



# Engaged: a toilet on every high street

An alternative model for high street provision

## Final Report

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## Engaged: A short summary

Engaged ran as a design research project, to think about a simple concept of reusing vacant high street units as toilets (plus commercial or community space), and to grow the idea, rather than to implement an idea that had already been figured out.

It wasn't just about the physical design.

We explored how it would fit into current systems and infrastructure by speaking with people within retail, community safety, government, and urban design.

Once we had an idea of how it could be implemented (within councils, through regeneration) we spoke with regeneration officers to think about how they could make it happen. This was through alternative (non-toilet related) funding streams. The council would oversee the design, build and management of the toilets but a business could be incentivised to supervise and maybe clean it.

We learnt about the problems within this task through interviews with pub staff responsible for toilets. We also found where the gaps are in current toilet provision by speaking with the public within the existing neighbourhood in Hackney Central.

We know that public toilets are a complex topic where there's a lot that can go wrong. This is why public toilets are in such a sorry state currently. Our awareness of these different challenges led us to look in all these different directions, to understand what the public want, what the councils can achieve and where the system will trip them up.

The limitation is that we haven't explored any one aspect at greater depth to a point where we have all the answers. Instead, we've uncovered a few key areas, that have the most potential to pursue, and where we have evidence to support future, focused studies to really fix the problems.

Key areas or 'outcomes' for Engaged:

- **Closed & Temporary Toilets.**
- **Future Inclusive Toilets.**
- **Lootopia and the High Street.**
- **Toilets in the 24-hour City.**
- **Talk Toilets.**

These key areas form our future plans. Each has an explanation in the next chapter.

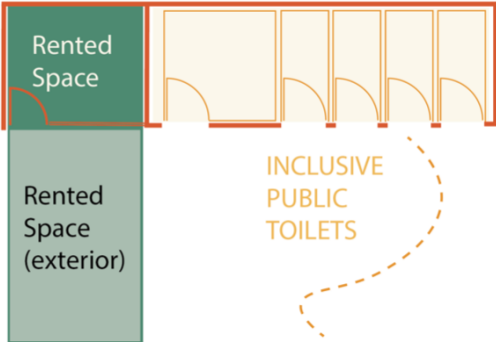
# Part 1: What's next for Engaged?

## Closed & Temporary Toilets

After speaking with regeneration officers in particular, we recognised that there were two **alternative models of Engaged** that don't use empty commercial space, that might have more potential to be funded.

- 1. Existing, sometimes closed, public toilet buildings, that could be extended or refitted to include a business.

We drew up a simple concept for the public toilet block at The Narrow Way in Hackney Central, to show what it could look like with an extension to house a business.



*Concept for a cafe extension to an existing toilet at The Narrow Way, Hackney. © PiM.Studio Architects.*

This is something we also featured in our application as precedents to Engaged, including a public toilet block in Clapton where local residents tried for years to repurpose it as a cafe + toilet (now closed) and in Kensington, where architecturally-acclaimed public toilets + flower shop were built at local residents' request.



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## Brooksby's Walk Public Toilets | Clapton

Public toilet + community cafe

- Clapton Improvement Society (CIS) fought to save the closed toilets, to support Chatsworth Road's regeneration projects, including a market.
- CIS reopened the toilets (2011) with a peppercorn lease from Hackney Council.
- CIS and NANA community cafe restored building as a cafe space (2013), with a public toilet.
- 'Brooksby's Walk' bar + restaurant (2015), keeping unisex toilet access to support the market.
- status: now an empty hospitality unit (with public toilet attached)

IMAGE (clockwise from top-left): Royal College of Art; Clapton Improvement Society; Google Streetview; Brooksby's Walk



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## Westbourne Grove Public Toilet | Notting Hill

Public toilet + flower shop

- Free-standing award-winning public toilet building with retail space.
- Designed in 1994 by architects CZWG, who added the retail unit at residents' request.
- Income from the unit - run as a flower shop - offsets the cost of running the attended facility.
- status: open

IMAGE: Londonist



This is also a model that features quite widely in London but in a different context – public toilets within parks are increasingly attached to a café, with a separate entrance and no requirement to be a customer. For example, both sets of public toilets at the Queen Elizabeth Park in Stratford, built for the 2012 London Olympics, have this design.

### What next?

We, or council officers, could learn a lot by speaking with parks departments, managers and the café staff within park toilets of this design. This could be captured in a report or bank of case studies around alternative or novel models for toilet provision.

### How would this benefit Londoners?

A lot of the challenges of footfall, anti-social behaviour, business incentives, contracts, cleaning and management schedules and impact on business finances must already have been addressed for this to be a successful model.

So,

- What have they put in place to make this work?
- What would be different about a high street setting?
- How could we adapt the model, if necessary, to work for the high street?

Capturing and sharing this knowledge between council departments and across boroughs would have a real benefit for decision-making around how to provide new models of toilet provision.

### What would we need to make this happen?

A small amount of funding (<£10K) to conduct the interviews and capture the findings to share with councils. It would be prudent to work with a dissemination partner, such as a regional authority, member organisation or charity in public space/regeneration (GLA, London Councils, Locality, LGA etc..) who can advise of the best format for the findings, and the network to share them with the right people.

## 2. Toilets as temporary structures, for meanwhile-use land.

Several regeneration officers who we spoke to were looking at how to get the most out of land set-aside for future development, but where that work would not start for years and the land was sat empty.

These projects have led to box parks, markets and pop-up entertainment venues, all of which require toilets to function effectively.

Two projects in Hackney that we spoke with were both considering this set-up: one because the land where they wanted toilets was owned by TfL, so they needed a temporary structure (it actually needed to be removed each week); and the other was already introducing containers to extend the appeal and occupancy of an existing market, through larger business incubation spaces.

Based on this, PiM.studio Architects developed design concepts for inclusive public toilets within the dimensions of shipping container. These included designs for one container split into toilets + activity, a two container model where one is the container and the other the activity. Activities include a toy library, co-working space, and welfare hubs for delivery drivers.

The containers can be arranged and positioned to create an attractive, public space between them, and which consider biodiversity, sustainability, and flexibility, for example, if there is no sewer connection or to use renewable energy.



*Design for toy library, toilets and public space, using shipping containers. © PiM.Studio Architects.*

### What next?

We will share the design concepts through Engaged dissemination and PiM.Studio Architects portfolio of work.

### How would this benefit Londoners?

This demonstrates an affordable way to implement inclusive public toilets within a small footprint, on council-owned land. PiM.studio Architects, in consultation with HHCD, have implemented options for many of the features for an inclusive toilet, to show a facility that can be used by the largest number of Londoners.

### What would we need to make this happen?

A council who are looking to implement toilets within a temporary setting, and who are willing to invest in an inclusive toilet design. PiM.Studio Architects and/or Public Convenience, a design consultancy run by Prof Jo-Anne Bichard and Gail Ramster, are keen to work for councils in this capacity to see toilets put in place that the Londoners who need them most can use.

## Future Inclusive Toilets (FIT) – can we design toilets that are FIT for purpose?

Experts, council officers and the public all mentioned **criminal activity and anti-social behaviour** in connection with public toilets.

In some cases, there was sympathy or at least unease with how best to address some behaviour. Whilst those we spoke to didn't want drug-taking to occur in public toilets, particularly if there is unsafe disposal of needles, people also understood that getting rid of the toilets doesn't solve the problem – it just moves or buries it. Sometimes it can make it harder for people who need help to be located and given support.

There was also acknowledgement that everyone needs to use the toilet, and people shouldn't be 'designed out'. People who spend all day outside, such as rough-sleepers or the voluntarily homeless, rely more on public toilets than most yet privately-owned, publicly-accessible toilets may not be accessible to them, either from exclusion or from feeling that they would be permitted. Other groups who may feel excluded include teenagers and people of colour. Discrimination that associates groups with anti-social or criminal behaviour reduces the number of toilets that people can access.

In more than one case, public toilets had been closed due to criminal activity including drug-selling and prostitution, and councils were struggling to work with the police to find a solution. The police would not support a toilet at the same location, even though new problems such as public urination and defecation had arisen. Amongst council officers there was wider acknowledgement that a guardian business would help to provide the sense of ownership and natural surveillance to reduce anti-social behaviour whilst maintaining access.

There were two challenges with this:

- staff would want training to understand the challenges they might face managing the toilets, and how to respond.
- It would be harder to find a business willing to stay open for long hours, and so later in the evening, problems would increase. What town centres increasingly need is out-of-hours toilet access.

There are ongoing challenges in toilet design in how to design out criminal activity whilst keeping an inclusive and well-used facility. In the past, the police have recommended removing shelves and flat-topped cisterns, installing UV lights, using stainless steel features including mirrors, or removing bins and paper-towels. Restricting access, by

needing staff to unlock toilets, using keypads, or charging to use the toilet, have also been tried to keep people out. These interventions don't solve crime but can lead to more dangerous drug-taking practices, whilst making public toilets unpleasant or unusable to many.

### What next?

We have already developed a research bid with another design research centre who specialise in designing out crime. This would have developed toilet designs that maintained the inclusive features that make toilets usable for many.

