LONG LIVE SOUTHBANK:

An Exploration into the
Skateboard Community’s
Relevance to Public Space Governance in London

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary paper adds to New Urbanist discussion and puts forward pragmatic methods to redistribute power in our cities. The Long Live Southbank campaign has provided an exemplary model for the protection of public space whilst simultaneously inspiring a generation of young people to galvanize, communicate and act when threatened by capitalist hegemonic forces. Drawing from empirical evidence, I critique planning practices in London alongside their Act of Parliament counterparts and argue for a new paradigm which, through improving consultation and the fostering of community empowerment and social capital, prioritizes culture over commerce and community over capital.

Key words:
London, Public Space, Southbank, Skateboarding, Planning, Design, Social Capital, Transparency, Democracy,

Acronyms:
LLSB: Long Live Southbank
SBC: South Bank Centre
FoSS: Friends of Stockwell Skatepark
NPPF: National Planning Policy Framework

Cover: Author’s own,
35mm print collage
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Long Live Southbank.
“The best campaigns are bottom up. People know what they want; and where there is real determination and a little bit of direction, they can be incredibly successful.
Communities are a beautiful thing.”

(Louis Woodhead, Long Live Southbank)

“The whole process has shown the power of community activism, it doesn’t take many people to start a movement, we must continually remind those in power that they work for us and must represent our best interests and not their own, if we don’t then it should be no surprise that they do not take us into account”

“It has also shown the negative power of apathy, if everyone leaves it up to someone else then greedy but motivated people will win in the end”

(Matt Gold, Friends of Stockwell Skatepark)

“The Long Live Southbank campaign has given credence to skateboarding as a real, valuable and vibrant community that is here to stay and should be respected”

(Andy Willis, Frontside Gardens)
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1.1 Introduction

London Planning Policy is flawed. In this paper, I use the contestation of the Southbank Centre’s (SBC) Queen Elizabeth Hall undercroft to identify problems in contemporary planning practices. In doing this, the challenge is to help speed up both the transformation of established practices of planning and the invention of new practices. I accept the hypothesis that the urban context is increasingly fragmented and that space is socially constructed. Public space can be commonly defined as any space that is free and open to everyone. It is described in the London Plan (2011) as ‘the space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible, including streets, squares, forecourts, parts and open spaces’.

Following the privatisation of the undercroft’s management under Margret Thatcher in 1983, the space has been threatened by private agendas and market forces. High land values are putting more pressure to deliver high returns for investors and the commodification of public space is rife. Resistance to urban renovations is driven by beliefs about the relationship between urban form and culture and what it means to be free in cities. Backlash to developments stems from stakeholders’ natural fear of losing the right to move and live as they have become accustomed to. With urban change increasingly cast from above, the benefits of urban systems get appropriated by those with power and existing communities pay the price (Montgomery, 2013:247).

In this paper I will review an expanse of literature from a range of disciplines and sources to place the LLSB campaign in its relevant context in New Urbanist discussion. I build on the work of skateboard academia and contest Howell’s claim that “Skateboarders are not interested in transformative politics, and the culture has little potential in that arena” (Howell 2001:21). I draw from empirical primary data and discussions with Lambeth council, corporate planners, LLSB campaigners, member of the public and respected members of London’s Skateboard community to offer alternative methods of urban planning. I argue that communicative planning theory provides suggestions for the design of interactive governance practices.
1.2. Research Aims and Objectives

My overarching research question is:

Through the contestation of the Queen Elizabeth Hall undercroft, how can we identify a more democratic approach to urban planning which values established communities that inhabit spaces that face development?

My research aims are:

1. To use the Southbank undercroft contestation as a tool to critique urban planning approaches in London
   i. **Objective:** *Provide a narrative for the contestation, identifying key events which highlights flaws in contemporary planning practices*
   ii. **Objective:** *Assess aspects of the campaign which exemplify theories in existing literature in the field of urban studies*

2. Analyse skateboarding’s relevance to public space governance
   i. **Objective:** *Evaluate how skateboarding counters existing notions of public space governance and planning*
   ii. **Objective:** *Assess skateboarding’s detachment from the market economy*

3. Offer Alternative methods of Urban Planning which are more democratic and centred around community building
   i. **Objective:** *Review emerging discussions in New Urbanism to identify new planning practices*
   ii. **Objective:** *Use empirical evidence from the case of Long Live Southbank to suggest a more transparent and fair planning relationship between developers and affected interest groups*
2. Research context

In 1968, the South Bank Concert Halls and undercroft opened to the public under management of the Arts Council. The previously public land was privatised by the Greater London Authority under Margret Thatcher in 1986 when the Southbank Centre Ltd. (SBC) was established as a registered charity. At the time, the Southbank Centre’s objectives were to promote the arts for the general benefit of the public, develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts and to provide support of such cultural activities to the arts (LLSB, 2014b). Part of the Concert Hall plans included an undercroft walkway designed by members of the radical ‘Archigram’ Architecture collective who intended the space to inspire playfulness and creativity (fig.2.1&2.2).

![Image](fig.2.1.png)

**Fig.2.1:** Queen Elizabeth Hall model 1962  
**Source:** Long Live Southbank, 2014:57

![Image](fig.2.2.png)

**Fig.2.2:** Queen Elizabeth Hall at night, 1967, year of completion  
**Source:** Long Live Southbank, 2014:71
The undercroft (fig.2.3), which is now only 30% of its original space, has experienced a history of the SBC preventing skateboarding including turning lights off the lights in the 1990s, covering the floor in gravel, drilling into the ground (fig.2.4), hosing the floor with water and annexing large parts of the space to be used for storing building materials for renovations. Due to political and economic difficulties, the SBC has a history of failed redevelopment plans (fig.2.5) with a common theme being the SBC failing to consider objectors voiced concerns.

Fig.2.3: Southbank’s Location at the geographic centre of London, on the bend of the Thames between Waterloo and Westminster Bridge.
Source: Authors Own, © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2016. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

Fig.2.4: Grooves cut into the concrete, 1999
Source: Long Live Southbank, 2014:187
On the 6th March, 2013, the SBC released plans for a £120m renovation of its festival wing which included £20million funding from Arts Council England. The festival wing development falls under Planning Act 1990, Part III sub-section 55(1a)(b) as a “structural alterations of or additions to buildings” (Legislation.gov.uk, 2016). In the proposal, it is clear whose interests are prioritised: “The design demonstrates a deep understanding of the current and future needs of the Southbank Centre” (Southbank centre, 2013:2). In their proposal, SBC included that the new “Cafés and restaurants will enhance the cultural experience” (Southbank Centre, 2013:4).
LLSB was set up in April 2013 due to a “lack of consultation and poor engagement with the local community” (Edwards-Wood in:LLSB, 2014a). In the proposal, Lib Peck, Leader of the Lambeth Council, said: “Southbank Centre has made great strides in recent years to reach out to the local community in Lambeth” (Southbank centre, 2013). This directly contrasts the consensus of the users as from the beginning of the contestation it was clear there were issues with public engagement; as one user explains: “They [SBC] don’t take the time to speak to the right people and when they do they don’t listen to us” (Cannon in:LLSB, 2014a).

Part of the proposed replacement for the undercroft was a commercial unit which the Southbank Centre site already has 24 of (Edwards-Wood in:LLSB, 2014a). One of the commercial units to fill the space was proposed to be Mexican chain restaurant ‘Wahaca’ which turned over £22m in 2013 and is financed by Capricorn Ventures International who owns 95% of Nandos, ASK and Zizzi.

SBC’s ‘solution’ to the outcry by the users of the space was a new £1m skate-space designed by SNE Architects which was claimed to be 10% larger in size and 120m from the current space (Hopkirk, 2013) and described by LLSB as “a pastiche of our culture”(Edwards-Wood in:LLSBb, 2015). Local users of the space responded in the same way that studies of community skateboard parks in the US have shown; that skateboarders value the natural terrain of the urban landscape over the programmed parks that are seen to control their behaviour and restrict their autonomy (Owens, 2001:791). Not only would the proposed moving of the undercroft destroy 40 years of culture and history (skaters began using the space in 1973 but no official pictures until 1976), it would infringe on young people’s freedom to engage in public space and also enables urban officials to better justify the prohibition of skateboarding in other public spaces elsewhere in the city (Woolley and Johns, 2001).

On the 4th July 2013, a record breaking 14,000 individual objections were delivered to Lambeth planning office resulting in the pausing of application for six months (LLSB, 2014a). During this time the SBC embarked on a well-spun PR campaign to discredit skaters and raise support for their plans, using personal connections between Jude Kelly and Billy Bragg,
Simon Sands of *The Stage* as well as Sarah Sands, editor of *The Evening Standard* for it to be used as a “propaganda machine” (Richards, 2016)(fig.2.6).

**Fig.2.6. Sarah Sands SBC Propaganda: “It is the poor homeless violinists who have no powerful backers”**

**Source:** http://www.standard.co.uk/comment/sarah-sands-online-david-puts-the-fear-of-god-in-goliath-9227620.html

The redevelopment would benefit young creatives from Tomorrow’s Warriors youth Jazz orchestra who state: “It’s important that people understand we’re not some elitist group. Most of us are from working-class backgrounds. All of our services are free” (Iron in:Gardner, 2013). However, LLSB stated that they too represented young people and had been “meticulous” to understand “every little detail” of the new plans and that some information had been withheld from them by the SBC (Dawson, 2013). SBC also changed the amount generated annually from the proposed commercial units from 11 to 12 to £17million (LLSB, 2014c). The SBC used tactics to reinforce a negative discourse portraying skateboarders as unruly and disorderly (Nemeth, 2006).

After 6 months of campaigning, the Festival wing held an invitation only ‘open space forum’ on September 14th-15th 2013, exemplifying reduced transparency due to lack of public invitation. However, only after two days of discussion including four and a half hours of negotiations was the idea of the preservation even entertained, when the SBC gave skaters the task of raising £17m in six months to bridge funding gap. This directly contradicts the undercroft as a ‘free’ space. On the 19th September the SBC installed a banner above the undercroft announcing its relocation.

