

# Online Community Consultation Projects

## by Axis Design Collective

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<http://axisdesigncollective.com>

## Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent – ‘tailor-made’ solution

<http://blurtonvision.co.uk>

The active use of the internet for resident consultation and information sharing has been a growing part of our work for all the projects we have worked on in Stoke-on-Trent. Due to the scale of this project and the relatively short timescale we decided at the tender stage to take this online work a stage further and commission a bespoke design tailored to suit the needs of the area.

	<b>:: BlurtonVision ::</b>
	<b>:: VisionNews ::</b> <a href="#">You can see the proposals by jumping on the Future Buzz. Click for details!</a>
<b>:: The BlurtonVision Team ::</b> Welcome to Blurtonvision a web forum specially designed for the people of Old Blurton, Blurton Farm and Newstead to become involved in the future shape of their homes and neighbourhood.  Aspire housing, Stoke City Council and Renew North Staffs have brought us together to come up with a locally supported set of improvement proposals for the future of the Blurton area.	<b>:: Select an Area ::</b> 
<b>:: Supported by ::</b>  <b>DEARLE&amp;HENDERSON</b>	
<b>:: Creating the Vision ::</b> Over the next few weeks we will be investigating local issues of concern to Blurton residents and proposing improvement plans. This web forum will be central to the process and keep you in touch.  Plans will also be displayed in local shops, schools & community buildings. A series of community open days and evening meetings will be advertised where you will have every chance to meet with the team and have your say.	
<b>Tell us about your area</b>  Click the area photo and leave your comments	
<small>  <a href="#">About Axis</a>   <a href="#">Copyright © Axis Design Collective 2005</a>  </small>	

Visitors to the site are presented with a brief explanation of the project and team members (along with an option to read about copyright issues around the work), and can then click on the aerial photograph of their area to visit the section of the site relevant to where they live.

During the initial stage of the project – the gathering of key issues – visitors were asked to complete an online questionnaire to tell us about their major concerns. The information collated is stored in a password protected area of the site, allowing only project team members to access any data submitted.

Using the data from this stage (along with that gathered during the usual methods of enquiry), the first round of proposals were prepared and launched to coincide with the second community open day. Upon visiting the site and clicking on either, Old Blurton, Blurton Farm or Newstead, a new aerial photo is displayed and individual proposals can be accessed and voted on.

axis

:: BlurtonVision ::

:: VisionNews :: Express your thoughts and issues via the questionnaire about Blurton Farm...

**Blurton Farm**

Public open space

Denham Square

Ingestre Square

Magdalen Road

Conssett Road

Public open space

LITTER / FLY TIPPING

HIGHWAYS & PAVEMENTS

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Click above to explore proposals  
and / or complete the survey below

