

APRIL NEWSLETTER

April just walked in wearing sunshine and a side of springtime joyful mayhem. It has a way of bringing a little extra energy, the kind that nudges you to dust off your ideas, step outside a bit more, and actually follow through on the things you said you would start. It is a season for fresh starts, small wins, and seeing what happens when you just go for it.

We hope you had a great Easter break and found time for meaningful moments with family and loved ones.

Over the past month, we have been out there connecting, sharing ideas, and building alongside some really great people.

Things feel like the world has turned the brightness up and forgotten to turn it back down.

As we move further into the season, we are leaning into it properly. More conversations, more action, more “yes, let’s try that and see what happens.”

So let’s keep showing up, keep backing each other, and see where all this slightly magical spring energy takes us.

Here's what else we've been part of recently:

Recent Community Actions

Launch of the BDCVS Plus model

Barking & Dagenham Council for Voluntary Service(BDCVS) is one of the oldest CVS organisations in the country, with 83 years of heritage supporting community action, social welfare and volunteering in Barking and Dagenham. At their Annual General Meeting last month, they launched the CVS Plus Model as a strategic shift away from traditional infrastructure support toward a broader, system-wide approach grounded in community power, collaboration and social justice. Recognising that conventional capacity-building functions are no longer sufficient on their own, the model is built on core principles of solidarity, social justice and community power. It focuses on resource pooling, networks and coalitions, practitioner forums and integrated community practice, with the goal of designing services in co-production with local organisations, promoting inclusion and ensuring community assets are not overlooked in delivery.

Line Dancing at Hockley Mews

Hockley Mews/Thames View Lodge Elders Group Project, delivered by Thames Life, supports residents aged 55 and over in an independent living complex in Thames View, many of whom have mobility issues or mild dementia.

Through activities led by our community organiser Marion Hull, the project helps reduce isolation and brings residents together, improving connection and wellbeing, as seen in residents enjoying learning to line dance



Upcoming events



Get your fingers moving and lend a hand to the BFF team. They are doing an amazing job keeping a green space alive in what can feel like an dystopian reality of concrete. Join them at the Terrible Gardeners Club, every Saturday from 12 to 2pm at the Barking Food Forest.

BD HOUSING JUSTICE



Thursday 23rd April 2026
Arrive at 5.30 pm for a 6 pm start

St Margaret's Parish Church, The Broadway, North Street, Barking IG11 8AS



After listening to 500 people in Barking & Dagenham as part of our Housing Enquiry, we will be putting our asks to candidates for local government and to build an accountable relationship with the next Leader of Barking & Dagenham Council.

Our asks will include Work & Wages, including a clear commitment to deepen our work to ensure fair pay across the borough so that all workers can meet the real cost of living and plan for a secure financial future through Living Hours and Living Pensions



Contact emmanuel.gotora@citizensuk.org

Citizens UK Charity is a Registered Charity, No. 1107264.
Address: Jacquard Point 1 and 3, Tapestry Way, London, E1 2FJ
www.citizensuk.org



Barking & Dagenham Citizens is a broad-based alliance of local organisations and residents working together to strengthen the borough and improve everyday life for those who live and work there. Through its Citizens Assembly, the alliance brings together diverse institutions from across Barking & Dagenham to collectively present “asks” to local government candidates.

The Assembly focuses on demonstrating the strength and unity of the borough’s communities, celebrating the wide range of institutions that make up Barking & Dagenham, and holding local leaders to account on the issues that matter most. In doing so, Barking & Dagenham Citizens works to make the borough a better place to live and work, and the best place to raise a family.

Deslightful Social



A few of our staff and trustees got together for dinner at a cozy restaurant last month. It’s always great to relax with the team and catch up on things beyond work.

One of our most active resident and campaigner for Housing Justice, Paul Scott penned an article expressing his concerns Over Increased Density at Barking Riverside.

Through the residents' eyes

I believe that the scale of housing proposed for Barking Riverside over the next 20 years is excessive and raises serious social, environmental, public health and fire safety concerns, concerns that have only intensified following the recent London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD) Planning Committee decision to approve an increase in density.

At the recent planning meeting, residents and community groups expressed strong objections to the intensification of development. Despite these concerns, the plans have moved forward. This decision has heightened anxiety among those who live and work in the area and who will be directly affected by these changes.

As someone actively involved in local community groups, I share the concerns raised at that meeting. The proposed 13,046 housing units on Renwick Road represent an unsustainable level of density in an already congested area. There is a clear risk that existing infrastructure will be overwhelmed unless there is substantial and guaranteed investment in essential services such as NHS facilities, schools, transport links, community centres and accessible green spaces. There must also be a stronger commitment to delivering genuinely affordable social rented housing.

