

Planning Aid in Action: Wootton and East Hunsbury

Background

Northampton Borough Council was successful in securing Frontrunner status and funding as part of the fourth round of the Frontrunner programme. Wootton and East Hunsbury is the largest parished area in the country, with unique challenges and large scale developments planned. Furthermore, it borders a number of natural 'communities' which fall outside the Borough and County areas. It is isolated by a trunk road and access from the neighbourhood to one of the biggest Tesco stores in the country is impossible by foot.

Early meetings with Officers from the Borough Council identified the unique role Planning Aid England could play in supporting the Parish Council in developing their Neighbourhood Plan and our attendance at the inception meeting was agreed. Also involved were the Planning Officer and Community Engagement Officer from Northampton Borough Council; a Planning Officer from Harborough District Council, an independent Planning Consultant and a Planning Officer from Corby Borough Council (a priority Local Authority in terms of IMD who are keen to engage with and support Frontrunner areas to apply emerging learning and good practise to priority neighbourhoods in Corby).

Planning Aid's support included:-

- Taking the first 45 minutes on the Parish Council's inception meetings' agenda to present Planning Aid, what it does and what it could possibly do to support them in the Neighbourhood Planning process.
- Three Planning Aid volunteers attended, with one giving a 20 minute presentation on the Localism Bill/Neighbourhood Planning and, in conjunction/consultation with the Borough Council, highlighted what a Neighbourhood Plan might and might not achieve for the area.

What was the outcome of the project?

Approximately 30 members of the public attended and were able to ask a number of questions to the volunteers and learn from emerging good practice elsewhere in the country. Reference was made to a useful and comprehensive Neighbourhood Planning Guidance document that has been produced by Broadland District Council in Norwich to support and guide their 6 Frontrunners.

Establishing a good working relationship with the Borough Council has enabled Planning Aid England to begin to scope support that might be offered to two emerging Neighbourhood Planning areas – both in the top 5% most deprived neighbourhoods in Northampton, with volunteers already being recruited. Interest from our volunteers is significant given the opportunity it presents to engage with the cutting/sharp edge of emerging policy and practice.

This is an ongoing activity with further information to follow.

