their communities”

Our Pride in Place consultation began with a series of semi-structured interviews with organisations in the community and voluntary sector who have worked with their target communities over many years. Their experience and understanding were vital to steering the project, both in making connections and in shaping the approaches taken. Early engagement of grassroots organisations in consultation processes will support a stronger sense of participation, civic pride, belonging, and ownership.

PLAY: USE A HOOK

What is this?

A hook event or activity sees consultation embedded within an enjoyable experience or social event. They are designed to encourage participation from audiences who may not typically engage with formal consultation processes. Events are designed to be inclusive and engaging to attract a wide range of participants, and consultation is conducted as part of the experience.

How does it Work?

The 'hook' is designed to encourage people to get involved and make the process informal and accessible through something social, creative, or entertaining. A guiding principle is that people are often more willing to share their views when they are already taking part in something they enjoy.

Feedback is gathered through light-touch methods such as short surveys, discussion prompts, or interactive activities. Depending on the target audience, hook events might include gaming, arts and creative workshops, sports activities, or pop-up performances that create a relaxed environment for participation.

Facilitators are integral to guiding the process and ensuring responses are recorded through methods such as short surveys, QR codes, or written comments. Questions can be themed around the activity to make the experience feel natural and relevant.

The aim is a consultation that feels more like a social experience than a formal feedback session.

When is it Useful?

By lowering barriers to participation, hook events are particularly useful when engaging audiences that are difficult to reach through conventional consultation methods. Younger demographics for example, might respond better to participatory engagement and/or interactive formats.

Hook events also have potential to reach large numbers of people and work well as site-specific projects. This might be particularly key to gathering feedback in areas such as placemaking, regeneration, or community services where feedback from a wide range of everyday users of a space is required.

Case study: 'Play Your Part', Adaptive Gaming with 18-30 year olds

"I've never been asked my opinion before. I'd rather do it somewhere like this where there's other things going on. I'd probably just ignore it if I saw a questionnaire online"

Play Your Part was a social event designed by Adaptive Gaming to gather feedback from young adults aged 18–30 about the amenities in Barnsley Town Centre. Participants played video games and answered questions about corresponding topics such as nightlife, hobbies, transport, and the overall town centre experience. During gameplay, participants engaged in conversation, scanned QR codes linking to short surveys, and provided comments at gaming stations. Many participants noted that they had never completed a survey or been asked their opinion on civic matters.



Case Study: 'Exploring Barnsley', Mark Mark with general public in Barnsley town centre

Using street theatre with interactive elements such as song and magic, upbeat music, and striking costumes, the performance attracted attention which encouraged passers-by to stop and engage. Taking place in the town centre meant a large and diverse range of people were spoken to. As the performers 'explored' the area, members of the public were asked questions such as their favourite places to go, what brought them into Barnsley, and their thoughts on the redevelopment work. An evaluator accompanied the performers to record public responses on postcards, with many participants noting they would not have stopped to take part in consultation without the engaging performance element.

"I much prefer this kind of interaction. If I saw someone with a clipboard wanting to stop me in the street for a survey/questionnaire I'd think they were trying to sell me something or con me."



PLAY: CREATING AND MAKING

What are they?

Creating and Making asks community participants to engage in creating their own artistic response to specific questions, themes, or topics. Encouraging this method of participation allows freedom of expression and responses are given both in the process and the output itself.

How does it Work?

Participants respond to a brief or theme and are given the creative tools to allow them to shape their response. This might include using art materials, collage, textiles, ceramics, photography, creative writing – or all the above.

Consultation parameters are established to align with the project's aims and while responses can be gathered through a general call-out or advertising, engagement is most effective when facilitated by an experienced artist or practitioner who can guide and support the process.

Creating and making is a flexible approach which can be used by individuals by themselves or as a collaborative process, and can be conducted at home, in group workshops or drop-in sessions. Flexible and adaptable, creating and making can take place as a one-off or as part of longer sessional work.



When is it Useful?