On The 23rd of October, the Southbank Centre took a ‘fait accompli’ stance and held meetings to design the alternative skate-space, ignoring the 70,000 members of LLSB who
objected to the planned redevelopment of the famous Undercroft. LLSB activists attended in an observational capacity and exposed that there were **no undercroft users or young people in attendance**. Using affirmative language for their plans, the SBC gave no justification for relocation.

By the November 2013, LLSB had requested to meet the Southbank Centre board of governors three times but were denied each time by Chairman Rick Haythornthwaite. LLSB also requested to address the Southbank Centre staff in constructive dialogue twice but were refused by management. On 26th November 2013, Southbank Centre re-submitted an amended planning application which still included the infilling of the undercroft despite the vast public objection that had been made known to Lambeth Council.

After Boris Johnson came out supporting the undercroft users by saying in January 2014: “The skate park is the epicentre of UK skateboarding and is part of the cultural fabric of London” (fig.2.7), the campaign continued to gain public support and the undercroft was secured later that month with a second delivery of objections of 27,000 personal objections. Support came from local residents, English Heritage, Mayor of London, London Assembly Members, Open Spaces Society, local MPs, Southbank Centre creative practitioners, local traders and over 140,000 members of the public (LLSB, 2014b).
Fig. 2.7. Strictly Roots and Culture

Source: Chris Bourke, 2014
3. Literature Review

3.1 Planning for Community: Public space design and planning.

Social geography and urban planning studies critically studied the role of public space since the urban race riots and civil strife in the late 1960s and 70s. The philosophy of Henri Lefebvre frames the debate, stating that public space is not just a neutral space but an active entity society produces, acting as the “natural arena of citizenship” (Masso, 2012:124). Who produces space and how is it experienced became the next tendency in the discussion with authors such as Jane Jacobs (1961) and Kevin Lynch (1960) arguing that the urban environment shapes our disposition, behaviour and knowledge. This then led to an interdisciplinary interest in exploring power and identity representation in public space, which this paper aims to build upon. Theorizing the implications of social space, Habermas’ theory of communicative rationality argues unmediated interactions were vital towards truly socially just and democratic public space (Calhoun, 1992). Habermas sought to reconstruct the public sphere and its practices whereby communities communicate ideas, differences and solutions (Foley, 1997; Healey, 1999: 115). Iris Young (1990) critiqued communicative rationality theory as it assumed a universal, homogeneous public and suggested instead that inclusive space should embrace the needs of a diverse society to encourage interaction between individuals of different interests and perspectives. It is here that groups assert their right to the city as they become visible in public space (Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010). Exploring public spaces’ psychological significance, Masso (2012) argues it makes visible the identities of social groups and their construction of citizenship as a socio-spatial relation. Public space practices underlines differing understandings of its nature and functions. For skateboarders, it is a platform for appropriation and creativity and for developers; a possible arena for commodification and a site for economic growth.

The benefits of publically accessible space are now commonly recognised, influencing planning approaches from New Urbanism to Smart Growth and economic development understanding as studies have shown that public space directly correlates to adjacent property values and improved public health (RWJF, 2010 IN: NLA, 2015). This understanding causes tensions as it clashes with economic shifts from the mid-late twentieth century as
capital became increasingly mobile and the telecommunication industry boomed, forcing
city elites to promote economic growth to attract business at the cost of public space
(Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010). Several trends in planning have emerged from this tension
including the privatized management of public spaces where austerity affected, cash-poor
councils provide incentives to the private sector in exchange for management contracts for
the spaces. This leads to complex public-private hybrid ownership and management
regimes. Defenders of privately owned public spaces argue that the efficiency of distributing
the public good outweighs any potential negative social impact. I argue that economic
efficiency should not be equated with detrimental social consequences.

Another trend to emerge is the highly programmed ‘festival’ spaces that focuses on
producing a consumption-based environment (Sorkin, 1992; Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010)
where non-consumers are discouraged from entering, prioritising the exchange over the
use-value of public spaces (Turner, 2002:543). Thirdly, concerns regarding security have
made creating ‘safe’ spaces increasingly important. This involves a critical mass of law-
abiding, desirable users who can identify unlawful activities themselves. To attract this
critical mass of desirable users, schemes rely on extensive programming and event planning
(Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010). These trends of privately managed, highly programmed
spaces with a focus on creating a critical mass of desirable users contradicts Iris Young’s
(1990:225) thoughts when she created the term ‘city life’ to refer to the multiplicity of
parallel groups, cultures, interests and meanings that interacts in a location, which should
not be reduced to or assimilated into an imposed scheme but be recognised in their

The link between public space availability, community development and a shared sense of
fate is exemplified by the undercroft contestation. In his book Envisioning Real Utopias,
Wright (2008:79) broadly describes community as “any social unit within which people are
concerned about the well-being of other people and feel solidarity and obligations towards
others”. Although cooperation can be built around self-interest, it is more fragile and
requires more monitoring than cooperation built on a culture on reciprocity and obligation
(Wright, 2008). Despite being a naturally beneficial social condition, solidarity is not natural
given and especially given current planning trends based on competition and growth, it
must be made explicit and nurtured through the provision of truly inclusive public space (Labit, 2015).

### 3.2 Planning practices: Neo-liberal urbanism in London

The traditional focus of planning activities in London has reflected and shaped conceptions of what *places* should be like (Harvey, 1978; 2008; Mitchell, 2003). Planning acted to promote development and regulate changes or correct market failures as well as maintain order when threatened by chaos (Healey, 1999:111). These ideas of planning are increasingly dismissed as manifestations of modernist thinking about place, where control was central in managing spatial change (Gehl, 2010; Montomery, 2013). There is a growing literature addressing the *democratic deficit* in planning by incorporating communicative planning which I will explore below.

The urban planning power-structure along the Southbank is increasingly institutionalist and monetarily driven. The institutionalist approach stresses that individual identities and preferences are actively constructed in social contexts (Innes and Booher 1998). Healey (1997;1999) argues that Institutionalism acknowledges that the active work of social construction is not neutral in power relations and that the power of structure and agency is intensified when privatised. Institutionalised planning aims to shape consumer preferences and can be linked to neo-liberal urbanism which is synonomous with creative destruction occurring across a cluttered and contested institutional landscapes (Peck et al, 2000; Fyfe & Bannister, 1998; Judd & Fainstein, 1999). Neo-liberal ideology rests on the belief that open, unregulated and competitive markets are the favourable framework for socio-economic development (Peck J and Tickell, 2002). Neo-liberal urbanism uses mechanisms to alter the urban form via the adoption of the ‘highest and best use’ as the basis for land-use planning decisions. This approach to urban planning is rooted in competitive individualism and exploits and produces socio-economic differences. Neo-liberal urbanism interacts with pre-existing space through complex and contested restructuring strategies and introduces itself within politico-institutional context (Peck et al, 2009:54). This can be seen in the Southbank case-study as the development became politicised and contextualised through the SBC’s condemning PR campaign. Furthermore, neo-liberal urbanism fractures through two stages, the *destruction* of the existing urban form through market centred reform initiatives, and
the creation of infrastructure towards market-oriented economic growth (e.g.- inviting Wahaca to commodify space into retail).

When identifying power structures involved in planning in London we must recognise the difference between Policy, Politics and Polity. Policy includes the framing and context of public strategies, with an emphasis on the distribution of public resources, politics is the degrees and venues of access to decision making arenas and procedure and Polity is the jurisdictional shape and boundaries of governance structures. Politics can affect spatial polarization due to the antagonism between irreconcilable visions with respect to the very nature of decision making: “opposing groups claim their right to exclusive control of the city” (Alegra et al, 2012: 566). Neo-liberal urbanism involves the economic shift that forced business elites and political leaders into entrepreneurial role in promoting economic growth (Nemeth, 2006; Gehl, 2010). In order to fix capital in Southbank, the government must make the area attractive to itinerant investment where ‘image is everything’ (Mitchell, 2003).

This attraction of capital is often embedded in economic strategies that prioritize order and visual coherence through aesthetic improvements, tourist spectacles, city marketing campaigns and slogans, and heavy-handed upgrading and development of security measures (Zukin, 1995; Fyfe & Bannister, 1998; Judd & Fainstein, 1999). Skateboarding counters this as it produces no tangible or exchangeable goods which is seen as irrational by those seeking to create the aesthetics of a more capital-friendly environment (Borden, 2001; Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010). This trend has been influenced by suburbanization and deindustrialisation which has pushed cities to compete for footloose capital investment by making themselves appear as attractive as possible to the top firms and brightest residents. Unfortunately, urban planning design strategies that provide business-friendly areas now have a tendency towards aesthetic coherence and spatial order over Habermas’ theory of unmediated social interaction which Southbank perfectly exemplifies. This shift in planning practices prioritises urban dwellers who can consume in these spaces over those who cannot. The shift of local authorities’ role from providing resources and services to the resident population to being considered as engines of economic growth has altered the quality of their urban policies which increasingly produce spatial fragmentation (Gehl, 2010; Montgomery, 2013; Alegra et al, 2012).
3.3 Moving towards Alternative planning practices

When identifying planning procedures and structures it is useful to consider the potential of alternative models proposed by Healey (1997; 2004) and others (Foley, 1997; Gehl, 2010). These scholars emphasize the role of communication and collaborations to achieve a more cohesive and consensual socio-spatial outcome. This is particularly relevant in the case of Southbank as the users made it very clear they felt ignored by the Southbank centre and communication attempts were continually rejected (Cannon; Woods in:LLSB, 2014a). This concept is rooted in Habermas’ (1984) communicative action and links to the literature around deliberative democracy and pluralist polity. Communicative planning affirms that the reflexivities and improvisations that allow agency to mould structure, rather than to be moulded by it, can be cultivated through dialogue and civic debate within a general restoration of the political community. This approach embraces all forms of knowledge including that of excluded stakeholders and embraces cultural difference as an asset (Healey, 1999:114; Morrissey and Gaffikin, 2006; Innes and Booner, 1999).

