

Neighbourhood Planning support: Caistor

Background

Caistor is a Georgian market town in the district of West Lindsey, Lincolnshire, some 17 miles south of Scunthorpe, with a population of 2,700. Caistor Town Council is the plan-making body – work on the plan is being led by a Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group. The aim is to deliver the development and regeneration potential of the town and in particular to create a Neighbourhood Plan that can enable and facilitate delivery of the expectations of the local community to deliver growth and economic sustainability for the town.

How did Planning Aid England help?

A support package was agreed in discussion with the Steering Group in late summer/early autumn 2011. This included:

- Planning for Non-Planners Training attended by 13 Steering Group members
- Plan Preparation Support Workshop attended by 12 Steering Group members
- Policy-writing Workshop attended by nine Steering Group members (and an LPA officer)
- Acting as a critical friend for review of the overall approach and key documents such as the terms of reference
- ‘Buddy’ system developed to support the plan / policy writing activity. Seven volunteers were identified and allocated as mentors or ‘buddies’ to work on one-to-one basis with Steering Group members assigned to different policy themes.

As a result of this ongoing support, the group has progressed its Neighbourhood Plan to draft stage and consulted on it in December 2012.

A Planning Aid England staff member led from the outset in shaping, discussing and agreeing the support package with the Steering Group and also attended early meetings. PAE then designed and coordinated all the events and activity above, including volunteer involvement, and liaised on a regular basis with the Steering Group Chair about ongoing and future support needs.



What difference did PAE's support make?

Andy Gutherson, Chair of the Caistor Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, explains: "The support and guidance of Planning Aid England (PAE) has been invaluable to Caistor as a Neighbourhood Plan Front Runner...One of the first tasks and most important that PAE was able to do was bring the Steering Group up to a shared knowledge base and understanding of the existing (pre 2011) planning system and the proposed changes emerging through the coalition government. This provided clarity for the group of the reason for the proposed changes and also the opportunity available to them through a Neighbourhood Plan.

The ability to do this in a dispassionate and professional way removed any risks of local people already involved in the process placing their own emphasis or values on that position. This initial workshop confirmed the opportunity afforded by the Neighbourhood Plan process. Without this early intervention the process could have floundered very early on.

Since that date PAE has been able to provide focused events depending on the areas of need identified by the Steering Group. All of these events have been well received by the volunteers, who have come away from the sessions with greater understanding and appreciation of the work they are involved in. For example, a general introduction to policy writing was followed up by a more bespoke session on the key issues arising from the Caistor consultation. This then provided the basis for a buddying arrangement between a named volunteer and a named lead in the community for a key policy area.

PAE's volunteers have brought a range of experiences and backgrounds to the project which is helpful in ensuring debate and exploration of different views on key issues." In turn Alyson Linnegar MRTPI, PAE volunteer, reflected on her experience supporting the group: "I have enjoyed immensely working with the group and found it very worthwhile. I have been pleased to gain first-hand experience of working and assisting a community producing its own statutory plan based on its own vision for the area. I also feel that I have a wealth of planning and housing knowledge and experience which I have been able to put to good use in advising and supporting the group during the plan making process."

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Listen to Alyson in discussion with two members of Caistor's Steering Group [on this video](#).

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