This first bid did not receive funding, but could be rewritten and extended beyond the physical toilet design, to also look at management of toilet facilities. It could draw on the experiences of park toilets + café models in the previous section, to inform design.

### How will this benefit Londoners?

By engaging with the police and community safety, we can learn what *can* be done to help nearby businesses or groups to manage and respond to problems with the Engaged toilets. This would create outputs that support the ongoing management of toilets, such as training programmes, in the context of criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Coupled with better toilet design that creates popular toilets with good natural surveillances into the evening, and a mixed user base, we could create a bet practice for toilets that are safe, inclusive and sustainable.

### What would we need to make this happen?

Our intention is for RCA-HHCD to reconvene with the other London-based design research centre, and submit this new proposal to a funding scheme, for example, Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), for approximately £250K.

## Lootopia and the High Street.

From the data we gathered in the Talk London survey, we learnt that 59% of respondents said they do not have public toilets in their town centre or high street.

Of those, 59% said they limit how long they spend in an area, due to a lack of public toilets.

These findings match similar surveys by the Bathroom Manufacturers Association, and AgeUK London, where 'high streets' was the main location where respondents thought public toilets were not good enough (70%), ahead of parks (47%).

This data is useful for showing the **value** that public toilets bring to the high street. If people leave early due to a lack of toilets, that will hurt businesses and the wider community, as well as limiting people's participation and quality of life.

When we spoke to people on Broadway Market, almost every issue around public toilets that we've heard in the last decade was mentioned. We were able to do initial mapping of toilets in the area with the local community, and where they would like new ones added, such as on the Canal side where food and entertainment had started to spring up. We also ran a co-design workshop with representatives of community groups.

Whilst through these activities we could test our ideas for engagement and co-design, this was quite compressed due to the summer availability of our own researchers and the public. We only ran the co-design workshop once, and had to hold it online.

We would have liked to rerun it with other groups, and adapt it so that it was something representatives could run themselves with those they represent. This would have really helped to identify people's experiences and needs, and how one facility or a strategy of provision could meet conflicting needs.

### What next?

By developing a new project, Lootopia, that looks at a similar concept but on a national level, we could focus on public engagement on different high streets across the UK, to further develop this co-design approach, and see if there are differences between rural, coastal, inner city high streets, or where there are different demographics. The more people that we speak to, the more inclusive we can make the design.

We could also delve deeper into the provider incentives, and capture how changes to business rates or rent reduction can be used to incentivise businesses to be guardians of the loos. This was recently brought up in a House of Commons debate on the



Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (Hansard, 2022. House of Commons, Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill 20th Oct 22, H.o.C col 874) through a new clause that stated –

*“The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision for a scheme under which if a business liable to business rates permits non-customers to use their toilets as a public convenience, the area of the premises containing the toilets is discounted from the calculation of the premises' overall rateable value.”*

Whilst the clause was withdrawn, it was promising to see this debated in parliament, capturing the need for more toilet provision on the high street, with recognition of how financial incentives like this could have a return through the increased access to toilets for many people.

Lootopia could further capture the value of toilets on the high street. We previously worked with health economists and developed a proposal that would have shown how people valued public toilets across different aspects of design, context, and service (for example payment, or gender-neutral facilities) and what trade-offs they'd be willing to make. This would identify, for example, what was a need and what was a preference. Whilst the previous bid was not successful, redesigning it to reuse the public engagement methods already developed and tested in Engaged, and drawing on the evidence from expert interviews and the Talk London survey that shows this research is needed, we could resubmit a similar but improved research project.

### [How will this benefit Londoners?](#)

The intended outcomes of Lootopia could feed into policy, to create informed regulations and standards around inclusive publicly accessible toilets. This wouldn't benefit Londoners alone, but would seek to scale some of the methods from Engaged to benefit people nationally.

### [What would we need to make this happen?](#)

For RCA-HHCD to reconvene with the Health Economists and other partners, to reflect on this new angle that builds on Engaged and explores toilets as critical high street infrastructure that holds different types of value, to be celebrated. This could be funded by, for example, Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), for approximately £750K.

## Toilets and the 24-hour City

Throughout Engaged we heard increasing mention of the need for toilets on high streets in the **evening and night time**. This was mentioned by regenerations officers such as a project in Shoreditch for weekend toilets + welfare centre, and by the GLA through their Night Tsar and her team who were focused on the new demographic of food delivery drivers who need infrastructure to support them.

The Mayor of London also ran funding during 2022 for councils to create night time enterprise zones. Whilst the night time economy (and the role of toilets within it) is not a new concept for London, it is interesting that there is funding behind it, suggesting a real drive to make improvements.

We also learnt, through different conversations with council workers, that they recognised the positive role that delivery drivers and food retailers play in keeping people safe at night time. For example, toilets that would be used by them may also be used by people visiting clubs and drinking. Having sober people who are at work also using the same facilities, can provide the footfall and natural surveillance to help to keep things calm and safe.

The night buses and night tube also support shift workers, including key workers who campaigned for public toilets to remain open during the pandemic. More night-time toilets would also support these Londoners.

### What's next?

Keeping our ear to the ground, as PiM.studio Architects (see: **delivery driver hub concept, page 38**) and Public Convenience Ltd for opportunities to develop night-time infrastructure including toilets.

### How will this benefit Londoners?

Considering all these audiences, it would be beneficial to be involved in the design of public toilets and welfare space for night-time, so that we can ensure provision is inclusive of disability, diversity, faith and health conditions.

### What would we need to make this happen?

To stay connected to the conversation at City Hall and within boroughs who are developing schemes.



## Talk Toilets

We've been reminded of what we find with every toilets project, that the public love talking about toilets, but official documents such as guidance, reports and discussion fail to mention them.

This was echoed by the Regeneration Officer who said that 'public toilets' often comes up as something really important to the public during consultation at the beginning of a scheme, but by the time the scheme has gone through planning and construction, they've been forgotten. Why forget something that's important to the people you're building it for?

Even the public need an invitation to talk about toilets. The long list of minor and major gripes with toilet design may never be shared with the providers. It's one thing to provide toilets, but by really engaging with the public you can build *good* toilets, that help people to visit the places you'd like them to go.

So we need people to keep talking about toilets all the way through a project, so that when it's built (whatever it is) the toilets are as inclusive as possible.

### What's next?

We have ways in which we can keep 'talking toilets' and inviting those conversations to be had. *Healthy City Design Conference* was a good example, where the panel discussion on city design that followed Gail's presentation of Engaged focused entirely on the challenges of toilets, with both the audiences and other panellists sharing their personal and professional experiences.

### How will this benefit Londoners?

By making sure toilets aren't poorly designed due to the toilet taboo.

### What would we need to make this happen?

Further opportunities, such as Transforming UK High Streets Conference in March, AgeUK London event on public toilets with London Councils, and New Local's 'Stronger Things' conference, will help us to mention toilets to the right people and build those networks. The brand of the Royal College of Art is also a big platform, and we could encourage more media engagement about our work. We are also writing a book for a general audience on designing inclusive public toilets (to be published 2024).

## Part 2: What is Engaged?

The Engaged project is run by the Public Toilets Research Unit (PTRU) based at The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (HHCD) at the Royal College of Art (RCA), in partnership with London-based PiM.studio Architects. The project was developed during 2021 with active research taking place in 2022.

Engaged is part of the Mayor of London's Designing London's Recovery programme. Designing London's Recovery was funded by The Local Enterprise Partnership for London (LEAP) delivered in partnership by the Greater London Authority, Design Council and CUSSH. The Engaged: On-the-Ground public engagement and co-design activities were supported by the London Borough of Hackney.



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### Why toilets on high streets?

People are the heart of the high street, but they need public toilets to spend more time participating in their community and the local economy. For older people, disabled people and those with young families, toilet access can help decide which high street to visit, or whether to visit at all. Yet despite public support, public toilets in England and Wales have reduced by 35% since 2000 (Hansard (2021) House of Lords, Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill. H.L Vol 811, col.432.)

Meanwhile our high streets have been going through a period of considerable disruption with a need for renewal. A shift to online shopping, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, make this a time for reconsidering the goods and services that feature in a town centre or high street, and the infrastructure we will need to support this.

## **What toilets are there now?**

There are three main groups of toilet that the public can access: the traditional council-owned public toilet block; Community Toilet Schemes (where councils ask businesses to allow the public to use their existing customer toilets); and a smattering of other toilets in public- and privately- owned spaces within the high street. This current make-up of publicly accessible toilets has advantages and disadvantages for the public.

### *Council-owned public toilet blocks*

These are what we think of when we say 'public toilet'. However, this is what is in most decline. Councils do not have to provide toilets for the public, and with budgets tightening, the considerable cost of cleaning and maintaining these facilities can mean that the council cannot justify the expense. Councils in other parts of the country have passed on responsibility to lower-tier authorities like parish and town councils, so that communities can save a facility that they value.

