

# EVALUATION REPORT SHAPING PLACES

Informal adult learning with disabled people on the urban environment



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# Who We Are

## Planning Aid for London

PAL provides free or affordable advice and training about town planning. We believe that it is important to involve people in making decisions about their local area. We have over thirty-five years of experience of working with community groups and individuals across London to help them get involved in town planning. We have over one hundred volunteers who are either accredited planners or from other built environment professions.

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## Knott Architects

an architecture practice who brings an emphasis on design-quality, sustainability, accessibility and innovation to our projects. We are a close core team of five with qualifications and experience in architecture and town planning, and have many collaborative links with other design consultants, artists, modellers, fabricators, building contractors and specialist manufacturers. Knott architects generate many types of models in-house, and have expertise in using innovative materials to do so.

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This is the Evaluation Report for Shaping Places, an innovative pilot project developed and delivered by Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects, and funded by the Transformation Fund (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills). The project has three overarching aims:

1. To assist disabled people, particularly blind or partially sighted people, to understand how Planning works – that is how and where places are built and developed, and what they are used for;
2. To assist disabled people to understand how they can get involved in decisions about their environment; and,
3. To contribute to informal adult learning opportunities for disabled people and town planners so that, together, they could understand more about each others' perspectives, and thereby improve planning consultations and outcomes.

This Evaluation Report outlines the original project aims, objectives and activities, and details how the project was evaluated and summarises the evaluation findings. We wanted to test out new ways of working, and improve the services we provide. This Project Report highlights key recommendations and learning from the project, and also suggests a way forward for future development of our services.

#### **This Report Highlights the Following:**

- A pilot tactile model resource was developed and tested in four different workshops. Participants in the workshops were asked to give feedback about how useful the model was in helping them to learn about town planning, and gave a range of feedback and suggestions for the model. These views are currently being used to develop the design of the model.
- 31 participants (70% of which were disabled) attended these workshops. 17 of these participants completed an evaluation survey. All of those who completed the survey stated that the workshops increased their knowledge of planning (yes definitely = 65%, yes some = 35%), and 88% stated that the workshops gave them new skills and knowledge which would enable them to participate in civic activities.
- All four workshops gained support from Local Planning Authorities, with Planning Officers and Access Officers from those local authorities attending to discuss with participants their work. 75% of the Planners attending responded to the evaluation survey, and all of these stated that the workshops had increased their understanding of the needs of disabled people in relation to the built environment. Further to this all of the respondents stated that they had already, or intended to in the future, to investigate ways in which they could improve the services they deliver for disabled people.
- The project generated a large amount of interest from other organisations, and has led to a range of new projects and networks being developed at local, regional and national levels. For example Planning Aid for London are now delivering training to the London Access Forum, a pan-London forum for disabled people to feed in their views on strategic planning applications.
- Involving participants in the project evaluation has led to some valuable and interesting findings which will allow both Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects to improve the services we deliver.

# The

## Shaping Places Project

People who are disabled are often excluded from the urban environment and are unlikely to be engaged in decision-making on planning and development. And yet, disabled people often have particular experiences of the built environment that must be understood and taken account of if these environments are safe, convenient and fully inclusive. This cannot happen effectively without the involvement of disabled people in decision making about town planning and development.

The Project explores practical and procedural ways in which this involvement might be improved.

### Project Aims and Objectives

Within the three over – arching Project aims set out in the Executive Summary, Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects worked together to achieve the following objectives:

- Improve the learning opportunities for disabled people by developing a toolkit, including a tactile model, to be used by Local Planning Authorities, developers, and disabled peoples' groups as a learning resource for land-use planning.
- Assist people who are physically disabled to gain understanding of the land-use planning process and developments affecting their local area.



- Increase physically disabled people's confidence and participation in decision-making on land-use planning, including responding to a live planning consultation.
- Increase planners' understanding of the needs of visually impaired people and people with other physical disabilities in relation to the built environment and consultation processes.
- Improve planning consultations and outcomes through increasing Planners' understanding of the experiences of people with physical disabilities.
- Build or strengthen partnerships between local planning authorities and third sector organizations working with people with disabilities.
- Develop the capacity of the National Planning Aid network to work with physically disabled people on consultation on planning and development matters.

