

Grounded Engagement: Community Experiences, Storytelling and Mineral Exploration in Cornwall

June 3rd, 4th and 5th Redruth, Cornwall

Workshop Report



Photo: Tin Miner Sculpture, Redruth, Cornwall (Laura Smith, 2026)

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About the project

Grounded Engagement: Community Experiences, Storytelling and Mineral Exploration in Cornwall brought together community organisations, industry representatives, geologists, researchers, educators and creative practitioners in Redruth, Cornwall, from 3–5 June 2026. Through a combination of discussion workshops, guest presentations and participatory filmmaking activities, the event explored what meaningful engagement looks like in the early stages of mineral exploration and the potential of creative storytelling methods to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders and develop new approaches to engagement in the minerals sector.

The event was a collaboration between three research projects at the University of Leeds: [Unlocking the UK's Critical Mineral Potential](#), which highlighted that transparent, consistent and meaningful two-way engagement practices are needed for the revival of UK mining to gain public support; [Grounded Engagement](#), which builds on this research to examine the challenges and opportunities of stakeholder engagement during mineral exploration and understand what meaningful engagement looks like in practice, and [Stories from the Subsurface](#), which explores how creative storytelling methods can help people communicate and make sense of issues relating to the subsurface and the energy transition.

Together, the interdisciplinary team created a space for reflection and dialogue that is different from conventional consultative approaches. Through workshops, discussions, filmmaking and screening events, the aim is to:

- Build shared understanding of experiences, challenges and aspirations relating to mineral exploration.
- Explore the potential of creative storytelling methods to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders and create meaningful engagement.
- Develop new approaches to engagement that focus on lived experience, amplify diverse voices and facilitate mutual learning.

Redruth in Cornwall provided a valuable setting for these discussions. As a region experiencing renewed interest in mineral exploration and development, Cornwall also has a rich mining heritage and strong community connections to place. Holding the event in Cornwall offered an opportunity to reflect on current experiences of mineral exploration and also consider wider questions of participation, communication and trust in extractive industry projects.



Photo: Welcome sign, Redruth, Cornwall (Laura Smith, 2026)

The three-day event was delivered through a collaboration between geologists, social scientists and creative practitioners from the University of Leeds' [School of Earth, Environment & Sustainability](#) and the [School of Languages, Cultures and Societies](#) with support from [Geosolutions Leeds](#). A follow-up event is planned for October 2026 to screen the films produced during and after the workshop and continue discussions with participants and wider stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all workshop and filmmaking participants for generously sharing their time, experiences, expertise and perspectives. The project received funding from an interdisciplinary Seedcorn Grant from the School of Earth Environment & Sustainability, and from Geosolutions Leeds, with additional equipment provided by the Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures

We are grateful to the [The Ladder, Redruth](#) for hosting the event and [Beats and Roots](#) for providing catering.

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Leeds BESS+ Research Ethics Committee (Reference: BESS+ FREC 2025-3466). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Summary

Grounded Engagement: Community Experiences, Storytelling and Mineral Exploration in Cornwall brought together community organisations, industry representatives, geologists, researchers, educators, and creative practitioners in Redruth, Cornwall, from 3–5 June 2026. Through a combination of discussion workshops, guest presentations and participatory filmmaking activities, the event explored what meaningful engagement looks like in the early stages of mineral exploration and the potential of creative storytelling methods to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders and develop new approaches to engagement in the minerals sector.

Discussions highlighted the importance of building relationships at the earliest stages of projects, creating opportunities for two-way dialogue, communicating in accessible ways, and ensuring a diversity of voices can participate in conversations about extractive industry development. Participants distinguished between communication and engagement, emphasising that meaningful engagement requires listening, dialogue and creating opportunities for influence, rather than the one-way provision of information.

A central feature of the event was the use of participatory filmmaking and storytelling methods. By working with community participants to develop and produce short films, the project explores how creative approaches might create space for people to share lived experiences, express concerns and aspirations, and communicate across stakeholder boundaries.

Several broader lessons emerged from the discussions about meaningful engagement. Participants emphasised the importance of early engagement, trust building, inclusive participation, accessible communication and ongoing dialogue throughout the exploration process. Discussions also pointed to the roles that governments, local authorities, community organisations and industry can play in supporting meaningful engagement. Participants stressed that engagement should not be understood as a single event or consultation exercise, but as a long-term process of relationship-building that starts at the earliest stage of exploration projects and continues through the project lifecycle.



