

Annual Report 2024





**celebrating 40 years of
independent planning
and engagement
support**



**community
places**





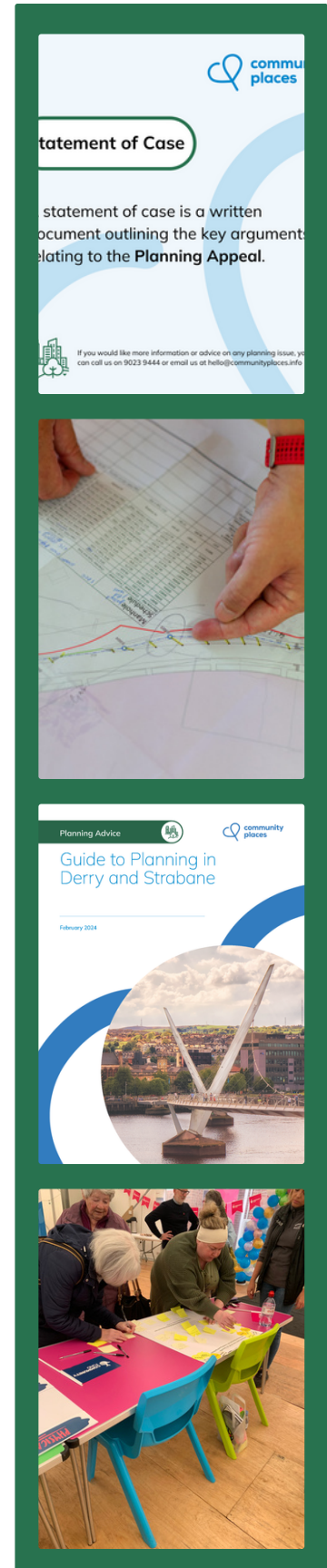
Our Planning Advice Service

free, impartial and confidential planning advice

Demand for our planning advice service is as high as ever – it is clear that people need considerable help and support to navigate the complexities of the planning system - during 2023-2024 we dealt with enquiries from 38 groups and 89 individuals.

- We helped people understand complex planning procedures, legislation and regulations.
- We gave groups advice on the planning requirements relating to their own community facilities.
- We encouraged and guided people who wanted to input to the preparation of Local Development Plans.
- We helped groups and people comment on a wide range of urban and rural development proposals which may have an adverse impact on their local community.
- We're making the planning system more accessible to all by simplifying planning 'jargon' and complex terms.
- We offered one-to-one confidential planning advice on an outreach basis.

The Department for Infrastructure part-funds our planning advice service and we welcome its continued commitment to support the organisation.





placing people at the heart of decision making

Throughout this past year we drew on and used our Participatory Budgeting Charter to plan and design tailored and inclusive PB processes.

We provided facilitated support to two PB processes led by Belfast City Council: Move More to Eat Well to Feel Better – the council’s second PB process along this theme – where over 7,000 votes were cast for 51 projects across the city each receiving funding of up to £2,500; and Belfast 2024’s Bank of Ideas where 29 ideas (out of a total of 93 put forward) received funding of up to £2,000 for creative projects across the city.

We supported Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council’s Community Planning Partnership and PB Working Group through the third run of its very successful PB initiative (Tak£500+) – where 108 local community projects received funding totalling £105,906 for initiatives to maintain and improve mental wellbeing. We are continuing to work with the Community Planning Partnership and the PB Working Group to evaluate and learn from the Tak£500+ PB process.

We were delighted to participate in the celebration and learning event for the Community Foundation’s Community Solutions to Housing and Homelessness Programme. We worked with the Project Steering Group and experts with lived experience of homelessness to design the PB element of this programme aimed at alleviating the root causes of homelessness. This was the largest thematic PB fund across the region to date (where six groups received £25,000 to advance their project ideas and two groups received £5,000 to develop their ideas further). Groups met to share learning and celebrate the impact the funding had had on their projects.





Community Planning Work

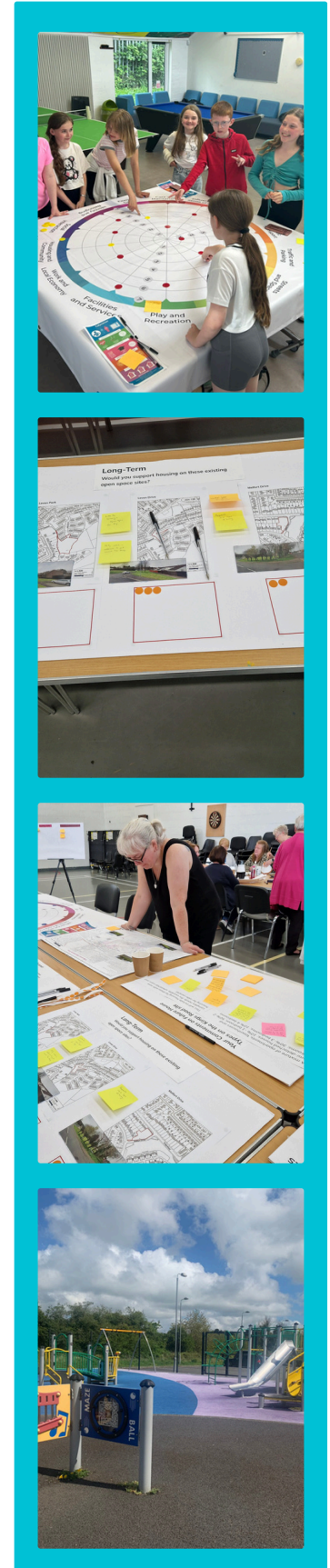
supporting community planning through collaboration, partnership and action