Public toilets also have a bad image as a dirty or dangerous facility, and many would prefer to use toilets in shops or other businesses. As a publicly-owned building, hidden off the main road, with low footfall and designed-in privacy, there is a tendency for toilets to experience vandalism, graffiti, arson, destruction and drug-taking.

### *Community Toilet Schemes*

Community Toilet Schemes are where a council organises for local businesses to allow non-customers to use their toilets. This is often in exchange for an annual fee of around £500-£1000, to cover some of the additional costs. The Scheme might focus on businesses on a certain high street, or cover the whole of a Borough.

The whole scheme can open up existing toilets to a wider number of people for the same cost as one public toilet. By working together in this way, the businesses are providing the public toilet infrastructure to support visitors to the area.

Community toilet schemes can struggle in a few ways. The council has no control over the type or design of the toilets that are available, so the overall provision may not be inclusive. The business owners can also refuse access to the toilets, which could exclude homeless people or young people; or people who may not feel welcome or able to access certain premises, such as pubs or places that sell alcohol. In places with high footfall, the volume of people who need to use a community toilet could quickly overwhelm the facility, to the detriment of the business and its customers. This is

particularly true in London where rents are high and high street premises are very small.

### *Other publicly accessible toilets*

Other publicly accessible toilets on our high streets include those in public buildings (libraries, the Town Hall) and private businesses to which the public have access, including train and bus stations, shopping centres and large stores such as department stores and supermarkets. The latter shares some of the same challenges as Community Toilet Schemes - the ability to control access and exclude some users or make them feel unwelcome, in a way that does not exist with public toilet blocks or public premises. There is also less oversight as to whether the provision is designed to be accessible or inclusive of local needs.

### *Toilet Strategies*

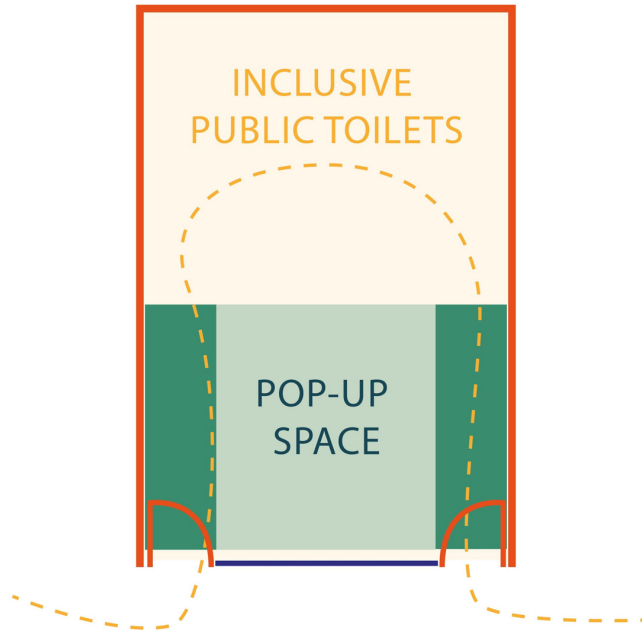
Overall, there is no strategy to publicly-accessible toilet provision in a Town Centre or High Street. Public toilets are closing, and there is no control over the volume or design of any publicly-accessible toilets to fill the gap. Councils need to take a holistic approach to identify whether provision is sufficient to support their high streets, and where gaps remain. This is an approach that has been implemented in Wales, through the Public Health Act (Wales) 2017, with the introduction of mandatory local toilet strategies.

## **The Engaged Concept**

The Engaged concept aims to give councils an alternative way of providing an inclusive, accessible public toilet that can support local demand, without the pitfalls of the traditional toilet block. This will help them to fill any gaps identified by a public toilet strategy, though in some high streets, there might be no toilets at all.

The idea is to explore reusing empty shops as part public toilet, part local business. This reduced business space could be used by a start-up, as a pop-up shop or by a **community** group, and would provide guardianship and natural surveillance of the premises. The public toilet would be designed to be as **inclusive** of as many people as possible, in particular the Londoners local to it, and for whom any existing toilet provision was not adequate. By reintroducing the toilet to the high street, Engaged would be bringing a feature of **public health** back into our cities, where other health and well-being features (drinking water, respite areas and pop-up clinics) could be provided.

The three elements of **community**, **inclusive design** and **public health** make up the foundation of the Engaged concept.



*Concept design and layout of the Engaged concept © PiM.Studio Architects.*

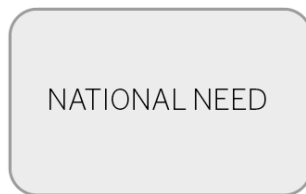
## The Engaged project: An overview

The project aims to find out

- whether the Engaged concept had potential within high street regeneration,
- what the barriers would be (and how to overcome these), and
- what an Engaged toilet would look like, if co-designed by local people.

The project ran three parallel strands of activities to address these aims, divided by geographic scale - **national**, **regional** and **local**.

RCA RKE Development Fund



aim  
To evidence common national challenges through expert interview and data analysis



Mayor of London: Designing London's Recovery



aim  
To identify opportunities & barriers within London LA regeneration teams.



aim  
To co-design an inclusive community-run public toilet with local people to widen high street participation.



### *National Need Study*

At a **national** level (funded by Royal College of Art), the **National Need Study** interviewed experts in retail, crime prevention, urban design and government, as well as reviewing existing government guidance. From this we built an evidence base for the need for better and alternative public toilet provision.

- Link to [National Need report](#)

### Pre-feasibility Study

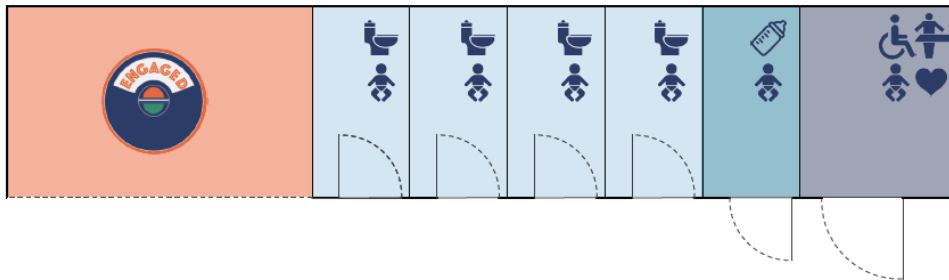
At a **regional** level, we ran a pan-London workshop with regeneration officers from multiple London boroughs. From this we identified the barriers and opportunities for the Engaged concept from a council perspective. We then developed a **Pre-feasibility Study**, to show how it could work for small, medium and large units, as well as some alternatives (extensions to existing toilet blocks; temporary toilets).

- Link to [Regeneration Workshop report](#) and [Pre-feasibility Study](#)

### On-the-Ground

At a **local** level, we worked in the Hackney Central area, mapping their local provision with the community panel, and ran **On-the-Ground** street engagement and co-design activities to understand local needs, in particular with representatives of users who were potentially or typically excluded from public toilet access. From this we developed more detailed concept drawings for Engaged toilet facilities.

- Link to [On-the-Ground report](#) and [Engaged Concept Designs](#)



## Part 3: What did we do?

This section covers the [activities](#), [deliverables](#) and [outcomes](#) of each of the three strands to Engaged.

### The National Need Study

The National Need Study collected evidence of the need for public toilet provision, and the ongoing barriers. It also gathered perspectives on how the broad concept for Engaged might be received, and what problems we should foresee, for further investigation.

#### Activities

There were three activities within the National Need Study.

**Eight hour-long interviews** with experts from across the UK. These were:

- a London borough Business Improvement District manager;
- a Designing Out Crime police officer from the north of England;
- an urban designer based in London and Wales;
- the director of a public toilet NGO;
- a director of a Community Interest Company based in London;
- a village community-owned toilet team;
- a central government civil servant;
- and a council officer from the north of England.

**A literature review** of 24 documents included papers, reports, guidance, strategy summaries, frameworks and press releases. These were published by a range of authors from: central, local and devolved government, charities & NGOs; public bodies & organisations; and companies. All were accessed online. All but one of these were published since 2018.