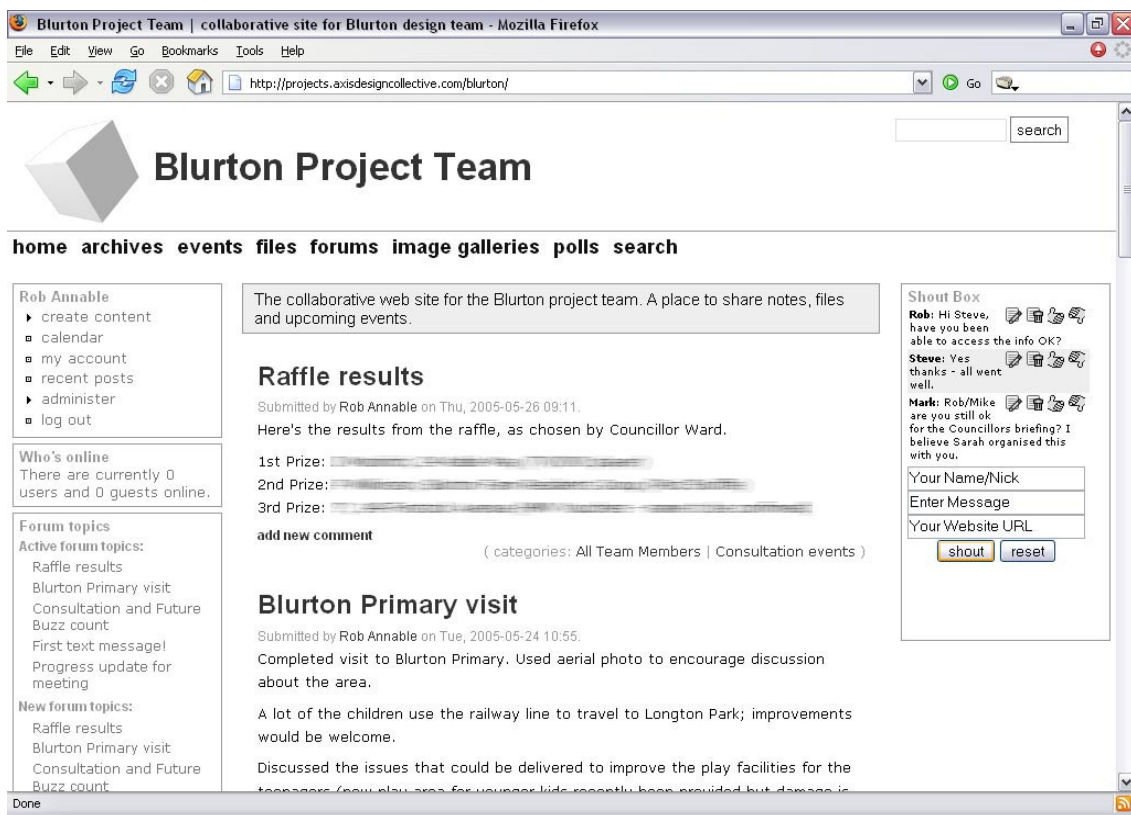
Throughout the project a ticker-tape news item has been used to keep people up to date and provide links to other sites; such as local newspaper articles and the Newstead residents own web site.

By including the use of the internet we were able to increase the numbers of consultations, ensure that the process was as transparent as possible and provide

another opportunity for hard to reach groups to view the proposals. Although the level of computer ownership in the area is unknown, our view is that as the cost of computer hardware continues to tumble it is incumbent on us to begin to explore online consultation techniques.

To improve access to the site, a special off-line version of the site was installed into four laptops provided to the resident groups; allowing them to use the site to record information without the need to be connected to a telephone/broadband line.

The project team also have a separate, private web site for the sharing of notes and files.

