



Planning for Healthy Communities – engaging local expertise

Capacity building seminar and consultation event on draft Belfast Planning Service Statement of Community Involvement

Thursday 19 November 2015, Duncairn Centre for Culture and the Arts, Belfast

Workshop report

How our neighbourhoods are planned plays a major role for people's everyday lives, and through that their health and wellbeing. Local communities have first-hand experience and expertise of how the built environment shapes their health, which can inform and support the development of planning policy and practice. The new planning system offers new opportunities to maximise use of this evidence. Planning authorities are required to engage the community in developing the new Local Development Plans. Drawing up a Statement of Community Involvement is the first step in this process, which offers an opportunity to integrate local level evidence into the development plan.

This event was designed for community sector professionals and offered an opportunity to explore how planning influences health; explore the role of the community sector in influencing healthy urban environments, and contribute views on the draft Belfast Planning Service Statement of Community Involvement, which is currently out for consultation.

The event was arranged by Belfast Healthy Cities in collaboration with North Belfast Partnership, who chaired the event. All Belfast Area Partnerships provided support to the event by circulating the invitation.

Programme

The event programme included a capacity building session with three presentations.

Jonna Monaghan, Health and Wellbeing Manager with Belfast Healthy Cities, provided an outline of how planning influences health, and an overview of the historical links between planning and public health. The presentation emphasised the need to take a people centred approach to planning in order to create healthy and prosperous cities.



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Wilson Lambe MBE, Chair of Ballysillan & Upper Ardoyne Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, presented a case study of how the Greater Ballysillan Masterplan was developed and how the masterplan is delivering change for local residents, eg. through investment in facilities for young people. The presentation highlighted the importance of engaging children and young people, working in partnership across sectors, and delivering results. The core element highlighted was listening to the community, enabling the community to take ownership of the process and demonstrating how views are being translated into action.

Dermot O’Kane, Principal Planner with Belfast City Council, gave an overview of the new planning system and the approach to developing the Local Development Plan and outlined the key ways in which planning can contribute to health and wellbeing. Community involvement was underlined as a key element of the new planning system, and it was emphasised that health and wellbeing is now a principle of planning, through the new Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

The discussion following the presentations focused on how a bottom up approach can be integrated into strategic implementation, how specific health considerations can be taken into account, and on how harder to reach groups can be engaged in the process. There was also discussion on how challenges of the new system, in particular effective collaboration between the two tier spatial planning system and central government led transport planning system, can be overcome.

Workshop – consultation on the draft Statement of Community Involvement

The second part of the event was an opportunity to comment on the draft Belfast Planning Service Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The workshop was conducted as an open discussion with the panel of speakers, chaired by John McCorry, Chief Executive of North Belfast Partnership.

Key points made during the discussion were:

- How can people and communities be kept involved and interested throughout the Local Development Plan process; people feel over consulted and frustrated with lack of visible results? How can other sectors effectively support the process?
 - More information needs to be shared more regularly
 - It was noted that planning officers can benefit from engaging more with communities; this builds experience, trust and relationships, and helps planners analyse and make sense of local information
 - Visioning is important, and engaging communities in visioning essential
 - It was noted the process to date has been very complex; Planning Appeals Commission effectively adds a third tier
 - Other sectors, including community and voluntary sector, may be able to support communities e.g. by developing temporary and pop up uses of

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space, exploring meanwhile use of vacant sites and other options that do not require planning permission or intervention

- How can the expertise and evidence available in communities and within community sector agencies be utilised more effectively?
 - Ways of dealing with information overload were explored
 - Mechanisms for effectively channelling grassroots evidence into the decision making process were also discussed
- What resources are available for new approaches?
 - It was noted many people and organisations feel pressure of reduced resources and are finding it difficult to maintain optimism
 - More collaborative approach was highlighted as a way of building trust and potentially identifying new, more efficient approaches
 - Planning gain, or mechanisms for ensuring some of the benefit of development is shared with society at large, was explored as one avenue
 - The use of consultants, cost effectiveness and alternatives were discussed; it was highlighted that communities already have information which can be tapped directly, and noted that overreliance on consultants reduces skills in the statutory sector
- How can the core principles of good consultation be reflected in community involvement?
 - Transparency and inclusiveness were highlighted as core principles, along with ensuring delivery to demonstrate results to consultees
 - Creative consultation mechanisms are important; traditional focus groups do not suit everyone
- A number of comments on the draft SCI consultation document were also made, focusing on the importance of 'plain English', a user friendly design and identifying communities and community sector agencies as key stakeholders with evidence that can support the process
- In conclusion, it was noted that planning plays an important role in creating healthy and prosperous cities, and that local stakeholders play an essential role in developing approaches that ensure Belfast is a welcoming, attractive, healthy and liveable city
- It was clarified that the workshop discussion will inform Belfast Healthy Cities' response to the draft SCI, and will also be shared with participants

Appendix 1. Event agenda

Agenda

9.30 Registration – tea and coffee

10.00 Welcome

Event chair: John McCorry, North Belfast Partnership

10.10 How planning shapes health and wellbeing

Jonna Monaghan, Belfast Healthy Cities

10.30 Influencing planning – creating liveable neighbourhoods

*Wilson Lambe, MBE, Ballysillan & Upper Ardoyne Neighbourhood
Renewal Partnership*

10.50 Local Development Plans – an overview of the new planning system

Dermot O’Kane, Belfast City Council

11.10 Questions and discussion

11.30 Workshop – views on the Statement of Community Involvement

12.15 Feedback

12.30 Close and lunch