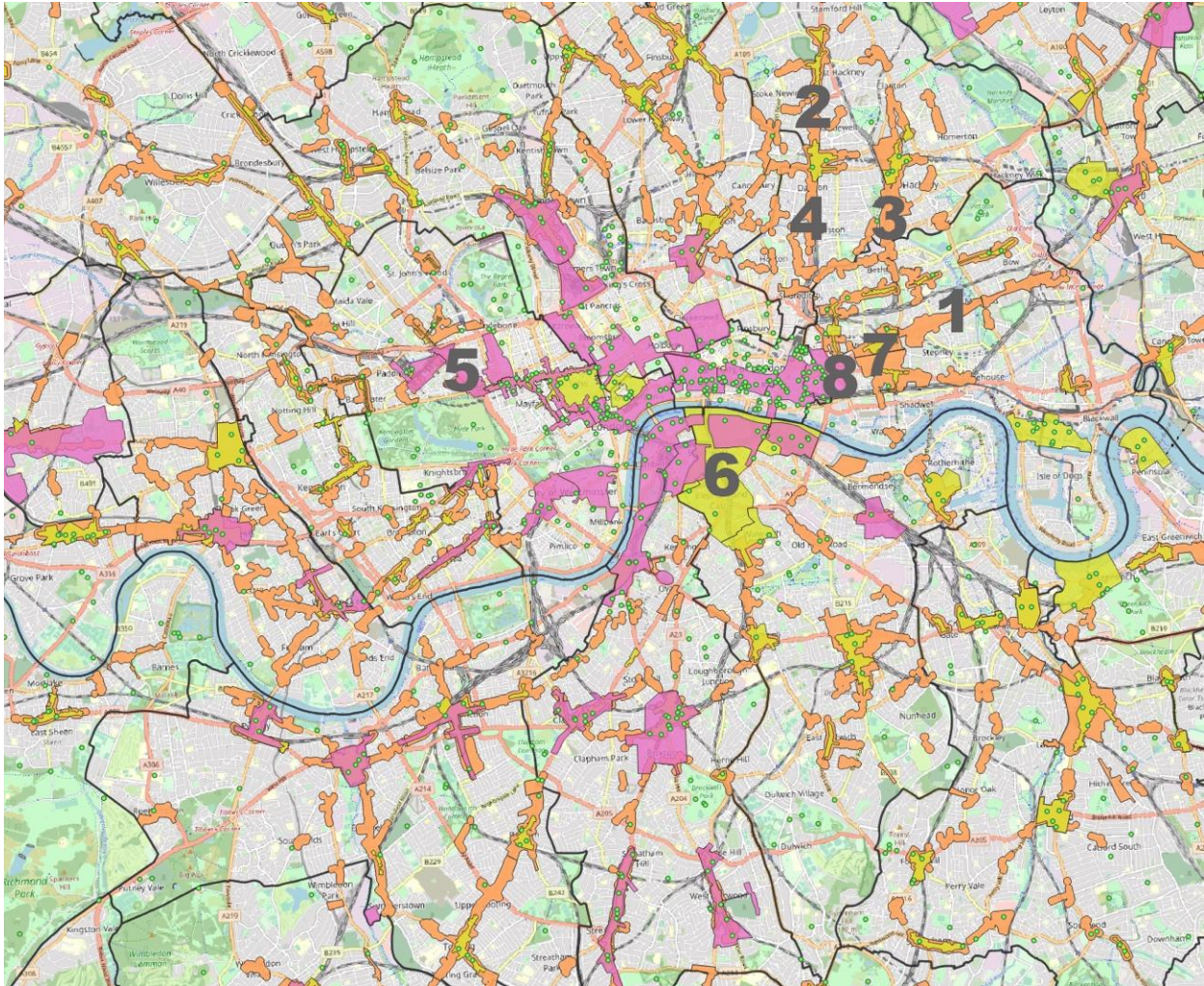
**A data comparison** of publicly-accessible toilet locations was overlaid onto high street and town centre areas. Due to data availability, this was restricted to Greater London.



## Deliverables

From these activities we identified themes, and presented these supported by the main insights and evidence from the experts and literature. The themes used to categorise the material in the literature review were: support; impact; implementation; standards/design; communication; inclusivity; schemes. These themes and the supporting evidence are shared in the [Engaged: First Findings Report](#) (September 2022).

This report also includes the map of publicly-accessible toilets mapped against high streets and town centres, reproduced here. For reproduction purposes, the snapshot is focused on Central London and the Inner London boroughs.



This map shows:

- current toilet provision across London as green dots (data: [The Great British Public Toilet Map](#))
- high street (orange zones), business improvement district (pink zones) and/or town centre boundaries (yellow zones) (data: [GLA High Street Boundaries](#)).
- eight areas that we have identified where provision is significantly low, or non-existent:
  1. On high streets running east along the A11 between Whitechapel through Stepney Green, Mile End, Bow Church to Bromley By Bow [LB of Tower Hamlets]
  2. On high streets between Dalston Kingsland running north to Stamford Hill [LB of Hackney]
  3. On high streets running north between Bethnal Green and South Hackney [LB of Hackney]  
*Note: this includes the Hackney Central area where we based our **On-the-Ground** study*
  4. On high streets running north between Shoreditch and Dalston [LB of Hackney]
  5. On business improvement districts in Edgware [City of Westminster]
  6. In town centre and business improvement districts within Southwark between the Thames and Elephant & Castle [LB of Southwark]
  7. In town centres and high streets in Whitechapel and Spitalfields [LB of Tower Hamlets]
  8. In the business improvement districts of Aldgate East [LB of Tower Hamlets]

This is not exhaustive, and further interrogation of the data reveals multiple individual high streets in inner and outer London with no facilities.

Future research could create a scoreboard of public toilet provision by high street, with particular focus on those that have no publicly accessible toilet mapped. This could lead to a call to action for better mapping data in those areas, or to the local council to review opportunities for introducing public toilets through planning or regeneration.

## Outcomes

Detailed, bullet-pointed benefits and barriers to Engaged are provided in the First Findings report. The overall position that we found from our investigation concurs with our own understanding of the UK's public toilets - needs are not currently being met.

*“Privately funded toilet business models, such as those we see in service stations and shopping centres, while often successfully implemented and maintained, provide only a small offering, within just a single public realm context. Community Toilet Schemes have not yet demonstrated significant uptake and council-owned public toilet blocks often remain poorly maintained and harbour safety issues.”*

Engaged: National Need Report, September 2022

Across the literature review and our expert interviews, there are two main challenges to solve: **generating sufficient funds** to implement Engaged and **devising a financially sustainable model** to ensure the Engaged toilet stays open and maintained in the long-

term. This reflects what is traditionally understood to be the central barrier to public toilet provision broadly, particularly in the context of austerity and cuts.

What will more likely bring about the successful deployment of the Engaged concept, and may even undermine the stranglehold of financial barriers, is if the model is put in place within the context of **strong partnerships** between councils, communities, businesses and local groups committed to improving public toilet provision.

These must hold a shared, fundamental understanding of the **value** of this provision and its potential to create **positive change** within the UK's economy, public health, equality and equity.

Continuing to assemble **data that supports the generative potential of investment in public toilets**, will also be key to success.

## Pre-feasibility Study

The Pre-feasibility Study was a London-based look to establish barriers and opportunities for Engaged from the perspective of London borough regeneration officers. It also incorporated and built upon the findings from the National Need study.

The aim was to establish 1) design principles and 2) typologies for different sizes of retail unit. A final aim was to find a partnering borough with whom we could work during the On-the-Ground phase.

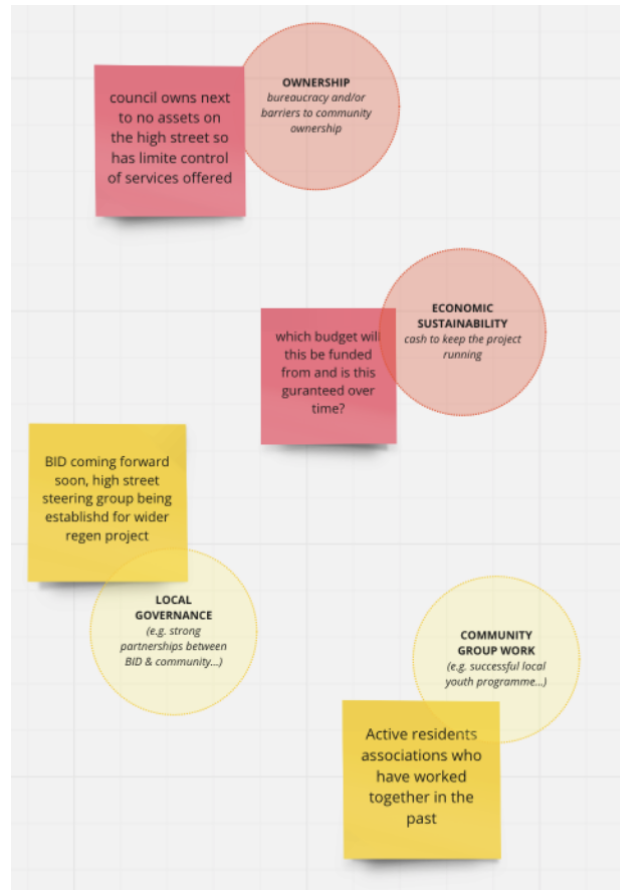
## Activities

We held an online workshop in May 2022 for London regeneration officers who were engaged in active projects with their local communities, and borough policy-making. 13 officers from eight London councils participated in the session.

Workshop activities aimed to:

- Gather place-based public toilet needs.
- Introduce the Engaged model, and explore how Engaged could be part of their vision for high street regeneration.
- Identify barriers to implementation of Engaged and public toilet provision.
- Explore potential versions of Engaged in different boroughs, addressing unique local barriers.
- Enable peer support and shared learning between officers in relation to toilet provision (barriers, challenges, successes).





Images show 1) the mapping exercise completed by each regeneration officer, to identify the main features of their high street, including toilets (or the lack of them) and 2) examples of the main barriers (red) and opportunities in the form of local assets (yellow) for the Engaged model, from a workshop exercise (see Outcomes).