Foley (1997) and Forester (1993) parallel Healey’s theory and argue that through learning how to collaborate, a greater understanding of locality relations and conflicts can develop which can result in more collective approaches to conflict resolution. The communication action approach aims to transform governance cultures through reflexive dialogue. It identifies that policy work is accomplished substantially through social interaction, linking to Habermas’ argument surrounding the importance of social interaction between interest groups to arrive at the best conception of what is ‘right and true’. The literature points towards the possibility of changing planning policy to re-conceptualize the processes of inter-subjective communication in the public sphere, promoting inclusive public consultancy to allow dynamic mutual learning to take place.
3.3 Skateboarding: its place in academia and links to Youth Exclusion from Public Space

The field of skateboard literature is largely grounded in discussions surrounding the exclusion from public space and the rejection of the consumerist logic of public space (Irvine & Taysom, 1998; Howell, 2001: Nemeth, 2004, 2006; Borden, 2001). However, the literature continues to expand towards identifying and exploring its informal social hierarchies (Dupont, 2014), issues of gender, masculinity and race (Beal, 1995; Beal, 1996; Porter, 2003; Brayton, 2005; Donnelly, 2008; Yochim, 2010) as well as the impact and authenticity of large corporations such as Nike, Adidas and other brands entering the skateboarding market (Gomez, 2012). Issues of race and gender, which are argued to be misrepresented in skateboarding, are beyond the scope of my paper as I choose to focus on building upon the established work on skateboarding’s relationship to the urban environment by exploring its relation to transformative politics. In addition to formal journal articles and books, Skateboarding magazines (both in print and online) including Sidewalk, Kingpin (UK) Thrasher Magazine, Transworld Skateboarding, and Jenkem (USA) all produce a large body of legitimate and passionate work which continues to push the sub-culture forward as it matures with age.

Skateboarding literature in academia has been based largely within subculture studies (Gomez, 2012). Beal’s (1995) influential study involved 41 interviews with skateboarders and drew heavily on Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony. She too contested Howell, and describes skateboarding as a site of social resistance, challenging dominant hegemonic ideologies whilst at the same time accommodating certain aspects of the same hegemony in regards to masculinity that exists within skateboarding (Gomez, 2012). Skateboarding allows male adolescents to develop a form of an ‘alternative masculinity’; one that promotes self-expression, individualism, and flexibility, while simultaneously de-emphasizing competition and rule-bound performance (Beal, 1996). This theory of social resistance coincides with the wider literature regarding the physical resistance to the homogenised city-scape.

In his seminal book ‘Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture of the Body’ (2001), Borden draws on the work and approach of Lefebvre, asking the reader to rethink architecture. He states that architecture is constructed by space, time and human activity, describing that “space is part of a dialectical process between itself and human agency”
(2001:11). The interaction between space and the body is the basis for Borden’s conception of architecture, arguing that both are internalised within each other, having moved from the suburban carved out swimming pools of the 70s and 80s to the streets of the cities in the 90s and 00s (2001:135) where ‘tactics’ are developed by skaters to traverse the intended use and manipulate space (De’ Certeau, 1984). He presents a more historically grounded and theoretical understanding of skateboarding compared to other leading skateboard academic Jeremy Nemeth who uses skateboarding as a tool to explore youth exclusion from public space and the tensions between the skateboard community and the City of Philadelphia in the contestation of Love Park, a world famous street skating site (Nemeth, 2006).

Nemeth (2006) identifies that young people in public spaces are seen by policy makers as a threat to public order and illegitimate in the context of prioritized urban planning. Using the case of Love Park, Nemeth illustrates how public officials and planners prioritize a certain vision of public space explored above. His work parallels that of Soja’s (1989), identifying that removing public space is detrimental to young people’s identity formation and social learning as social identities are argued to be constructed in space. He links the economic and political restructuring of cities to the formation of regulatory regimes which in turn allows for an unprecedented preoccupation with perceived security against actions and spaces that threaten order (Nemeth, 2006:298). This is physically manifested in public space when people falling outside the accepted order are seen as transgressive and as a result are made marginal due to their rejection from public space in a similar way that many homeless population are treated. Engaging with the Right to the City movement, Nemeth argues that we should not just have the right to, but also the right to define public space.

Nemeth refers to and builds on the work of Valentine (1996, 2004) who argues that children and adolescents are being continually excluded from public space which is predominately viewed as ‘adult space’. This tension of youth exclusion is explored further by Churchill (2003) who argues that the needs of specific group of children, who often self-organize into homogeneous groups based on age, race or skill level in this case, are the least considered by planning and design in cities. Engaging in a shared activity with like-mined young people in a neutral space as opposed to school or home allows cross-cultural relationships to build and can be argued to allow for a greater chance of community cohesion in their future lives. Furthermore, other academics argue that this access to the public environment allows for adolescents and children to internalise and learn vital social skills and build autonomous
social structure (Katz, 2006: 115). This issue of unadulterated social interaction is increasingly important as chances for public, un-institutionalized and unregulated play has become progressively uncommon where most youths encounter peers in school clubs or organised sports (Valentine, 2004). The Southbank undercroft exists outside “the social and cultural landscape of childhood where adults try to shape children’s use of space” (Smith and Barker, 2000:246). When children are driven to sports games as opposed to skateboarding through the city, parents are preventing children from evolving their own understanding of their local environment and giving them a “dislocated sense of space” (Valentine, 2004:74). The literature suggests that skateboarding in London gives young people invaluable experiences towards their development and allows them to develop natural mapping skills as they engage in transitory reading of the city that is quite different to that of a pedestrian or a motorist (Valentine, 2004:74). To summarise, Skateboard literature contextualises debates surrounding planning practices and urban accessibility. It shows that undesirable groups promoting the use value of a space against its exchange value contradict monetarily driven agendas of urban governance. As Simmel (1903:14) would argue, this economic egoism reduces qualitative values to quantitative terms and denotes money as the “common denominator to all values”. This not need be the case.
4. Methodology

4.1 Approach and Justification

In order to accomplish my research objectives, a multi-method qualitative approach was adopted (Brannen, 1995), employing short interviews, in-depth interviews and observations. This form of Action Research is based on an open-ended pedagogy and empiricism and is effective as the transformative research is produced by a real engagement in the world (Adelman, 1993). The interviews were structured using a variety of question types to ensure they were dynamic (Dunn, 2010). Choosing to interview planners, relevant activists and council members, I adopt a phronetic research stance which helps clarify values, interests and power relations as a basis for praxis (Flyvberg, 2009). This method, focusing on knowledge-sharing, aims to identify and seek to address injustices (Mason et al, 2012:254) to peruse positive social change in partnership with non-academics (Pain et al, 2011:185). Whilst visiting the site I will use participant observation to better understand the culture of the undercroft. This ethnography gives me a chance to reflect on events in the field rather than retrospectively and offers a more natural research situation. I must remain subtle in my observational capacity to avoid ‘The Hawthorne effect’ where participants change behaviour when they know they are being observed (Miller et al, 2012).

4.2 Short and in-depth Interviews

15 short (10-20 minute) interviews were conducted with both users of the undercroft and members of the public along the Southbank with a varied respondent demographic. A structured interview approach was taken for these short interviews, to ensure answers remained relevant (Dunn, 2010). Nonetheless, the recorded interviews were not completely rigid, adopting a conversational style allowing respondents to discuss a range of subjects (Graham, 1984; Valentine, 2005). To build the conversational relationship I used a number of techniques including conversational repairs to clarify misunderstandings, non-verbal acknowledgements and summaries of understanding to encourage conversational competence. This increased the interviewee’s confidence and therefore honesty, allowing for more fruitful analysis of interview (Rubin, 2005). A voice recorder will be used, allowing me to transcribe and fully analyse interviews whilst simultaneously allowing interviewees to
view the recording as a symbol of my ability to get their messages across accurately (Rubin, 2005:126, Miller et al, 2012).

Through purposive sampling, semi-structured, in-depth interviews (1-2 hours) were conducted with two planners, the case worker for the contestation from Lambeth council, two representatives from LLSB as well as two representatives from the London skateboarding community who were aware of the case and are involved in similar projects in London. These in-depth interviews allowed for the full expression of complex themes and contradictions that other methods would not (Dunn, 2010; Oppenheim, 1992; Valentine, 2005). The interviews were aimed to be ‘content focused’, with an interview guide, prepared prior to each (Dunn, 2010), specific to each interviewee (See: Appendix). Using an outline of questions, I allowed the interviews to unfold informally, offering participants the opportunity to explore issues, opinions and experiences they felt were significant to them (Longhurst, 2009).

4.3 Ethical consideration and limitations

At every stage of research, ethical considerations were taken into account, reducing participant discomfort by creating a relaxed and informal atmosphere (Dowling, 2010; Dyer and Demerrit, 2008). A major ethical consideration of my project is my positionality as a devoted skateboarder who is emotionally and politically engaged in the case-study. The project cannot be completely unbiased as the analysis undertaken is shaped by my own experiences (Ganga and Scott, 2006). However, this also gives me an advantage of insider knowledge of the community, allowing me to use shorthand language to eliminate the need for lengthy explanations of terms and sub-cultural understandings (Mason et al, 2012:252). There are issues of power imbalances in my project as during interviews, the researcher is often perceived as being in a higher position of power, subconsciously indicating that every question must be answered (Miller et al, 2012). To combat this I will make it clear that interviewees do not have to answer all questions and they have the right to contest/question the nature of any question asked. All interviewees were informed of the aims and nature of the research before answering questions and all public/user-group interviewees will be kept anonymous via the use pseudonyms (Dowling, 2010). To increase transparency and the acknowledgment of perspectives in the London skateboarding community, in-depth interviewee identities will be disclosed.
5. Research Findings and analysis

‘To use the LLSB contestation as a tool to critique urban planning approaches in London’

5.1.1 Lessons from LLSB

LLSB has been successful in contesting development plans and through holding jams and setting up a campaign table, have exemplified what Keirsey and Gatrell (2006:2) argue, that groups “strengthen and legitimise themselves and their efforts through the development of adaptive spatial practices”. They also retained their identity as an established community, reflecting Lefebvre’s (1961:53) argument that any community that fails to produce their own space, would suffer a loss of identity. Additionally, the group has showcased Harvey’s (1996) contention that for a movement to work successfully, they need to develop a universalist politics capable of reaching across space. This was achieved by the early adoption and continual usage of the poignant phrase “support culture over commerce and community over capital” as well as the tireless work of LLSB activists and supporters and especially the commitment and videography of LLSB spokesperson Henry Edwards-Wood.

