



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Smithfield

Redevelopment Project

A Human-Centred Stakeholder Management Portfolio

Sevastian-Alexandru Dragos (2224309)

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Lecturer: Nishi Ramsurrun

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1. Introduction: More Than Bricks and Budgets - This Is About Belonging!

Picture this: - you've sold fruit from the same Bull Ring stall for twenty years. Your regulars know your name. You've watched kids grow up, helped neighbours through hard times, and built a livelihood on a patch of concrete that's been a market since the 1100s. Now, someone tells you it's all going away to make room for 'progress'.

That's the human heartbeat behind Birmingham's £1.9 billion Smithfield Redevelopment - a project that promises 1,000 new homes, 8,000 jobs, and a reborn city centre (Birmingham City Council, 2025a).

On paper, it reads like a blueprint for renewal, but numbers don't tell the full story. Beneath the glossy renderings of sleek apartments and manicured plazas are real lives: traders fearing displacement, Digbeth residents worried about being priced out, and archaeologists gently brushing away medieval pottery that connects us to Birmingham's very birth (Smithfield Birmingham, 2025).

We are looking at this not just as a construction project, but equally as a moral test, as well. Can regeneration uplift a city without uprooting its soul? The answer lies not in budgets or timelines alone, but in how people are heard, seen, and valued throughout the process.

Launched in 2022 and entering its critical delivery phase in 2025, Smithfield sits at a crossroads. On one path: top-down development that prioritises speed over empathy, profit over place. On the other: a human-centred transformation where community voices don't just inform outcomes, they are building and shape them. Recent tensions, like Hammerson's successful appeal to demolish the Indoor Market despite local resistance, reveal just how high the stakes are (Birmingham Mail, 2025).

Traders have reported poor communication, unclear relocation plans, and a growing sense of invisibility, as if their 900-year legacy is being treated as an inconvenient footnote (The Guardian, 2024).

This portfolio argues that ethical communication is not a 'soft add-on', but the bedrock of legitimacy, trust, and long-term success. We'll explore who truly holds stakes in Smithfield, not as abstract categories, but as neighbours with names, fears, and hopes. We'll examine how to engage them with dignity, respect, and genuine partnership. And we'll propose an original framework: - the Human-Centred Regeneration Model (HCRM), to ensure this project builds more than buildings; it builds trust, belonging, and a legacy Birmingham can be proud of: one where progress never comes at the cost of people.

Critically, this moment arrives as Birmingham navigates post-pandemic recovery, a Section 114 financial notice, and national scrutiny over urban inequality (Birmingham City Council, 2025b). In this context, Smithfield isn't just a development - it's a litmus test for whether cities can grow with their people, not over them.

2. Stakeholders: Real People, Not Just Power Boxes

Let's be honest: - Stakeholder 'mapping' can feel cold. Charts and matrices reduce humans to labels - "high power/low interest", 'primary' or 'secondary actor' - as if people are data points rather than individuals with lives, memories, and stakes in their community. But Smithfield's story isn't written in spreadsheets, it's woven from lived experiences, and to understand it, we must meet the people behind the roles.

Firstly:- Birmingham City Council (BCC). Yes, they hold formal authority, but many officers are local residents too: parents, neighbours, people who've watched the city weather boom and bust. After Birmingham's 2023 financial crisis, their task is nothing short of Herculean: deliver economic growth while rebuilding public trust in institutions that many feels have failed them (Birmingham City Council, 2025b). They're not faceless bureaucrats; they are also people, under immense pressure, trying to balance fiscal responsibility with social justice. Every decision they make is scrutinised, not just by auditors, but by families wondering if they will be pushed out of their homes. Their ethical burden is heavy: how to steward public assets without sacrificing public goodwill. In practice, this means resisting the temptation to prioritise developer convenience over community continuity - a tension laid bare in the Indoor Market demolition appeal (Birmingham Mail, 2025).

Then there are Lendlease and Hammerson, the primary developers. It's tempting to cast them as 'profit-driven outsiders', but their long-term success depends on creating a place that people loves, and not just occupy. Their community liaison teams are often Birmingham-born, working late nights to listen to concerns, mediate tensions, and translate corporate plans into human terms (Lendlease, 2024). The tension here isn't "us vs. them", it's about aligning commercial viability with social value. When Hammerson pushed forward with the 'Indoor Market demolition' despite trader resistance, it wasn't just a legal move, but exposed a fracture in that alignment, revealing how easily economic logic can override emotional reality (Birmingham Mail, 2025). Yet Lendlease's ongoing commitment to co-design workshops shows that developers can be partners in ethical regeneration, if held accountable.