These concerns are echoed more broadly by Duncan Bowie, former Greater London Authority lead planner, who has questioned the suitability of such large-scale, high-density development. He has highlighted ongoing issues with the Barking Riverside masterplan, particularly the lack of adequate social infrastructure and appropriate housing mix. He has also suggested that lower and medium rise housing would better serve the needs of the community.

Environmental risks further compound these concerns. Barking Riverside is in a flood risk area, and climate change is expected to increase water levels over time. Building high density residential blocks in such conditions raises serious long term safety questions.

Fire safety is another critical issue. Many proposed buildings exceed heights that can be effectively reached by London Fire Brigade ladders, typically around 10 storeys, increasing potential risks to residents.

In conclusion, while new housing is necessary, the current approach prioritises quantity over quality and safety. The recent approval of increased density should be reconsidered to ensure development is sustainable, balanced and truly serves the long-term interests of the community.

Celebrating Memories, Cherishing Legacy

**A tribute to Tribute to Pip
Salvador Jones, by Matt Scott**



Pip was among one of the most wonderful inspiring people I have ever worked with. Simple as that. I couldn't claim to know her very well but well enough to have relied on her judgement and support when it really mattered. I've done welfare rights advice several decades ago as a volunteer in a Claimants Union, enough to know how challenging that work is, but I cannot really imagine how phenomenally demanding leading the Citizens Advice Bureau, as Pip did for so many years, must have been. All I have is massive respect for the importance of the role and what it takes to do it. Likewise, her leadership as chair of the CVS (Council for Voluntary Service), as a lynchpin of the values of our sector, amidst the waxing and waning of other interventions and projects.

Some of what I remember about Pip is her clarity about issues and processes, her exceptional strategic insight about how to break complex issues down and execute processes. How to navigate the professional jargon, which Pip would have called something else, some choice profane words perhaps. None of the bureaucratic oppression that she daily wrestled with phased her, it was always a direct approach – here's what we are going to do. Very refreshing. Here was someone who had the answers and wanted to get on with it. Fighting for justice in the advice world – that is a tough job. To do it with such drive, humour, panache – that is rare indeed.

There are so many memories of Pip speaking up, telling it as it is, counselling a certain approach to be taken, analysing, explaining, fighting, listening deeply, standing in solidarity, uplifting and empowering, checking and challenging in all directions. Being her authentic self in settings where people are stuck behind performative masks. I remember her speeches at some of the large events we put on – most

recently on housing justice and resilience, and her words were powerful. Everyone felt them. They went to a different level.

I struggle with knowing what to do with grief and losing people that have occupied an important place in our lives, whether professional or personal. Because there is not much maybe that can be done, only experienced, processed. It must be both intensely frustrating and rewarding to work in the advice field as Pip did, so excellently. For a while I shared that sense of frustration and joy in the work we were involved with together and am left with a sense of yes, frustration, and sadness, because the that person is no longer there and all the windmills they tilted at, all the big problems they took on, remain, seemingly bigger than ever. I also hold on to my appreciation for having worked with and known Pip, and marvel at all the lives she uplifted and supported.

Through the CEO's lenses

Dialogue, Delay, Deflect and Co-opt – recognising patterns in regeneration and development, Blog by Matt Scott

Looking back at earlier work on community development, I was reminded of a set of patterns widely documented in community organising and planning literature. They tend to surface most clearly in regeneration and development contexts, where there is a structural imbalance of power between developers, institutions, and local communities.

The first is **dialogue**. Consultations are launched, workshops held, engagement plans rolled out. On paper, this reflects good practice. But too often the effect is to move issues out

of public space and into controlled environments where they can be discussed at length without resolution. The process itself becomes the output. Time passes, energy drains, and communities are left with the sense of involvement without meaningful influence over outcomes.

The second is **delay**. Development operates through complex systems, and processes such as feasibility studies, viability assessments, funding cycles, and planning approvals are part of that reality. However, these can also function, intentionally or not, as mechanisms that slow momentum. Urgency dissipates, community pressure weakens, and proposals that once faced strong challenge begin to progress with reduced scrutiny.

The third is **deflection**. Responsibility is difficult to locate. Developers point to planning policy or viability constraints. Local authorities point to funding pressures or statutory limits. Decisions sit elsewhere, or nowhere clearly at all. While these constraints are often real, the cumulative effect can be a lack of accountability, where communities struggle to identify who can actually say yes, no, or do something differently.

