

# Young people's campaign for a voice in local neighbourhood design



*Give us  
the Vote at  
14*



*“We want to stimulate a sea-change in attitudes to young people and help create a society that is ‘positive for youth’. Such a society is one in which young people are encouraged to make the most of their lives, and where young people and adults live alongside each other with mutual appreciation and respect”.*

*Government ‘Positive For Youth’ Discussion Paper, 2011*



*“Young people have a talent for seeing things as they are and not being afraid to say so. It seems perverse to exclude them from the new neighbourhood planning. If we can accommodate their ideas then we may get places we all feel better about, and better citizens – and avoid some of the problems we’ve seen.”*

*Lee Mallett, Planning in London magazine, and Victoria Thornton, Founding Director, Open-City – Co-Chairs, My City Too campaign*

# My City

## Why include young people in local planning?

Young people have a major stake in the future of their local urban spaces, yet, on the whole, find it difficult to engage meaningfully with local decision-making around planning and the built environment.

The GLA Young Londoners Survey 2009 stated that only 2% of young people surveyed thought they could have significant influence in decision-making in London, and 73% said they had no influence at all.

Until the age of 18 young people cannot vote and so are not represented formally within the political process at local or national level – and therefore there is no official outlet for them to express their views on the places and spaces around them. The lack of voting rights for young people, the negative perception of young people's behaviour in public space and the minimal spending capacity of young people in commercial areas have in the past all contributed to the marginalisation of young people by councillors, planning policy officers, developers and urban designers. This is NOT sustainable.

Young people must be fully involved in placemaking and policy-making if they are going to value, respect and take ownership of the spaces and places around them.

## Where will the My City Too campaign make a difference?

As an independent, non-profit organisation, Open-City has worked intensively for more than 4 years with young people aged 13-19 across London to enable them to take an active role in the development of their city.

**Now we are campaigning for young people to have the right to vote in neighbourhood referenda on planning from the age of 14.** Young people have a vital contribution to make, and without their support local design and planning decisions do not represent the views of all sections of the community.

We believe it is vital that built environment professionals and the wider community are able to understand the needs and issues facing the next generation – in so doing ensuring that they include them in the design and development process.

Through the My City Too campaign we aim to challenge negative perceptions of young people, ensure they have a seat at the policy table and are able to have a voice in their own communities.

## Why now?

The time for thinking about how the Localism Bill will be delivered is now. Neighbourhood forums and neighbourhood referenda form the backbone of community planning legislation in the Bill and will dictate the design of neighbourhoods and community spaces of the future. We believe it is fundamental to include the aspirations and ideas of young people in local decision-making, and that they have a great deal to contribute to the process.

While the Bill has been amended to make provision for business interests in neighbourhood forums, there is currently no clarity on how young people will be included in the new forums or for their participation in referendums. The removal of the right to raise petitions by under 18s and its replacement with the neighbourhood referendum system directly disenfranchises young people.

Ensuring the youth of today have a clear stake in their future and are able to participate in the decisions and changes taking place in their own communities is the only way in which to deliver localism in its entirety.





# My City Too Ambassadors present their case for local votes at 14

*“As a young person I want to feel I can help change my neighbourhood and be a part of our future environment. We will be responsible for looking after our city and neighbourhoods in the very near future and we want them to be inspirational, sustainable and inviting for everyone.”*

*Neelam, aged 15*

*“I think that as young people the built environment has a profound effect on our daily lives, and will continue to do so as we grow up. I enjoy the opportunity to meet other young people and discuss the different aspects and issues relating to the built environment, enabling each of us to learn and get a broader understanding of London as a city.”*

*Angelina, aged 16*

*“The Localism Bill is important to everyone no matter what age they are or who they are. We are concerned we will be left out because we can’t vote and people might not want us in the neighbourhood forums. But we are going to prove we have a lot to contribute and make sure we are not excluded from the discussion – we intend to make localism for everyone.”*

*Robert, aged 16*

**Let us  
have our  
say!**



## Why are we campaigning?

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To make our cities inspirational

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To create positive changes in our communities

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To help other young people influence decision-makers

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To improve perceptions of young people and show ourselves in a different light

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To create a quality built environment for all

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the Vote at  
14*

## Why should our voices be heard?

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We are the leaders of tomorrow

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Decisions taken today will affect generations to come

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We have greater power and strength when we work together

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We can help provide solutions to existing problems

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## The way forward – Our proposals

Let us help draw up guidance to make neighbourhood forums inclusive and not exclusive

As key stakeholders in a neighbourhood, schools should play an important role in neighbourhood forums

We would like the right to vote at 14 on neighbourhood matters

Nominate a youth champion within a neighbourhood forum to represent the views of young people

