

# Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs, University of Northampton

## Neighbourhood Planning Laboratory - Prospectus

The Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs (NIUA) at the University of Northampton has established a Neighbourhood Planning Laboratory to undertake research, commissions and advocacy on Neighbourhood Planning for the Northamptonshire/Milton Keynes area.

The service will be delivered in association with EASI4communities (E4C), a Northamptonshire social enterprise specialising in community engagement. The Laboratory uses the town planning, housing, environmental and social research expertise of Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs and the community development and social enterprise expertise of E4C.

The Laboratory offers an affordable, University based, independent service to local authorities and communities. Importantly, we have excellent local knowledge of communities, and planning activity across the Northamptonshire/Milton Keynes area.

### What the Laboratory will do

- Enable local authorities to fulfil their obligations under the Localism Bill relating to Neighbourhood Planning and accommodate any surge in demand for planning guidance and community development expertise triggered by the passing of the Bill
- Provide a consistent approach to supporting all communities, rural/ urban and local authorities
- Measure the impact of a Neighbourhood Plan in an area with respect to subsequent planning decisions and the difference this makes to communities
- Spread the word about best practice, enabling communities and local authorities to share experiences with others
- Encourage a stronger relationship between the university and communities/citizens/local authorities, helping to break down possible barriers to accessing University services
- Encourage volunteering in the preparation of neighbourhood plans.

Experience to date of working with communities exploring the process of Neighbourhood Planning in Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes has highlighted:

- The differing levels of support required to enable communities to work efficiently together to help shape their local community through this process
- The considerable local authority and community effort required to support consultation, community organisation, and engagement in Neighbourhood Planning
- The challenge for communities of accessing affordable planning and community development time and expertise

- The need for a resource that understands the local planning and political context and can provide effective learning, advice, guidance and practical support.
- The need for independent brokerage to ensure optimum outcomes for both communities and local authorities

## **Services of the Neighbourhood Plan Laboratory**

Bespoke support will be provided to communities and local authorities by the Neighbourhood Planning Laboratory team.

*For local authorities, the Laboratory offers;*

- Evaluation of Neighbourhood Plan bids
- Community development work alongside local authority community engagement
- Community development for establishing Neighbourhood Forums
- Additional community planning expertise for the development of plan options
- Evaluation of Neighbourhood Plan proposals
- Assessment of Neighbourhood Plan outcomes and impacts

*For communities and neighbourhoods, the Laboratory offers;*

- Technical advice on how the neighbourhood planning process works
- Support for community development and engagement required for preparing a neighbourhood plan, including fund raising for neighbourhood planning
- Surveys and questionnaire research for community profiles
- Preparing, costing and designing plan options
- Advice on how community and social enterprise can assist in the delivery of neighbourhood plans
- Technical advice and support for neighbourhoods when their plans are being formally assessed and tested at Neighbourhood Plan Assessments and in Local Referendums

*Contact Bill Toyer, Enterprise and Innovation Manager, School of Social Sciences, University of Northampton 01604 892166; mobile; 07702958517.*

## **A note on Neighbourhood Planning and the Localism Bill**

The Localism Bill, currently going through Parliament (expected to receive Royal Assent by April 2012) introduces new powers for communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. The importance of Neighbourhood Plans is that, once approved, they will be legal planning documents incorporated in statutory Local Plans.

The Localism Bill provides the opportunity for any qualifying body, be it a parish council or a constituted community organization (a “Neighbourhood Forum”), to initiate and undertake neighbourhood planning. The local planning authority role is to give advice and support.