The project was a pilot project for both Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects. We wanted to test out new ways of working, and improve the services we provide. So, a final aim of the project was to help us to understand from participants how we can improve the way we work.



### Project Activities

To achieve the objectives, we wanted to do two main things. Firstly we wanted to develop a tactile model toolkit which could be used as a learning resource for disabled people. Secondly, we wanted to run a programme of workshops with disabled people to provide a learning opportunity for them, and to enable us to test how well the tactile model worked as a learning resource.

We worked with several different organisations to develop the tactile model and the workshops (see Appendix A for a full list of organisations). Their input and assistance were essential to making the project a success.

### The Tactile Model

In 2008 Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects began work on development of a tactile model resource designed for blind and partially sighted people to help them understand town planning. We played around with several different ideas, and consulted disabled people about how best the model could be developed.

We were then successful in gaining further support and resources to enter into Phase 2 of development of the model through the Shaping Places project.

This allowed us to produce a second version of the model based on feedback from the first round of consultations. We then consulted with a wider range of groups on the model through a programme of workshops, to gain a wider and deeper range of comments about the model.

Phase 3 will be the final stage of the model development, where we will take on board the feedback from the Shaping Places project to produce a final and improved version of the model.

### What is the Tactile Model?

The model is designed to be read with either ones eyes or ones fingers. It consists of over 250 magnetised pieces that can be arranged in any format on magnetic base-boards. Diagrammatic cityscapes can be generated – either generic scenarios or site-specific situations.

A 'menu' of brightly coloured symbols and distinctive textures enable the pieces to represent 22 different land uses. For example a carpet texture represents residential-use and a cross symbol represents a health building. The model is robust, non-toxic, transportable and adaptable and it is constructed using sustainable and recycled materials.



## The Workshops

Planning Aid for London developed and delivered a programme of workshops to be delivered in four different boroughs across London (Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Croydon, and Tower Hamlets).

We wanted to include thirty disabled people in these workshops, as well as invite a range of speakers from Local Authorities and third sector organisations. The workshop content was designed to fulfil the original aims and objectives of the project, and provide a lively and informative opportunity for participants. The workshop programme is detailed below.

## DAY 1: What Is Town Planning and How Does It Shape the Environment?

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 10.00 | Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to Planning Aid for London</li><li>• Overview of course objectives and course programme</li><li>• Highlight course as pilot programme – welcome feedback</li><li>• Practicalities (toilets, fire etc)</li><li>• Warm up exercise – what are your expectations? What are your ground rules?</li></ul> |
| 10.30 | Introduction to Planning – by Planning Aid for London <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is town planning?</li><li>• What town planning can and can't affect?</li><li>• What town planning does in relation to disabilities?</li></ul>  |
| 11.15 | Break   |
| 11.30 | Presentation from Local Planning Authority  |
| 12.15 | Introduce tactile model and site visit activity (to give people time to familiarise themselves with the model over the lunch break)   |
| 12.30 | Lunch   |
| 13.30 | Site Audit – split up into 2 groups   |
| 15.00 | Break   |
| 15.15 | Feedback from site audit using model  |
| 15.45 | Conclusions   |
| 16.00 | Finish  |



## Evaluating the Project

The Shaping Places project was a pilot project for both Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects. We wanted to test out new ways of working, and improve the services we provide. Evaluation of the project, including feedback from participants, was very important to us, as it helps us to understand how we can improve the way we work. We also wanted to find out what impact the project had on participants.

### Methodology

The evaluation has been carried out using a range of methods suitable to the different objectives stated in section 2.

**1.** Focus Groups were used to find out how whether the tactile model toolkit was a useful learning tool. The focus groups were run as the final session of the workshop, with all participants in the workshop taking part. Participants were asked to discuss how easy they found the model to use, what they liked and disliked about the model, and ways that they would improve it to make it more useful for disabled people. The group was facilitated to ensure that all participants fed into the evaluation, and comments were recorded by a note taker.

**2.** A Questionnaire was used to see whether participants had an increased understanding of Planning and Development and confidence to participate in decision-making on land-use planning. All workshop participants were asked to complete the survey at the end of day 2 of the workshops. They were offered support to fill the form in by an impartial support worker. Template survey available in Appendix B.