LLSB’s experience with various institutions highlighted flaws in London planning practices as well as power relations between institutions. When interviewed, Paul Richards (LLSB campaigner) highlighted that one issues faced was a difficulty in meeting the relevant representatives from institutions instead of “gatekeepers” that would pass them from one representative to another. LLSB activist Louis Woodhead expressed surprise when the huge number of personal objects did not seem to influence SBC alternative skate-space plans: “This should weigh very strongly in development decisions. When it does not, it raises big questions as to who is this city really being built for”. When interviewing Helen Miles, the Lambeth Council case worker for the contestation, she commented:

“The number of comments doesn’t influence the final decision, what we’re considering is the content of those objections. We can’t say that just because 100 people have said it we can’t give it more weight. We have to consider it a planning objection.”
In the eyes of local councils, the number of objectors is not as important as the content of those objections. This is something I argue should be amended. As Louis pointed out, the number of objections should have greater weight in the planning process for it to be truly democratic.

5.1.2 Consultancy: Tokenistic Toxicity

The case of the undercroft contestation has shown that institutional ‘consultancy’ is often “tokenistic” (Richards, 2016) and ceremoniously exists to adhere to statutory obligations and to be in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework 2012. This was evidenced by the leader of Lambeth council meeting LLB once to fulfil legality then not agreeing to further meetings. Richards expressed his frustration with how various bodies including Lambeth Council, the Central Government, the Arts Council, the SBC and MPs would meet amongst themselves to discuss plans but not invite or meet with the users of the undercroft who were the group most affected by the plans. Development plans are drawn up behind closed doors and then taken to councils for advice via pre-applications enquiries. With the help of the opaque legality of pre-application enquiries, Local Councils are bound to confidentiality and even after they have advised on plans, the plans do not reach the public domain until they are published as a formal planning application:

“If someone wants advice on a proposal, before they submit an application they have the option to come to us, pay a fee and we provide a response to them. That response is confidential”

(Helen Miles, Lambeth Council)

My argument for early engagement is not novel. In national policy it is advised for developers to engage in public consultation early. However, in the eyes of developers who look to serve their own needs, they would rather not deal with contesting interest groups and only engage in tokenistic consultation:
“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”

*(NPPF, 2012:45, Paragraph 188)*

The contestation has served to expose the true colours of the SBC and “the toxicity of which they operate” (Richards, 2016). The contestation has shown the ruthlessness of their quest to serve their own needs whilst ignoring obvious public outcry. New information is still coming to the surface of SBC protecting their own interests, seen through the Minister of Architecture’s allocation of a ‘Certificate of immunity from Listing’ to the SBC Festival Wing in direct opposition to advice from English Heritage and the Twentieth Century Society who were concerned with massive permanent extensions (Waite, 2014). This immunity helped secure the SBCs renovation as plans were drawn up.

The contestation has questioned the SBC’s interest in London’s culture. This is evidenced by the twice failed SBC objection to the undercroft’s worthy ‘asset of community value’ status and directly contradicts the Localism Act 2011 (c.20) which aims to facilitate the devolution of decision-making powers from central government control to individuals and communities (Legislation.go.uk, 2016). In my interviews at the undercroft (fig.5.1.1&5.1.2), users described the space as: “a multi-functional community hub” (Rick,23), a “tight-knit community” (Shelly,20) and “one big family” (Ian, 16). The Localism Act was supposed to “make the planning system more democratic and more effective” as well as give “new rights and powers for communities” (Local.gov.uk, 2015). Contextualised by this act, Richards (2016) expressed surprise that the central and local governments were “so non-responsive to community pro-activity”. The ineffectiveness of the current system is acknowledged at various levels. A paper outlining the Localism Act by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2011:9) describes the difficulties for objecting interest groups: “They often need more time to organise a bid and raise money than the private enterprises bidding against them.” 2 years after this was published, the objection period was further reduced, which I will explore below. This act, which brought with it an air of optimism in 2010, has had little effect on the balance of power in London and has instead “served a
useful purpose by showing that a much more radical approach is necessary if we are to deliver excellent public services in a time of austerity” (Pipe, 2013).

**Fig. 5.1.1, 5.1.2**: Users of the space

*Source: Authors own*
5.1.3 July 2013: Discriminative ‘Reforms’

When viewed at a larger scale, planning policy reforms affecting LLSB’s ability as an objector sheds light on the discriminative and unfair relationship between developers and interest groups. In July 2013, amendments were made to the Judicial Review process which affects how objectors (groups like LLSB) can contest development plans. The main focus of the ‘reforms’ were to streamline the process and reduce costs for developers. Most importantly, the time limit to file a claim was reduced from three months to six weeks. (Pinsent Masons, 2013). Changes also included the removal of the right to challenge a decision by oral reconsideration. Any appeal against a decision will be determined on papers alone. This contrasts humanist notions of planning and prioritises the bureaucratic nature of planning and the agency of those who can navigate legal/planning documents. This is good news for developers because the ability of claimants to rely on ‘weak’ challenges to prolong process will be denied. Other good news for developers are changes to ‘after the event legal expense insurance’ where the opportunity to recover the costs of insurance cover from claimants has been removed and is now at the party’s own risk. This will further deter claimants from pursuing challenges against decisions (Pinsent Masons, 2013).

On the 6th September, the Ministry of Justice proposed additional planning–specific reforms to Judicial Review. The changes reflect an increasing number of judicial review applications: between 2007 and 2012, judicial review applications increased 86% (Stanwell, 2013). In 2011, only 4% of judicial review applications reached the final hearing stage which is explained by developers as resulting from a large number of “meritless and opportunist claims” (Stanwell, 2013) that ‘clog up’ courts, delay developers projects, increase costs and are ‘detrimental to the recovery economy’. An important question to ask here is this: are the claims increasing because of opportunism, or because developers are becoming more ruthless and destructive with newly streamlined planning timeframes? Just 188 cases were classified as ‘Town and Country Planning’ out of a total of 12,434 judicial reviews in 2012, and so it is wrong to characterise planning as clogging up the courts (Hoult, 2014). No mention is made to how these claims may be reflections of detrimental social and cultural costs to interested parties affected by development plans.

Further ‘reforms’ included removing the opportunity for applicants to request a second hearing if their application is ‘ruled to be without merit’ as well as introducing a ‘planning
fast track’ system to allow planning challenges to be identified faster. Other changes include reviewing the availability of legal aid to those challenging plans where there has already been an appeal and tightening the test to identify whether a person or body has sufficient interest to bring a claim. These changes reduce the ability of objectors to assemble suitably compiled judicial review applications and discriminate against the public’s disability to understand complex planning policy. The Oxford Dictionary defines disability as a ‘disadvantage’ or ‘condition that limits a person’s activities’. I argue that the disadvantages these ‘reforms’ bring to the public who wish to organise an interest party to object plans are in direct opposition of the Equality Act 2010 which was introduced so that public authorities would consider how their policies and decisions affect people who are protected under the act and meet the needs of people with protected characteristics (Citizens advice, 2016). Specifically, part 11 chapter 1 section 149(1a) outlines the ‘Public sector equality duty’, where “A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination that is prohibited by or under this Act” (Legislation.gov.uk, 2016). Along this line of thought, it is the council’s statutory obligation to eliminate discrimination of the public who can be argued to have a form of disability (recognised as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 part 11 chapter 1 section 149(7)). The SBC, although a registered charity, is a privately owned (53%) organisation and does not have to comply with the public sector equality act. Therefore, the responsibility to eliminate the discrimination against laymen interest groups falls to Lambeth Council. A simple and straightforward way of doing this is to extend legal advice and facilitate high-quality public consultancy with affected groups; in this case, the skaters, BMX riders, Graffiti writers and other users of the space, paralleling Healy’s communication action theory.

5.1.4 The benefits of local Democracy: Participatory Planning

Robert Putman put forward the idea of social capital in his study of Italy in 1993. Social capital means “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putman 1993). Putman argues that social capital facilitates formation flows for mutual benefit, nurtures reciprocity and creates trust. Once these are in place, they usually are self-generating as future generations are inducted into these norms through socialisation. The meaning of the ‘public realm’ includes the social and cultural value and the civic identity places hold as a ‘self-organising’
shared resource that individuals and communities alike interact with on a daily basis (NLA, 2015). This was a common theme that emerged in my interviews as spaces that skateboarders inhabit tend to be “largely unregulated and self-policing spaces” (Matt, FoSS). The city therefore, enables social formation of citizens as “right claimants” (Isin, 2008:266) who are capable of being governed and to govern themselves. Social capital is also expected to have positive effects on economic growth as it enhances benefits of investment in physical and human capital (John and Chathukalam, 2002). High stocks of social capital are argued to increase active civil engagement. LLSB, who occupy social space represent an interest group exemplifying heightened social capital which has led to civic engagement.

Putman argued that “civil associations contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government” as well as internally affecting interest group members by developing their habits of solidarity, cooperation and public mindedness. This links back to Wright’s (2008) argument of the strength of social power of communities that feel obligation towards each other as well as Labit’s (2015) argument that solidarity should be explicitly nurtured in society through the provision of truly public space. Furthermore, LLSB’s influence on and support of FoSS, an equally important fight for the right to public space against developers, reflects Putman’s theory of the benefits of social capital as it has external effects on the local area by aiding secondary associations (Putman, 1993:89-90): Matt from FoSS describes: “LLSB provided us with invaluable input and support from the start, in fact we could not have achieved what we did without them”.