Recognising that verbal or written responses are not always inclusive or accessible, creating and making encourages creative, impactful, and non-traditional responses to prompts. The varied applications mean there is potential to reach a wide range of people including those who are socially isolated.

Outputs that are visually interesting and diverse can be really impactful and perfect for

exhibiting or publication, lending colour to quantitative data or traditional data feedback. The work speaks for itself and can lead to very unique personal interpretations and insight.

Creating and making is proven to work particularly well in group settings for community building and planning sessions to encourage conversation and connection alongside the consultation work is highly beneficial when facilitated.

Case Study: 'Safe Spaces', Lucy Dewsnap with LGBTQ+

'It seems to have generated this, almost pride, in making a difference, and being part of a community.'

Safe Spaces was advertised as a creative social group for anyone in Barnsley identifying as LGBTQIA+. Participants were given a 'creative pack' which included a sketch book, art supplies, a camera, a prompt zine, and the option to attend six in-person workshops. The workshops provided an open and supportive space for reflection, expression, and connection, with participants encouraged to work in whichever medium felt most natural or inspiring to them. Artworks, a project zine, and captured conversations illuminated a range of insights from group participants and those who contributed from home. These featured in a pop-up exhibition at Barnsley Civic and the group has now evolved into a regular community craft group, Flock.



"As artists it's often about taking people on a journey with us, or us going on a journey with them"

Case Study: 'Barnsley Skylines' Nelson & Woodward with The Hut, Age UK

Barnsley Skylines was six-week skills-based engagement project using woodworking as the central activity to provoke conversations about Barnsley's history and recent changes. The group created a series of works including a balance board and key landmarks which were discussed during the sessions. This existing group work on made-to-order commissions and personal projects so the importance of planning and timing, co-production and flexibility were highlighted as a key learning.

PLAY: ARTISTIC RESPONSE

What is it?

An artist-led response sees one or more artists work directly with participants to gather and reflect ideas, experiences, and opinions in an imaginative way. The output can take many forms, including visual art, poetry, songs, or theatre, allowing the feedback to be represented in a cohesive manner that is accessible, engaging, and expressive.

How Does it Work?

The artist engages with target groups or the general public through workshops or sessions where the participants are encouraged to share their views via creative activity or conversation. These may be one-off, repeated, or involve mixed groups depending on the specific consultation aims.

While additional facilitators may support the process by collecting information, the artist's presence is crucial, as they capture both verbal and non-verbal cues and develop an understanding of overarching themes as well as individual perspectives.

The artist creates a piece of work that reflects the collected feedback. This may include direct quotations, observed behaviours, and key thematic insights. The artistic output is intended to capture the essence of the discussions, translating community voices into a format that can be shared widely.

When is it Useful?

Artist-led responses are particularly effective for reaching communities whose voices might otherwise be underrepresented, such as adults with learning disabilities or older people who cannot easily gather in one place.

Engaging with an artist over a period of time – and particularly one who is already embedded or connected with that community – allows for trusting relationships that enable participants to feel more comfortable and supported in sharing their views.

By combining responsive creativity as part of the consultation, this approach provides an accessible and compelling way to represent ideas, highlighting both individual and collective perspectives.



Case study: 'Our Voices', Becky Newbould and Christian Davis with learning disabled adults.

Our Voices grew as a collaborative response to conversations about citizenship. Delivered by an established community artist, the project involved multiple sessions in partnership with existing groups for people with learning disabilities across Barnsley. The facilitator played games within sessions to allow participants to get to know one another which acted as a springboard for conversations and discussions on the theme. A key response in this project was that participants voices were heard, as often people with learning disabilities are spoken for. This was the stimulus for the creative output, a sound installation in which participants can be heard sharing their thoughts on 'What makes a good citizen?'

"To hear your voice means you're being taken seriously... Straight away its saying to someone, 'Hey teenager-who-is-autistic, Barnsley Council take you seriously and we want to hear your voice.' And that is something they'll have never had before."

