

SNAPshot

the newsletter of NW Planning Aid

Winter 2008



Welcome to SNAPshot, the newsletter from NW Planning Aid, for staff, volunteers, friends, partners ... and of course anyone else who is interested in our work and activities!

We plan to bring you news on a range of topics including community activities, projects and case-work, volunteers — as well as issues affecting the service. We will be very keen to have your comments on the newsletter...and naturally any relevant articles for publication in future issues will be very welcome!



Increased Funding for Planning Aid



The big news this year for Planning Aid England was the long-awaited announcement in June from Communities and Local Government (CLG) of its doubling of Planning Aid grant funding for 2008 – 2011. The initial excitement (and relief!) has subsided we are now getting down to implementing the measures required to meet the new challenges (including more stretching targets) that the increased funding has brought.

Enhanced staffing will increase our Helpline service from three days per week to five days and we also have additional community planning resource. The team has welcomed the much needed addition of a dedicated administrator to manage the day-to-day running of the regional office and support services, enabling staff to focus squarely on the delivery of planning advice, engagement and education.

'Senior' Planner Joins NW Planning Aid!

New Planning & Community Advisor **Claire Senior** joined us in November. Claire is an experienced planner and has been a Planning Aid volunteer for 3 years. Active in both casework and community elements of the service, she is well-placed to take on the demanding role of providing advice to Helpline callers across the region as well as working on and expanding the community programme in Merseyside and Cheshire.

Do you work for a LPA in Merseyside or Cheshire? Could you introduce Claire to your planning dept? If so please contact her!

NW Planning Aid support for Manchester Women's Design Group

In late 2007 the RTPI issued its new guidance on spatial planning and gender awareness, after identifying that large developments can impact differently on men and women. The Manchester Women's Design Group (MWDG) is part of the London based Women's Design Service which has been involved for over 20 years in supporting and influencing positive gender design in local and town planning, architecture, and environmental developments. NW Planning Aid has been working closely for several months with the MWDG.

In addition to providing training on plan reading and other aspects of the planning system, four of our volunteers regularly support the group by attending their monthly Steering Group meetings, providing planning advice and other input as appropriate



Gender 'Checklist'

Partly as a result of this planning-focused input members of MWDG, supported by NW Planning Aid, have been developing a gender 'checklist'. As far as the group are aware, from research and national contacts, this is the first such check list to be prepared on the gender issue nationally and we are delighted to be part of this groundbreaking work!



Best Practice

Volunteer Zoe Hodson said that her involvement on developing the checklist had given her a sense of creating 'best practice for the future'.

Pioneering Initiative

Volunteer Sarah Baron said it was 'rewarding' being involved in this 'pioneering' initiative! She also felt that participants benefited by exchanging ideas about how to develop the checklist, as well as sharing other ideas, suggestions and information on promoting gender as a priority issue for the built environment.

The Director of the National Women's Design Service expressed her gratitude and thanks for the support and input that Community Planner Jackie Dibley and the volunteers involved have given to the WDG in Manchester.

Planning Aid Evaluation

We recently reported that NW Planning Aid was under the spotlight as the subject of a case study in the 2007-08 evaluation of Planning Aid England. The independent report, carried out by Merida Associates, makes interesting reading and provides a clear and comprehensive account of Planning Aid activity in that period. The report is available to volunteers in electronic format – for a copy please contact **Rita**.

Community Planning



Volunteer Sarah Foster delivers Section 106 training

Community Planner **Jackie Dibley** has been developing and delivering our community training programme in **Lancashire** and **Manchester** with sessions on 'Introduction to Planning' and 'Section 106 Agreements'. The events have been popular and well-received and future sessions are planned for Merseyside and Cheshire.

Volunteer involvement and support at these events has been invaluable with volunteers delivering the training, facilitating workshops, chatting to participants and spreading the word about Planning Aid!

Other recent community work has involved supporting consultations in **Blackpool** and **Bolton**, supporting the **Manchester Women's Design Group** and providing workshops at local conferences including those of CPRE and Homes under Threat (HUT) groups. Future activities include involvement on the public consultations for Manchester's Core Strategy which will include a 'bus tour' of areas in the city—taking information and consultation out to the people!

Whilst Jackie focuses on Lancashire and Manchester, **Claire** will be focusing on **Merseyside** and **Cheshire** for community engagement and outreach. With visits already planned to Crewe & Nantwich, Ellesmere Port & Neston and Sefton planning authorities we hope to promote Planning Aid, increase outreach to communities and identify some potential partnership working in these sub-regional areas.

InVOLved...news and info for our volunteers...

Without the support and commitment of volunteers there would be no Planning Aid! NW Planning Aid has fantastic support from planners in the region and since 1st April (no fooling!) 2008 we have registered an record **28 new volunteers** bringing our total number to over 140! We are keen to ensure careful management of volunteer data and it's important to let us know of any changes to contact details, employer, RTPi status (see below) etc.

Please let Rita know if any of your details change!

Joiners and Leavers...

