

Planning Aid England senior management team in place

Programme Manager John Rider-Dobson and Operations Managers Sheena Terrace (South) and Sarah Holmes (North) are based at the new National Unit offices in Newhall Street, Birmingham along with the other members of the national team who provide information and support on volunteer, finance and other issues to the regional services.



Above: John Rider-Dobson



Above: Sarah Holmes

"The strength of Planning Aid has been built from the work undertaken in regions." – John Rider-Dobson

With a strong background in project and programme management, John, along with the Operations Managers, is developing plans and proposals for improvements to the overall management structure and way of working for Planning Aid England (PAE).

John said: "The strength of Planning Aid has been built from the work undertaken in regions; we are looking to further this regional good practice and distribute it across all regions. As part of this development, we will be improving how we communicate on new projects, especially the National Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), which are

anticipated to start in 2010."

In addition to NW Planning Aid, Sarah has responsibility for Yorkshire, West Midlands and North Planning Aid regional services. Sarah, a former Planning Aid volunteer, has extensive knowledge and experience of planning having worked in Development Control, Forward Planning and Regeneration. She worked in local authority planning in Greater Manchester for some years, and prior to joining us held the post of Course Director for MA Spatial Planning at Birmingham City University.

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Sarah says "I have been a firm supporter of Planning Aid since asking them to be involved in a project I was working on in Rochdale. It is a real pleasure to now be part of the team that is delivering the service on the ground."

John and Sarah are committed to the future success of PAE and have been out to meet staff and volunteers at the National Volunteering Week event (see article on page 2).

Planning Aid readying itself for new national planning regime

Big changes to how the planning system deals with major planning applications are on the way, and Planning Aid is making sure it is ready to help its clients, writes John Rider-Dobson

From October the way the planning system deals with major projects

like airports, ports, roads, railways and power stations, water and hazardous waste will start to change.

The government says it is making the system faster, fairer and easier for people to get involved; Planning Aid wants to ensure individuals

and groups are able to engage and influence the new process.

Working with the government, which has allocated Planning Aid funding for this purpose, the service will be

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news in brief

Annual Review now available

Planning Aid's national Annual Review 2008/09 is now available and contains lots of interesting articles, images and case studies from services across the regions. For your electronic or hard copy contact Rita (see back page).

Tomorrow's Leaders Awards

Volunteer Lindsay Whitley has won the NW award in the prestigious RTPI Tomorrow's Leaders initiative which tips her as a key leader in tomorrow's planning world. Shortlisted with two other candidates (also Planning Aid volunteers!), Lindsay impressed the panel with evidence of her natural leadership qualities, commitment to planning and enthusiasm for helping people understand the planning system – as demonstrated by her involvement with Planning Aid.



Lindsay (right) at an event in Manchester.

We salute you!

To celebrate volunteers' contributions during 2009 NW Planning Aid held a buffet and drinks reception for volunteers during National Volunteering Week in June. Hosted by Eversheds at their Manchester offices, the event featured an informative seminar on National Policy Statements given by Samantha Grange of Eversheds, who then chaired an open discussion on the topic.

Staff from the regional service attended and we were delighted to welcome as our guests Sue Percy (RTPI Director of Professional Services), Planning Aid England's Programme Manager John Rider-Dobson and Operations Manager for the North, Sarah Holmes.

Regional Manager Jan Beaumont gave a presentation on NW Planning Aid's achievements over the past year, including the recruitment of 58 new volunteers to the service! The focus of the evening was very much on the role volunteers have played in delivering a successful service over the past 12 months, as emphasised by Sue's introductory talk. John introduced himself, speaking of the future direction of Planning Aid and our continuing dependence on volunteer support. The evening concluded with drinks and networking. Volunteers commented on how much they enjoyed the social aspect of the event, and the opportunity to meet members of the national team and our new Director Sue.

Free Volunteer Development Seminars

We are committed to providing first-class development opportunities for our volunteers and this includes our excellent range of free seminars which are kindly provided by Eversheds and King Chambers.

Forthcoming dates for your diaries:
Monday 14 September 2009
Eversheds, Manchester
Consultation Guidelines

Monday 19 October 2009

Kings Chambers, Manchester
Regional Strategy Update

Wed 09 December 2009

Eversheds, Manchester

Christmas Event A light-hearted review of planning 'highlights' from 2009, plus a Planning Quiz!

Look out for email alerts for these events or contact Rita for a booking form.

NW Planning Aid speaks at RTPI event

Regional Manager Jan Beaumont was one of two keynote speakers at a recent RTPI Regeneration Network event hosted by the University of Chester.

At the well-attended event, catchily-titled 'How can planning aid successful regeneration?' Jan and co-speaker David Chiltern, Area Director with the Homes & Communities Agency, spoke about the challenges, rewards and benefits of engaging with the community on planning and regeneration issues. The overarching

premise of Jan's presentation was the importance of the education, encouragement, inclusion and support of communities during periods of change; she was able to effectively illustrate her key points using NW Planning Aid's experiences in recent years on a number of community planning projects but focused specifically on the work undertaken with the Rotunda Community College and neighbouring residents in a deprived area of Liverpool.

The event was filmed by university

students and will soon be available to view on YouTube whilst speakers' presentation slides are to be posted on the RTPI Regeneration Network webpage.

Jan said: "Participating at the event provided an excellent opportunity to promote our service to people working in planning, regeneration and community development. We also made a number of valuable contacts that we hope will help us to further our outreach activities in the Cheshire area."