We also further interrogated the documents within the Literature Review. This allowed us to develop a Schedule of Accommodation for minimum and ideal standards across product and service elements of Engaged toilet provision.

## Deliverables

Details of all the workshop activities and evaluation of the findings and its effectiveness, are available in the [Engaged:Regeneration Workshop report](#) (May 2022).

As well as the Schedule of Accommodation, we developed Design Principles for Engaged, shown here:

## Design Principles:

The design principles for the Engaged Model have been informed by the research and have led to multiple necessities being highlighted. This has been approached from two perspectives: the **Engaged Unit** space which could be commercial or council-owned; and the **Engaged Toilet Facilities**. With these two elements as the focus, we are able to build on the surrounding context to embed the system into the community and high streets.

### Gender-based principles

To ensure that everyone is provided with respectful and inclusive facilities

### Space for other uses

Handwashing, infant-feeding, respite/wellbeing

### Easy to maintain/clean

Facilities, materials and equipment to be selected based for ease of maintenance

### Wayfinding/ Branding Requirements

Lines on Floor, signposting, display stickers

### Viewpoint

A clear view to the toilet entrance

### Soft-walls/barriers

To create a pathway to the toilet, separate from the unit's visitors/customers

### Accessibility features

Providing for both physical and neurodiverse needs

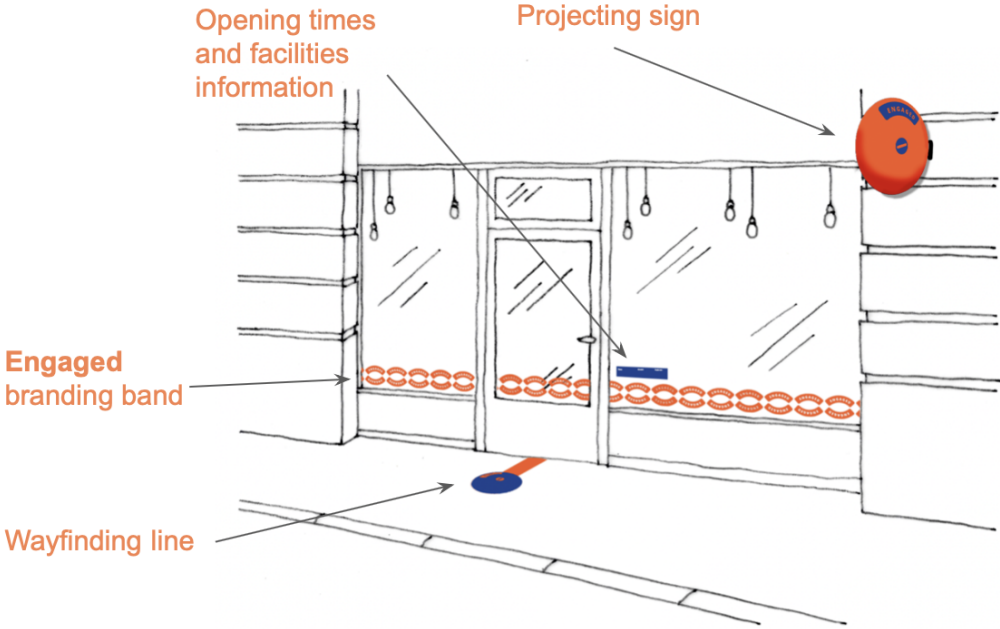
### Safety

By including 'design against crime' elements

### Sustainability

Advocating the use of sustainable materials and methods. E.g. Natural roofs, wood, water reduction and reuse

Some of these principles were developed into concept drawings, for example 'Wayfinding/Branding requirements' to show how an Engaged unit would be seen from the street, to be easily identifiable without overshadowing the business's own branding.



This and other principles are available within the [Pre-feasibility Study](#) (May 2022).

## Outcomes

The workshop highlighted that participating local authority regeneration officers were **keenly aware** of the need for public toilets as a crucial element of public health provision, and in enabling general access to public spaces and the high street. They also recognised public toilets as being a **lifeline** for those with additional needs or vulnerabilities.

## Barriers

Barrier identified during the workshop fell under three main categories. These are listed here, along with just one specific barrier for each. Other barriers can be found in the full workshop report.

- Access to appropriate spaces and locations.

Some high streets do not have many empty units, and councils themselves own very few properties. There is also an objective to sustain activities in the evening and night time, but not many business premises would be willing to provide extended opening hours for toilet access.

- Bureaucracy

Many council departments would need to be involved to see this through. Regeneration often identifies a lack of toilets as an issue with strong community support, but by the time a scheme has gone through planning and construction, this requirement has been overshadowed by other demands.

- Safety & Security

Councils already have problems with crime and anti-social behaviour around existing toilet facilities. Trying to keep toilets open, re-opened, or re-built is a challenge, and some find that police and community safety teams will not support this. The linked business may have concerns, particularly if toilets are open later in the day.

## Opportunities

Opportunities existed within regeneration plans, within alternative configurations that move Engaged away from empty units, and within establishing partnerships between councils, businesses and communities:

- Supporting Regeneration

Any version of Engaged will need to align with key community activities. There is an opportunity for Engaged to fulfil the needs of the community identified during regeneration engagement work, that local plans seek to serve. A challenge for Engaged is to keep the community involved throughout regeneration so that the toilets are not forgotten, are co-designed with local people, and inclusive of local needs.

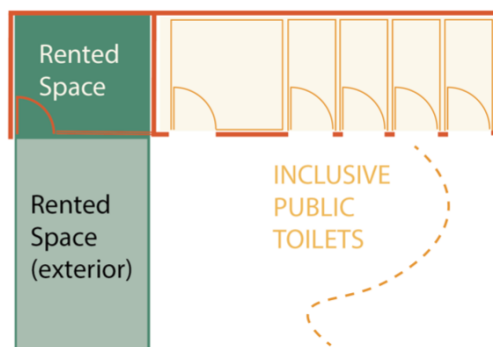
- Configurations

As well as empty units, the officers proposed alternative configurations for Engaged:

- 1) a **deconstructed** version, where the guardian business is a short distance from the toilet provision, e.g. two premises in the same square or market;
- 2) a **mobile unit** that could be moved for different uses, such as markets, night time hotspots or events. Shipping containers are widely used at the moment, for temporary land use of plots earmarked for later development;
- 3) as part of **new developments** where the shared space activity could be matched to the late-night needs, the management of the toilet could be written into the contract, the development company could support maintenance costs or responsibilities, and the design could be made inclusive from the outside;
- 4) where an **existing toilet block** is reconfigured or extended to include space for an attached business.

These configurations, where Engaged sits outside of existing privately-owned premises, removes the challenge of the private landlord from the equation, and gives councils more control over the toilet provision.

These configurations also align with another insight from the officers - that it is easier to get money for new things (that might happen to include a really good toilet) than for refurbishing something that already exists, even if it's not working very well, which can be said for a lot of our public toilet stock.



*Drawing of the 'add-on' typology from the Pre-feasibility Report, where an existing toilet block is extended to include a rentable space, © PiM.Studio Architects.*

- Ownership and responsibility for Engaged

Finding ways to meet day-to-day maintenance needs and sustain Engaged over the long term were identified by officers as key 'practical' barriers. From the opening survey, we found that officers felt public toilets should be owned and maintained by councils and businesses working in partnership. Overall, officers could see these responsibilities equally being met by the owner (e.g. council); by developers' (e.g. written into contracts), or by those leading the shared space activity, in return for financial reward or incentive from the owner.

Given officers' keenness to involve and serve community groups within the shared space activity, incentives that might appeal to community groups were also recognised. These could be non-financial (e.g. continued use of space in return for cleaning) – or – rent costs could be covered by (external) community group funders.



## On-the-Ground project

The On-the-Ground project sought to go deeper into the needs of a particular London community, to understand: 1) the existing toilet provision; 2) what local people would want from an inclusive public toilet; and 3) to trial engagement and co-design activities with the public and specific community groups.

As well as being of local value, insights from the project would inform how we develop and pilot Engaged for other communities in the future, as a sustainable proposition that can bring value to the high street

Through the pre-feasibility study, we met a regeneration officer from London Borough of Hackney, responsible for Hackney Central area. Through her, we gained the support of London Borough of Hackney for our activities in the area, and connections with council officers and the wider community.

### Activities

All of our activities in the Hackney Central regeneration area were created to invite members of the public to share both their experiences, and how public toilets could better meet their needs. We also spoke with some businesses that provide toilets, to understand the challenges, and how these solve these (due to difficulties in finding interviewees within the time limitations, these were not from the Hackney area).