Ask neighbourhood forums to sign up to a charter of principles that will help them to ensure equal access and participation for all groups living and working locally



# Why young people need to be involved

Community leaders  
and decision-makers  
give their views

*“Young people are vital to the development of London and its future, and getting young people enthused in terms of long-term planning is crucial to their communities.”*

*Stephen Kelly, Planning Director,  
Harrow Council*

*“The environments that society shapes today and tomorrow through planning will be the environments in which our children will play out and shape their futures. Young people have most to lose from their failure. They have opportunities to take a very active part in planning our futures – to have an influential voice and to have their concerns addressed, their aspirations expressed, and ideally realised.”*

*Colin Haylock, Junior Vice-  
President, Royal Town Planning  
Institute*



*“When it comes to what is happening in their own community, children as young as 14 not only have a real understanding of that, but are also participating in what is going on and have an interest in the things a community might be doing to improve itself. We should look for ways of involving them.”*  
Lord Lucas, Conservative Peer, 2011

*“People often have negative impressions of young people and don’t know how, where, who to approach when wanting to involve them in projects. We would welcome all help with finding ways to involve them; they are an important part of the housing estate and the local community.”*  
Elizabeth Knowles, Community Leader, Alexandra and Ainsworth Housing Estate, Camden

*“It is really important that young people make their views known as many planning and development decisions will affect a community for years to come.”*  
Peter Dawson, Councillor, Northcote Ward, LB Wandsworth



*“Participation in projects around London has allowed me to give back to the area and to speak on behalf of my entire borough. It gives us the chance to express the ideas of people who come from different races, genders, ages and cultures.”*  
Ace, aged 17, from LB Tower Hamlets

## Who are we?

Open-City is an independent, non-profit organisation that aims to create better places for a fairer, more equal and greener London. Through education, advocacy and training we empower communities across London to develop the skills, knowledge and voice to influence how their environment is designed and managed, in order to secure better living standards for all.

Through our well-established relationships across communities, local authorities and professional sectors, we champion an inclusive approach to our built environment.

In 2007 Open-City established the youth engagement and capacity building programme My City Too. This young people’s campaign for better places and spaces – directly addressing the inequality of young people’s representation in built environment decision-making – operates across the 33 London boroughs.

My City Too has put more than 2000 young people aged 13-19 from diverse cultures and backgrounds, including those from the most deprived areas, at the heart of built environment policy creation, giving them skills, confidence and motivation to participate as active citizens.

Its key achievements include the creation of a young person’s Manifesto for better London spaces as well as enabling young people in several London boroughs to actively participate in decision-making at borough level alongside planning and youth officers, and local councillors.

My City Too has allowed an unprecedented dialogue between teenagers and decision-makers in the built environment. It has given decision-makers the opportunity to work directly with young people to find out how they relate to the built environment, and so encourages them to create space more suited to young people’s needs and priorities.

It has enabled young people to broaden their horizons by exploring different parts of their city and to become more informed about how these are designed, managed and used.

The ‘Give us the Vote at 14’ campaign is the latest phase of this initiative, seeking to embed young people’s voices in local planning for the future through enshrining their rights in policy.

## What people say about My City Too

*"I have been greatly impressed with the work Open-City have been doing with youngsters right across the capital. Their projects give youngsters an opportunity to learn about planning, architecture and communities that simply isn't available in a classroom."*

*Councillor Dan Crawford, LB Ealing*

*"My City Too is proof that young people have a big role to play not only defining their own space in the city, but helping shape the city to be more inclusive for the rest of us."*

*Finn Williams, Urban Designer,  
Croydon Council*

*"My City Too attempts to engage teenagers in civic issues, to give them an insight into architecture and urbanism and to persuade them that they are able to influence planning and local decisions, and that they should. It is about giving them the language and frame of reference to express their ideas and desires."*

*Edwin Heathcote, architectural critic,  
Financial Times*



Open-City  
44-46 Scrutton Street  
London EC2A 4HH

Tel: 020 7383 2131  
Fax: 020 7380 1037  
mycitytoo@open-city.org.uk  
www.open-city.org.uk  
www.mycitytoo.org.uk

*Give us  
your  
support*

My City Too!

Go to [mycitytoo.org.uk/localism](http://mycitytoo.org.uk/localism) or email us at [mycitytoo@open-city.org.uk](mailto:mycitytoo@open-city.org.uk) to add your support to the campaign



*“As young ambassadors for our city and our built environment we want to participate in neighbourhood forums and referenda. We want the chance to contribute to the changes in our local communities and to vote on new proposals”.*

*My City Too Young Ambassadors*

Open  
—City

My City Too is an initiative by Open-City, the architecture organisation

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[open-city.org.uk](http://open-city.org.uk)