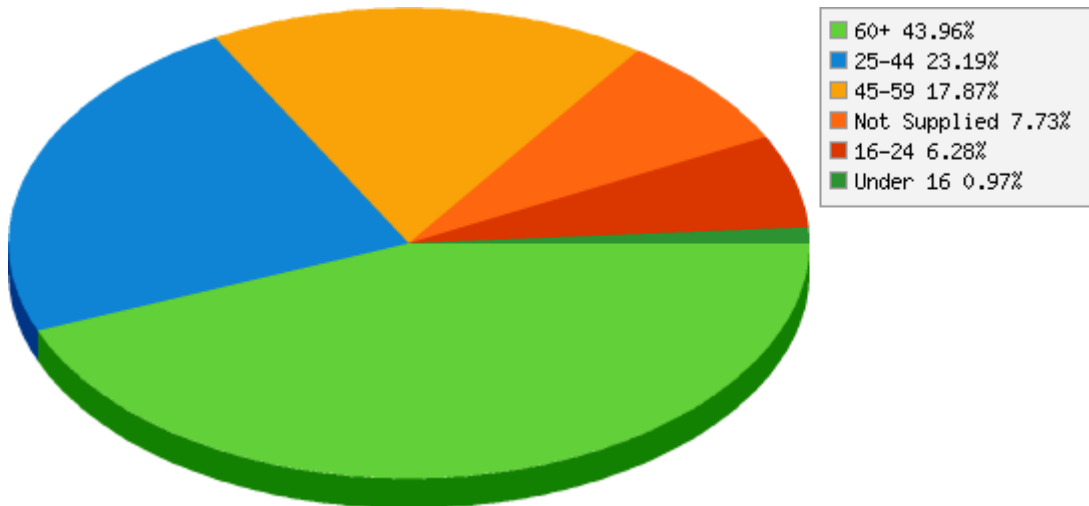


This takes the form of a 'Content Management System' and provides a central location for storing notes, images, files and calendar dates for the project.

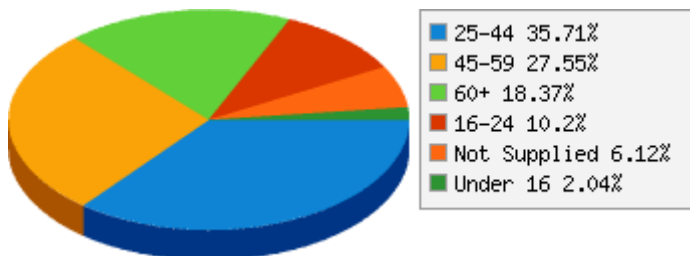
As well as providing an innovative arena for the public to get involved with the project, the web site has also delivered some useful behind-the-scenes benefits to improve the collation of data and assess issues such as usage demographics.

Stage 1 results (issues questionnaire):

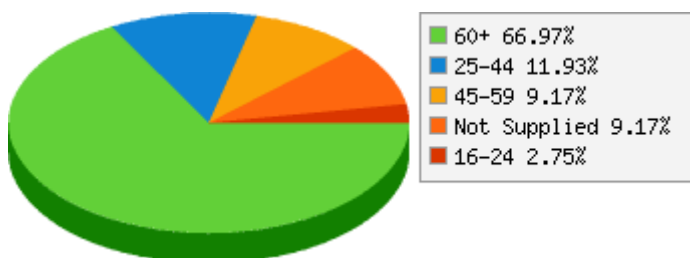
Summary of ages for all 207 **QUESTIONNAIRE** responses (Internet or Paper Based).



Summary of ages for all 98 **INTERNET ONLY QUESTIONNAIRE** responses.

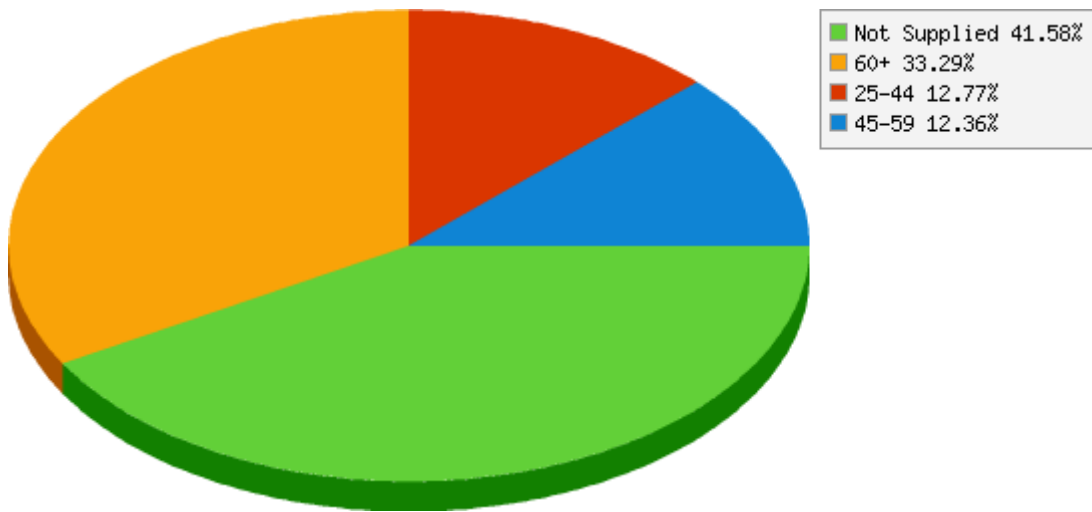


Summary of ages for all 109 **PAPER BASED QUESTIONNAIRE** responses.