12 July 2022: Hackney Central Community Walk  
26 participants

14 August 2022: On Street Activities, Broadway Market  
84 participants

22 August 2022: Community Co-design Workshop (Online)  
5 participants

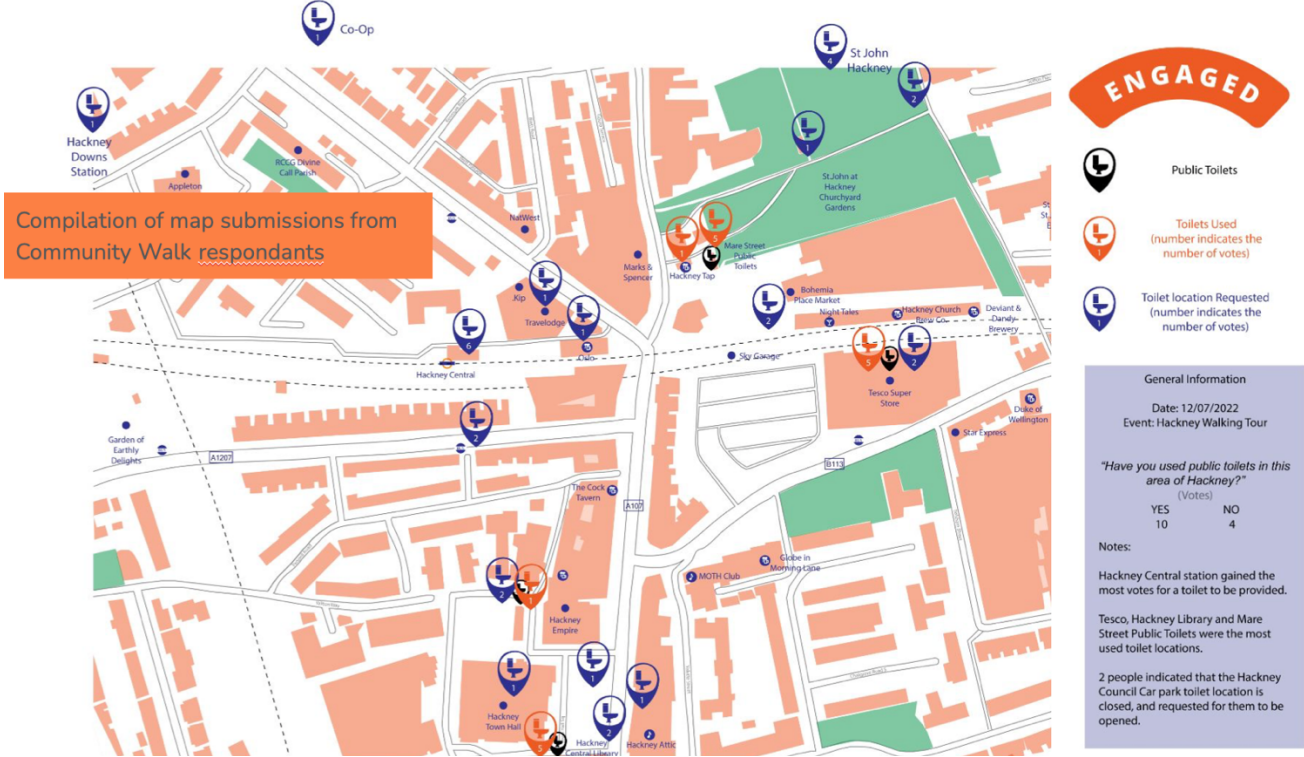
1-5 September 2022: Provider Interviews  
2 interviewees

### Hackney Central Community Walk

Engaged joined a walking tour organised by Hackney Council for the Hackney Central Community Panel, led by the council regeneration officers. It toured four sites allocated for development, centred around Hackney Central Station. They also visited the Garden

of Earthy Delights, a community garden that had been relocated from land awaiting development to another empty plot, with the council’s assistance.

Participants were given a booklet and asked to add public toilets that they knew of, ones that they used, and places where they would like toilets to be added.



This map of all the submissions shows public toilets in black, toilets people used in red, and places they would like toilets in purple.

**Broadway Market**

At the suggestion of Hackney Council, we were able to have a market stall on Broadway Market, in the South of the Hackney Central area, to speak with passers-by about public toilets and the Engaged model. We ran 3 activities: **a collaborative mapping exercise, a multiple-choice question, and a written question.**

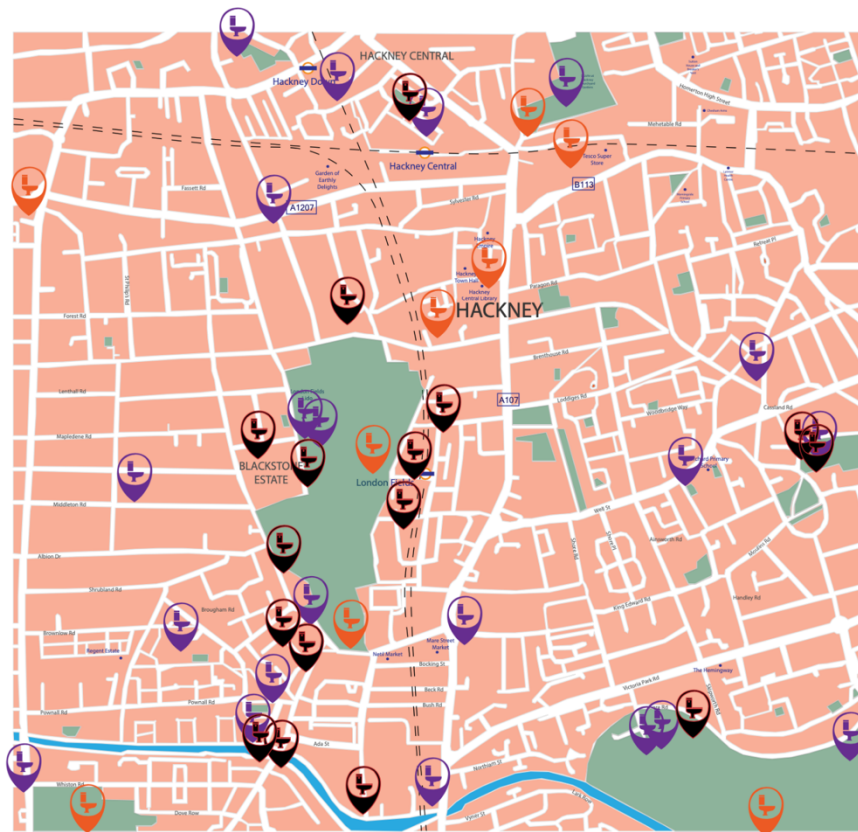
- Map of Hackney Central

We re-ran the **map** used at the Community Walk but covering a larger area – the full Hackney Central regeneration area. We also altered the key, to show public toilets, places they would like a toilet, and sites of public urination.



This photo shows the map at the start of the day, showing toilets that we already knew about. Participants used coloured stickers to add other toilets, places they would like a toilet, and sites of public urination.

This next graphic shows the final submissions, with spots of public urination (black), current public toilets (red) and where people would like public toilets (purple).



## ENGAGED

-  Spots of Public Urination
-  Current Public Toilets
-  Where would you like public toilets?

### General Information

Date: 14/08/2022  
 Event: Broadway Market Engagement  
 Total number of individuals registering their engagement: 84  
 Notes:

This information was gathered during a day festival at Hackney's Broadway Market. Members of the public were invited to populate the map with their personal insight into Hackney's public toilets and demand for public toilets.

Other activities were presented at Engaged's stall in addition to this activity.

The stall was open to the public from 10:00am - 5:30pm.

- Multiple-choice question

We asked participants a question which they could answer by placing lego pieces in different milk bottles. We changed the question every 2 hours, with 4 questions asked in total (the final one for 1 hour only).



We asked:

1. Which public toilets are you happy and able to use? (vote for all the apply)
2. In the past year has the lack of suitable public toilets stopped you going somewhere or meant leaving early? (one vote only)
3. What else would you like in a public toilet? (vote for all the apply)
4. Which toilets would you use when out and about? (vote for all the apply)

We also asked whether residents lived in Hackney or not.

