

Engaging Heritage with Community Planning

Conference Report



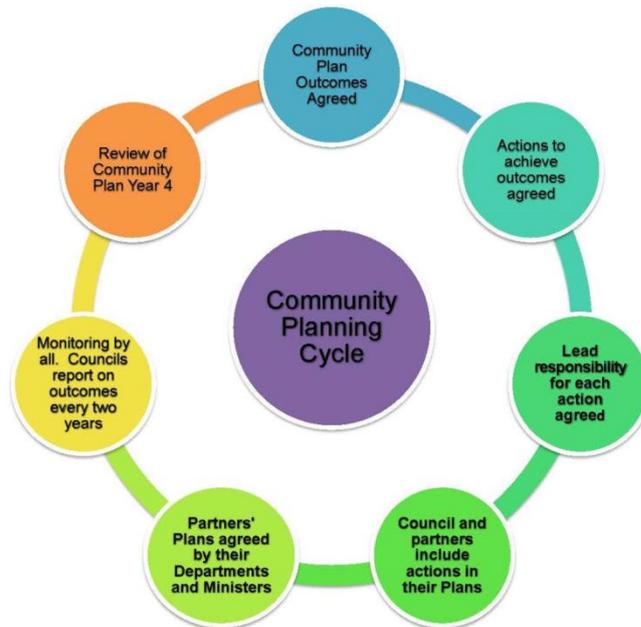
Paul Mullan, HLF Northern Ireland – Welcome and introduction

- The venue in which the conference is being held is emblematic of the value of heritage and heritage buildings – it exemplifies what can be achieved.
- The topic of engaging heritage with the community planning process came out of discussion with Brian Williams (NIEA). Both HLF and NIEA have an interest in dialogue with Councils in the context of their new powers. We need to promote awareness that heritage has a lot to offer the Councils – both councils and the heritage can benefit, but there is some joining up to do.
- Community Planning is something that the heritage sector should be engaged in, and something in which the heritage voice should be present at each stage.
- This event is to encourage the sector to get involved in the process. Heritage can have an impact – not just in terms of tourism potential, but also more broadly in relation to fundamental things like wellbeing, sense of community, people and place.



Colm Bradley, Community Places – [What is Community Planning?](#)

- Community Planning started in 2002, under direct rule, but stalled several times until now. It is currently running under the new Councils.
- What is Community Planning?
 - In essence, it is planning and improving public services.
 - Joining up how we provide services and create opportunities for enhanced wellbeing (economic, social and environmental) in communities.
 - Statutory Partners are obliged to participate.
 - Proactive community involvement – councils and partners must seek participation and encourage persons to express views, and to take them into account.
 - Some debate about what the plan should cover:
 - All public services, or
 - More focussed on a more limited number of outcomes that are achieved through partnership working and things that bring added value. How is Community Planning adding value to what people are already doing in terms of public services?
- The Community Planning cycle
 - Reviewed every 4 years.
 - Report on progress every 2 years.
 - Outcomes are agreed by all partners and put into the plan.



- Scotland is a good example of being deliberate about Community Planning – it is embedded into government at all levels.
- Case Study – Orkney
 - Working towards common National Outcomes (outcome 12 for Scotland – ‘We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations’)
 - The Community Plan in Orkney reflects this in local priorities – ‘Protect Orkney’s landscapes, its cultural heritage and environment and ensure their sustainable management; Promote the appropriate enhancement of our biodiversity and cultural heritage’.
 - The high level outcome is translated into detailed local targets, with everyone signed up to deliver. Note, then, that Community Planning is not vague – it is about specific, measurable, actions taking us toward an agreed outcome.
- What is the current situation in NI?
 - Data gathering, engaging with partners, scoping existing plans, community engagement, community involvement, designing processes, considering links with LDP, thinking about structures, measuring progress.
- Some ideas:
 - Community Planning is a wider canvas than spatial planning. Broader issues can be raised.
 - Scottish Natural Heritage – “[Natural benefits – the contribution of the natural environment to Community Planning Partnership priorities](#)”.
 - English Heritage – “[Knowing your place](#)”.
 - Linking Community Planning and LDPs



- RTPI Scotland – [“Linking People and Places: Spatial Planning and Community Planning”](#).
- In the Fife Structure (Area) Plan, the Community Plan is one of the key documents shaping land use planning. Spatial planners take their lead from the Community Plan.
- If you think heritage has broad value in society, Community Planning is the forum in which to raise and discuss that.

