Newcastle City Futures was a multi-media exhibition and event series devised as a ‘pop-up’ urban room and created to promote an innovative city-wide approach to engaging residents, local authorities, politicians, service providers, charities and businesses about the future of Newcastle and Gateshead. Planned, delivered and curated by School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, and with some financial support from Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal, the exhibition involved a wide range of partners including Newcastle City Council, Science City, Nexus, Newcastle Airport, Amber Film & Photography Collective, Northern Architecture, Discovery Museum, Tyne and Wear Archives, NE1 Business Improvement District, Newcastle United FC, Royal Institution of British Architects and Royal Town Planning Institute.

Over 19 days it received over 2,400 visitors, established a network of more than 22 different partners across the city and hosted 24 free public events. The exhibition was designed to make planning and urban change issues accessible to a wider audience to spark a big conversation. Innovatively, positive change through planning was made real by presenting oral histories from community members, linking personal stories to previously unseen photographs, showing historic films and artefacts from living memory, and presenting models of built, unbuilt, demolished and imagined development and city plans for Newcastle and Gateshead.
This was a project in itself but also formed one of seven methods within the parallel Government Office for Science (GOS) funded project ‘Newcastle Urban Foresight’, led by Professors Mark Tewdwr-Jones and John Goddard. Public feedback from the exhibition was particularly important when considering the time horizons used within foresight projects. It is often difficult for individuals to imagine their own lives in 50 years’ time never mind what the world will look like. Taking stock of the present and looking back at past future plans helps ground people’s expectations and hopefully provides a more positive and realistic set of future scenarios.

The GOS Foresight project has pursued a cross-sectorial approach to discussing Newcastle’s future to 2065, as a new city-wide innovative method of engagement that goes across sectors and forges new relationships between research communities and other groups. This includes working with community and voluntary sectors – as well as businesses and public sector – on a number of existing and emerging policy areas. The enthusiasm within the city towards the Foresight project has led to strong political buy-in being achieved for futures work, where none had existed previously, even before the project has completed its analysis.

The ‘Newcastle City Futures 2065’ report is available on the University website.

The Newcastle City Futures exhibition and GOS Foresight project has led directly to the setting up of the Newcastle 2020 initiative, led by the city council and comprising senior executives from public sector organisations in the Newcastle city region, to identify public sector threats and opportunities over the next seven years. A Newcastle 2020 Operational Steering Group has been established that focuses on four broad sectors for the city: ageing and health; employment and skills; infrastructure; and digital technologies. The Foresight project is both facilitating the cross-sectoral discussions and supporting dialogue through intelligence and data, with the full support of both Newcastle and Northumbria Universities.

Furthermore, a joint city council/university ‘City Futures Development Group’ has been created to embed the Foresight project results back into Newcastle University and the city council. The intention is to forge a single point of contact between the academy and the local authority, but also to provide advice, intelligence and support, and to respond to policy and funding opportunities that require a partnership approach. Membership of the Futures Group is drawn from the universities, city council, and other sectors across the region. This allows a stronger relationship to be developed between science and social science (within the university), and between academic research and policy evidence and decision making intelligence within the city council. In this way the concentration of expertise at Newcastle University in urban and regional change, planning, public participation and social science analysis, is being put to use to shape the future prosperity of Newcastle.

Mark.tewdwr-jones@ncl.ac.uk

http://www.newcastlecityfutures.org/NCF2065.html