The turnover of volunteers in recent months means we are welcoming many new people to NW Planning Aid, a number of whom we have already met at the Induction sessions run in September and October! It also means that some volunteers have left us due to work, family and other commitments, job changes and moves out of the region. We want to acknowledge the valuable contribution they have made to Planning Aid and wish them well for the future!

Chester Posse!

Many of our volunteers work for Local Authorities but Chester City Council holds the record for the number of employees volunteering for us! **Seven** of their planners - Nick Smith, Lyndsay Ainsworth, Bethan Evans, Liz Stone, Nial Casselden, Rob Charney and Michelle Talgam (not pictured) - are currently registered with us and regularly involved in a range of activities.



Volunteer Support...

We value the commitment and effort our volunteers put into the service and in return we pledge friendly, professional support for all their volunteering activities. If we can be of any help please call or email us!

Regional Administrator Rita Codd 0161 969 3672
nwadmin@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Regional Manager Jan Beaumont 0161 969 3672
nwco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Planning Advisor Michael Mansell 0870 850 9804
nwcw@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Community Planner Jackie Dibley 07779 225268
nwcp@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Planning & Community Advisor Claire Senior 0161 962 7882
claire.senior@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

2008 Volunteer Training Programme

Providing a quality volunteer training and development programme is an important undertaking at NW Planning Aid! Seminars held this year have been well attended and volunteer feedback has been very favourable! Here is a sample of comments from the recent seminar **Legal Requirements for Public Consultations...**

Gave me better awareness of good practice for public consultation ... **Provided some good working examples of consultation exercises...** *Interested me in assisting at consultations ...* *As I work in a local authority, it was interesting to see how consultation is carried out in the private sector... well-planned and organised!*

Two further events are planned for this year, please see the programme below; an email asking for nominations will be circulated before each of the seminars and full joining instructions will be sent out to delegates before the events. We do hope you will be able to attend, particularly the seminar in December which will also incorporate our Christmas social event!

Forthcoming Training Seminars

Mon 17th November
Legal Challenges & Judicial Review
Kings Chambers

Weds 3rd December (Christmas Event)
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
Eversheds (with Kings Chambers)

Look out for more news and info on these events or contact Jan or Rita



Spirit of Christmas Past... NW Planning Aid volunteers enjoy a drink and chat with colleagues and friends at a past Christmas event...



Volunteers from NW Planning Aid and Planning Aid for Wales get together at a training event in historic Chester

Volunteer Induction helps volunteers to understand the background of Planning Aid and their role within it and provides guidance for involvement in Planning Aid activities. New volunteers can find out more about the kinds of cases and/or community activities they can get involved in and it is a great opportunity to meet fellow volunteers and the staff team! **Next Induction session January 2009.**

An **Induction pack** has been developed for volunteers and will be given to new volunteers on Induction. We need to provide every volunteer with a copy but to avoid postage & packing costs we will distribute them at training and other events; remaining folders can then be posted. We have started distribution so you should receive a folder soon! Folder contents are available electronically – contact **Rita** if you would like one.

Casework Service

Our Planning Advisor **Michael Mansell** handles calls from people wanting help and advice on every aspect of the planning system. Enquiries range from simple queries on planning applications and objections to much more complex cases requiring expert advice and guidance.

As well as providing phone advice and visits to individual clients and groups, our casework volunteers also contribute to community events and planning 'surgeries', such as a surgery held for Gypsies & Travellers in the region and a surgery for community representatives in Toxteth, Liverpool.



Volunteer Simon Plowman advising clients at the Gypsy & Traveller planning surgery

If you have worked/are working on any cases that you feel are suitable to 'showcase' (especially if you would like to provide a brief 'case study'!) please contact Jan.

Client comments...

Through the efforts of our volunteers people who otherwise could not access professional planning help are supported and engaged in resolving their planning issues. We often receive excellent feedback from our Planning Aid 'clients' who appreciate the expertise and time given to them by volunteers

. We thought we would share a few of these with you!

- *Helpful service – gave good advice and reassurance.*
- *Good to know help is at hand for the layman.*
- *The advice gave me confidence.*
- *Well done – keep up the good work!*
- *Very good service for those unsure of how to deal with a planning issue.*
- *A very helpful service which I appreciated a lot.*

Thanks to all volunteers who help with the casework service and provide this much-needed support and advice for our clients.

Photo & Events Album



Many of you will remember Tracy Morrison our previous Community Planner. Tracy moved back to North Yorkshire last year and is now working as a planner for a local authority. I am delighted to say that Tracy was recently married to her partner Andrew (also a planner!) in a lovely ceremony in her home town of Yarm.



Former volunteer Ailbhe Hickey left us earlier this year to return to her native Ireland where she has settled back, along with her partner and new addition Seanan who was born May 08.



Jan, Rita and Jackie at the recent NW RTPA Annual Dinner at the Hilton Hotel in Manchester

If you have any photographs, social news or achievements you'd like to share with us, please contact Jan!



Seasons Greetings

To all our colleagues, volunteers, partners and stakeholders

Thanks for your support and hard work in 2008 and we look forward to sharing future successes in 2009!!

Planning Aid is part of the Royal Town Planning Institute

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