Now, the heart of the matter: market traders. For families like the Pearces, who've sold shellfish for generations, or Hasan Khan of MK Fabrics, the market isn't just a job - it's identity, community, legacy (The Guardian, 2024). When plans to demolish the Indoor Market moved forward without a confirmed temporary site, it wasn't merely inconvenient, it was existential. Their fear is deeply human: "Will my customers find me if I'm moved 'too far out'?" (Birmingham Mail, 2025). These aren't hypothetical's, they are questions of survival. A stall isn't just a business; it's a social hub, a safety net, a place where trust is built over decades. To dismantle it without a clear, dignified transition plan is to disregard not just economics, but social infrastructure. As one trader shared anonymously: *'They treat us like we're in the way of progress; but we are Birmingham's progress'*.

Nearby, residents of Digbeth and Nechells watch the cranes rise with mixed emotions. Some hope for cleaner streets, safer parks, and better transport links. Others dread rising rents that could push them out of homes their families have lived in for decades.

This isn't 'NIMBY-ism' - it's a fear of erasure, as one resident told a local reporter: "Will this new Smithfield still feel like our Birmingham?" (The Guardian, 2024).

Their stake isn't financial - it is emotional, cultural, generational. They've built networks of mutual aid, shared childcare, and local pride that no developer's brochure can capture.

Importantly, many are from Global Majority backgrounds, meaning regeneration risks amplifying historical inequities if accessibility and cultural sensitivity aren't central (UK Government, 2024).

We must also consider future residents: students, young families, retirees who'll move into Smithfield by 2030. Though they don't yet have a voice, they deserve one.

Will there be playgrounds for children, community gardens, or affordable groceries within walking distance? Will public spaces be designed for interaction, or just for aesthetics? Their needs can't be an afterthought - they must be anticipated with empathy and foresight. After all, today's newcomers become tomorrow's community elders.

Also - the heritage and environmental guardians. When archaeologists uncovered medieval remains in 2023, they didn't just 'delay construction' they unearthed Birmingham's foundation (Birmingham City Council, 2025a).

Groups like Historic England aren't just bureaucratic roadblocks; they're memory-keepers, ensuring the future honours the past rather than paving over it.

Their work reminds us that regeneration isn't just about the future - it's about continuity. Erasing history to make way for 'modernity' isn't progress; it's amnesia. As Jones et al. (2023) warn, sanitising "uncomfortable heritage" for tourist appeal risks creating soulless spaces that lack authenticity.

So how do we engage this rich tapestry of voices? Traditional Power-Interest grids fall short. A trader facing displacement has urgent, legitimate claims that demand more than a newsletter or a generic consultation email (Zheng et al., 2024). That's why we need a human-first approach: one that recognises power imbalances not as neutral facts, but as ethical risks.

Ethically, our duty isn't just to inform - it's to protect, amplify, and co-create. As Garcia-Iglesias et al. (2024) argue, ignoring the emotional and psychological needs of communities in engagement processes leads not only to conflict and delays but to a deeper rupture: broken trust.

The most vulnerable: traders, low-income renters, or elderly residents, often have the least structural power but the most at stake. If their fears are dismissed as '*resistance to change*', the project loses its moral anchor.

In short, Smithfield's stakeholders aren't just 'abstract groups'; they're neighbours; they are friends; they are custodians of history. And how we treat them, through every email, meeting, and decision, will define whether this project is remembered as a triumph of inclusive renewal or a betrayal of community trust.

3. Communication Plan: From Monologue to Meaningful Partnership

When stakeholders are *the heart* of Smithfield, communication is *its pulse*. Too often, regeneration projects treat communication as a box to tick: a website update, a few flyers through letterboxes, a public meeting where plans are presented as final.

That's not engagement, it is performance. It tells people: "We've made a decision. Here's what it is".