PLAY: MAP IT OUT

“No chance to break the ice with any of the groups let alone build a relationship. It’ll be in at the deep end and see what we get.”



Case study: ‘The Ballad of Belonging’, Ray Hearne with local community groups

A socially engaged poet/musician visited established local community groups in Athersley, conducting on-the-spot conversations around the theme belonging and connection to the town centre. Testing a drop-in method of working, the artist was flexible and responsive, using his skills and expertise to guide conversation and taking cues from each group. Verbatim quotes and key themes were woven into a single output: a poem reflecting both individual experiences and shared perspectives. This process enabled diverse voices to be represented in a creative engaging way, demonstrating how artistic practice can interpret and communicate community perspectives. The project also highlighted the value of longer lead times to plan effectively and build stronger connections with established local groups.

What is it?

Using maps as a tool for exploration encourages participants to interact with place in a creative manner, actively identifying and reflecting on the things that matter to them in a visual or verbal way. Mapping activities encourage discussion, collaboration, and invite suggestion, and can bring people together to consider how their community could be improved or transformed.

How Does it Work?

Maps are designed to cover a specific area or place and used in a workshop or drop-in session for people to engage with. The maps may range in size from large reusable resources to printed sheets for annotation, notes and doodling. Adding images works well or a photowalk session may be added where participants can create their own personalised maps.

Like the creating and making activities, these mapping activities are easily accessible across a range of ages and abilities due to their visual nature. They can be designed to be facilitated as part of a creative workshop session, or for short capture drop-in sessions, or be used at home.



When is it Useful?

This method is an attractive, easy-to-access, interactive method that allows freedom of expression and acts as a non-verbal conversation prompt. The visual aid, represented by street names, landmarks, photographs, or images can be a useful trigger to prompt discussion and input especially when working with people who do not respond well to verbal or written cues.

Mapping activities are most useful for place-making and community projects concerned with a specific area or theme. They are easily accessible and adaptable as drop-in activities or for deeper work and can be used across a wide range of participants including young children.

“Community groups often provide a pathway into other town centre spaces that service users become familiar with and confident to access”

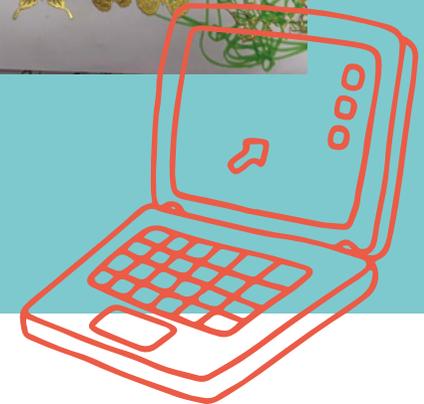


Case study: ‘Miniature Barnsley’, Barnsley Civic and BMBC

A mini-Barnsley 3D map was created for pop-up consultation at the Together at the Town Hall event. The map provided an entry point for interactions with the public who were asked to place counters to represent their usage of the area. The map acted as an icebreaker for conversation about usage and vision for the town centre (with lots of debate about which landmarks were included and which weren't!) and the interactive element allowed facilitators to engage directly whilst collecting feedback.

Case study: ‘Barnsley Map’, Helen Boutle and artists from Creative Recovery

As part of their regular Live Arts Café programme, Creative Recovery self-led on a responsive project using psychogeography-inspired mapping to explore participants’ personal connections to Barnsley town centre. Each participant received a printed map and creatively recorded their experiences, routes, and emotional responses to the town, guided by prompts such as belonging, safety, accessibility, and facilities. The session was well attended with great outputs, highlighting the great benefit of working with already-embedded community leaders and the communities they serve.



PLAY: CREATE A RESOURCE

What is it?

Engagement centres around a purpose-built tool or resource that facilitates meaningful input from participants. The resource is designed not only to attract participation but also to guide discussions and capture insights in a way that feel natural, enjoyable, and engaging.