Place Shaping in Tullycarnet

Working alongside the community and statutory agencies in Tullycarnet we developed a Place Shaping Plan for the area. The Tullycarnet Place Shaping Plan looks at the regeneration potential of the area over the next ten years and focuses on social, economic, community and environmental issues. We used the Place Standard Tool (a simple but effective tool to structure conversations about a particular place) as well as focused and open engagement events to inform an action plan of place shaping priorities and regeneration objectives.

Using the Place Standard allowed us to focus and prioritise actions that the community felt needed most attention. We developed a number of regeneration objectives for the area including:

- a connected community with active travel options to access health, employment and education services;
- delivering affordable and quality homes to create a thriving community people are proud to call home; and
- a vibrant and attractive place with quality green and open spaces where people feel a sense of pride and belonging.





Community Engagement Work

supporting people to have a voice in shaping local places

Engagement on Railway Platform Extension

We helped residents living close to the railway halt at Adelaide in south Belfast engage with Translink on proposals to extend the railway platform to enable six-carriage trains to stop there. Residents were supportive of the extension proposal but they had concerns about the impact the works were having on their home life.

We visited the site and listened to residents' concerns which included impacts from noise and vibration, negative visual impacts following removal of trees, loss of privacy, light spill and pollution. We undertook desktop research to identify good practice options which would mitigate the longer term impacts of the platform extension and presented a range of options at a community engagement drop-in event. Residents were invited to comment on practical and feasible solutions including planters (mobile and themed), living walls, seating and social space, soundproof foam, shielded lighting, good neighbour code of conduct and consultation with the local community on planting and landscaping detail.

A range of recommendations emerged from the engagement, including affording residents the opportunity to shape and influence planting and other vegetation; appropriate fitting and positioning of sound barriers and a review of the lighting regime to help mitigate concerns of residents living close to the railway line. Longer term recommendations included low maintenance mobile planters and container pots, integration of soundproofing foam as part of the boundary treatment works, and visual heritage boards to celebrate local history. Residents also stressed the importance of good communication and engagement during the design and implementation of the platform extension works.



Transforming and Sustaining Our Services



With funding from the National Lottery Fund NI's Dormant Accounts Fund we continued to work on our TASS (Transforming and Sustaining Our Services) project during 2023-2024. The project's aim was to update and transform our digital presence as an organisation and to increase our visibility and service accessibility. The project's main achievements have included:

- an engaging, modern and accessible website which better reflects our mission and aims;
- a new brand, a new logo and supporting colours which are all simple, clean and modern – colours which reflect our four pillars of service provision (planning advice, and support and advice on community engagement, community planning and participatory budgeting);
- refreshed tone and voice and website content to ensure our message is appropriate, appealing and accessible to the people and groups who come to us for advice and support;
- capacity building for our staff team on a wide range of digital skills including website editing and maintenance, graphic design, developing and publishing social media content, digitizing resources and video editing and publishing.



We are very proud of our new brand, our new website and its content and new and refreshed materials and resources. Funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund has allowed us to invest in upgrading our digital presence which we hope will support the long-term visibility and awareness of the organisation, our work and the services we provide.



Delivered by

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND

Board of Directors 2023-2024

- Raymond Jackson (Chairperson) - Confederation of Community Groups Newry and District
- Murray Watt (Treasurer) - Individual Member
- Breige Conway - Northern Area Community Network
- Michael Graham - Forward South Partnership
- Brendan Murtagh - Individual Member
- Stevie Johnston - EastSide Partnership
- Nadine McMahon - Connswater
- Ann McNickle - Causeway Rural and Urban Network
- Cathy Polley - Ards Community Network
- Nuala Toman - Disability Action



Staff Team 2023-2024

- Paul Roberts (Chief Executive)
- Celine McCart (Administrator)
- Sinéad McConnell (Planner and Engagement Officer)
- Doreen O'Neill (Projects Secretary)
- Claire Rea (Planner and Engagement Officer)

We wished Louise O'Kane well when she moved on to a new career opportunity after 16 years' service. In August 2024 we welcomed Paul Roberts - Honorary Professor in Practice of Planning and Urban Regeneration at Queen's University Belfast - as our new Chief Executive.

Income 2023-2024

- Department for Infrastructure - £112,250
- NLCF Dormant Accounts Fund NI - £48,000
- Project and Other Income - £58,825

Expenditure 2023-2024

- employing our staff - £170,695
- delivering our projects and services - £19,429
- organisation costs - £27,770

Figures extracted from Audited Accounts March 2024 prepared by Finegan Gibson, Chartered Accountants. We achieved a small surplus (£1,181) for the year.





**community
places**

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