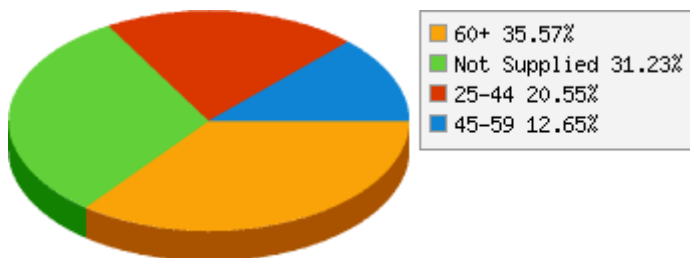


Stage 2 results (voting on proposals):

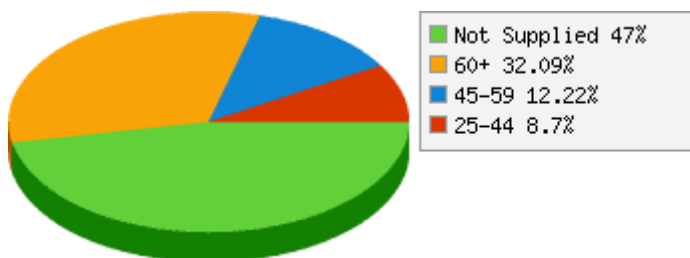
Summary of ages for all 736 **VOTING** visitors (Internet or Paper Based).



Summary of ages for all 253 **INTERNET VOTING** visitors to the site.



Summary of ages for all 483 **PAPER BASED VOTING** visitors.



At the beginning of the project there were concerns that the web site would be unused due to the high proportion of elderly residents in the area. We can report that this was not the case. We found that by using the online technique as a *supplement* to the standard methods of enquiry we had a good balance of attendance between the paper based and internet options. Those in the 60+ age range, who are traditionally the group most likely to attend face-to-face consultation events, showed that they are also happy

to use the website. Those in the age ranges more likely to be economically active and perhaps unable to readily visit consultation events made greater use of the online option than the face-to-face events.

