

Planning Aid in Action: Madeley Neighbourhood Plan

Background

Madeley Parish Council is currently undertaking a neighbourhood plan. It is one of DCLG's neighbourhood planning Front-runners. Telford and Wrekin Council successfully secured funding for three neighbourhood planning front runners, including Madeley. These are to be prepared in advance of the new provisions being introduced through the Government's Localism Bill.

With support from the Council, Madeley Parish Council has recently commenced work on the preparation of its own neighbourhood plan. Madeley Parish has a population of around 18,000. It comprises the wards of Woodside, Cuckoo Oak and Madeley, which are all within the top ten most deprived wards within Telford.

The industrial heritage of the area is evident in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, which is located within the Parish. In contrast there are the new town housing estates of Woodside and Sutton Hill, which are subject to various on-going regeneration initiatives. The area also includes the Halesfield industrial estate.

The officers at the Parish Council have expertise in community development and 'planning for real' type exercises. However they have limited staff resources and are not familiar with plan making and the emerging neighbourhood planning process.

They have therefore asked if Planning Aid volunteers could give the Parish Council additional help and support. In particular they have requested that Planning Aid act as a 'critical friend' throughout the plan making process – a sounding board they can turn to for help and guidance at various stages.

Partners are Madeley Parish Council, Telford and Wrekin Council (as the Local Planning Authority) and Planning Aid England.

Planning Aid's support included:-

- Supporting the community consultation exercises undertaken by the Parish Council officers to ensure that it is focussing on planning related matters and extracting the required information
- Liaising with Telford and Wrekin Council, amongst others, to interpret the implications of the adopted planning policies and the emerging review of the LDF Core Strategy, as well as the potential consequences of the National Planning Policy Framework
- Supporting the drafting of the neighbourhood plan to ensure that it is in a format that will satisfy the local planning authority and an independent assessor.

PAE appointed a team of volunteers (with a mixture of skills/backgrounds) and a project leader who could offer guidance throughout the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. The team, comprising five volunteers came together in October 2011 and met with the officers employed by the Parish Council, who provided a briefing on the local planning issues and the proposed timescale.

The team is now on standby, with their respective skills and expertise being called upon as and when required. If they lack the particular skills required to meet a request from the Parish Council, PAE will attempt to secure support from other specialist volunteers. However the core team will provide help to ensure consistency throughout the process.

What was the outcome of the project?

The project is on-going, possibly for the next eighteen months or so. A successful outcome will be the completion of the neighbourhood plan, which has been adopted by the local planning authority.