Real communication starts with a *simple promise*: "**We see you, we hear you, and your voice changes things**". This isn't just nice to say, it's the ethical foundation of sustainable regeneration

An Ethical Foundation - Beyond "Best Practices", we propose three non-negotiable principles:

Transparency with Heart: Transparency is not just about sharing data, it is about sharing context. If the temporary market setup is delayed, avoid vague corporate phrasing like 'due to unforeseen circumstances', instead, say: 'We're still finalising funding with partners, here's our revised timeline, and here's how we'll support your business during the gap: grants, pop-up spaces, marketing help'. This kind of honesty builds integrity-based trust, which research shows, is far more resilient than trust built on polished promises or selective disclosure (Bourne, 2023). Critically, this includes admitting when mistakes are made; like the early 2025 admission that no temporary market plan existed (Lendlease, 2024). Owning errors publicly is not weakness; it's the first step toward repair.

Inclusion as Co-Creation: Inclusion isn't just translation services (though we'll offer Urdu, Punjabi, Polish, and BSL via Birmingham's Brasshouse and BASS services). It's meeting people where they are. Host workshops at Nechells POD at 6 PM, City Hall at 3 PM, provide childcare so parents can join, use storytelling booths so elders can share memories of the old markets. As Landa-Oregi et al. (2025) show, the best urban design emerges from lived experience, not from expert opinion alone, but from all the wisdom of lived experience.

Inclusion isn't charity—it's intelligence-gathering. And it's legally reinforced: the Equality Act 2010 and BSL Act 2022 require proactive accessibility (UK Parliament, 2010; 2022).

Closing the Loop: - Every single time.

Nothing kills hope faster than the "black hole" of consultation - the feeling that you spoke, but nothing changed. Our "You Said, We Did" Dashboard will be publicly accessible, tracking every piece of feedback. Examples: 'You asked for more affordable housing in *Plot 4A* - 12 extra units added', or 'You worried about night time noise – here is our revised construction schedule with quiet hours enforced'. And when a suggestion can't be implemented, we will explain why, respectfully and clearly. This transforms feedback from a chore into collaboration (Systemiq, 2024).

A Phased, Human Strategy:

Phase 1: Co-Design (Now – 2026):

This is about listening deeply, not presenting solutions. Regeneration isn't a sprint - it's a decade-long walk with the community. Our plan evolves with their needs.

Launch 'Smithfield Stories':

Partner with local historians and schools to record oral histories from traders, long-time residents, and market-goers. These won't gather dust in an archive; they'll inform public art, street names, and museum exhibits, ensuring the past is kept alive into the new fabric. Imagine QR codes on new benches that play voice describing life in the 1990s market.

Host 'Design with Lego' workshops:

Make planning tangible and joyful for kids and families. A child's vision of a park matters just as much as an architect's. These sessions also build intergenerational connection - grandparents sharing memories while grandchildren build models.

Create a Traders' Council:

Give market vendors direct, monthly access to Lendlease's project director, not through a call centre, in person or via video. Their insights on foot traffic, stall layout, and customer needs are professional-grade expertise. This isn't symbolic, it is operational.

Ethical focus: Show, from day one, that community wisdom is valid, valuable and essential.

Phase 2: Living Through Construction (2026–2030+)

This is the hardest phase - years of dust, noise, and disruption. Communication must shift from vision to care.

Co-create a 'Good Neighbour Charter' with contractors: a clear, signed agreement on acceptable noise hours (e.g., no heavy machinery before 8 AM or after 6 PM), dust control measures (water sprays, covered trucks), and a fair process for compensating damage to homes or businesses. This isn't a vague promise; it's a binding social contract, monitored by an independent community panel.

Assign a Neighbourhood Liaison Officer per street: this can be a real person, with a direct phone number and local knowledge, who can respond to complaints in real time, not next week. This person becomes the face of accountability, trained in conflict resolution and trauma-informed communication.

Send predictive SMS alerts:

Example: Heavy deliveries on your street Tuesday 10am to 12pm. Please plan accordingly' - Simple, proactive, and respectful.

Offer 'Customer Connection Grants' to relocated traders:

Funding for flyers, social media adverts, or loyalty cards to help them keep their customer base. Pair this with 'Market Trail' signage guiding customers to new locations.

Ethical focus: Minimise harm. Disruption is inevitable, but dignity isn't optional.

Phase 3: Belonging & Legacy (2030+)

Now, we shift from building to belonging.

Host ‘Welcome Dinners’:

Pairing long-time residents with new neighbours over shared meals is breaking down “old vs. new” divides. Food is a universal language of connection.

Fund these through the **Legacy Fund** as followings:

- **Co-create a *Community Stewardship Handbook***: A living guide on how to care for parks, host street festivals, resolve neighbour disputes, and keep public spaces safe and welcoming.