Social capital increases the likelihood of individuals joining organisations, especially horizontal ones (John and Chathukalam, 2002). The production of social trust and reciprocity will help remove barriers to collective action and political negotiations. In his book Smart City, Anthony Townsend (2012:310) builds on Putman’s idea, placing it in the context of the 21st century digital city, stating that “connection is the means by which people will participate in civic life, not just actively but passively as well”. In an era of mistrust in politicians, he argues “The answer lies at the grass-roots” (2014:320).
‘Analyse skateboarding’s relevance to public space governance’

5.2.1 Skateboarding’s contextualisation of ideal public space

Skateboarding’s relevance to public space governance lies in its influence in interest group formation. LLSB exemplify perfectly how to protect public space through community activism and political stubbornness. Unfortunately, LLSB’s success has not been the same for similar groups in recent times. Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco, Love Park in Philadelphia, Brooklyn Banks in New York City, Central TV in Birmingham, Old Market Square in Nottingham and many more have helped build global skateboarding scene but unfortunately all have been demolished or redeveloped. In this sense, it is summed up well by one of the users of the undercroft in my public interviews: “The battle for the space is more important than the actual space” (Billy, 22), reflecting a growing sense of unrest that the destruction of such significant sites should not be allowed to continue. This is reflected in the literature as critics who lament the loss of public space are often more concerned with the diminution of the public sphere than they are with the reduction of physical space itself (Kohn, 2004).

As identified earlier, skateboarding is linked to the exclusion of young people from public space governance. Often coming from suburbs as well as the inner city, Southbank acts as a stage where these groups of youths can escape the grip of school and their parents and have an unsupervised opportunity to meet other people from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Through LLSBs engagement in political activism, young people who became connected to the movement learnt how they can help shape their city and in doing so, empower themselves and the people that surround them: “The older guys taught me a lot about the city” (Tom, 16). An observing member of the public responded to the question regarding the destruction of the undercroft: “I think it was the city trying to show that they can do what they want to young people, but they can’t” (Olú, 20).

Skateboarding identifies cracks in public space governance and contextualises ideal public space. ‘Open-minded’ public spaces have been described by scholars as being spaces where un-programmed, spontaneous encounters allows for opportunism and discussion with others (Nemeth, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Isin, 2008). These spaces allow for personal identities to be constructed through meeting the ‘other’ and therefore teach true urbanity (Rogers,
1998; Bridge and Watson 2002; Gehl, 2010). When individuals are declined access to public space this becomes an issue of urban citizenship and representation in the public forum. The infilling of space in 2005 and the removal of the homeless from the under-croft in late 1990s ignores the fundamentals of truly public space which is not public if the “maintenance requires the marginalization or exclusion” of a particular constituency (Valentine, 1996:217) (fig.5.2.1). Controlled public spaces allows dominant individuals to be protected from confrontation with others of social difference, separating uses and users. However, in truly inclusive public spaces, powerful groups are forced to confront existing inequalities and deal with the differences instead of detaching themselves from the reality. It is only in these universally inclusive public spaces where space can be claimed by marginalized groups and as a result be counted as a legitimate part of the public environment (Nemeth, 2006; Mitchell, 1995).

![Fig.5.2.1: Homeless woman in the undercroft, 1993, before removal of their community](image)

Source: Long Live Southbank, 2014:162
Neo-liberal simulations of public space are becoming more sophisticated, but so are the skater’s tactics for detouring those spaces. In a speech delivered at ‘World Town Planning Day 2014’ Louis Woodhead, LLSB campaigner, explains “Locals at Southbank have a great familiarity with the architecture. We know where the cracks are instinctively, where the drain covers are, where there is a slightly raised paving slab”. Therefore, skateboarders create a material space that fits in their unique uses and memories, what Lefebvre (1974) would call a “representational space”, a lived space inscribed by skaters’ aspirations and demands that falls outside formal governance ideologies. Another key theme in Lefebvre’s writings is power relations of production, stating that if one person appropriates space, it pushes others to do the same. This can be seen through the creation of skateboarders appropriation of the undecroft since the 1970s. When tactics are used to appropriate space, the representational space formed includes complex symbolosims, representing the ‘underground side of social life’. Lefebvre describes this new space as ‘a tool of positivity’ which contradicts the governance system that attempts to control it. The skaters’ appropriation of the abandoned space of the undecroft exemplifies Lefebvre’s notion of an intrinsically adaptive relationship between space and the self (Cullinane, 2014) and how skateboarders can act outside the intricacies of public space governance.

5.2.2 Reflections of a cultural hierarchy

The contestation revealed cultural hierarchies in the SBC as one group would lose artistic expression over another. With this in mind, the price of the development can be seen not just through the commercial unit but informally through the people that use it; the skaters and other artists that use the space. Ben Bradshaw, Former Cultural Secretary described how the Hungerford-Bridge skate-space plan exemplified a scheme that someone tried to impose on a group but does not end up being creative. Instead, the existing undecroft reflects that “something that has grown up from the grassroots ends up being of real lasting cultural value” (LLSB, 2015). Interviews with members of the public observing the skateboarders showed that the public thought the in-filling would be “destroying the original culture of London” (Jane, 45) and that some were there purely to “soak up the atmosphere” (Mark, 24). A user of the space expressed the space has “got its own culture” (Ben, 30) and another that: “it acts as an art gallery... its interactive” (Billy, 22). The cultural hierarchy exposed raises interesting questions about what
culture truly is. In the BBC John Peel lecture series exploring the state of culture in Britain, Brian Eno (2015) discusses that “we need to rethink how we talk about culture. Rethink what we think it does for us and what it actually is”. He goes on to argue that “culture is a sort of collective ritual” that helps build relationships between people. Edwards-wood (in:LLSBb,2015) describes how LLSB “wanted to dispel myths and represent the culture as it is; an art-form and valuable form of expression”. Skateboarders at the undercroft, through artistic expression, in line with Putman’s social capital, Wright’s social power theory and Eno’s understanding of culture, help advance notions of togetherness and the value of communicative society.

The LLSB table at the undercroft used throughout the 17 month campaign acted as a doorway between the cultural realm of skateboarders and the general public. Locating the debate in a relevant space, it contrasted the detached parliament and newspapers as the domain for debate. As a stage for discussion and buffer between what can appear as an intimidating culture, the table opened up relations to the public who had a “conditioned view of what skateboarding is through the influence of media and corporations” (Pressey in:LLSBb,2015). What observers saw was a profound and human element to the formal arts institution of the SBC. The case highlighted the difficult nature of irreconcilable visions, reflecting the delicate nature of urban decision making (Alegra et al, 2012:566).Throughout the process, the SBC had difficulties understanding the value of skateboarders and did not address them as artists that been through a lot of struggle to get to where they had. The SBC were of the old mentality that the skateboarders were delinquents and a problem. Richards (in:LLSBb,2015), reflected that the SBC and undercroft users had massively differing approach and use of language but through dialogue and discussion there was a “common goal” that everyone could benefit from. This emergence of a common goal exemplifies what Innes and Booner (1999) described as ‘emancipatory knowledge’ and Forrester (1999) as the benefits of ‘argumentative planning’ which uses conflict as “creative tension” to be channelled more productively (Morrissey and Gaffikin, 2006:877). This communicative approach centres on core values of equity, participation, inclusion and transparency. When questioned about what exactly he meant by the “common goal”, Paul explained that LLSB and the SBC agreed that “the space should provide cultural and art history” to the public.
5.2.3 Skateboarding’s Detachment from Neoliberalism

Perhaps the most common theme in my research, apart from the centrality of community at the undercroft, was the community’s detachment from capital. Southbank local and pro-skateboarder Chewy Cannon (in:LLSB,2014a) expresses this clearly: “we’re not doing it for money, we’re doing it for love”. Discussing the undercroft, one user noted: “no one’s taking any money, no one wants any money” (Freya, 28). Another tutted at the mention of money, saying: “As a skateboarder you just want to keep it alive” (Nick, 34). But it was not just young skaters that expressed their deviation from the market economy. I interview a mother whose son was BMXing at the undercroft, when asked how the space differed from other activities along the Southbank, she quickly answered:

“IT’S FREE! That’s the major difference for me as a single mother on a very tight budget living in the inner city, it’s one of the only free, cross cultural activities going on.”

(Jane, 45)

“There is nothing monetary about it, there is no marketing, there is just skateboarding and all the other stuff that goes on there, it is self-policing, it feels completely removed from the rest of London, it has built its own atmosphere, its own identity.”

(Louis Woodhead, LLSB Activist)

“Southbank is one of the only place where money is irrelevant, it’s just all about the activity, it’s all about the motivation and the individual and not about the cash and that’s the only place in London where that’s true”

(Freya, 28)

LLSB showcases a detachment from Walzer’s argument that money buys participation in contemporary society, so you can participate in the dominant norm of material consumption. Those unable to consume, or that choose to hold other norms, or “threaten the prevailing order and its value system, may be marginalized from the mainstream and even physically contained or excluded” (1986:475).
‘Offer Alternative methods of Urban Planning which are more democratic and centred around community building’

5.3.1 Community Agency in Planning

The LL&B campaign has revealed that urban planning practices need to change. To be democratic they need to become more transparent and local authorities should be under increased obligation to facilitate consultation with adversely affected communities. A recent public survey undertaken by Open-City revealed that 46% of the population feel ‘not involved at all’ in planning, consultation or development of their neighborhoods and 97% believe well designed spaces positively affect mental well-being (Badrock and Cassels, 2013). Communities need to organize and assert their agency, as LL&B have done, as well as integrate historical elements of a space’s creation to contest London’s homogenisation.