How It Works

A resource is created or co-created according to the consultation objectives and the target audience. Examples might include board games, make-your-own zine kits, mapping activities, or interactive digital assets. The design of the resource ensures that feedback collection is embedded in the activity itself, using mechanisms such as discussion prompts, short surveys, written responses, or group exercises.

The resource might require a facilitator to guide the session in order to maintain focus on the consultation themes while supporting participants to contribute freely. The resource can be designed to be done as a one-off or rolled out to a wide range of facilitators and practitioners trained in delivery.

Making the resource adaptable means it can accommodate different delivery contexts from small group sessions to large community events, or online formats.

When is it Useful?

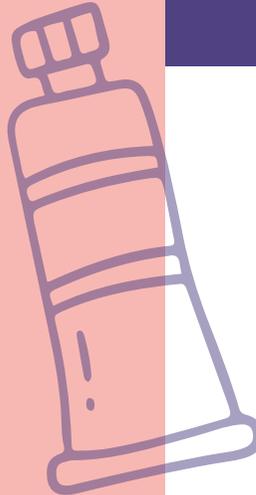
A resource can be particularly effective for groups – either existing or newly gathered – to give a focal point. Engaging in a thoughtfully designed activity opens up the potential for group discussion and an opportunity to contribute honest opinions, share diverse perspectives, and engage in collaborative exchange.

Because the consultation is built into a tangible resource, it provides a repeatable, structured framework that can be adapted to different contexts while maintaining consistency and quality of feedback.

The resource development model can turn consultation into an communal experience with the added benefit of community building.

Case study: The Barnsley Game, Chilypep/ Youth Alliance with young people

Led by Chilypep and supported by the wider members of the Youth Alliance, young people co-produced a Monopoly-inspired board game to explore local amenities, with properties grouped by themes like nature, shopping, college, eating and leisure. Blank spaces allowed participants to add features and young people included a relevant-to-them, youth-friendly and modern twist on all elements including using bank cards instead of cash. Facilitator training sessions plus the game's portability and adaptability enabled engagement in multiple settings, from structured workshops to outdoor youth work. By placing young people at the centre of design, the project showed that co-designed, enjoyable, and responsive consultation, can bring high participation, meaningful discussion, and rich qualitative insights.



“Wanted to play the game again - really like it as a consultation method. Promoted good discussion”





PLAY: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

Case study: 'Most Significant Change', Barnsley Civic

A pilot panel saw a collection of eight stories gathered from across the community and voluntary sector with the question of 'what is the most significant change that has happened in Barnsley town centre and why does it matter to you?'. Significant themes that emerged included the redevelopment of the centre and its impact, the safety and atmosphere of the town, limitations on travel and accessibility. The panel felt there was a value to hearing these personal insights which promoted discussion of common themes whilst participants commented on the opportunity to reflect and think deeply about the issues.

"As a lover of stories, the MSC framework definitely resonated with me. Focusing on what matters most to people, rather than steering evaluation in a fixed direction"

What Is It?

The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is an interview-based approach that captures the impact of projects or places through their personal stories. It focuses on participants' lived experience, using stories as data for reflection and learning. A panel of stakeholders are involved in analysing the stories as a key part of the process which means that MSC provides a platform for voices that are often unheard.

How Does It Work?

MSC begins with one-on-one interviews guided by a central question about change. The story collector then writes up each story into a short narrative, following the traditional story structure of a beginning, middle and end, which the participant reviews and approves to ensure their story has been accurately captured. A panel of key stakeholders comes together to examine the stories, discussing key themes and learnings. This collaborative and creative approach distils individual experiences into a format that is accessible, personal, and meaningful.



The cyclical process of collecting stories and running panels can create an ongoing archive of experience with regular review and reflection. The short nature of the stories also makes them ideal for wider sharing or presentation.

Who Is It Useful For?

MSC is particularly useful for organisations and community groups that want to evaluate people-focused projects or understand improvements

in services and quality of life. By its nature, it is a subjective process when very detailed, reflective insights based on lived experience are needed. The panel element encourages stakeholder engagement in discussion and decision-making, ensuring that findings are meaningful and inclusive of diverse perspectives, and it may be employed as part of organisational review, to assess specific projects.