Photo: Maria Radeva, 2026

To support participants with storytelling beyond the workshop, the Leeds team left filmmaking equipment with participating groups and is providing remote mentoring and technical support throughout summer 2026 as participants continue developing their films.

This report summarises the discussions, insights and reflections that emerged during the workshop and presents the key lessons identified by participants. It also marks the beginning of an ongoing conversation that will continue through future project activities, including a public screening of the participant films and follow-up discussions in October 2026.



Photo: Laura Smith, 2026

About the event

Mineral exploration is often viewed as a technical process, yet in practice it is deeply social. In the UK, exploration companies and geologists must engage directly with landowners, mineral rights holders and local communities. Successfully gaining access to land and maintaining positive working relationships depends on trust, communication and mutual understanding. If relationships become strained or positions become entrenched, rebuilding trust can be extremely difficult.

The workshops created a space for dialogue between different stakeholders to reflect on what meaningful engagement looks like in practice, what barriers exist and what lessons may be relevant for mineral exploration in Cornwall and elsewhere.

The team used creative and participatory methods, which have been shown to support and facilitate dialogue and mutual learning. Storytelling approaches such as participatory film can capture lived experiences, amplify diverse voices and contribute to policy discussions in ways that conventional consultation processes often miss.

"What strikes me about Cornwall is that we have an opportunity many of our African case studies didn't have. We are still relatively early in the project lifecycle."

James Van Alstine reflecting on 15 years of working on oil, gas and mining operations across Africa.



Photo: Laura Smith, 2026

The event combined discussions and creative activities over three days.

Day 1: Discussion workshop

Participants explored experiences of engagement, communication, and industry-community relations in Cornwall and elsewhere. Guest speakers shared lessons from UK and international mining contexts to stimulate discussion.

Days 2 and 3: Participatory filmmaking

Participants received training in filmmaking and sustainability storytelling techniques before working collaboratively to create short films about local experiences and aspirations relating to mining and mineral exploration. Participants were able to communicate their own perspectives and tell stories in their own voices.

Messages from the discussion workshop

This section highlights some of the key messages from the workshop discussions, including a selection of points made during the guest presentations.



Photo: Maria Radeva, 2026

1. Engagement must begin early

A consistent message from workshop participants was that meaningful engagement should begin at the earliest stages of exploration activity. Participants emphasised that early engagement:

- Builds trust before positions become entrenched

- Creates opportunities for dialogue before major decisions are made
- Helps identify local priorities and concerns
- Improves understanding between stakeholders

Many participants felt that communities are often informed about projects after important decisions have already been made, limiting opportunities for meaningful influence.

As one guest speaker noted, Cornwall still has an opportunity to develop conversations about participation, trust and benefit-sharing before positions become polarised.

Early engagement was therefore viewed not simply as an opportunity to share information, but as a chance to establish relationships, understand local priorities and create the space for ongoing dialogue. The workshop itself highlighted how much relationship-building is often required before people feel willing to participate in discussions about mining and mineral exploration.

Key lesson: Trust needs to be built before formal consultations begin. Early conversations and relationship-building help to create the foundations for meaningful engagement later in the project lifecycle.

2. Stakeholder engagement should be a two-way process

Participants distinguished between communication and engagement. While communication often focuses on delivering information, meaningful engagement involves:

- Listening as well as informing
- Dialogue rather than one-way consultation
- Opportunities for stakeholders to influence processes and outcomes
- Recognition of communities as active participants

Participants observed that people want to be listened to, not simply talked to. While consultation processes can play a role in providing important information, some participants felt that they do not always create opportunities for meaningful two-way discussion. There was broad agreement that people are more likely to engage constructively when they feel their perspectives are welcomed, respected and capable of shaping discussions.

Key lesson: Engagement is not the same as communication. Communication shares information, while engagement creates opportunities for two-way dialogue and mutual learning.