As time has passed, the SBC has seemed to forget the ambitions of Archigram who designed the undercroft for creative interpretation. The current planning of the space should be “embedded in past experiences” (Healey, 1999:114) that determine the obligations of the use of the space. For future generations to use the space as it was done since the 1970s; “the creative interpretation of the buildings brutalist architecture goes hand in hand with the architects original, playful visions” (LL&B, 2015). If consultancy was properly utilized, then the skateboarders could have been given the proper respect, time and opportunity to transform assumptions about the space through strategic critical reflexivity which reflects the reason the space was originally built for the festival of Britain. Dennis Crompton (in Southbank Centre, 2013:3) who was originally involved on the team of architects in the 1960s “expressed [his] ambition that there should be other facilities on the South Bank, so that it becomes alive ... rather than just a cultural centre”. I argue that the echoed scraping of wheels, the smell of aerosol from the writers spray-cans (fig.5.3.1) and the sight of a truly diverse community sharing a passion, in the words of Simmel (1903) “intensifies the consciousness” and exemplifies a space that is sensually alive as Archigram wished it to be.
Fig. 5.3.1: Graffiti at the undercroft

Source: Authors own
5.3.2 Conversation, discussion, debate

In the literature, spatial planning practices are described to typically involve making acquaintances among networks that coexist in a locality in order to resolve conflicts and to provide an arena for people to meet, discuss ad debate (Healey, 1999). In practice, for this case at least, this is far from the truth as LLSB were continually kept out of meetings and excluded from discussion, contrasting a supposed interactive governance process. The SBC, using its well-educated and well-connected workforce and use of affirmative language looked to form and one-sided argument which led to LLSB members being dominated and marginalized in meetings (Healey, 1999). Instead, in conversation between groups, we must accept some common principles to allow communicative exchange to take place (Habermas 1984). Conversations imply the exchange of knowledge and understanding and of claims for attention. Effective conversation requires some degree of trust and a preparedness for some degree of mutual understanding and compromise. The ‘fait accompli’ stance taken by the SBC and their bias in meetings is discussed clearly in literature as Foley (1999:22) describes: “In determined situations, institutional actors cannot be relied upon to initiate and defend a communicative process that supports an alternative or oppositional vision of what is ‘desirable’”.

The case of LLSB has shown that we need to re-think how we deal with planning contestation. Institutions, local authorities, planners, urban designers and the central government need to build governance practices that seek to sustain the diversity of relational webs in a locality. They need to create processes and arenas with the potential to generate multifaceted learning, build intellectual and social capital, and develop a shared systems of meaning. Formal power is not necessarily effective power (Wright, 2008:115). As the Localism Act intended but failed to implement, we need to acknowledge the power of communities. Power, when cast from elites in the form of political or economic power is not necessarily more effective than social power when imbedded from below. The use of social power to mobilise people for voluntary action contrasts to economic and state power that uses money and political force to influence society. LLSB manifests social power which is “rooted in the capacity of people to form associations to advance their collective goals” (Wright, 2008:145). The viability of this social power should be integrated into
communication planning approaches to embraces all forms of knowledge including that of excluded stakeholders.

Jacobs’ (1961:238) writes that “cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”. The thought of opposing the forces that shape our cities is often overwhelming, but it should not be. As Lefebvre described, the right to shape the city cannot be bequeathed by the state; it is earnt simply though the act of habitation that one has the right to participate in shaping its future.
6. Conclusions

6.1 Complexities in Practice

I acknowledge that there are gaps in my research which allow for possible further study in the future. Firstly, using London as a case study for changing planning practices risks synecdoche fallacy as accounts of wealthier cities cannot be generalized to all cities (Alegra et al 2012). Furthermore, due to time limitation, a larger sample size would have been beneficial to broaden empirical data. For advocating increased transparency, difficulties lie in applying theory to practice. In practice, planning is extremely complex and confidentiality is often in place to protect against misinformation being made public. To be more democratic the process needs to be more transparent and plans put into the public domain at the point of conception, but this is difficult to identify and implement due to the private nature of developers.

Moreover, I argue that councils should be obliged to help balance the scales of development contestation through legal advice and consultancy facilitation, but this implies bias and would no doubt be criticized by developers as tipping the scales the other direction to discriminate against them, in favour of laymen interest groups, negating local councils’ stance as a neutral mediator. Local councils, having experienced severe funding cuts, have a very difficult task and should not be treated as a scapegoat for developers’ actions:

“FoSS has a good working relationship with Lambeth Council”

(Matt Gold, FoSS)

“The council have in almost all respects remained neutral from 2013 onwards”

(Louis Woodhead, LLSB)

“I think they (London Legacy Development Corporation) have been incredibly innovative when helping the existing local communities to thrive”

(Andy Willis, Frontside Gardens)
When asked about the possibility of eliminating the confidential pre-application enquiry period to ensure complete transparency, Lambeth Council suggested acknowledgment of transparency issues, but were bound by planning law:

“We would always tell developers to relay with interested parties. Until that application comes in that is not a statutory requirement. We suggest. We cannot say you have to do this. Until it comes into law that’s the obligation we bound by”

(Helen Miles, Case Officer, Lambeth Council)

Therefore, the duality of the issue is to formulate increased obligation for both the council to aid local interest groups as well as put into law an increased obligation for transparent and substantial consultation by developers. We need to develop a more space and community-focused policy framework that produces better understandings of socio-spatial interrelations.

“[Local councils] cannot require that a developer engages with [interest groups] before submitting a planning application”

(NPPF, 2012:45 paragraph 189)

A path to better planning relationships can be achieved through cutting out the defensive and frustrating role of institutional ‘gatekeepers’ to allow for direct communication. Additionally, better quality communication and consultation should prioritise transparency and the appropriate invitation of the public and interest groups alongside a commitment to a fairly mediated and effective conversational approach. This approach would facilitate communicative exchange and increase transparency through a conscious change of language used, in particular affirmative and specialist language. Increased openness in the long run leads to better public relations and allows room to discuss plans.
6.2 The Right to the City and Skateboarding’s Resistant Ideology

The meaning and nature of public space is constantly being produced, reproduced, contested, negotiated and reconfigured and there is always potential to defy imposed order and overthrow this control (Mitchell, 2003). Claiming the right to the city requires never taking that for granted. LLSD has exemplified that the right to the city includes the right to define and be creative in space. Through this, individuals and communities are empowered, fostering social capital which in turn leads to politically charged civic engagement. Planners, politicians, developers and members of the public alike need to recognise that when communities take pride in their space and work to change it for the better through open-minded, transparent engagement, power is re-cast to the communities that inhabit that space.

Skateboarding is deeply rooted in a resistant ideology and this will never change. What can change is the implication of this ideology. At present, skateboarding exerts mainly a shamelessly inward-facing production of videography, clothing, art and expression. When the resistant ideology of the sub-culture and the passion of those who engage in it is coupled with an insultingly arrogant and heavy-handed attack by outsiders who have historically victimised and devalued their existence, serious action must be taken. LLSD has shown that the resourcefulness, creativity and solidarity of the skateboard community can be exported successfully into the political domain. With this in mind, events have shown that Howell (2001:21) is deeply mistaken when he suggested that Skateboard culture cannot affect the political domain.
6.3 A Humane Approach

The human condition is built to feel good when we trust and cooperate with each other. We are exceptionally suited to cooperate in environments like Southbank where, given the right settings, we are able to nurture relationships and transform strangers into people worthy of respect and care. Through determination, imagination and stubbornness LL SB has proved we can overhaul old urban governance systems. Success is not always guaranteed, but each time we contest unfair, undemocratic and discriminative developments, we erode its power and simultaneously find new life within ourselves.

In this paper I have identified and critiqued contemporary planning practices in London. Specifically, the neo-liberal urbanist tendency to commodify spaces and prioritise the exchange value over its public-use value. In our current economic climate, increasing land values are putting more pressure to deliver high returns for investors. With businesses and the government looking to bounce back after the 2007-8 recession, it is clear that planning that facilitates economic growth is prioritized and evidenced clearly in the NPPF. So alternatively, what should we plan towards? I argue along the same lines as Charles Montgomery who builds on the work of Lefebvre, Jacobs, Whitman, Harvey, Gehl and others, in his inspiring book *Happy City* and states: “cities must be regarded as more than just engines of wealth; they must be viewed as systems that should be shaped to improve human wellbeing” (Montgomery, 2013:41).

After providing basic human needs of food, shelter and security, the city should maximise joy and minimise hardship, lead to health rather than sickness, offer us real freedom to build our lives as we wish and build resilience against economic and environmental shocks. Furthermore, city officials, councils and institutions, through communicative planning should be fair in the way they appropriate spaces, services, hardships and costs. Most important of all it, urban design and planning should allow us to build and strengthen relationships between acquaintances and strangers alike. It is this possibility for sociability that public space represents. It offers the chance to build relationships that give life meaning and represent the city’s greatest achievement and opportunity. A city planned to communicate acknowledges and celebrates our common fate. This opens doors to empathy and cooperation which will help us tackle the great challenges of the future.
7. References


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8.3 Public Interview Highlights

Users of the space:

How far have you travelled to come skate here? Local users

Stockwell- waterloo

10 minutes on a bus

What does Southbank mean to you? Interviewees highlighted that sb was a community space that acted as “one big family” and also was widely recognised and agreed as the most famous street skating location in London.

“the most famous street skating spot in London”

A community space for everyone to use

What do you think about the sense of community here?

“Slightly disjointed sense of community”

Tight knit community. Big family

What do you think it means for the UK/global skateboarding scene?

“postcard image of London street skating scene” “globally respected and known as the place to go to London to skate” “Tourist attraction” “urbanely exist”

“Recognised all over the world. A lot of companies use it to hold events there. Over exposed

How important do you think the space is for Central London?

“battle for the space is more important than the actual space” “money has had to be pumped in to fight corporate money”

Very important. One of the only places where people that want to skate can express themselves and chill. There’s nowhere else like it in London. Express- an energy outlet-do their own thing and not sit at home doing nothing

Do you think it is a cultural asset to the area?
“films, free graffiti site, breakdance, bmx, rollerblade- it got an image to it- people remember what it looks like”

Always so much energy and movement, it attracts a lot of attention from the outside there’s a lot of interest

**How do you think it differs from other activities/attractions available in the area?**

“it acts as an art gallery” its interactive” “no ones taking any money, no one wants any money”

It’s a physical activity, some people see it as a sports facility, you can practice, hone your skills. other people see it as a chill area. It’s a multi-functional community hub.

Ben- 6- You can go there and do pretty much anything

**What are your opinions of the proposed redevelopment of the undercroft that was proposed last year?**

“People want to make more money in the city. Business want to be along that riverfront. There’s a high density of people just walking through there constantly so I can understand why they would want to move there. But as a skateboarder you want to keep something alive.” “Saying goodbye to Southbank would be the end of an era for skateboarding in central London”

It should stay the way it is, they shouldn’t do anything to it

**What are your opinions on the increasing privatisation of public space in London?**

“it’s disgusting” building up and up and up” “its destroying the original culture of London”

All public spaces should be public space. They should create more public space instead of decrease them

**What do you think is the future of Southbank? Future proposals?**

“Maintain the spot” “demo’s jams, people bring” . “I think the LLSB campaign will continue to grow”. “I hope it just continues to exist in the way that it has been existing”

It could be a dark future it could be a light future. You don’t know, it’s in the powers of the government and that group of elite people.