Ownership begins with shared rules.

- **Establish a *Resident-Governed Legacy Fund***: Seed it with 1% of developer profits, standard in ethical regeneration, and hand control to a community board to fund local initiatives: youth clubs, gardening groups, cultural events for decades to come. This ensures regeneration outlives construction.

Ethical focus: Hand over agency. Regeneration shouldn’t end with a ribbon cutting - it should begin a new chapter of community ownership.

Navigating Real Ethical Dilemmas

We know it won’t be perfect, so we plan for tensions.

Create a public Disclosure Protocol, agreed in advance, listing what’s always public (e.g., environmental impact assessments) and what’s temporarily confidential (e.g., live commercial negotiations), with clear release dates. Independent oversight ensures compliance.

‘What about consultation fatigue?’

Offer a ‘Participation Menu’: quick polls for busy parents, deep-dive panels for engaged residents, or just ‘listening circles’ for those who want to share without pressure. Let people choose their level of involvement.

‘How do we hear the silent?’

Partner with Community Connectors, trusted locals like faith leaders, shop owners, or youth workers, who can reach those sceptical of ‘official channels’. Compensate them fairly for their time and networks. And we treat data ethically: informed consent for every story shared, anonymisation for sensitive input, and independent review of feedback analysis to prevent bias or selective interpretation (Garcia-Iglesias et al., 2024). No data is used without permission; no story is co-modified.

In the end, this plan isn’t about tactics, it’s about covenant. For every tonne of concrete poured, we commit to an equal measure of respect.

4. Conclusion: The True Measure of Success Isn't Built - It's Felt.

We came to this project as students of business. We leave it with a deeper truth: business at its best is humanistic. Smithfield's legacy won't be defined by how fast the towers rose or how many units sold. It will be known by its human kindness. Will a trader look back in ten years and say, "They fought for us"? Will a Digbeth elder feel their history was honoured, not erased? Will a child in a new flat run down the street and feel, without doubt, that this is home?

That's why our Human-Centred Regeneration Model (HCRM) matters. It's not idealistic, it is pragmatically ethical. The cost of a Neighbourhood Liaison Officer is far less than the cost of a legal challenge or a PR crisis. The time invested in co-design prevents costly redesigns, community backlash, and vacant buildings no one loves. As Bourne (2023) reminds us, 'slow trust' built through consistency, honesty, and care is the most valuable asset in long-term projects.

In an era of climate anxiety, economic fragility, and social fragmentation, cities need places that foster connection and not just consumption.

We also recognise the tension between ideal and real. Budgets are tight and timelines are pressured, but ethics isn't a luxury it is risk management. Ignoring community needs doesn't save time or money; it breeds delays, reputational damage, and social fracture. Prioritising people builds resilient, beloved places where people stay, invest, and thrive. This is especially crucial as Birmingham recovers from its Section 114 notice, proving that fiscal responsibility and social responsibility are not opposites, but partners.

If we could give one piece of advice to the Smithfield team, it would be this: measure what matters. Track, not just construction milestones, but human outcomes:

- The percentage of traders reporting stable or increased income post-relocation
- Resident satisfaction with communication clarity and responsiveness
- The diversity of voices represented in planning sessions—not just who shows up, but whose ideas shape outcomes

Because what gets measured gets managed, and Birmingham deserves a regeneration - that manages for people, not just profit.

In the same way, this project must bind the city's past, present, and future; not through grand architecture alone, but through genuine relationship, mutual respect, and shared ownership.

And not just random, the archaeologists at Smithfield aren't just digging up old bones; they're uncovering stories that bind us across centuries.

As the Museum of London prepares to relocate to Smithfield, it has a unique opportunity to curate not just history, but living memory, ensuring the new museum high street reflects the traders, makers, and storytellers who define this place (Museum of London, 2025). Looking ahead, Smithfield could become a national model, if it will choose courage over convenience.

Other cities watch Birmingham closely. Will Smithfield prove that regeneration can be both economically vibrant and ethically grounded? The answer lies in daily choices: in how a contractor responds to a noise complaint, in how a planner listens to a child's idea for a playground, in how a council officer explains a difficult decision.

Cranes will one day fall silent, scaffolding will come down. But the memory of how this change was made, with humility or with haste, with inclusion or exclusion, it will echo indeed for generations.

Let it be a story Birmingham tells with pride: not just of a city that grew, but of a city that grew together, without leaving its people behind!

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