

Annual Report

2020

Community Places



Planning Advice for People and Communities

helping groups engage

Our accessible, confidential, independent planning advice and support service continues to be very much in demand with people and communities particularly for those who find the complexities of the planning system a mystery.

Over the past year we gave advice and support to 35 community groups on a wide range of planning issues and policy areas. Groups came to us for help with planning requirements in relation to their own community facilities (change of use; access; permitted development); objecting to roads, traffic and sporting facility proposals; and proposals for housing developments and HMOs in urban areas.

A few groups were also keen to input to and influence the Draft Local Development Plans which are currently being prepared by local councils – issues groups wanted brought to the fore in the Plans include: social and affordable housing; sustainable transport; improved health and wellbeing and ensuring communities are balanced and protected from over-development. We also continued to provide support to a number of groups who are opposing major and significant planning applications including a proposal for a gold mining extraction plant in Co Tyrone (soon to be the subject of a Public Inquiry); and two large-scale renewable energy proposals (one in Kells, Co Antrim and another in The Sperrins).



Board and staff members meet with Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon MLA

Planning Advice for People and Communities

**one-to-one
advice**

This past year we dealt with requests for planning advice from **140** people from all 11 local council areas on a wide range of planning issues. Queries included - What can I do if my neighbour has built a house without checking the drainage requirements and now my garden is flooding? I want to provide accommodation for my daughter who has special needs – will I get planning permission for a dwelling? I want to speak at a planning committee meeting – can you give me some pointers? I have an idea to provide dog walking therapy for isolated elderly people – do I need planning permission for the kennels? I built a garden shed but now I think I might have broken the law if it's too big – what can I do? A wind turbine has been built just opposite my house - is there anything I can do? I think my neighbour is running an unauthorised business from his garage - what can I do?

**working
together for
better
involvement**

Our planning advice service is part-funded by the Department for Infrastructure and we welcome the Department's ongoing commitment to support the organisation. This coming year we look forward to sharing our many years of accumulated learning on planning issues with a Project Working Group established by the Department's Chief Planner to explore opportunities for further community engagement in planning.

Putting People in the Lead through Quality Participatory Budgeting

PB charter

learning workshops

share experience

vox pops

mentoring

digital engagement

We are pleased to report we have been able to continue and progress our ground-breaking and innovative work to develop and mainstream Participatory Budgeting across the region. Early in 2020 we secured funding from the National Lottery Community Fund's **NI Great Ideas** fund for a two-year project to "put people in the lead" through quality participatory budgeting.

The project brings together members of the PB Network (established in 2018) and aims to develop a charter for Participatory Budgeting which will embody a quality locally led approach to planning and applying all PB processes. By this we mean ensuring that all PB processes involve stakeholders from the start – genuinely "putting people in the lead".

We will convene a series of regional learning workshops to bring people and communities together to share and learn from their own PB experiences (the real difference PB can make to a decision-making process and positive impacts on people and communities). We will also look at and learn from examples of PB processes which have had success in other jurisdictions to inform the development of the charter. Mentoring support to groups planning a PB process will also be provided.

The project has adapted well to the challenges associated with Covid-19 social distancing and other restrictions and is now also using digital and online engagement methods to maintain connections, keep the momentum going and plan future project activities.



Capacity Building and Support on Co-Production

capacity building

With resources secured from the Carnegie UK Trust we are delivering a capacity building and support programme on co-production to community planning partners in three local councils (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon; Derry City and Strabane; and Lisburn and Castlereagh) as part of the Trust's Embedding Wellbeing initiative.

good practice

In essence co-production can be described as people, communities and service providers working together in the shaping, planning and delivery of effective public services with community planning the logical starting point when it creates an environment for mutual support and learning.

learning symposium

We convened a good practice sharing and learning symposium in September 2019 which examined the principles, methodologies and operation of co-production in the context of the role community planning can play in sharing knowledge; building trust; widening participation; and sharing resources to enable communities to exercise control over resource allocation.

tailored support

Our work will continue into 2021 as we provide tailored support to each of the three councils, who are:

- looking at applying co-production principles to progressing local growth plans;
- exploring different models and mechanisms to improve local community engagement; and
- applying a co-production approach to a participatory budgeting pilot project to help address local needs.

learning resources

We will develop resource materials for the Community Planning Partnerships which will focus on the principles of co-production; the role of community planning in co-production; and how the community and voluntary sector can be represented using a range of community engagement models. These resources and the learning from the Project will be shared with community planning partners across the region.

engagement models



Community Engagement, Research and Survey Work

We also worked on a range of community engagement and research assignments during the year – including:

- a health and wellbeing study in a disadvantaged area of inner North Belfast which looked at environmental, housing and other factors which were impacting negatively on residents' wellbeing. Focused engagement with residents and the local community recommended a series of improvements including cleaning and maintenance of shared spaces; improved lighting and fencing; enhancements to alley-gated areas; and animation of open spaces.
- a research assignment (commissioned by Sustainable NI) to assess, analyse and report on the extent to which local and regional environmental non-governmental organisations have been able to engage with and participate in the community planning structures established by local councils;
- community engagement work with residents in Stranocum (Co Antrim) focusing on the themes of village assets and strengths; active living; lifelong learning and facilities and activities for young people and how these could be developed and progressed into an action plan to benefit all village residents;
- facilitated review of a local community plan in Scrabo – the residents' association asked us for help in assessing and reviewing the progress made on the actions identified in the Local Community Plan we helped it prepare in 2008 (as part of our Supporting Communities in Community Planning Project). Successes to report include the establishment of a very well used community resource centre; environmental improvements on the estate and a wide range of services and activities for the local community;
- household surveys, analysis and reporting (in Newtownabbey, Portglenone and Eglinton) for two housing associations as part of the 'Housing Together – Building a United Community' initiative.

**health and
wellbeing**

**eNGO
engagement**

**village
planning**

**community
plan review**

**good
relations in
housing**

Board Members

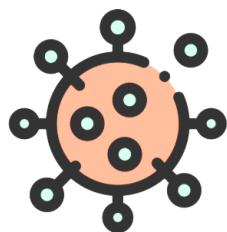
- Raymond Jackson (Chairperson) - Confederation of Community Groups Newry and District
- Murray Watt (Treasurer) - Supporting Communities
- Michael Graham - Forward South Partnership
- Austin Herron - Carrickfergus Community Forum
- Stevie Johnston - Individual Member
- Brendan Murtagh - Individual Member
- Ann McNickle - Causeway Rural and Urban Network
- Cathy Polley - Ards Development Bureau and Community Network

Staff Members

- Colm Bradley - Director
- Fiona Conroy - Planner and Engagement Officer
- Celine McCart - Administrator
- Louise O’Kane - Planner and Engagement Officer
- Doreen O’Neill - Projects Secretary
- Claire Rea - Planner and Engagement Officer



Covid-19



March 2020 (the end of this reporting period) saw the outbreak of a global health pandemic bringing unprecedented challenges for many people and communities. Community Places assessed the significant risks associated with the pandemic and, in line with Government guidelines and advice, we closed our Belfast city centre office premises and made arrangements for our staff to work from home with access to all our cloud and other data and resources. Our Board is meeting via video conferencing. We continue to provide our region-wide advice and support services to people and communities. Outreach advice and other face-to-face engagement and project activities will resume when it is safe to do so. We have changed how we work but not what we do.

Finance Yearend March 2020

Income 2019-2020

	£
- Department for Infrastructure	116,000
- National Lottery Community Fund NI Great Ideas	30,098
- Erasmus+ Programme	8,754
- Project and Other Income	<u>90,563</u>
	<u>245,415</u>

Expenditure 2019-2020

	£
- Employing Staff	189,726
- Delivering Projects and Services	13,356
- Organisation Costs	<u>39,520</u>
	<u>242,602</u>

*Extracted from Audited Accounts Yearend March 2020
prepared by Finegan Gibson, Chartered Accountants and Auditors*

Contact Us

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