**Members of the public - HIGHLIGHTS**

**What brings you to the Southbank today?**

KANYIN 21 “watch some skating, soak up the atmosphere” -

JULES-46 my son has an interest in bmx so we stop by here and he can have his play time after I’m finished doing my errands in town.

Just walking past

**What shops/facilities have you visited here today?**
“none”

“Been into the bfi café, gourmet pizza company are quite reasonable. It’s got very corporate and chainy round here recently, it’s not as interesting a place to be around these days.

Just been to check out some galleries

**What are your opinions about the skateboarders using the undercroft space?**

“they are creative”

I think it’s a crime they’ve had to fight so hard to keep hold of this space. It’s always been a free, open community space. When the festival hall was developed, they didn’t know what to do with the undercroft. What’s happened here is incredible. It’s a cultural hub but from a street level. Rather than being a high art/fine art because around here you’re surrounding by high art culture.

I think it’s really good to have the opportunity to see people doing something they’re passionate about. I think it’s really good that for people who maybe aren’t that interested in it like older member of the public, they can be exposed to it. Great place to display the sport.

**Do you think it is a cultural asset to the area?**

“most definitely”

“It’s the rawest form of anything happening around here. Because there aren’t any rules compared to other spaces in the city where you’re outlawed to paint or skate.

**How do you think it differs from other activities/attractons available in the area?**

“its completely different, its got its own community and culture.”

Its one of the only free spaces. ITS FREE, that’s the major difference for me as a single mother on a very tight budget living in the inner city, it’s one of the only free, cross cultural activities going on.

Unless you’re going to an arena or a football pitch it’s difficult to see any sports, I know there’s football cages but it definitely brings the exhibitive side of it. People are

**What do you think about the sense of community here?**

“There’s always a great sense of community with skaters. Skateboarding a culture”

“The older guys gave me stickers to give out and taught me a lot about the city”

I’m not too sure – everyone seems friendly

**How important do you think the space is for Central London?**

“It’s an important space for a lot of young people but not to the city as a whole”

It’s vital. So many places are being skate stopped from being skated. It just feels like everyone’s against you as a skateboarder.
Very - because there’s nothing else like it. It’s the place that everyone knows

**What are your opinions of the redevelopment of the undercroft that was proposed last year?**

“It was stupid, it was pointless, it was a waste of their time. It’s not going anywhere. I think it was the city trying to flex and show people that they can do what they want, but they can’t, you can’t just take peoples spaces away from people”

It means a lot to a lot of people. 100% it should be kept.

**What are your opinions on the increasing privatisation of public space in London?**

It used to be a lot more interesting as a place to come along here as there were a lot smaller, individual owned local businesses. If you look at the waterfront, they’re all from corporate roots- you’ve got your Starbucks, your café Nero’s. All these chains make everything a bit bland really

**At the supposed cultural capital on London, what are your opinions surrounding the increased planning towards habits of consumption here? Money!**

“We live in a society where all were made to think is that we need to buy things, and especially in the city.”

At the Southbank you have lots of activities that are aimed at families and mostly really at tourists, and everything you have to pay for, whether you’re going to go on the wheel, to the aquarium, McDonalds, really bland really boring all aimed at generating cash, sb is one of the only place where money is irrelevant, it’s just all about the activity, it’s all about the motivation and the individual and not about the cash and that’s the only place in London where that’s true
What started with a group of skaters/activists with no interest in gaining money or power whatsoever, how has the process of entering the formal legal domain been? What have you found most difficult to deal with and what has surprised you?

The whole process has been very difficult, we are all volunteers and finding time to deal with the bureaucracy has been a problem, *we have been surprised by the ease at which the council seemed willing to give up its land to private enterprise.*

Through your work you must have had lots of discussions/encounters with the local council, what have you learnt about the attitudes of the council surrounding the use of land for skateboarding/bmxing?

*It has been surprising that before we started the skateparks in Lambeth existed in a grey area with no one taking responsibility for them, they were not included in any council or private budgets* (when we first started investigating the council did not even know they owned the park, they thought they had handed it over to Network Housing; the (private) developers of the Stockwell Park estate)

**How is the relationship between FOSS and the council now?**

*FoSS has a good working relationship* with Lambeth Council but time will tell whether or not they can keep their promises regarding the repair and upkeep of the park.

They have now included the Skateparks in the borough in their parks and outdoor spaces budget (however this has *been slashed by 50%.....*)

They have at our request named The Skatepark as an Asset of Community Value

Since we started the official policy seems to be leaning towards building more Skateparks on the site of old council facilities such as paddling pools like at Bloblands in Norwood Park (this is not through altruism it is more to do with the relative costs of maintaining skateparks vs paddling pools etc)

**Removing space is detrimental to young people’s identity formation and social learning, how would you say FOSP has protected young people’s right to the city?**

*Hopefully we have contributed to the idea that the community at large are entitled to free outdoor spaces for recreation in the city. I also hope we are trying to fight the tide of local councils handing over their (our) assets to the private sector*
What do you think about the feel and sense of community at Stockwell compared to other spots in London such as Southbank, Mile End or Frontside Gardens, just to name a few?

The community at Stockwell is unlike any other skate park I have ever visited, truly unique and welcoming. The park is one of the only places I have been where such a large number of people can all skate at once safely.

Do you think it is a cultural/social asset to the area and how do you think it differs from other activities/attractions available in the area?

It is without doubt a unique and world famous cultural and social asset to the area, it is a free, largely unregulated and self-policing space where people of all ages, genders and backgrounds gather to engage in free expression, it also has a community spirit that is so often missing from modern urban life.

Having formed in November 2014, did the success of the Long Live Southbank campaign have an impact on your creation, and if so, how so?

LLSB had a huge impact on the creation of FoSS and they have provided us with invaluable input and support from the start, in fact we could not have achieved what we did without them!

Long Live South Bank

With the emerging success of groups like friends of Stockwell Park and the protection of other parks out of London such as Harrow, how do you think the LLSB campaign has impacted the government’s view of skateboarding?

Before LLSB the government did not have a coherent view of skateboarding

How important do you think the Undercroft space is for central London and why?

The undercroft has always been the unofficial centre of the skateboarding scene in London and has become a vital symbol of people power in central London, as well as being to this day one of the few free dry places to skate in South London.

What are your thoughts regarding the idea that the Long Live Southbank movement is more important than the physical undercroft space?

You can’t have one without the other but I see the point

It is upsetting to hear about the probable demise of Brixton cycles from its current location, how do you think the increasing value of land in London threatens local communities and the access to public space?

Without a doubt the relentless pursuit of profit threatens to destroy communities not only on a local level but on a global level.

Your alternative plans for the area include more community based designs with great considerations regarding sustainability, why do you think these sorts of plans are not as commonly implemented in new housing designs?
Development is driven by profitability not sustainability

What was the process of protecting the park from acquisition from Network housing?

That was fairly straightforward, First of all we formed the Friends of Stockwell Skate park in order that the Council and other bodies would have an “official” body to speak to (previous enquiries from private individuals had been largely fruitless). We then did some investigation with land registry and the councils own records that showed that the proposed transfer of the skatepark to Network Housing had never been finalised. We applied for the asset of community value which in turn made the council realise that they must keep hold of the park and accept responsibility for it.

Given your success, how would you describe the collective power of grassroots, community based activism?

The whole process has shown the power of community activism, it does n’t take many people to start a movement, we must continually remind those in power that they work for us and must represent our best interests and not their own, if we don’t then it should be no surprise that they do not take us into account.

The old saying “if you don’t ask you don’t get” comes to mind

It has also shown the negative power of apathy, if everyone leaves it up to someone else then greedy but motivated people will win in the end

As a lifelong skater I would like to thank you for everything you’ve done to support the scene! Thanks very much for your time, would you like to add anything else?

If you haven’t already please join us at friendsofstockwellskatepark.com

8.5 Interview with LLSB activist Louis Woodhead

As skateboarders, we constantly appropriate space when interacting with the city. This kind of action is exactly what Archigram had in mind when designing the undercroft to be a playful part of “the city as a unique organism”, how do you think this freedom is impacted by increased privatisation of spaces in London?

Security guards, skate stoppers and boring, uninspiring places are all restrictions on freedom, and creative usage of a city. These often seem to come with privatisation, it seems. Every time you skate street because ‘every where’s a bust man’, privatisation is affecting your freedom.

Through your work you must have had lots of discussions/encounters with the local council, what have you learnt about the attitudes of the council surrounding the use of land for ‘unusual’ practices?
What started with a group of skaters with no interest in gaining money or power whatsoever, how has the process of entering the formal legal domain been? What have you found most difficult to deal with and what has surprised you?

We are very grateful for the philanthropy that helped Simon Ricketts, a well-known planning lawyer, represent us until 2014. I spent a few hours watching the village green proceedings in court and saw how alien the issues being debated were to the daily reality of the undercroft. Although in the end, the court proceedings did not make or break the deal we signed with the Southbank Centre, it is ludicrous to think that the future of such an incredible event could have been decided on tiny legal details, and the interpretation of them by individuals who have no real connection to the space (the judge, not Simon). Most difficult is perhaps the wrong word, but I would never want to see the stress of the campaign affect anyone else’s mental health in the way that it has. A sound mind is a very precious thing.

How is the relationship between LLSB and the council now? How have they responded to your August 2015 proposals?

The council have in almost all respects remained neutral from 2013 onwards. I believe they have done their best to stay disentangled. They have not commented on out August 2015 proposals. We would welcome their support, however Southbank Centre are the most important body to be working with right now.

How important do you think the Undercroft space is for central London and why?
Hugely! **Diversity is what gives a city life.**

What does Southbank mean to you and how important do you think it is for both the British and Global skateboarding scene?