Karen Phillips, Derry City and Strabane District Council – [Community Planning in Derry City and Strabane District Council](#)

- DCSDC has inherited a perspective from its legacy Councils with a focus on the importance of heritage, regeneration and sustainability.
- The need – low economic activity, social deprivation and peripherality. Poorly connected in terms of infrastructure, legacy of lack of investment.
- Opportunity – new council area is larger and united, new opportunities for partnerships and alliances, whilst building on existing good relationships. New processes and functions in place.
- The new DCSDC strives to be:
 - One new unified Council with the needs of local communities and business at the core of what we do.
 - A centre of excellence and innovation with a clear focus on outcomes and delivery.
 - Working in partnership with statutory and community sectors to achieve economic, social and environmental regeneration.
 - Driven forward by effective leadership and highly motivated and valued staff who have clear sense of purpose and place.
 - Balancing urban and rural diversity.
 - Committed to clear and timely communication and celebrating our achievements.
- DCSDC recognises the role of heritage as an economic driver – a lot of heritage regeneration work has been undertaken, for example, the Walls, the Guildhall, Ebrington Square, Sperrins landscape work, Sion Mills etc.
- Before Community Planning, Derry City had the One Plan – *One City, One Plan, One Voice*. Community Planning is an opportunity to build on that and learn lessons from it.
- Community Planning in DCSDC is a co-designed process.
 - Thematic Groups have emerged as a way to take Community Planning forward in DCSDC – Social Wellbeing, Economic Wellbeing, Environment Wellbeing, with those pillars clearly linked to the 3 directorates in DCSDC.
 - There are a number of cross-cutting themes that go across all of the pillars.



- Going forward:
 - On 4th June there is a preliminary meeting of the Thematic Groups. This will involve approximately 700 people.
 - Workshops will also take place in July, August and September.
 - Information gathered at the workshops will be compiled and will begin to shape the Community Plan.
 - There will be further public consultation on a draft plan before the Community Plan is published in April 2016.

Q&A session

- We should be ambitious about what can be achieved through Community Planning. We can deliver it well. We have experience of partnership working, we know each other well and have good working relationships, we have a strong community and voluntary sector (though we need to be organised and smart about how we connect with local government).
- Planning policies have not changed. Until Councils introduce new plans and policies, they have to work with the existing policies.
- Outcomes in some case studies were things that were being carried out anyway – is there a sense that Councils should be more inspired and do more challenging things with Community Planning? Most Councils will be focussed on what local people have identified as priorities – we are relying on people to be visionary.
- A strategic, long term focus is important for Community Plans, rather than being driven by short term concerns.
- Council websites should have clear signposting to contacts for Community Planning.
- In 9 of the new Councils, Community Planning sits in the office of the CEO – it is a priority.

Ian Maye, Department of the Environment – [Central Government Reform and Linking the Historic Environment with Communities](#)

- It is important to deliver Local Government Reform and planning reform in a unified way.
- The Director of Historic Environment, in preparation for the new Department for Communities. The purpose of this Department will be to deliver core services to communities, and to support and meet the needs of communities.
- Historic Environment Division – we need to think differently about how we manage heritage, monuments and buildings to become true community assets. We can treasure and exploit heritage as an asset for the community.