The fourth is **co-option**. This is often framed as partnership or inclusion. Community representatives are invited onto boards, advisory groups, or into paid roles. Sometimes this is genuine and constructive. But it can also involve selectively bringing individuals closer to power in ways that soften challenge, fragment collective voice, or shift loyalties. In its more direct form, co-option can simply mean buying people off through opportunities, contracts, or influence so that opposition is diluted or neutralised.

Over time, these dynamics do more than just influence process. They can begin to narrow the scope of what is considered possible, steering discussions toward pre-determined outcomes while presenting them as open.

Community concerns may be acknowledged in language, but not in substance. The result can be a form of managed agreement, where people are encouraged to accept conclusions that were never genuinely up for debate. None of this is new. Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation highlighted decades ago the difference between tokenism and genuine power. Saul Alinsky wrote extensively about how power operates and why communities must understand it to act effectively. John Gaventa's work on power and participation, alongside planning theorists such as Patsy Healey, continues to show how these dynamics persist in modern regeneration contexts.

For those working in regeneration, community-led development, or partnership with developers, this matters. Not because engagement should be dismissed, but because it needs to be honest about where power sits. Without that, engagement risks becoming a process that manages dissent rather than shaping outcomes.

For residents and community groups, the challenge is to engage with greater awareness and on clearer terms. That means:

- Being clear on **what decisions are actually open to influence**
- Asking for **timelines tied to delivery, not just consultation stages**
- Identifying **where real decision-making power sits**
- Staying organised and aligned as a group, even when individuals are invited into formal roles
- Recognising when inclusion is meaningful and when it may be diluting collective voice

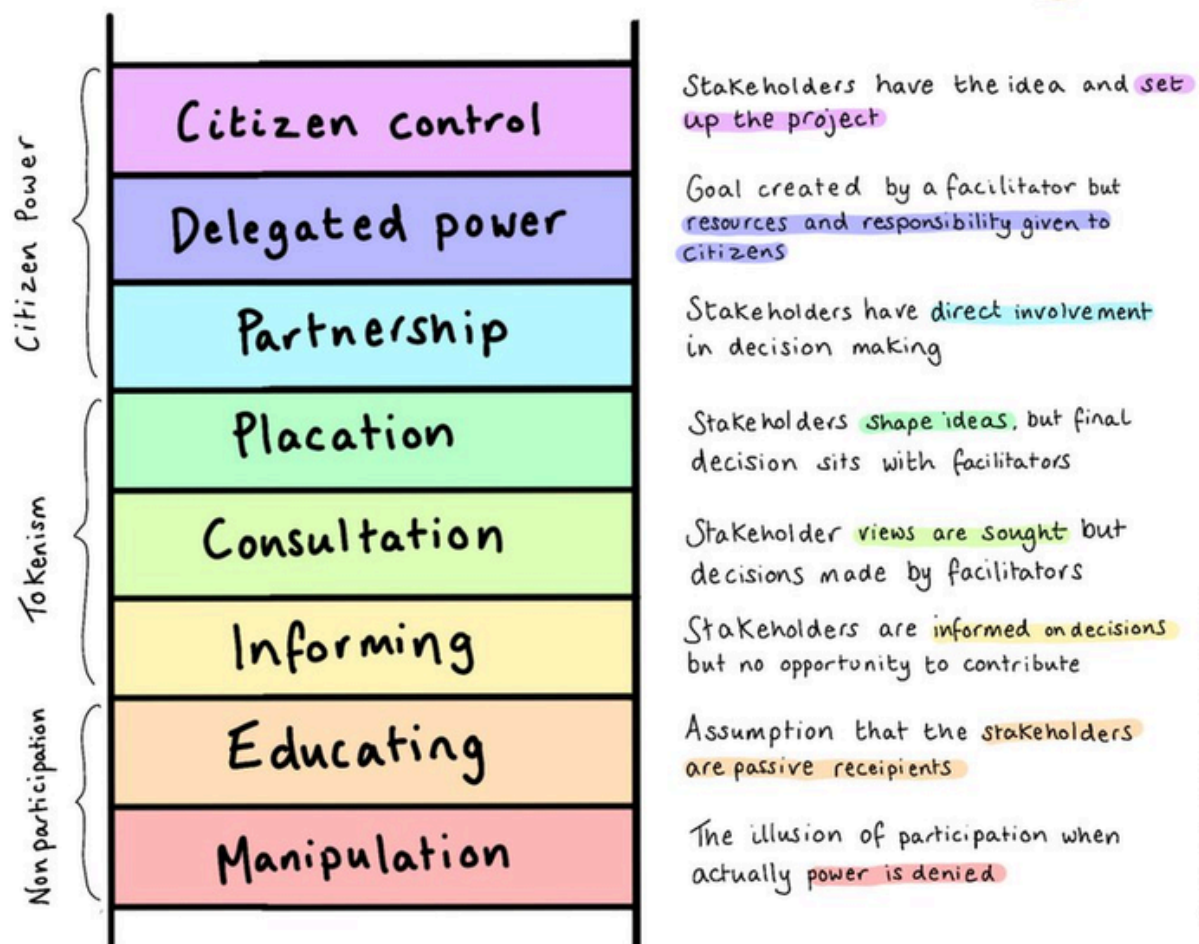
It also means recognising when engagement is no longer productive. There are moments where continued participation simply legitimises a process that is unlikely to