*Hey man, I’m going to attach a talk that I gave yesterday. I went off on one about what SB means to me, so feel free to quote.*

Do you think it is a cultural asset to the area and how do you think it differs from other activities/attractions available in the area?

*It is definitely a cultural asset to the area. It is different in countless ways: there is nothing monetary about it, there is no marketing, there is just skateboarding and all the other stuff that goes on there, it is self-policing, it feels completely removed from the rest of London, it has built its own atmosphere, its own identity.*

At the supposed cultural capital of London, what do you think about the increased planning towards the necessity of spending money at cafes/restaurants/theatres on the Southbank compared to access to free activities?

*We surely do not need any more places to spend our money on the Southbank. Creativity is never a bad thing, a free creativity is often more genuine to take part in and view. It is more inclusive, and allows you to focus on what is actually going on, and the beauty of it, rather than worry about how much you’ve spent or see it as some sort of status symbol, although paid for art can also be very genuine. Whether Southbank Centre are doing their best given the funding they get, or whether they could do better, if you look further up the ladder, there are real questions to be asked about governmental policy on arts funding, and how, for instance, tax evasion impacts this.*

What do you think about the feel and sense of community at Southbank compared to other spots in London such as Stockwell, Mile End or Frontside Gardens, just to name a few?

*Stockwell has a beautiful scene and I am not surprised to see them rallying together to keep hold of their future. Mile End has a great scene, and I am sure Frontside Gardens does also. I love to go to Southbank because there is an even more varied mixture of people there, and the charisma of the space makes the coming together of these people a little more special. There’s probably some quotes from the attached document you could quote here also.*

With the emerging success of groups like friends of Stockwell Park and the protection of other parks out of London such as Harrow, how do you think the LLSB campaign has impacted the government’s view of skateboarding?

*Government isn’t quite the right word, but the media coverage we’ve got, the talks we’ve given, the discussions we’ve had and everything else has certainly given influential institutions some positive steering towards more progressive policies for free creative*
**activities like skateboarding.** Especially relevant are institutions such as English Heritage, historic England, the Arts Council, and local councils who will have taken note that the largest planning permission in UK history came from LLSB.

What are your thoughts regarding the idea that the Long Live Southbank *movement* is more important than the *physical* undercroft space?

Both are hugely important and both exceed the other. Southbank is far from defined by LLSB, and LLSB has wider relevance to the gentrification of London, and the provision of free creative spaces.

Removing space is detrimental to young people’s identity formation and social learning, how would you say LLSB has protected young people’s right to the city?

The campaign wasn’t entirely about young people, it was all inclusive. However when a communities space is under threat, its right to the city is being questioned, and LLSB stood up against that.

Given your success, how would you describe the collective power of grassroots, community based activism?

*The best campaigns are bottom up. People know what they want, and where there is real determination and a little bit of direction, they can be incredibly successful. Communities are a beautiful thing.*

As a lifelong skater I would like to thank you for everything you’ve done to support the scene and protect what I would regard as the cornerstone of English skateboarding! Thanks very much for your time, would you like to add anything else?

*Thanks for thinking of us – It would be great to see your project when you’re done. Happy to chat more at SB – just a little time pressed right now, my numbers -------------- if you ever want to give me a shout at SB. I’m often there in the evenings around 7ish. Bless up!*
8.6 Interview with Andrew Willis, Frontside Gardens

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to answer these questions Andy. First
ly, can you tell me about your background and how your work with Frontside gardens cam
e about?

I’ve been skating and building skateparks for nearly 20 years. From 2000 to 2003 I studied Ci
vil engineering at Leeds University, then worked as a transport engineer for 2 years, and hav
e built skateparks and bespoke installations professionally ever since.

Frontside Gardens is built on reclaimed land, what do you think about the value of these d
isused spaces in a time when land prices in London are at an all-time high?

I think they can be extremely valuable. There aren’t many opportunities to run projects that
aren’t primarily concerned with making money, so when spaces are acquired by non-
profit making enterprises, they can often have a real impact on the communities that they be
come part of.

How is the relationship between Frontside gardens and the council now? What is the futur
 e for Frontside gardens?

It’s really good. The governing local authority for the site and much of the surrounding area
is the LLDC (London Legacy Development Corporation). I think they’ve been incredibly innov
ative when helping the existing local communities to thrive amongst the extensive regenerati
on going on all around them. They supported a number of local fun and successful businesse
s over the time that we’ve been there. We currently have a rolling lease that we’re fortunat
 e to have had for so long. We’re now on the lookout for a larger site, hopefully with some in
door space that will help us to operate throughout the year, and become a more sustainable
operation.

What were/are your opinions on the redevelopment of the undercroft that was proposed
in 2013?

I didn’t think it was fair, and lacked respect for the impact that the space has had on people’
s lives for many years.

What are your thoughts surrounding the new proposals (August 2015) that are attempting
to reclaim two thirds of the original space that was taken away from the undercroft in 20
05 and promised to be given back in 2007 but never was?

I think it would be amazing.

How important do you think the Undercroft space is for central London and why?
Very important. There are not many undercover places to skate in London, and since around 1990 the population has been steadily increasing, and so has the skate scene. The city needs more places to skate, and it needs to keep its original skateboarding mecca as it holds a special place in people hearts and gives hope for the future.

What are your thoughts regarding the idea that the Long Live Southbank movement is more important than the physical undercroft space?

Both are very important.

With the emerging success of groups like friends of Stockwell Park and the protection of other parks out of London such as Harrow, how do you think the LLSB campaign has impacted the government’s view of skateboarding?

I think it has given credence to skateboarding as a real, valuable and vibrant community that is here to stay and should be supported.
8.7 Interview with Helen Miles, case worker, Lambeth Council. Notes.

Principle planner and case officer for Haywood gallery application.
Lambeth council “have statutory function to undertake”. “This kind of thing, we like to do but can’t take priority”.

When questioned about Lambeth council being disentangled with contestation:
“we have to be fair and transparent across the board” “we can’t prioritise one group of people who are commenting over another”. “I know there were lots of political discussions that happened around this”. Coming from the planning policy perspective. What we do is invite comments, review those comments. And then we take all these into account before making a recommendation. “The volume of their comments they put forward demonstrates it’s a key issue, but that has to be taken into perspective of all the other comments that we received

We consult neighbors, interested parties but we also have statutory consultees like heritage, 20th Century Society.

When asked about their position on the august 2015 proposals regarding reissue of space that was taken away in 2007:
“I personally haven’t seen those proposals, if they came to us as pre-app, that would be confidential”.

Pre-app: pre application inquiry- any applicant for any scheme can pay us a fee to have us look at an application before its submitted and advise on concerns, any positive aspects of it and we provide some feedback on that ”. Pre-app “a service that we provide”

“When they come as an application that’s when we look into making a decision”

Private developer pay council to look over the plans and after that is confidential?
“No- across the whole of the UK it’s a standard action that comes through in planning law” if someone wants advice on a proposal, before they submit an application they have the option to come to us, pay a fee and we provide a response to them. That response is confidential”

Can you comment, would you know on whether it’s true that the SB centre spent 3 years drawing up plans including the destruction of the undercroft without it being in the public domain?
“It wouldn’t be something that we’d know, I don’t know when they started talking about these proposals, I can’t comment on how long that had been in discussion “

**What’s the policy or law on public consultation? What’s Lambeth council stance on public consultancy for new**

“We’ve just published statement of community involvement – in conjunction with planning act 1990 and the amendments which set out who we need to consult for what particular application.

**If a new plan does have public consultancies - what is the process it goes through – how easy is it to be side-lined – how important are public consultations?**

They are a statutory consultation, we have to consider absolutely every response that we receive. The planning officer then have to decide what weight that is given. There are certain things that come under planning law that we can consider like ...... and there are some things we can’t consider like the right to review – we as planning officers assess the relevance of the consultation responses and planning issues, they are then included in the report and given weight in the consideration of the application.

**You can’t consider the right to review: ? Dodged – time is essence**

**You guys are mutual** – that is always the local authorities’ position – we are neutral – ultimately we make a recommendation. We take whatever the applicants proposing ....... (about half through) any comments that are made we weigh the up and come to a recommendation. **We start from a mutual position. Then we look to our policies and see if a particular scheme has support or not --- is skating not is policy less likely to be supported**

**What made this case special:**

The volume of responses is definitely what made this case special with other cases we deal with. I mean I don’t know they were ever quantified. I’ve never seen any evidence to back up that statement. Any application that turn up more than a thousand responses is automatically something that requires an additional level of scrutiny, particularly this one. There are a couple of things that make this a major application.

**Since the application, how has the councils understanding of skateboarders or the undercroft space in general been changed?**

“Personally, I’m definitely more aware of the reasons why that undercroft is so important to the Long Live Southbank group. We did some research into that ourselves. But, if you look at our local plan policy we don’t make any specific reference to the skater community as a group, we look to represent all groups equally - who have various different claims to different pieces of land and buildings throughout the borough. As the case worker I gained a
greater understanding but we have to balance that out against the fact that were not just serving that one group.

Given your position and given your knowledge of the area, what would you say- how could we approach urban planning in a more democratic and community focused way?

“I don’t think it’s really for me to comment on that.”

Given that I am speaking on behalf of Lambeth, I think we have A: statutory function to follow B we have guidelines and steps we take to provide a democratic approach to planning.

What would have happened if companies or developers had an obligation to put their plans into the public domain- let the people who stand to be affected know- for longer no that people have more time to object to the plans

“We would always tell developers to relay with interested parties”. Until that application comes in that is not a statutory requirement. We suggest. We cannot say you have to do this. Until it comes into law that’s the obligation we bound by.

The statutory planning process is that there’s a 21 day limit for comment. However, in most cases, and I know in this case, that that period was much longer. I would say that it’s enough time to provide comments. I don’t think its necessarily the same as being involved from the start or working with the architects all the way through. The number of comments doesn’t influence the final decision, what we’re considering is the content of those objections. We cant say that just because 100 people have said it we cant give it more weight we have to consider it a planning objection. I don’t think that the number should be the only thing considered when you’re looking at the quality of the response