- A good example is Dunluce Castle – it doesn't currently deliver as it might. We need to manage it to realise its potential in terms of greater visitor numbers, and to sit alongside the other great Causeway Coast attractions.
- The potential of Built Heritage in the Department for Communities is significant. We need to support communities to realise the potential of their heritage and to recognise that heritage is a real driver of economic and social benefit. The new Department will have links with museums, culture and arts.
- Economic and social potential of heritage:
 - NI historic environment generates circa £532 million of output per annum, creates/sustains a total of circa 10,000 FTE jobs and generates circa £250 million of GVA each year.
 - In NI, the historic environment accounts for three jobs per thousand of the population but the figure is 8.1 in Republic of Ireland and 11.8 in Scotland.
 - If the NI sector could perform at an equivalent rate to Scotland, it could be generating £1.5 billion annually and supporting 20,000 jobs i.e. three times its present output and twice as many jobs.
 - There is therefore major economic potential, with the benefits this will bring, alongside the challenges of site management
- We can realise these benefits if we work in partnership, making better use of the assets we have to enhance the vibrancy of local communities.
- Legislation to establish statutory partners (Community Planning Partners Order NI 2015 should be in place by July. Guidance on Community Planning will also be issued by July. Community planning partnerships can use this legislative framework to identify innovative uses of local iconic environmental, cultural and built heritage sites that are important to local people
- The link between Community Planning and LDPs is important – spatial planning is one of the tools of delivery, breathing life into Community Planning.
- Community Asset Transfer – potentially a good way to realise heritage benefits in Community Planning. Communities are better placed to use assets in an appropriate way – and in ways that can't be done under direct state management.
- We are in difficult times, but we can come out the other side stronger, by working together and enhancing the historic environment for communities.
- We have the energy and enthusiasm in NI to make Community Planning and the reform of local and central government work.

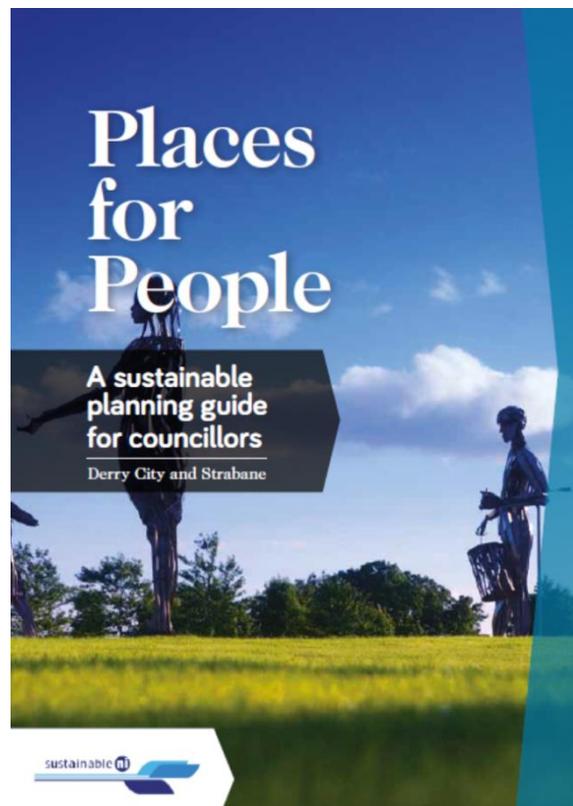
Jim Kitchen, Sustainable NI – [Places for People: A Sustainable Guide for Councillors](#)

- Buildings last because they are loved. They don't have to be outstanding or listed to be important to people. Historic buildings are original and irreplaceable – their cumulative presence gives Belfast (and other places across NI) its unique historic character. They give people pleasure.

- Once such buildings are gone, they are gone forever. They are often replaced by something far inferior – from the elegant to the execrable. We can afford now to be more discerning about what we build.
- This is not just about buildings being modern or historic – it is about design and beauty, and the benefits that flow to us from those things. There are some great examples of beautiful modern buildings with excellent sustainability credentials.
- The point of Community Planning is to contribute to sustainable development – enhancing the quality of people’s lives without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.
- The new planning system in NI – there has been a lot of capacity building, but this has been largely to do with process, and with little or no reference to beauty.

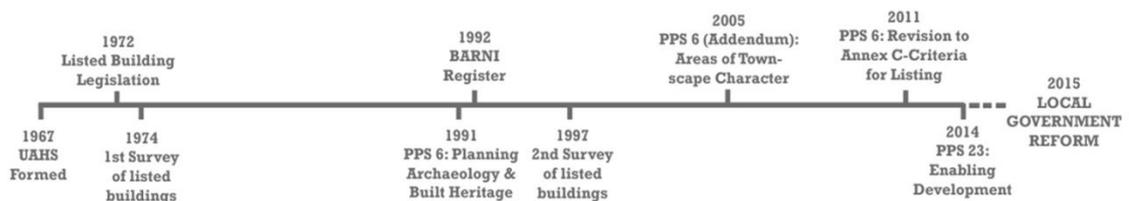


If we are really planning for people, we must include the concept of beauty! This spirit is captured in the new Handbook for Councillors produced by SNI (funded by the Challenge Fund). It is a sustainable planning guide for Councillors, an advocacy document, to encourage wider consideration of the wonderful and beautiful natural and built heritage that exists in Council areas – we need to safeguard and use this resource!



