

Annual Report 2023



Community Places

Helping people and communities since 1984

Planning Advice to People and Communities



Demand for our planning advice service remains constant and groups continue to contact us for help and advice in understanding complex planning procedures, legislation and regulations as they seek to influence how proposed development will shape their communities. Our work this year included: provision of advice on a wide range of complex and detailed regional and local council planning policies; helping groups prepare statements of case for planning appeals; and advice to groups on procedural aspects of the Public Inquiry process.

We also provided advice and support to groups seeking help on planning requirements pertaining to their own community facilities including proposals to develop a community hub and nature trail; a community garden on an interface site; and converting a former bank building for community use. We advised groups on a wide range of urban and rural development proposals including men's sheds; housing and apartment developments; community gardens; and anaerobic digesters.

We helped people submit their comments to planning applications for a wide range of proposals including wind turbines, a pig farm adjacent to a residential dwelling, manufacturing, distribution and waste storage facilities, tourism accommodation in the countryside, a hotel development in an AONB, dwellings on farms and houses in the countryside, sporting facilities, sand and gravel operations, and housing developments. We also provided advice on enforcement proceedings; neighbour notification; planning conditions; the planning appeals process; retrospective planning applications; and the requirement for planning permission for a range of domestic structures and alterations.

Our advice service covers the whole region and during 2022-2023 we helped 31 groups and 107 individuals with planning queries. The Department for Infrastructure part-funds our advice service and we welcome its commitment to continue to support the organisation in this forthcoming year.

Using Our Engagement Tools



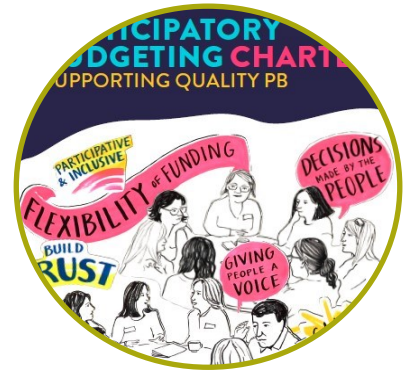
We published our Guide to Engagement Methods in 2022 - this drew on our many years' experience of facilitating and designing engagement exercises and events. When we're asked to facilitate community engagement we agree a shared purpose, identify the appropriate level of engagement required and select suitable engagement methods. Over the course of this year, we had the opportunity to apply two of our own innovative techniques developed in recent years.

We used our My Place Participatory Card Game to facilitate six community engagement sessions focusing on people's experiences of using four parks in three local council areas. The parks were assessed against 14 place criteria including public transport, sense of safety, family friendly, activities and facilities. A total of 86 people from three schools and three community groups participated in the engagement sessions. Participants rated each of the spaces and suggested how the parks could be improved. Findings of the engagement helped inform and shape a vision and action plan for the Future of Urban Green Spaces project.

We also used the My Place Card Game and our Snakes and Ladders Board Game at Community Consultation for the Quality of Life's Your City Your Voice Belfast Urban Room initiative. The focus of the Urban Room was to hear voices that are often excluded in conversations about the city centre. Community groups and architecture and planning students dropped in to share their experiences of the ups and downs of the planning system and to discuss how city centre amenities and spaces could deliver improved quality of life outcomes.

We popped up at Open Botanic 2023 - a festival organised by Forward South Partnership - to enable people to experience Botanic Avenue in south Belfast, one of the city's most vibrant and busy thoroughfares, as a vehicle-free zone. The event took place on a Sunday and included a range of family-friendly activities and games, music, arts and crafts - all enjoyed without traffic. We were pleased to invite local residents and younger people to play our Snakes and Ladders Board Game to help them find out more about how planning works.

Participatory Budgeting



We have been working to create an enabling environment for Participatory Budgeting over the last six years. We are pleased to note that there have been over 40 different PB processes across the region focusing on a number of themes from community safety, health and wellbeing, collaboration, housing and homelessness and community connections.

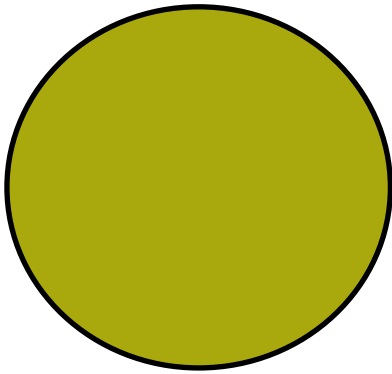
Our [PB Charter](#), shaped by PB practitioners and good practice, is being used to plan and design tailored and inclusive PB processes which place communities at the heart of decision-making.