**3.** An email survey was used to see whether there was a change in Local Authority Planning Officers' understanding of the needs of disabled people in relation to the built environment and consultation processes. Further to this we wanted to see whether Local Authority Planning Officers intended to improve planning consultations and outcomes after taking part in the course. The survey was circulated to all Local Authority Officers and Planning Aid Volunteers following their participation in the project.

**4.** Value for money and the achievement of project outcomes were assessed by the project manager by comparing project activities against the original work plan and budget.





## Findings

### 1. The Tactile Model Learning Resource

We wanted to understand how useful the tactile model toolkit was as a learning resource for disabled people. The four workshops provided an excellent opportunity to find out about the tactile model from people with a range of disabilities and knowledge of planning. The range and quality of points from the groups was extremely valuable.

The following key points were gathered:

- There was a huge range of views about how useful people found the model, with some finding it not at all useful, while others found it very useful for a range of different things including learning about planning, using the model as a discussion/facilitation tool, and finding your way around a local area.
- How much time and explanation about the model people had made a significant difference in how well they understood it. It is not immediately intuitive to use, and so does require time to understand and get used to using it.
- There were several comments and recommendations from participants about the finer details of the model, which were extremely useful in helping us to refine the model.

### Sample of Participants' Suggested Changes to the Model

- Integrating sound into the model would help blind and partially sighted people.
- Developing a 'sister model' which demonstrates fine grain details in the urban realm would complement the scale of the existing model.
- Using embossed letters to describe the different use types would be useful (eg SH for shop).
- Shop symbol should be changed.
- The envelope for post office needs to have an edge around it rather than being flush with the edge.
- Using a football for the leisure centre would be clearer.
- There should be distinction between pedestrianised and non-pedestrianised areas.
- Pedestrian crossings need to detail what type of pedestrian crossing it is.
- The town hall symbol (a clock) is too similar to the education symbol (a tick).



## 2. Learning Outcomes for Disabled People

We wanted to find out how effective the workshops and tactile model were in increasing participants' a) understanding of Planning and development; and, b) levels of confidence to participate in decision-making on land-use planning.

### Sample Question from Participant Survey

1. Has this training increased your knowledge of planning?

Yes, definitely



Yes, some



No



Not sure



Any Comments?

- Out of a total of 31 participants, 17 completed the final evaluation survey, giving a response rate of 54%.
- Of those completing the survey, all participants stated that the workshops increased their knowledge of planning (Yes definitely = 65%, yes some = 35%).
- For the majority of participants completing the survey (88%) the workshops gave them new skills and knowledge which would enable them to take

part in consultations on planning applications and planning policies. For one participant the workshops enabled them to “become involved in local planning in my locality, including possibly access group”, while another stated that the workshop enabled them to “be better informed of other peoples' opinions and the value of their comments”. In total 9 participants (29%) said they would investigate and/or join a local access group.

## 3. Learning Outcomes for Planners

Alongside the objective to increase disabled people's understanding of town planning, the project also aimed to increase Local Authority Planning Officers' understanding of the needs of disabled people in relation to the built environment and consultation processes. A better understanding of these needs would be an important factor to improving planning consultations and outcomes. Planners were involved in the project either as speakers during the workshops, or as PAL volunteers.

- The response rate was 75% (6 out of 8 surveys)
- All respondents stated that the workshop had increased their understanding of the needs of disabled people in relation to the built environment.



One participant stated; “meeting people, especially those who are visually impaired, helped me to get an understanding of some of the issues that they may face in relation to the built environment.”

- The Planning Officers were also asked whether there were any activities they had undertaken as a result of attending the workshops which were aimed to improve their services. Out of the four surveyed, two stated that they had already investigated what improvements might be made. “It has encouraged me to look further into some of the issues faced by disabled people in relation to planning/consultation. I have met with our Access Officer further to this course... and will look to establish if we can make any improvements to the current service”.

#### 4. Project Activities and Value for Money

We first wanted to check that all of the project the activities were done, and that the project demonstrated value for money.

- A pilot tactile model was produced
- A workshop programme was developed and delivered in four different London boroughs.
- 31 participants attended the workshops, although not all of these were disabled: 30% of

participants did not state they had any disability, but did work for organisations that work with/for disabled people.