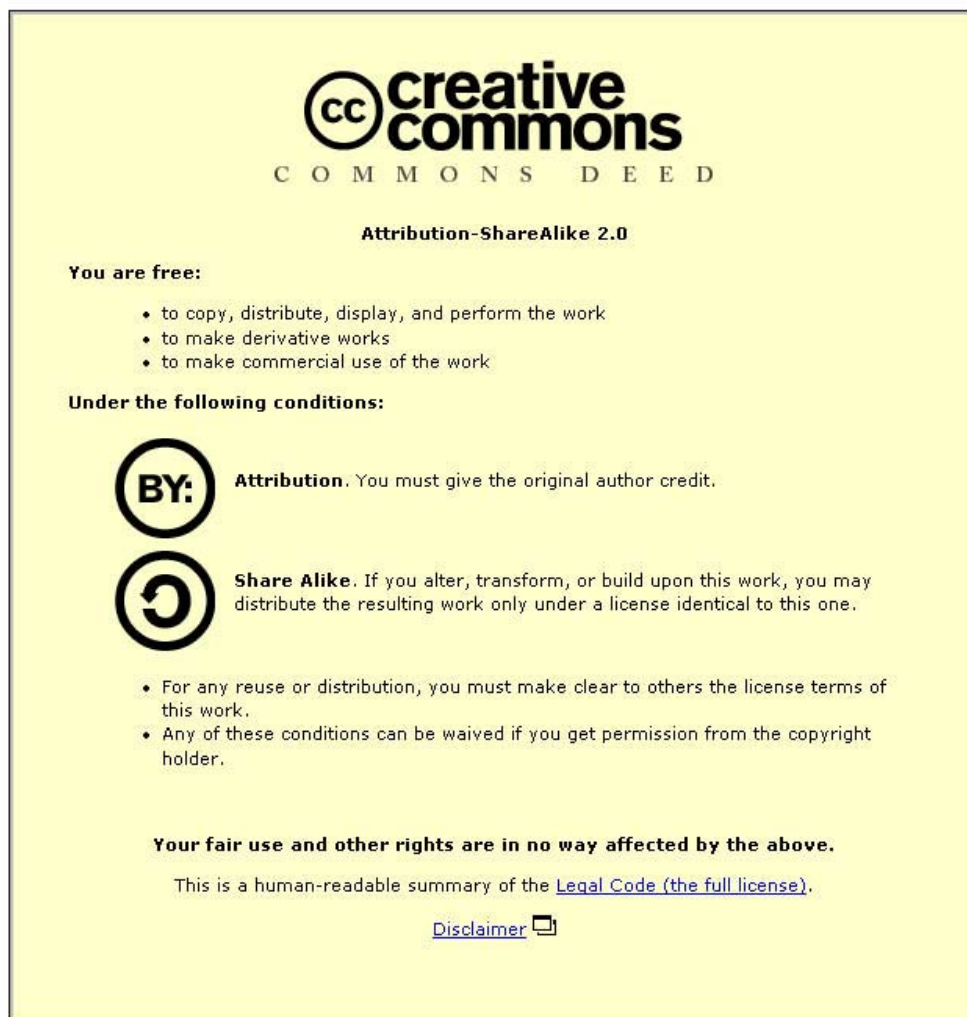
Unfortunately, due to the time of year this particular project ran, the local schools were very busy and we were unable to get the 16-24 age range successfully involved. Other methods of enquiry were used such as a photography competition for the local youth group. The results of which are available for viewing on the web site.

At the time of writing (edit: July 2005), the web site has had 478 'unique visitors' (first visits) and a total number of visits of 1209 (including people returning for a second time). As the public has accessed each of the available pages, a total page view count of 9968 has been generated.

We see the web site as an endowment to the community and the stakeholders so that the site, its architecture, domain name and aerial photography may continue to help deliver greater sustainability.

### Technical details:

To ensure that the input committed to this part of the project continues to deliver value for money and encourages innovation we are declaring the web site to be ‘open source’. This means that the *structure* of the site is freely available to be used by other consultants/clients/communities for similar projects. The *content* prepared by ourselves is subject to the usual copyright. If anyone wishes to make use of the technology, they must accept the terms of the ‘Creative Commons’ license that has been applied to the site.



The details regarding this license can be found here:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>

This license is based on the principles of ‘copyleft’ as opposed to copyright.