Drawing on the PB Charter, this year we provided facilitated support to co-design two PB processes being led by local council partnerships: Tak£500+ in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council where funding of over £75,000 was awarded to 81 groups for a range of exciting community-led health and wellbeing initiatives; and Belfast City Council's Active Belfast Partnership where groups pitched for up to £1,000 for projects along the theme of 'move more and eat well to

feel better' – 27 groups were successful with project ideas to promote this wellbeing initiative across the city.

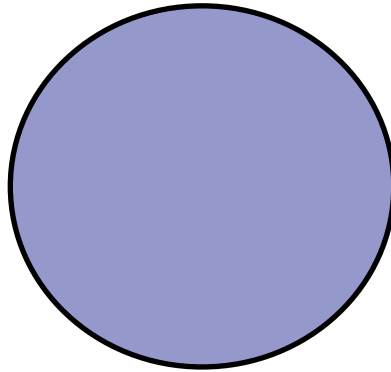
We provided PB support to the Community Foundation's Community Solutions to Housing and Homelessness Programme. This Programme supports organisations and groups who are working to alleviate homelessness. We worked with experts by experience to design and facilitate the PB element of the initiative where eight groups pitched for funding of up to £25,000 (from a pot of £160,000, the largest PB pot in the region to date) for projects aimed at elevating the voice of those with lived experience of the root causes of homelessness.

Transforming and Sustaining our Services



With funding from the National Lottery Community Fund's Dormant Accounts NI Fund awarded in October 2022 we embarked on a two year project to transform and modernise how we communicate our message and deliver our services.

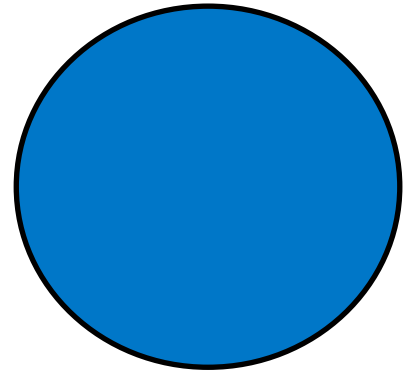
This transformation will mean updating our digital presence as an organisation including a new brand and website and refreshed communication channels; and upskilling our staff team in communication and digital skills. This will enable us to better promote our values and services in a more accessible, creative and engaging way. Work in the project's first year has included development of a communications plan; developing some new digital content shared on our social media channels; training and capacity building for staff on photo and video editing; digitizing resources and graphic design; and working with a website and



graphic design team to develop the new brand and website.

This is a very exciting opportunity for us to reinvigorate awareness of Community Places as an organisation; the services we provide and how we work with people. 2024 - our 40th year - will see us with a modern digital infrastructure, a wide range of new and accessible resources for communities, a new brand and a refreshed and engaging website - look out for big changes at

www.communityplaces.info



Finance and Funding

Income

	£
Department for Infrastructure	116,000
National Lottery Community Fund Dormant Accounts NI	26,250
Project and Other Income	32,804
	175,054

	£
Employing Staff	174,492
Delivering Projects and Services	12,497
Organisation Costs	27,199
	214,188

Expenditure

Our Planning Advice Service is part-funded by the Department for Infrastructure. The National Lottery Community Fund Dormant Accounts NI Fund is providing funding to help us transform and sustain our services. Summary figures extracted from Audited Accounts yearend March 2023 prepared by Finegan Gibson.

Our People

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

Our Board

Our Team

- **Louise** O’Kane - Chief Executive
- **Fiona** Conroy - Planner and Engagement Officer
- **Sinéad** McConnell - Planner and Engagement Officer
- **Claire** Rea - Planner and Engagement Officer
- **Celine** McCart - Administrator
- **Doreen** O’Neill - Projects Secretary

Community Places
2 Downshire Place
Belfast BT2 7JQ

Telephone: 028 9023 9444
Mobile: 07883 649 288
Email: hello@communityplaces.info

Community Places is a company limited by guarantee registered in Northern Ireland (NI17958). Charity Registration NIC101428.