- All workshops gained support from the Local Planning Authority and other partners (see appendix A)
- The workshops were delivered at a cost of £420 per participant (£210 per day). This is relatively high, however, the cost can be explained by: the fact that the project is working with disabled people who require more support than other learners; and that the project is also a pilot project and thus a considerable amount of time was put in at the beginning of the project for research and development.







# Conclusions & Recommendations

## Key Lessons

- The model is versatile and can be used in a wide variety of ways; however, we found that it does require substantial explanation and guidance in how it is used. There are several ways in which the tactile model could be improved, and we will investigate the viability of making these changes.
- The focus groups gave very useful feedback about how easy the model was to understand, and enable PAL to refine the model accordingly.
- In delivering the workshops we learned a huge amount about how to ensure that an event or workshop is accessible for disabled people (please see Appendix B for a guidance sheet which we have developed as a result of our findings).
- On the whole the feedback shows that the workshops were effective in increasing participants' understanding of Planning and Development and confidence to participate in decision-making.

A range of activities and speakers gave a good range of ways for people to engage in the subject matter, however there is potential to develop the workshop content and for improved facilitation and timing of the workshops.

- The opportunity for Planning Officers to meet disabled people and discuss with them their experiences of the built environment and planning consultations was useful. There is evidence that the project did lead to potential improvements in planning consultations and outcomes. However, there is a role for Planning Aid for London to provide further support for such improvements, for example through highlighting best-practice cases, or providing training specifically for Local Planning Authority Officers, or helping to build partnerships between local planning authorities and third sector organizations.

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- It is very important to consult with disabled people on planning applications and planning policy, and to do so early on in the development process. Consultation processes must be suitable and accessible for these groups. Planning Aid for London and partner organisations have developed a range of techniques that can be used by Planning





Officers, Access Officers, and other parties when working with these groups.

- The role of Access Officer is assigned within the Planning Department. This doesn't necessarily imply a new staff member, but that one member of staff takes on this role. This role is stated clearly to the public, so that the public have a clear point of contact regarding access groups.
- It is clear that many difficulties faced by disabled people are due to a lack of awareness and understanding from the general public and professionals. Ensuring that Local Authority Officers and other professionals receive training in awareness about disability issues would be beneficial.
- That an Access Group or group undertaking similar functions is established in every local authority, with the purpose of representing disabled people and other groups, on town planning matters. Access groups can provide a useful forum and point of reference for Local Planning Authorities when consulting on planning applications and planning policies.
- During the workshops several issues were raised by disabled people regarding difficulties they face in accessing the built environment.

These include: inadequate tactile paving, poor urban design and street clutter, inadequate facilities to enable access (wide doorways, ramps, lifts), affordable housing and location of services. While standards and guidance has been developed for several of these issues, implementation and enforcement remain weak in many areas. There are grounds for developing a large range of indicators in the built environment for blind and partially sighted people, including tactile paving, Braille signage on buildings, and clearly demarcated safe route ways, improved lighting at night-time. These indicators should be consistently applied nationally.

- While standards and guidance has been developed for several of these issues, implementation and enforcement remain weak in many areas. Strengthening enforcement would lead to improvements stated that they had already, or intended to in the future, to investigate ways in which they could improve the services they deliver for disabled people.





## Learning Opportunities & Future Developments

The Shaping Places project has provided a valuable opportunity for Planning Aid for London and Knott Architects to develop their capacity, skills and knowledge of working with disabled people. It has enabled both organisations to work first hand with disabled people and to gain feedback from disabled people about the support and services that they require. It has also enabled us to develop links with other organisations and develop networks.

The lasting outcomes from the project are:

- Development of a tactile model toolkit (to be completed by 2011) to improve consultation and involvement of disabled people in town planning and development.
- Increased understanding of the relationship between town planning and disabled people by 31 disabled people or people working with disabled people, 8 town planners and other key stakeholders.
- Increased profile and awareness of Planning Aid for London both across London and with national organisations working with disabled people.

- Stronger partnerships between Planning Aid for London, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inclusion London and the Centre for Accessible Environments.

### Continuation of Project

There are five main ways in which the project will be continued.