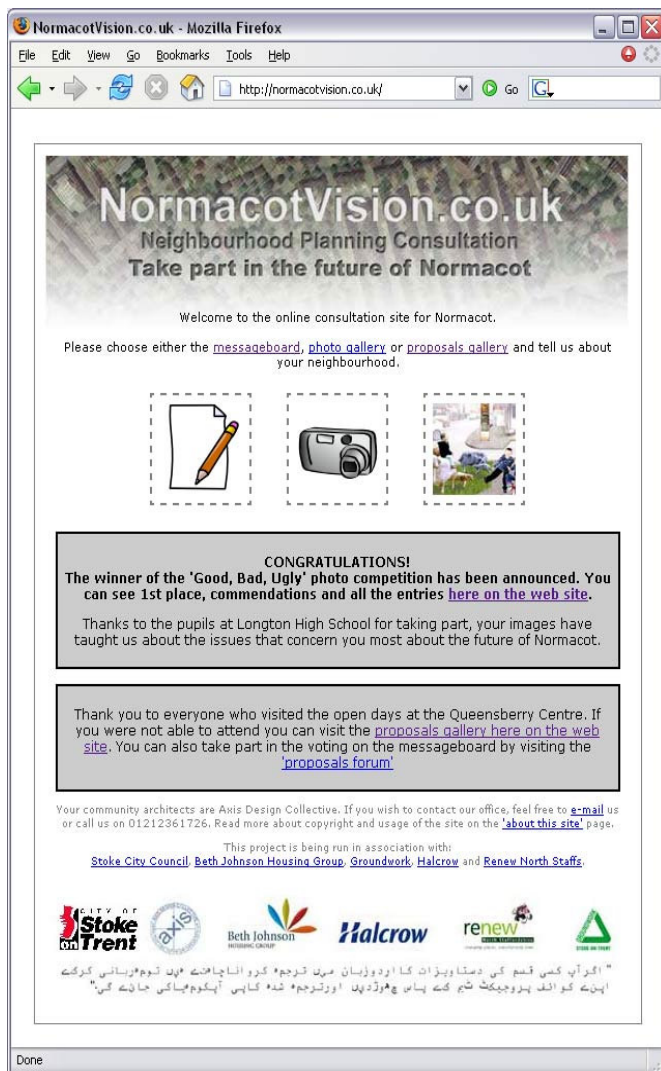
“Copyleft describes a group of licenses applied to works such as software, documents, and art. Where copyright law is seen by the original proponents of copyleft as a way to restrict the right to make and redistribute copies of a particular work, a copyleft license

uses copyright law in order to ensure that every person who receives a copy or derived version of a work, can use, modify, and also redistribute both the work, and derived versions of the work. Thus, in a non-legal sense, copyleft is the opposite of copyright...One of the most important reasons creators or authors might want to make copyleft applicable to their work is that **in so doing they hope to create the most favourable conditions for a wide range of people to feel invited to contribute improvements and/or elaborations to this work, in a continuing process.**”

Definition from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyleft>

## Normacot, Stoke-on-Trent – ‘off the shelf’ solution

<http://www.normacotvision.co.uk>



In an effort to increase the reach of the consultation beyond the more conventional methods already in place, we decided to add an online option to the project.

A public web site was constructed allowing the residents to tell us about their neighbourhood from home or work. By including the use of the internet we were able to increase the numbers of consultations, ensure that the process was as transparent as possible (all the comments and ideas were available for viewing throughout the project) and provide another opportunity for hard to reach groups to view the proposals. Although the level of computer ownership in the area is

unknown, our view is that as the cost of computer hardware continues to tumble it is incumbent on us to begin to explore online consultation techniques.

The structure of the site is restricted to ‘off-the-shelf’ software solutions due to the restrictions of time and budget. There are three different areas that the visitor can use to learn about the project and give their opinion. The front page of the site was updated whenever new areas became available and from there visitors could choose to post comments either on the message board, the gallery of site photos or, ultimately, the project proposals.

A useful lesson learnt during this stage of the project was that many visitors appeared more comfortable telling us about key issues by posting comments attached to the photos that were uploaded, rather than use the text-based message board.

The 'Good, Bad, Ugly' photo competition results can also be viewed on the web site.

At the time of writing, the web site has had 157 'unique visitors' (first visits) and a total number of visits of 345 (including people returning for a second time). As the public has accessed each of the available pages, a total page view count of 4019 has been generated.

Technical details: the opening page of the site was constructed and maintained by Axis Design Collective, the message board uses 'open source' software from:

<http://www.phpbb.com>

and the photo gallery uses 'Folderblog' from:

<http://folderblog.tetto.org/>

The project team also have a separate, private web site for the sharing of notes and files.