TAKE A DEEPER DIVE: CITIZEN-LED DECISION MAKING

Citizen-led decision making is increasingly being explored across the creative and cultural sector. Assemblies and juries are being used to shape programming, organisational leadership, strategy, and wider cultural policy. Some initiatives are run by individual organisations focusing on their own venues, while others bring together multiple organisations, local authorities, and regional partners to explore broader themes and policy areas.



Deliberative Democracy

At the heart of citizen-led decision making is deliberation. Participants first learn about an issue, hear diverse perspectives, and reflect on them before reaching decisions or recommendations.

A common misconception is that these processes simply ask people for their opinions but that comes last. By providing evidence and encouraging dialogue among participants with different viewpoints, deliberation allows people to develop informed, considered positions rather than quick reactions.

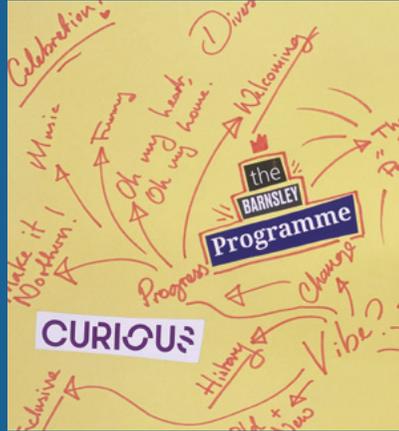
The legitimacy of the process is crucial. Participants must believe that the organisation genuinely wants to hear their recommendations and has the authority to act on them. Organisations, in turn, must trust that citizens can develop realistic and constructive suggestions.

Why It Matters

The Citizens in Power network actively promotes citizen-led decision making, highlighting its key benefits:

- **Effectiveness:** Diverse participants bring fresh perspectives and encourage innovative thinking.
- **Inclusivity:** Processes reflect the broader community, giving more people a voice.
- **Deliberation:** Participants have time to learn, discuss, and form thoughtful decisions.
- **Legitimacy:** Decisions made by representative citizens are often more credible to the wider public.
- **New Thinking:** Collaboration sparks creative solutions not always found in traditional decision-making.
- **Capacity Building:** Participants gain confidence, knowledge, and skills, often inspiring ongoing civic engagement.





Formats and Key Principles

Effective deliberative processes include three core elements; clearly defining authority, using a civic lottery to create representative groups, and structuring sessions for learning, reflection, discussion, and recommendation development. Types of formats include:

Citizens' Juries: Smaller, focused groups examining specific issues in depth.

Citizens' Assemblies: Larger groups addressing complex policy or strategic questions over longer periods.

Citizens' Panels: Flexible groups used when processes don't fit jury or assembly models.

Applications in the Creative Sector

Arts and cultural organisations can apply deliberative democracy to:

- **Cultural Programming:** Themes for festivals, public art priorities, and funding allocation.
- **Institutional Futures:** Directions for museums or theatres, inclusion, and community engagement.
- **Cultural Policy:** City or regional cultural strategies, funding priorities, and creative economy planning.

When well-designed, these processes produce practical, thoughtful recommendations, moving citizen participation beyond consultation toward shared decision making. More resources are available through the Citizens in Power network.

