

Neighbourhood Planning support: Inner East Preston

Background

The Inner East Preston Neighbourhood Area was formally designated in November 2012. It lies to the east of Preston City Centre and covers the majority of two wards, St Matthews and Fishwick. The area is highly urban in character with a population of approximately 12,000. It is ranked as amongst the top 10% most deprived communities in England.

The qualifying body, the Friends of Fishwick and St Matthews (FoFs), was established in 2011 to represent local residents and promote the neighbourhood area. They received fifth wave Front Runner status in March 2012.

How did Planning Aid England help?

Planning Aid England (PAE) first met with representatives of FoFs in 2011. The group were keen to express their views on a number of major development proposals in the local area but were unsure how to do this effectively. PAE volunteers were able to explain the planning process to them and, over the course of a number of weeks, help them articulate their comments and concerns. This proved to be the catalyst for community action and the group, supported by the Council, were nominated to take forward a Neighbourhood Plan for the area.

In May 2012 PAE delivered a training session to outline the Neighbourhood Planning process and explore what it could mean for the local community. This enabled the group to move forward quickly and agree upon key milestones. An Issues, Vision and Objectives document was drafted over the course of the summer and consulted upon in Oct-Nov 2012. PAE staff and volunteers attended a number of consultation events, offering practical support and advice on community engagement.

In November 2012 PAE organised an event at a local primary school. Year 5 pupils were asked to take part in a series of activities designed to stimulate discussion on the neighbourhood and share their thoughts and ideas on how it should develop in the future. Work is currently underway to secure involvement from local businesses on the Neighbourhood Plan.

From the outset, the FoFs established an excellent working relationship with the local authority. The support offered by PAE has therefore been to 'plug any gaps' and to share information and best practice gained from working with groups around the country.



What difference did PAE's support make?

Grete Smith, FoFs Secretary, explained how FoFs has worked with PAE: "The initial session, when representatives from Planning Aid England explained the full process of neighbourhood planning, was of great value to the group. The process is convoluted and daunting, especially for a newly formed residents group without any expertise in planning. Having an organisation we can trust and approach is very helpful.

As part of the consultation, a representative from PAE and one from the Planning department at the City Council ran a planning session at the local primary school. This is considered by FoFs to go a long way towards the group's general vision and objectives, since it is raising awareness of the environment and the community and preparing the next generation of residents."

This event was also welcomed by the local planning authority. Victoria Hunter, Planning Officer at Preston City Council, commented "The school event was run to coincide with wider consultation on draft issues for the neighbourhood plan to address.

[PAE] developed a lesson plan which was informative, interactive and fun for the school children. The comments provided by the children really did highlight what they considered to be the main issues which the neighbourhood plan should address. Without this event, it is unlikely that these views would have been heard. Such original ideas for consultation are imperative to involve the whole community in the development of the neighbourhood plan."

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Planning Aid England provides free and independent advice on neighbourhood planning. Call: 0203 206 1880 or Email: info@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