Nikki McVeigh, Ulster Architectural Heritage Society – [UAHS, built heritage and communities: Looking forward from 40 years](#)

- UAHS has 40 years’ experience in the promotion and protection of the built heritage, and in linking communities to built heritage.
- Approximately 20% of NI’s buildings pre-date the 1950s. This is a finite resource of buildings that needs to be safeguarded – and that is why UAHS exists.
- Protection of Historic Buildings in NI timeline:



- *Your Architecture, Your Heritage: promoting participation in protection of historic buildings* is a new project to promote local and better use of heritage assets.

Community Planning



- It is a complex challenge to work across 11 different Council areas with different ways of working and different attitudes toward heritage.
- The project is about promoting participation in heritage and raising capacity in communities to be able to get involved.
- Built heritage handbook for Belfast, in partnership with Belfast City Council.

David Cuthbert, Belfast City Council – [Building the Belfast Agenda](#)

- Belfast context:
 - Challenges – 31% economically inactive, 54% of business say they have difficulty in accessing the right skills in the population. Ranked low among UK cities for business start-ups. Division in the city – approximately 90 interfaces.
 - Opportunities – the city sustains 200,000+ jobs, and is a significant contributor to the NI economy. Then population is young. The city can attract foreign investment.
- Community Planning is an opportunity to tackle the big issues. Councillors want to build a 'Belfast Agenda' to do this, harnessing the Council's new powers in strong place leadership, spatial planning, regeneration and economic development.
- What is the Belfast Agenda?
 - Not just about a document sitting on a shelf.
 - Links social issues and spatial planning.
 - Based on outcomes for people.
 - 15 year vision for the city.
- The priorities of residents have been gathered and identified over the last year:
 - Stronger economy & more jobs.
 - Happy & healthy communities.
 - An attractive and sustainable place.
- The Belfast Conversation is taking that forward, encouraging people to think about what they like about Belfast now, what they would like Belfast to be in 2030, and the first steps that need to be taken to make those changes.
- The Belfast Agenda will be published in April 2016.



Q&A session

- As Belfast City Council developed its approach to Community Planning, it considered good practice from elsewhere, for example, Cardiff.
- There is a strong sense of attachment between communities and the assets that are in them. When they are under threat, people band together to protect them – this is the essence of Community Planning – identifying, safeguarding, enhancing what is important to communities.
- It is important for government to work with partners who can leverage in other resources – whether money or expertise.

- Community Listing recognises value of a building in a community, acknowledges local pride in building, but cannot stop a building from being demolished. It can be seen as a step toward Listing, and could potentially carry weight as a material consideration in decision making.
- Community Planning needs will vary even within one council area, and this local scale variation should be captured in Community Plans.
- There may be perceived tension between Community Planning and, for example, wind turbines affecting local communities. However, Community Planning should be seen as a way to bring planning as close to communities as possible. It should give people the opportunity to have a voice on big issues like the impact of wind turbines.
- There should be feedback between Community Planning and the Programme for Government. The PfG should reflect elements of Community Plans, building on meetings between Executive Ministers and Councils. Potentially a bottom-up effect where Community Plans begin to shape and form priorities for central government?
- How do we sell Community Planning to the wider public, so it is not just seen as a tick-box exercise? This is a process of exploration. People need to see their views being taken on board and delivered to see that it is a valuable tool. Reporting every 2 years will be important in terms of accountability and transparency.
- There is a sense of optimism and excitement about the potential for Community Planning to deliver.

Craig McGuicken, Northern Ireland Environment Link - Conclusion

- Local government is becoming more important – the sector needs to find ways to engage with this important process.
- Today is the start, but we need to keep going. NIEL will gather information from your feedback and come up with ways to take heritage engagement with Community Planning forward.

