

## Digital engagement with younger people key to addressing planning challenges

By **Ciaran Nerval** | Mon 23 October 2023

**Utilising social media and digital technology is key to engaging the younger “silent majority” to help more schemes gain planning approval, according to a panel of experts at last week’s Developers Club conference.**

The panel at the Future of Development event held on Friday (20 October) at the Royal Society of Medicine in London agreed engaging with the younger generation through social media was vital in getting a more accurate and wider community response to developments plans.

John Walker, head of UK and European real estate and infrastructure at CT Group, argued more schemes would get approval if younger people engaged more with schemes.

“You look at any local newspaper, and you’ve got the line “hands off our fields” – I guarantee you 99 out of 100 of them look like me,” Walker said.

“They’re white, they’re old, they’re the voice because the younger generation don’t get a voice. We need to reach out to the wider but silent majority. Local authorities need to use social media. I think we will get there in the end, but we’re not quite there yet.”

Walker also said the current system was “far too complicated”.

“We need to go back to basics. What does it look like? How big is it? What’s the land use? What’s the impact on daylight and traffic. We need to take out all the other stuff that’s been bolted on over the decades.”

Rosey Cassidy, director at Newman Rosey Property Group, agreed and said technology could be used to add more “transparency in the communication process” during a scheme’s planning phase.

“If there was a mutual space, where everyone can upload documents, everyone can see what’s there,” Cassidy said. “That sort of transparency would push everyone in the right direction.”

She added: “There’s too much human bias. With these big schemes, planners get to put their name

on the city, or they get to be the person that turned down the big scheme. They get more attention, whereas the little schemes somewhat fall by the wayside and they go to the bottom of the list.”

Chartered town planner Fidel Miller added “further integration of digital technologies into the system” was key in speeding up the planning process.

He said: “We’re heading in that direction. We need the push towards digitisation, but it needs to be people focused as well: digital engagement tools for people to engage with the system and feed into the visions for a development, which creates much more legitimacy.”

The Developers Club was set up by entrepreneur property developers **Tex Jones and Shiro Rauniar**, to encourage young, upcoming small and medium-sized housebuilders to gather, network and share ideas.