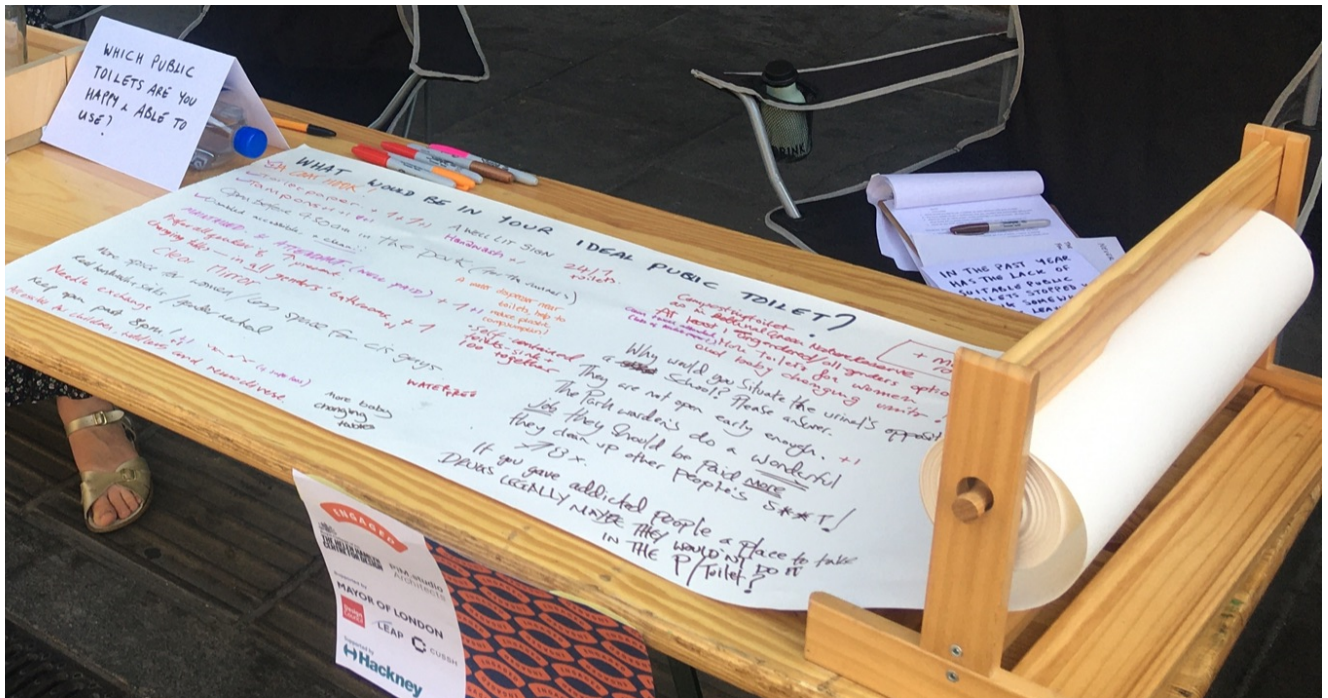
From this, we know that **84 people** participated throughout the day. Of these, **50 people** lived in Hackney and **34 people** lived outside Hackney.



- Written question

We asked people to answer an open question by writing on a communal piece of paper, meaning participants could read what others had suggested, opening up further discussion.

We asked four questions throughout the day, each for two hours (the final question was for one hour only).



We asked:

1. What would be in your ideal public toilet?
2. What has stopped you using a public toilet?
3. What's missing from your high street?
4. What businesses wouldn't you feel comfortable going into, to use the toilet?

The data from all these activities is shared in our [On-the-Ground report](#).

### Community Co-design Workshop (Online)

Having captured broad ideas of what local people and visitors to Hackney might want from public toilets, we now wanted to dig deeper into how people were excluded and what they would need for better toilet provision. We ran an online workshop with representatives of different groups, who we met through the walking tour, through our engagement at Broadway Market, or who were suggested by the Hackney Council regeneration officer.

The five attendees for this workshop were all Hackney-based. They represented different community groups to ensure a wide perspective on the local needs. They self-selected who they felt they represented, through their own experiences, their work or volunteering:

Attendee 1: LGBTQ+ & Ability/Disability

Attendee 2: Families & Ability/Disability

Attendee 3: General Public & Ability/Disability

Attendee 4: Homeless/Vulnerable & Street drinkers / people who spend all day outside

Attendee 5: General Public & Other, medical condition

The image shows a digital form titled "ENGAGED" in a large, white, sans-serif font on an orange, curved banner. Below the banner, the text "PLEASE READ:" is followed by a paragraph of consent information. The form is divided into several sections:

- Initials:** A text input field with a light blue background. A note below it states: "This is used for data processing and will not be published".
- What are your pronouns :** A text input field with a light blue background. A note below it says: "Please define if other". The field contains the text "They/Them".
- Based on your experience, how could public toilets be better design for the needs** of **LGBTQ+** & **Ability/disability user** ?
- Select an option/options from the selection below**
- A row of seven blue buttons with white text: "Families", "Faith", "Homeless/Vulnerable", "Women", "Night-workers", "General Public", "Youth", and "[ Other, Specify ]".

*This image shows part of the online worksheet on Miro, where each participant captured their answers.*

We ran six activities in the workshop. Activities focused on experiences, needs and preferences. We went beyond essential physical features to include questions around

sensory experiences, such as smells, sounds and how people wish to feel when using a public toilet.

We also asked about features and potential benefits of the activity space for groups or businesses.

A description of each activity is shared in our [On-the-Ground report](#).

## **Provider Interviews**

To learn more about the experiences of businesses who take care of toilets, we interviewed a pub landlord and someone who worked as wait staff in a pub. Both let non-customers use the toilets, provided they hadn't caused problems in the past.

This small sample of two interviews scraped the surface of the challenges providers face, but illustrates the areas they find difficult and the benefit of expanding this activity in the future.

The discussion captured insights on the themes of: design; cleaning & checking; training; challenges; amenities.

## **Deliverables**

The deliverables for the On-the-Ground project were:

- 1) A project report
- 2) A concept design for an Engaged toilet.

We shared the [On-the-Ground report](#) with the Hackney Council Regeneration Officer, who shared it within the council and gathered interest internally around public toilets in Hackney. She was able to identify two ongoing projects within regeneration where the Engaged model might fit.

One was on Shoreditch High Street, where money for urinals was available to support the night-time economy, and officers were exploring whether this could be used to create a more inclusive public toilet next to or within a welfare centre. The Welfare centre would be housed in a trailer, so that it could be put on TfL land for busy Friday and Saturday nights, but moved out of the way in the week.

The second was in Bohemia Place market, where improvements included using shipping containers to provide incubator spaces for businesses that had grown out of the market units. Officers felt that the market needed its own public toilet provision, and that this could also potentially use a shipping container, or one of the units in the railway

arches. They were keen to make it inclusive, sustainable and part of the public realm that would be representative of local culture.

It was good to find that our report had brought different projects within the council together, and created a focal point for that shared communication around public toilets. It was also good to know that councils are exploring ideas that fit within the Engaged model. After speaking with both groups, neither was appropriate for Engaged to develop designs around, due to restrictions in Shoreditch of using the finances to fund a urinal (which would be a separate feature to the trailer) and opportunities arising in Bohemia Place to reopen some former public toilets rather than using a shared space.

Consequently, PiM.Studio Architects developed ideas for inclusive public toilets + activity space within shipping containers, inspired by Bohemia Place and other suggestions from the Regeneration Workshop that we held in May. This covers different toilet layouts, and options for an attached activity space in the same container, in a separate container and outdoors, with drawings for how these could be configured.

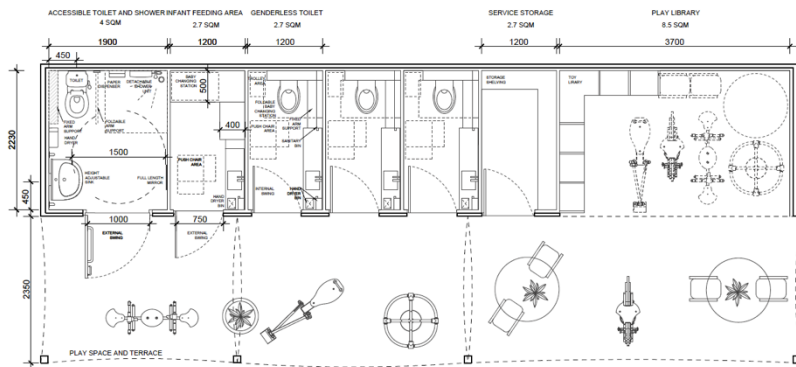
Design Concepts for temporary toilets

**OPTION 3D**

- 3 X TOILETS
- 1 X CHANGING PLACE AND ACCESSIBLE
- 1 X INFANT FEEDING AREA
- 1 X STORAGE/SERVICE

TOYS LIBRARY (INDICATIVE USE)  
PLAY SPACE AND TERRACE

ENGAGED PLAN LAYOUTS  
1:50 @A3



*This image shows an extract from the design concepts document, showing the layout for a container used as a public toilet and pop-up toy library. © PiM.Studio Architects.*



## Outcomes

From so many activities we gathered many insights; some small, some overarching. Some that have really stuck with us are shared here:

From Broadway Market, we were reminded just how much people are happy to talk about toilets once invited to do so, and how we are all excluded by public toilet design. Some of us are excluded almost all the time, whereas for others it might only be if we are with other family members, or at a certain point in our life. Most people who we spoke to had a particular concern with public toilets and something new to add to the list of things they would like addressed, including consideration for homeless people, trans-people, people of different cultures, people with neurodiversity who are sensitive to loud noises, and children. By considering everyone who is excluded collectively, rather than by the way they are excluded, then the excluded make up the majority of the public.

We collected useful insights for Hackney Council such as which toilets were most used by those on the walk (Tesco, Hackney Central Library, Narrow Way Toilets) and where toilets should be added, with Hackney Central Station a priority area.

From Broadway Market, we also learnt that there are problems with urination around some housing estates, and a need for public toilets in smaller parks and new leisure areas such as the canalside. A need for extended opening hours also reflected those highlighted by council officers, such as for late-night entertainment, but passers-by also mentioned that park toilets should be open earlier, for people taking exercise.