change outcome. In those cases, stepping back, regrouping, or shifting strategy can be a rational and necessary choice, rather than a failure. Not every table is the right one to sit at. At its best, regeneration can deliver real social value and long-term benefit. But that depends on moving beyond process for its own sake, towards engagement that genuinely shares power and leads to action.

Because without that, dialogue is just a holding space, delay is a reflex tactic, deflection is the go-to move to obscure responsibility, and co-option sows division all in order to control and steer outcomes while presenting them as imaginary consensus.

Ladder of Participation

(Arnstein, 1969)

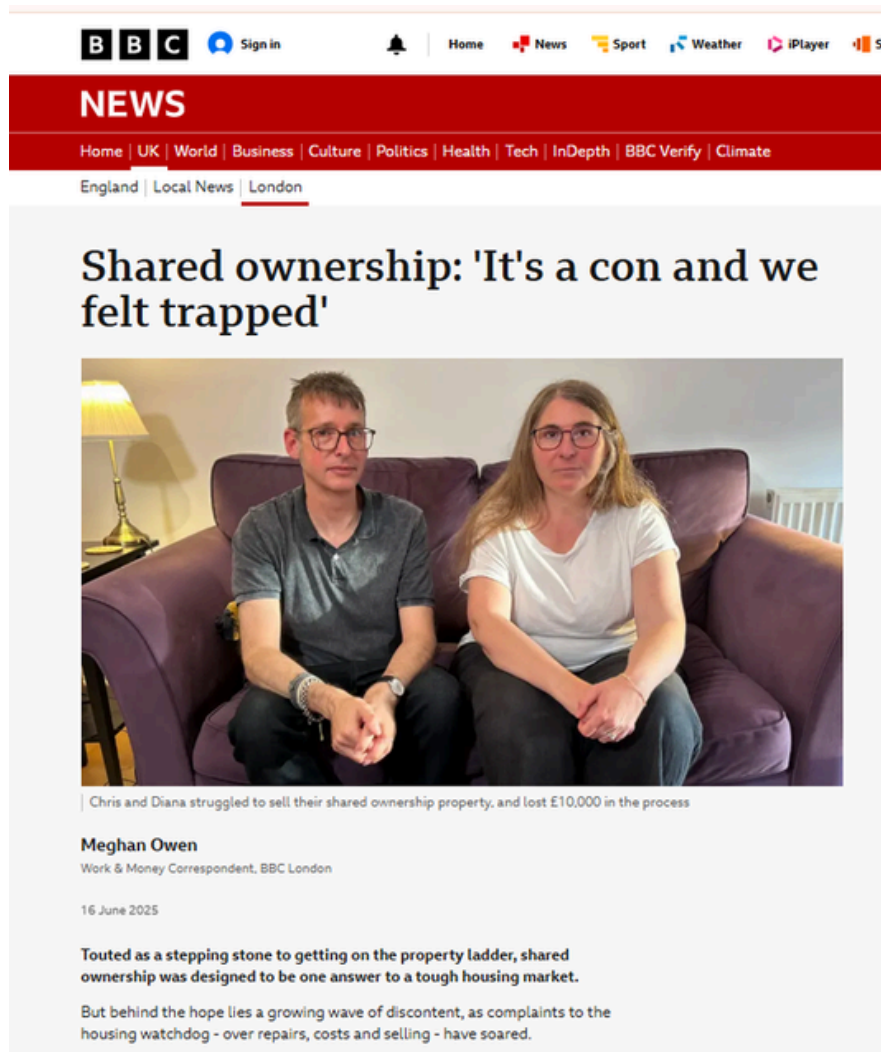


@creative.clinical.psychologist

Drawn by Juliet Young

In other news

A BBC report highlights how some shared-ownership homeowners feel “trapped,” facing rising costs, service charges, and limited control despite part-owning their homes. It raises concerns that the scheme, meant to help people onto the property ladder, can leave buyers with the downsides of both renting and owning.