Community engagement with young people in Sefton

case study: Sefton

To help engage young people in Sefton in the borough's

Core Strategy consultations, NW Planning Aid has delivered a range of activities for young people of all ages to help them become more aware of planning and regeneration issues.

Students at Bootle's St Robert Bellarmine Catholic Primary school became town planners for the future when NW Planning Aid facilitated classroom sessions on town planning and design. The activities provided an interesting contrast to a student project on Bootle's history and helped to identify how town planning has influenced change in the town over the last 100 years.



During the design session students constructed models using cardboard tubes and boxes, plastic containers and paper. The children's ideas were creative and sustainable including a hospital

with pharmacy and care home, a manufacturing unit providing energy via solar panels and wind turbine, a futuristic cylindrical apartment block run on solar energy, family housing with solar panels and an elevated area in case of flooding, and a museum with an internal working elevator.

After Planning Aid volunteers explained why planners have to balance many different needs, students demonstrated an impressive grasp of the topic, contributing to a lively discussion on issues like housing, open and green spaces, transport, health, education and renewable energy. The youngsters were then projected 21 years into the

Class teacher Neil Farmer said it was a valuable opportunity for children to work with adults other than teachers, adding that it was beneficial for them to learn about such an important topic from experts.

NWPA support leads to award

NW Planning Aid has been involved for over two years in supporting women in Greater Manchester to engage more effectively with planning, and to highlight gender-related planning issues. Staff and volunteers have provided professional expertise to the Manchester Women's Design Group (MWDG) on the development of a Gender Checklist and have also supported events such as an exhibition stall for the 2009 International Women's Day event at Manchester Town Hall where local women were consulted on issues they think are important in relation to the built environment such as crime, transport, housing and play. MWDG recently won a Manchester Women's Award for Women in the Environment, and attribute much of their success to the invaluable support of Planning Aid. Volunteers attended the event to see the award being presented.



Volunteer **Zoe Hodson** (left) with the award-winning MWDG.

Helping communities get to grips with Section 106 Agreements in Salford

case study: Salford

Community organisations in Salford have benefited from a free training session on Section 106 Agreements delivered by NW Planning Aid volunteers.

Over twenty representatives from community organisations participated in the workshop to learn about the S106 Agreements, and they unanimously agreed the session was both enjoyable and informative for volunteers and workers alike

The event was led by Planning Aid volunteer Sarah Foster, a professional planner and expert in Section 106 Agreements, and supported by eight



Planning Aid volunteers who facilitated a varied set of workshops which included a role play situation where community representatives, developers and planners negotiated over an imaginary S106 agreement, struggling to eventually come to a final agreement.

"I found the information clear and the role play was fun and very interesting" was an enthusiastic comment fed back from one of the participants.

...new national planning regime

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helping to publicise and educate stakeholders on how things will work. Planning Aid, whilst being independent of the new system, wants to ensure people's voices are heard. Its role will be to offer free independent advice to people who cannot afford professional fees on how they can have their say in the new process.



National Networks such as rail will fall under the single national planning policy.

The first change the public should notice will be publication of National Policy Statements (NPSs) in autumn this year which will set out a single national planning policy on Ports, National Networks (road and rail), Renewables, Electricity Networks (powerlines), Fossil Fuel, Oil and Gas Infrastructure (pipelines and storage) and Nuclear Power. Only the Nuclear NPS will state specifically where sites will be located but all future applications (known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, or NSIPs) will be judged against these statements.

The body deciding the applications, the Infrastructure Planning Commission

(IPC), will begin advising people on applications from October 1st. The IPC expects to be able to receive its first applications, from the energy and transport sectors, next March.

NPSs will replace all other related planning policy so it is vital the public has its say. There will be at least 28 days for consultation on each of them and eleven statements are planned by 2010. Planning Aid will be there to offer the public advice during these consultations and during the two other opportunities for individuals and groups to have their say.

Developers will be required to consult with local communities about what they plan to do before putting in an application. The public will be able to have its say then and can also give its views, in writing or in person, when the application reaches the IPC. It will be holding open floor hearings on applications when requested.

Planning Aid is expanding capacity and establishing procedures in readiness for dealing with a substantial number of public inquiries and requests for advice, particularly when the location-specific Nuclear Power NPS comes out. The other NPSs will not be as specific, but they will almost certainly raise questions which Planning Aid clients may well wish to ask and the service will do its best to help with them.

For information and advice on the new national planning regime please call Planning Aid on (0121) 214 2915.

casefile: Wigan

Planning objections

Our Helpline receives many calls from people needing help with composing objections to a wide range of local planning proposals.

A local interest group wanting to object to proposals for Wigan's Menses Park contacted us for advice. Plans included re-location of a well-known statue from its historically-significant site at the highest part of the park, removal of mature trees and bowling green, and construction of a training centre and new park entrance. The group had discovered an agreement from 1878 containing conditions relating to building work in the park; our volunteer recommended their objection also demonstrated how proposals would be detrimental to the park's appearance, remove an important entrance to the town centre and reduce open space. The group received help to prepare a well-reasoned letter of objection and they now await the outcome of the proposals.

A client acting for his elderly mother was concerned about a neighbour's proposed two-storey extension. Our volunteer visited them to discuss the matter further and help write a letter of objection on the grounds of visual impact; she also identified local planning policies which supported the objections. The clients were pleased to receive the news that planning permission had been refused.

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