From Broadway Market, we found that all-gender toilets with their own sinks were the type of toilet that most people were happy and able to use, above separate male/female toilets. There was also lots of support for Changing Places toilets, once we had explained what these were (facilities for adults with profound and multiple disabilities). Many people mentioned a need for more water fountains (it was over 30 degrees when we were at the market) and more benches in public spaces. They focused more on the need for more public amenities rather than businesses missing from their local area.

Cleanliness and access were key issues, with toilets being either not clean enough (visually or by smell) and not accessible, open, or non-existent.

There wasn't much in the co-design workshop where needs conflicted with each other. People did highlight the need for low sensory stimulation, such as no scent or a clean/fresh natural smell. People wanted space to move freely, and a feeling of privacy and safety, to help them feel relaxed and safe. They focused more on a community

group managing the toilets, in order to support and provide a facility for those who may not be able to use existing toilets.

There was also a need for better signage, to find toilets that already exist.

From the provider interviews, we learnt how it is good to have the toilets in sight to keep an eye on things, and to help not forget the regular need to check and clean them when managing other tasks. Drug use was a problem, and they would welcome training to know how to respond and support different situations. Making it easy to clean and maintain the toilets was important, such as having supplies nearby.

The activities worked well and we would repeat them with little modification. The main way in which we would wish to scale things would be to develop relationships with more local groups, to represent others such as those of different faiths, and strengthen links too, so that they could run workshops themselves with those they represent. Hackney Council were not actively seeking to address public toilets in their area but supporting us with our research. If a council was actively developing a strategy, we would bring together different needs through this approach, and seek how to address those where there were conflicting requirements, in order to build a cohesive public toilet strategy and help those who were most isolated through a lack of usable toilets.



*Design Concept for a purpose-built public toilet with bike parking and a welfare hub for delivery drivers.*

© PiM.Studio Architects

## Talk London Survey

An additional layer of work was the Talk London Survey. Through the GLA team we were able to write a survey for the general public and business owners to find out their experiences of public toilets in the high street. The business owners survey was harder to distribute, though we may still be able to gather responses through the GLA network.

### Activity

For the general public, we submitted the questions via their Talk London team. Once published on the platform, the survey received 2305 responses.

### Deliverables

The survey questions that we submitted, shaped by the Talk London team, asked the public whether they knew of toilets in their town centre or high street, whether they used them, and whether a lack of toilets affected how long they spend in an area. We also asked how good people thought their local toilets were.

These questions were then repeated specifically for evening and night-time provision. We also asked what stopped people from using existing public toilets at night-time.

### Outcomes

The full survey report is here:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/talk-london/designing-londons-recovery?nid=938#tab-surveys>

Whilst respondents may choose to complete the survey due to an interest in toilets, it is nonetheless useful to hear what Londoners think of local toilet provision. 59% said there were no public toilets in their town centre or high street (31% yes, 10% don't know). Of those who answered no, 59% again said that this limits how long they spend in the area, with 9% avoiding it completely due to the lack of toilet provision. Of those who had local toilets, 61% of respondents used them (sometimes or always).

At night-time, only 9% said that there were public toilets nearby (but again, a similar 63% used them sometimes or always). However, people were more concerned about safety at night-time (42% to 23% in the daytime) and would prefer to use business of café toilets (56% to 39% in the day).

Cleanliness of toilets was also a leading concern at all times of day.

## Part 4: Anything else?

### Other things we've done

We have had lots of opportunities to talk about Engaged and our findings along the way.

- Gail Ramster presented Engaged at 'Sustainability needs Inclusivity' Festival. 13-14 June 2022, Norrkoping, Sweden.
- Jo-Anne Bichard was invited to speak about toilets at the Toto showroom as part of the Clerkenwell Design Week, London (May 2022).
- Engaged was part of *Designing London's Recovery Exhibition*, V&A Museum, part of London Design Festival, 22nd September 2022
- Gail presented the findings of the Regeneration workshop at *Healthy City Design* Conference (Traina, R, Ramster, G and Bichard, J (2022). Engaged: Re-using empty commercial premises as public toilets, as a model within high street regeneration, *Healthy City Design*, London 10-11 Oct 2022)
- Gail presented Engaged project at a GLA Round Table about public toilets, hosted by Caroline Russell AM (Greens) and Night Tzar Amy Lamé, 13 Oct 2022
- Gail presented Engaged at the DLR Show & Tell online event, 4 Nov 2022.
- Jo-Anne presented Engaged at Design.Different symposium, hosted by The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, at RCA Battersea, London, 8 Nov 2022.
- Gail presented Engaged in person, along with her other project The Great British Public Toilet Map, at a public toilets event at City Hall, hosted by Caroline Russell and AgeUK London, 25 Nov 2022.

Next year, we have plans to produce two academic papers or a book chapter about the need for public toilets and expert views on Engaged, based on the First Findings report (to be submitted to a peer-review journal, 2023).

Gail will also attend the Transforming UK High Streets Conference & Exhibition 2023 (March 2023) and was awarded a place through the Arts & Humanities Research Council on their researcher development training with the Institute for Government, 'Engaging with Government', to learn about the impact of research in policymaking.

## What we think about it all

We're really pleased about the number of activities we've designed and implemented in a short time frame, the depth of research achieved in particular through experts and literature, and the networks we've built from nothing that meant we could realise all the on-the-ground experimentation that we hoped for, in a real London neighbourhood.

What's worked really well about Engaged is having a reason (the new concept, and the workshops and interviews about it) to make connections with lots of council officers in London, in particular in regeneration. This is an area we've not worked with before, though it is a common place for people with an urban design or architecture background to go, and we do have connections with former colleagues who now work within regeneration.

The improved understanding and connections in regeneration could really help us to make progress with better public toilet design, as these officers are working at the very start of the process, designing the ideal future scenario. Our past research has tended to focus on those already managing public toilets and the problems they face, rather than those with the capacity to reintroduce them in new ways. These connections have continued to grow as we've spread the word about our project through reports, conferences and the GLA's events, and those with AgeUK London, helping us to make more connections within London Boroughs which we must seek to maintain, learn from and influence.

The First Findings report captured first-rate research by our researchers both through expert interview and in the literature review. It is very thorough and digs deep into the challenges around toilet provision and the Engaged module, and formed a strong foundation for the rest of the project.

The engagement with the public through the On-the-Ground activities was rewarding, to remind us why we work so hard to get more inclusive public toilets. The issues raised were not unique to Hackney and reflected everything that we've heard before in our people-centred research into public toilets. In some ways, this breadth of observation was surprising, that all these individual and distinct examples of exclusion through design can be experienced by a hundred passers-by in one small neighbourhood, and presumably, repeated in thousands of neighbourhoods across the country.

The Talk London survey was an amazing opportunity to reach thousands of Londoners and capture their experiences. This data is really useful within an area where there is

very little qualitative research carried out and helps to make the case that toilets add value to the high street.

Whilst we would have liked to develop a design for a live location in Hackney, it is perhaps more useful for the project to develop drawings for the Engaged model using the constraints of a shipping container. This shows Engaged in a truly versatile module, and to promote this model to councils and providers in the future. PiM.Studio's drawings show the adaptability of design depending on the intended audience, with examples including a café, toy library, co-working space and welfare hub for delivery drivers. The inclusive design features make it a pleasant easy-to-use facility for as many people as possible.

The contrast between the enthusiasm of the public to talk toilets with the very low mention of toilets in government literature around high street design, reaffirms our belief that our toilets would be much better (and exist!) if we simply talked about them more. This would help those creating our town centres and high streets to realise the impact public toilets have on our ability to spend time on the high street, and choose one destination over another. It would also help providers to understand what a good, inclusive toilet looks like, and what people need to be able to use it. If we don't talk about them, we don't share this information, and those providing them might not invest the time and effort in their design.

We believe more than ever that public toilets are critical high street infrastructure, but we need to say it even more than we have before. The conversations it sparks from others about their experiences will inspire us all to design better.

## Public Toilets Research Unit @ The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art

The **PTRU** is a specialist research unit based at **The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design** that focuses on public toilet design and research <https://www.rca.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-centres/helen-hamlyn-centre/public-toilets-research-unit/>. It is co-  
led by Professor Jo-Anne Bichard and Gail Ramster.

Its outputs include TINKLE, the Toilets Innovation and New Knowledge Exchange <https://tinkle.rca.ac.uk> and The Great British Public Toilet Map <https://toiletmap.org.uk>.

Founded in 1991, and based at the **Royal College of Art**, The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design delivers research- and impact-focused inclusive design projects in collaboration with academia, government, business and the public sector.  
<https://www.rca.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-centres/helen-hamlyn-centre/>

## PiM.Studio Architects

**PiM.Studio Architects** design beautiful spaces for living in harmony with nature. Through research and design, they re-articulate the relationship between architecture, humans, and all other living beings: an architecture for All.

PiM believe that creating a more biodiverse built environment and reintroducing a degree of wildlife in our buildings and our cities is possible at all scales and for all kinds of projects. If we will learn (again) to live in harmony with nature, we can be happier and healthier in our cities, workplaces, and our homes.

PiM.Studio Architects is directed by Maurizio Mucciola and Maria-Chiara Piccinelli and is based in Hackney, East London. <http://www.pim.studio>



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