The image is a screenshot of a BBC News article. At the top, the BBC logo is visible next to a 'Sign in' button. Navigation links for Home, News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, and Search are present. Below this is a red banner with the word 'NEWS' in white. Underneath the banner, a row of links includes Home, UK, World, Business, Culture, Politics, Health, Tech, InDepth, BBC Verify, and Climate. A secondary row of links shows England, Local News, and London. The main headline of the article is 'Shared ownership: 'It's a con and we felt trapped'' in a large, bold, black font. Below the headline is a photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a purple sofa. The man is wearing a grey polo shirt and glasses, and the woman is wearing a white t-shirt and glasses. Below the photo, a caption reads: 'Chris and Diana struggled to sell their shared ownership property, and lost £10,000 in the process'. The author's name, 'Meghan Owen', is listed below the caption, followed by her title 'Work & Money Correspondent, BBC London'. The date '16 June 2025' is also present. At the bottom of the article preview, there is a short summary: 'Touted as a stepping stone to getting on the property ladder, shared ownership was designed to be one answer to a tough housing market. But behind the hope lies a growing wave of discontent, as complaints to the housing watchdog - over repairs, costs and selling - have soared.'

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Shared ownership: 'It's a con and we felt trapped'



Chris and Diana struggled to sell their shared ownership property, and lost £10,000 in the process

Meghan Owen
Work & Money Correspondent, BBC London

16 June 2025

Touted as a stepping stone to getting on the property ladder, shared ownership was designed to be one answer to a tough housing market.

But behind the hope lies a growing wave of discontent, as complaints to the housing watchdog - over repairs, costs and selling - have soared.

Another article worth looking into highlights that London's mayor has approved temporary 'emergency' planning changes, cutting affordable housing targets and relaxing design rules (such as requirements for dual-aspect homes) to make developments cheaper and easier to build. The aim is to revive stalled housebuilding in London, although critics warn that this could reduce housing quality and the number of genuinely affordable homes delivered.

London Mayor OK's cuts in affordable and dual-aspect homes to boost housebuilding

27 MARCH 2026 • BY GINO SPOCCHIA

[mbm-gallery-fullwidth]

A lower affordable housing quota has come into effect in London after mayor Sadiq Khan signed off temporary 'emergency' measures to encourage housebuilding in the capital

Earlier this week (25 March), the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) said a fast-tracked planning route for schemes meeting a 20 per cent affordability threshold had been agreed and signed off by the mayor.

It means schemes which achieve this lower proportion – a 15-point reduction from the 35 per cent under current GLA guidance – will in theory secure approval quicker.

The AJ understands this comes into force immediately, alongside changes to remove the requirement for dual-aspect homes from London's design guidance, which the MHCLG and GLA hope will help end London's long-running housebuilding struggles.

These articles demonstrate that shared ownership schemes and relaxed building regulations can result in fewer benefits for individuals, either by trapping buyers or by reducing the affordability and quality of new homes.

and last but not the least...

Have you spoken to a Thames Life researcher in your neighbourhood?

In recent weeks, our independent Thames Life researchers have been out across Barking Riverside and Thames View, in community spaces and door to door, having real conversations with residents about their experiences.

This work builds a genuinely independent picture of local life, shaped by what people actually think and feel, not what fits a narrative.

Too often, developer led consultations have offered limited options, steering responses and leaving little or no meaningful way for residents to register disagreement. When feedback is filtered, managed, or commissioned by those with a vested interest, it risks reinforcing decisions rather than challenging them.

Nothing will change without honest, independent and unbiased insight.

That is why our approach is different. Guided by the Thames Life Resident Charter, our research is:

independent of developers

transparent in its purpose

open to all views, including criticism and disagreement

These are not PR exercises. They are real conversations, led by residents, for residents.

Our latest round of engagement is now complete, and findings will be shared in the coming months.

If you would like to share your views in a safe, independent space, we would love to hear from you. Get in touch with Thames Life directly at info@thames-life.org.

Because meaningful change starts with listening, properly.

That's it from us!

Hasta la vista till next month.

**Until then, keep being the change that you
want to see in society.**

