

Hailing a successful 2009 – and looking to 2010

Happy New Year to all our volunteers, readers, partners and stakeholders!

2009 has been a successful and rewarding year for us, despite the difficulties of the current climate, and with the support of our dedicated volunteers we look forward to more challenges and successes as we move into 2010.

Planning Help and Advice

During 2009 our planning advice service helped over 450 individuals and households and over 130 groups, giving expert assistance to hundreds of people – a significant number of cases being directly handled by our volunteers. Planning Advisor Michael Mansell reports that cases have ranged widely, from simple household planning application enquiries to more complex issues including helping community groups understand local planning policy and make representations in respect of significant local planning proposals (see case study p4). Michael finds that typically, most people access our service via the Helpline but other enquiries do come in through the website, email and – as our good reputation grows – referrals from other groups and agencies.

Supporting Communities

Our Community Planning programme has been exceptionally busy during 2009 too, as supporting people to participate in consultations on planning continues to be a key part of our work. Staff and volunteers have been involved in doing just that in a number of events across the region, assisting over 3,000 people to understand regional and local



Above: Providing professional planning advice.

"Our Introduction to Planning session 'unpacks' the key parts of the planning system." – Jackie Dibley

plans and planning, and to have an informed say in the issues that affect them, as well as helping community groups put forward their own plans and ideas for local improvements.

Over 300 people participated on our community training programme during 2009. Community Planner Jackie Dibley says: "Our Introduction



Above: Sustainability training.

to Planning session 'unpacks' the key parts of the planning system, dispels some common myths about planning and gives people useful information on where and when they can engage with and influence local plans. It's really rewarding to see their confidence on what can be a complex subject increase as the session progresses."

The training programme was extended during the year to include a seminar on Sustainability which was very well received and will be repeated in 2010. For information on 2010 training sessions contact Jackie (see p4).

news in brief

Helping community groups in the NW

NW Planning Aid has been helping community groups to understand and engage with the North West's Regional Strategy. Community Planners Jackie Dibley and Claire Senior delivered information and workshop sessions in partnership with 4NW (the region's Leadership Board with responsibility for planning, housing, transport and economic development) to explain key elements of the Strategy and help people identify when and where they can get involved in the consultations.

Showcasing our service in the community

Planning Aid was featured in a number of Community Roadshows held in shopping centres in Bootle, Liverpool, Southport and Manchester during the autumn of 2009. A short film showing what the service can provide for individuals and community groups was shown over several days in each location and hundreds of leaflets and other information was distributed to shoppers and passers-by who were also asked to complete a short survey about their experiences of planning.

A big 'thank you' to our volunteers

We think our volunteers are rather special people!

During 2009 we registered a total of 56 new volunteers, bringing our volunteer force to over 200! Together they contributed hundreds of hours to our Casework and Community activities. Without this support we would be unable to achieve a fraction of the work we do in the region and hundreds of people would not have received the excellent expert planning help and advice we were able to give them.



Above: Newly inducted volunteers October 2009.

NW Planning Aid Regional Advisory Panel Chair Kate Bailey says "Volunteering for Planning Aid offers lots of benefits... for example active volunteers are welcome to attend our free, professional (and sociable) training events which cover a range of topical planning issues; a number of volunteers will also have the opportunity to receive free places on regional and national conferences". Sarah Foster, active on the community training programme, agrees,

adding "Volunteering can count towards Continuing Professional Development and the opportunity to see planning from a different perspective is invaluable – both as a volunteer and in the day job as a planner!"

So a big **THANK YOU** to our volunteers...we look forward to your involvement in more activities with us during 2010 – whether that is on casework, research, community engagement and participation, community training, exhibitions and promotions or activities with young people! The volunteer training programme will be finalized during January – volunteers should watch out for email alerts advertising coming events and seminars!

NW Planning Aid supporting planning students

NW Planning Aid has formed excellent links with the planning schools at Manchester and Liverpool universities and visits planning students and their lecturers on a regular basis, talking about the work of Planning Aid and running workshops to help students apply their theoretical learning to more practical planning situations.

Says Regional Manager Jan Beaumont: "We believe that Planning Aid's aims should be of interest to all planners and the earlier we can kindle that

interest the better. Hopefully their interest and support will continue throughout their planning careers!"

Students appreciate the benefits that volunteering can bring and several of NW Planning Aid's volunteers are undergraduate volunteers keen to gain some practical experience and advice from professional planners.

Said Tim Harrison from Liverpool University's Department of Civic Design "The support given to us by

Jan and the team from NW Planning Aid is invaluable to our students. The talk and hands-on activities provide a real 'world view' of planning which students find an invaluable addition to their academic work."

Iain White of Manchester University agrees, adding "The talks and workshops provided by NW Planning Aid add a very useful dimension to the students' learning, especially the practical sessions looking at public engagement and community planning."