3. Communication should be accessible and relevant for the local context

Communication methods and language were identified as important factors influencing participation. Participants emphasised the need for:

- Plain English communication
- Reduced reliance on technical and scientific jargon
- Opportunities for people to explore information at their own pace
- Multiple communication channels tailored to different audiences

Participants noted that technical language can unintentionally create barriers to participation, particularly for those with little knowledge of mining or geology. Accessible communication was viewed as an important part of creating inclusive discussions, with more interactive and creative approaches to help broaden participation and understanding. The groups also discussed the importance of public education about the subsurface, critical minerals and the role these resources play within the energy transition.

Key lesson: Communities want to be heard, not simply informed. Approaches that create spaces for inclusive discussion can be more effective than relying solely on presentations or formal consultation events.

4. A wider range of voices needs to be included

The challenge of ensuring representative participation was highlighted. Participants noted that:

- Communities contain diverse interests, experiences and viewpoints
- Certain groups can be difficult to reach
- Young people are often underrepresented
- Some communities face barriers relating to transport, time and costs

Discussions highlighted that participation cannot be assumed. Some individuals and groups may not feel confident taking part, may not believe their views will make a difference, or may face practical barriers to attending events. Participants emphasised the importance of actively reaching out to different groups, including those beyond a project's immediate area of impact, and considering how engagement processes can be designed to make participation easier.

Key lesson: There is no single 'community voice'. Communities contain diverse interests, identities and experiences, and therefore engagement approaches need to be adaptable and flexible.

5. Meaningful engagement should not be left to industry alone

Participants recognised that many exploration companies operate with limited resources and new companies may lack expertise. To overcome this challenge, it was noted that responsibility for engagement could be shared among:

- Industry
- Local government
- National government
- Community organisations
- Educational institutions

Participants highlighted that some of the questions raised by mineral exploration extend beyond the responsibilities of individual companies. As one guest speaker emphasised, questions about public priorities, land use and the distribution of benefits and impacts require political and societal consideration. Government was seen as having an important role in:

- Building public understanding of critical minerals
- Supporting community capacity-building
- Facilitating dialogue among different stakeholders
- Creating opportunities for inclusive participation

Participants expressed support for greater collaboration between industry, government, educational organisations and community groups to support informed and inclusive dialogue. At the same time, participants stressed the importance of avoiding controlled or top-down engagement processes.

Key lesson: Meaningful engagement cannot be left to industry alone. Government, local authorities, community organisations and industry all have a role to play.

6. There is a role for open and inclusive public debate

Participants discussed the potential value of wider public conversations about the future of mining in Cornwall. There was recognition that opportunities are needed for a broader range of people to take part in informed debate about critical minerals,

environmental impacts and future development. Some possible approaches were suggested based on their success elsewhere, including:

- **Citizens juries** - a small, diverse group of local people hear evidence from different perspectives, question experts and stakeholders, and develop recommendations on an issue.
- **Public forums** - open opportunities for community members, organisations and companies to meet, share information and discuss concerns and opportunities.

These approaches were seen as potentially valuable because they allow people to hear a range of perspectives and can help broaden participation beyond those who would normally attend public meetings or consultations. Participants emphasised that such conversations should ideally be facilitated by individuals and organisations that are already embedded within local communities.

Key lesson: A wider public conversation about the future of mining and its benefits and impacts should take place to broaden participation.

"Governments often fail to take ownership of engagement processes, especially in the crucial early stages of development. Responsibilities are delegated to companies... Yet the most important questions concern land rights, public priorities, competing visions of development and the distribution of benefits and impacts. These are inherently political issues that governments cannot simply outsource."

Emma Wilson, reflecting on mining governance in Sweden

Storytelling, Filmmaking and the Critical Sustainability Stories tool

A central aim of the project is to explore how creative storytelling methods can help build shared understanding and facilitate dialogue around mineral exploration. Through film, people can tell stories in their own words and from their own perspectives, and these stories have the potential to reveal experiences, values, hopes and concerns that may not be captured through more conventional approaches to engagement.