- The tactile model will go into a final phase of development (to be completed by 2011) following feedback from participants.
- The project generated interest in London boroughs where the programme was not run (Hammersmith and Fulham, Hackney, Havering and Greenwich). Planning Aid for London is currently in discussion with the organisations in these boroughs to discuss the possibility of running the workshops there. Publicity of the workshops will also be rolled out in other London boroughs.
- The project also generated interest from national third sector organisations (National Planning Aid, and Guide Dogs for the Blind). Subsequently workshops have been arranged for



the national conference of Planning Aid on the 29th of April, and with the National Guide Dogs consultative forum on the 6th of May. These workshops will give an opportunity to share best practice and build capacity of these organisations with regards to disabled people and town-planning.

- The project developed strong interest from Inclusion London, a second tier charity working with Disabled Peoples' Organisations across London. Subsequently, Planning Aid for London are working with Inclusion London to deliver a London-wide event for 150 people on Access Groups. The event will bring together Local Authority Officers, Access Groups and other disabled peoples' organisations from across London, with the aim of assessing the support needed by these parties to improve access matters across London.
- As a result of the work with Inclusion London, Planning Aid for London is also providing a training programme for the London Access Forum. This is a group of disabled people which meet monthly to address strategic planning matters across London.

### Barriers to Project Continuation

The main barrier to continuation of this project work would be a reduction in funding for Planning Aid for London. Therefore, development of a funding strategy, and securing additional funding, will be essential.





# Appendix A:

## List of Organisations Linked to project

- Centre for Accessible Environments
- Greater London Authority
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Inclusion London
- Insight Radio
- Linden Lodge School
- London Access Forum
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- London Borough of Brent
- London Borough of Ealing
- London Borough of Croydon
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- National Talking Express
- Royal National Society for the Blind
- Royal London Society for the Blind

# Appendix B:

## Guidance sheet: Setting up and running workshops with disabled people

### General Principles

- Everyone has a different way of learning, so try to use a mix of exercises and methods in a workshop. Work as a group/individually, take people on site visits, use models, etc.
- Be inclusive – think about how different groups can work together and foster collaboration. It is important to try to avoid separation of different groups.
- Prepare! Putting in preliminary research and organisation will have huge benefits.
- But also be prepared to change the workshop format/aims etc. in response to participants needs and other circumstances as they arise.
- Agree rules and boundaries. Participants should have a common understanding about the aims of the workshop, what can and cannot be achieved by the group, and how the groups should work together to achieve these aims. Give space for people to get things off their chest early on in the workshop to then move on to what can be done.

### Venue

- Take advice from disabled people or an access officer about what venues they would suggest.
- Ensure that the venue is accessible – check for disabled parking bays, hearing loops, changing places/disabled toilets, level access, enough space for large wheelchairs, etc. There are several more considerations about the accessibility of a venue, and you may wish to take advice about access auditing.
- Visit the venue in advance!

### Publicity

- Think about the audience. For example, if you want to reach blind or partially sighted people then think about using a local talking newspaper or local/national radio stations.
- Use a range of formats and clearly state that publicity that it is available in other formats.
- Often finding a key local organisation/gatekeeper can be critical. For example, local mobility organisations often have excellent links with disabled people in the area.

### Sign-up

- Making sure you know who is coming to the workshop is important as it gives you a useful opportunity to check with attendees what support they will need.
- The best way to know what support to provide is to ask! Only that person knows exactly what format materials and what other access needs they might have. They will generally appreciate you asking. If you are unable to provide any of their requirements clearly explain why and ask about alternatives. Also check whether they have their own PA, and whether they will attend.
- Give plenty of time between sign up and the actual workshop to be able to arrange any support.

### Materials and Support for Participants

- As stated above in sign-up, the best way to find out about what support participants would need is to ask participants themselves. Some of the things you may need to provide are:
  - Transport
  - Palantypists, Sign Language Interpreters, Hearing loop
  - Hand outs in Braille/Large print/coloured paper/audio/emailed in advance
  - Plenty of time in breaks – people may have guide dogs that need walking etc.

### Costs

Events for disabled people can often be quite costly due to the need to provide specific assistance for participants. Make sure you budget for these additional costs!