Town Planner workshop with primary school pupils

Over 40 students at St Peter's C of E Primary School in Leigh participated in a half-day 'Town Planner' workshop where they learned about the work of town planners and how good town planning can contribute to healthy and happy communities.

case study: Leigh

range of creative, colourful communities that anyone would be happy to live in!

In addition to applying their newly-gained knowledge of planning, students used a range of other skills including team-working, communication and maths as well as creative design and art.

After a talk on the planning system which used local examples of housing, retail and transport developments and open green spaces to highlight key points, the eight and nine year olds split into groups to work within guidelines to ensure they provided the required mix of housing and enough shops, leisure facilities, open spaces and other amenities to serve the people that would live there. Using specially designed worksheets, they had to calculate that they could produce their buildings etc within their budget before work could start on design and 'build'.

Once the 'paperwork' was completed students designed their communities, mapping out roads, housing, shopping and open areas on cardboard bases before starting 'building' work using cardboard models, coloured paper, paint and other materials, producing a



"It's important to provide young people with as much information about the world as possible. Planning Aid's support has certainly added to their knowledge of their local area and the work of a planning department."

Kathryn Platt, Wigan EBP

Support for Gypsies & Travellers

In 2009 NW Planning Aid continued its support of individuals and groups from Gypsy and Traveller communities, assisting with planning issues and building the capacity of support groups and development workers.

Activities included attending a women's coffee morning, participating in meetings of the Greater Manchester Irish Travellers Forum and hosting a display at the NW Pavee Ceilidh to celebrate the International Year of Irish Traveller. We asked an Irish Traveller women's group member to help us deliver a talk and workshop on cultural issues in planning to over 50 people at a conference on engaging with minority groups.

Later she said "Helping Planning Aid with the workshop gave me more confidence – I would never have been able to stand up and give a talk to strangers like that without their support and encouragement."



Above: Discussing Gypsy & Traveller issues.

Planning Aid 'zones' in on Preston

In October 09 staff and volunteers got on board Preston City Council's Citizenzone trailer in the city's Flag Market to promote Planning Aid services and give on-the-spot planning advice to local residents.

Volunteers chatted to many passing shoppers and workers, handing out leaflets and other information. Several local residents obtained advice on a range of planning issues and volunteers were also able to demonstrate how to look up local plans and access

useful websites such as Planning Aid and the Planning Portal via the trailer's online computers. A number of other visitors called in, including



local councillors, Preston City Council planners, community and voluntary workers from the area and Lancashire Constabulary's Crime Reduction Officer Sue Slater who was keen to find out more about the work of Planning Aid and the potential links between our projects. Preston Community Radio came along to interview Regional Manager Jan Beaumont about Planning Aid and the Citizenzone event which was additional welcome publicity for us!

Left: The Citizenzone event in Preston.

Young people: the future!

The Children's Care Monitor for 2009 interviewed over 1000 young people who were asked questions, among others, on how safe they felt in different places.

The research found that children felt least safe in towns and cities. Planning has an essential part to play in ensuring the safety and security of communities, especially the most vulnerable; today's young people will become the adults living, working and raising families in the towns and cities of tomorrow and they have a vital stake in the plans and policies currently being drawn up for the future. We remain committed to reaching out to the region's young people via a series of specially designed educational sessions aimed at engaging this key group with the principles of good planning in a fun, practical way.



Exploring creativity.

As over 400 young people within the age range of eight to sixteen years old have participated in a variety of sessions in schools and other locations, they have consistently impressed us with their enthusiasm to learn and apply this new knowledge and



Young person taking part in Sefton.

understanding in a range of practical activities such as designing and modelling neighbourhoods (see case study p3) or to specific issues such as commenting on local authority plans. Planning & Community Advisor Claire Senior says: "Staff and volunteers find the sessions with young people enjoyable and rewarding – especially when we find we've inspired a young person to consider a career in planning!"

If you are interested in finding out more about our work with young people please contact Claire or Jan (see below).



Young people's field trip in Burnley.

casefile: Kirby

Stadium plan halted

Local people in Kirkby were unhappy with plans for the relocation of Everton football stadium and the development of a major retail complex in the town for a number of economic and social reasons.

When the application was called in by the Secretary of State, Kirkby Residents Action Group (Krag) made the brave decision to give evidence to the public enquiry on behalf of local residents. Soon Krag realized they needed expert help to guide them through the maze of planning information involved and their concerns led them to NW Planning Aid where volunteer Brian Jackson was assigned to their case.

With guidance and support from Brian, in particular on Design and Section 106 issues, group members spent hundreds of hours studying plans and documents and preparing for the public inquiry which they attended alongside environmental and planning professionals and barristers, acting as witnesses and facing cross-examination on the many issues involved. Brian says his contribution, spending around 40 hours with the group, was relatively minor and applauds their commitment, willingness to learn and to apply their knowledge for the good of the community. The planning application was eventually refused.

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