Application in Policy Development & Local Democracy

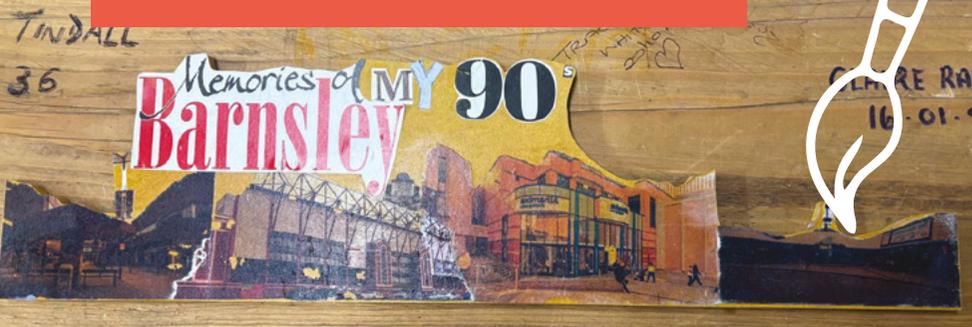
In the UK, citizen-led decision-making processes have already been applied at local and regional levels of government. They have been used to address specific areas of policy development e.g. SYMCA's *South Yorkshire Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change*, and the current *Citizens of Culture Assembly* in the West of England exploring cultural policy making for the whole of the region.

In Ireland they have taken things a step further with a national Irish Citizens' Assembly being formed by an Act of Parliament to explore a wide range of contentious issues. This led to the historic vote to legalise abortion in Ireland in 2018.

Citizen-led processes when first explored were often one-off affairs that produced a set of recommendations and then finished their work. In many cases, this led to a lack of concrete delivery and a level of disillusionment among participants. More recent approaches have sought to build iterative processes which maintain ongoing relationships throughout a whole programme of research, deliberation and delivery, with citizen returning to deliberative processes multiple times to assess progress and ongoing planning. This has resulted in much more significant and long-lasting societal impacts.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



- **Culture Works:** Arts and cultural activities can enable richer dialogue and outputs either in complement or apart from traditional methods of capture.
- **Thoughtful Design:** Effective planning is essential, and clarity of purpose and intended outcomes should guide every step. Consideration should also be given to the needs, experiences, and contexts of the people you are trying to reach to ensure meaningful engagement.
- **Local Partners:** Collaborating and learning from grassroots organisations or individuals who are already doing the work allows for more authentic voices to be heard from disconnected communities.
- **It Takes Time:** Rushing the process can be counter-productive and lead to distrust. Build in time and space for deeper engagement and to allow more considered responses to emerge.
- **Close the Loop:** Follow up with the people you consulted so they see the impact of their contributions. Throughout a practical delivery process continue to consult and engage with consulted communities to assess whether the interventions are matching their expectations. Continued engagement and constant dialogue will help to build trust and promote future participation.
- **Organic Momentum:** The more we listen the better chance we have for new cultural and community initiatives that foster pride and cohesion. We hope the project will have a ripple effect on how we listen to and engage on all levels across the Borough.

THANKS

This project of community pilots and consultation involved a significant amount of collaboration, input, and shared learning. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of time, insight, and expertise offered by the many groups, individuals, and organisations who contributed along the way.

While we worked closely together throughout the project, time constraints meant that participants were not directly involved in the development and content of this playbook. However, we hope this will be a starting point and look forward to the possibility of developing a more fully co-produced version in the future.

Our warmest thanks to the generous members of the public and participants who contributed their views, creativity, and time to this project, and to all the artists, creatives and organisations who facilitated and contributed to the learning including:

Action for Autism, Adaptive Gaming, Ad Astra, Age UK (The Hut), ArtWorks, Athersley Cares, Barnsley College, Barnsley Council, Barnsley CVS, Barnsley FC Community Trust, Barnsley Libraries, Barnsley Premier Leisure, Barnsley Refugee Advice Project – Refugee Council, Barnsley Youth Alliance, Becky Newbould, BYouth, Catherine Copley, Chilypep, Christian Davis, Citizens in Power, Creative Recovery, David Jubb, Helen Boutle, HOPE in the Community, Kaine Williams, Knit and Natter at Roundhouse library, Learning for Living and Working at Barnsley College, Lucy Dewsnap, Mark Mark, Mark Robinson, Mark Tillotson, Mencap Barnsley, Nelson & Woodward, Ozone at Barnsley Football Club, Ray Hearne, Rheanna Webster, Ruby Chandler, Thinking Practice, YMCA Barnsley.

If you would like to connect with any of the artists and facilitators who worked on this project, please get in touch via Barnsley Civic.