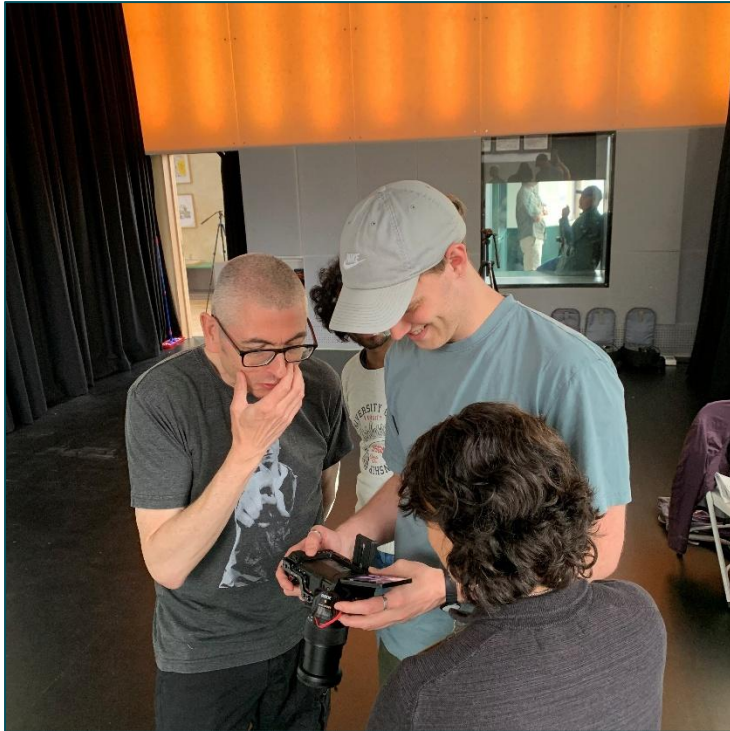
Photo: Laura Smith, 2026

In the second part of the event, we used filmmaking to explore experiences of mining's revival in Cornwall by working with a small number of community groups to train them in filmmaking and storytelling and let them tell their own stories through a short film. Professor Paul Cooke introduced participants to a range of filmmaking techniques, including:

- Framing and composition, including the 'rule of thirds'.
- Interview techniques and question design.
- Recording high-quality audio.
- Capturing supporting footage (referred to as 'B-roll').
- Basic editing and story construction.

To build confidence using the cameras, participants first practised by interviewing one another and reviewing footage together. They then developed their own ideas and went into their local communities to capture footage, conduct interviews and

gather material for their films. Throughout the process, participants received feedback and support from the project team.



Photos: Laura Smith, 2026

One element of the filmmaking workshop was the use of the Critical Sustainability Stories (CRISS) Tool. [CRISS | Critical Sustainability Stories](#) is an educational resource designed to support storytellers in exploring sustainability and climate-related issues in thoughtful and evidence-informed ways. The tool consists of six key topics and a series of reflective questions that encourage participants to consider different perspectives, identify connections between environmental and social issues, and think critically about the stories they are telling.



Photo: Laura Smith, 2026

Participants will continue working on their films throughout summer 2026, with remote mentoring and technical support provided by the project team.

The films will be screened at a follow-up public event in October 2026. Alongside showcasing the films, the event will provide an opportunity for further discussion and reflection on the issues raised during the workshop.

What Did We Learn?

Although the filmmaking process is ongoing, the workshop demonstrated the potential of creative storytelling approaches to create different kinds of conversations between stakeholders.

Participants were able to move beyond discussions about mining and engagement and instead focus on personal experiences, local landscapes and stories that matter to them. The filmmaking activities highlighted the value of creative practices in opening different spaces for listening, reflection, and dialogue. By supporting participants to develop and create their own stories, the process encouraged participant-led discussion.

What became clear was that participants from different stakeholder groups described themselves not only through their professional roles but also as members of the local community. Recognising these commonalities helped participants move beyond assumptions about different groups and explore shared interests, aspirations and concerns.

Key lesson: Creative storytelling can reveal experiences, concerns and aspirations that may not emerge through conventional consultation and engagement processes. Stories can help people better understand each other and can support discussion across different stakeholder groups.

Next steps

- The filmmaking groups are continuing to work on their films throughout summer 2026 with regular online check-ins from the Leeds team.
- The project team intend to host a local screening event in Cornwall later in 2026 where the filmmaking groups have the opportunity to showcase their films. The community will be invited to watch the films alongside the filmmakers and the University of Leeds team.
- The University of Leeds team are pursuing further collaborative opportunities on the topic of stakeholder engagement in the context of mineral exploration in Cornwall. If you're interested in collaborating or would like to be involved, please contact Laura Smith L.e.smith1@leeds.ac.uk