

# Using diversity as a strength

Developing neighbourhood planning in Tipton, in partnership with the Bangladeshi Women's Association and Tipton Development Group

**How does neighbourhood planning work in very diverse areas? Does it make the process more challenging?**

Not according to residents in Tipton who have been working with the Bangladeshi Women's Association to learn out more about neighbourhood planning including how they use their diversity to enhance their local area.

## About the area

Tipton is a town in the borough of Sandwell, West Midlands. It is located about halfway between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. It was once one of the most heavily industrialised towns in the Black Country, with thousands of people employed in different sections of the town's industries. Most of its factories have since closed and it has gradually developed into a commuter town mostly occupied by people working in other parts of the region. Tipton has three wards: Great Bridge, Princes End and Tipton Green – and a population of around 38,000.

The Jubilee neighbourhood is a very deprived area within the Great Bridge ward, which is characterised by low-rise, mixed tenure - predominantly social - housing and has few amenities other than a large park.

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The community is very diverse with various BAME groups and a significant white British community – however there is little interaction between the two. Unemployment in the area is high, educational achievement is low and a significant proportion of residents don't speak English as a first language

### **Bangladeshi Women's Association**

BWA is a community led charitable organisation, dedicated to 'improving the quality of life for residents of Tipton and its surrounding areas. It was established by a group of BME women in 1985, who wanted to address the social and economic needs of their families. Although their roots are in the Bangladeshi community, they aim to serve all residents in the area, and see their role as providing a bridge between public services, and the community. This is primarily being achieved via the Tipton Development Group, which was set up by BWA in 2012 and is a group of 25 involving local residents, volunteers and professionals.

### **Developing the neighbourhood story**

Despite these challenges, there is a very positive culture of activism and volunteering within the community led by a fantastic local charity, BWA - that has a vision to 'create thriving neighbourhoods' in the area.

In February 2016 BWA received a small grant from central government to help them advocate for neighbourhood planning within the community including raising awareness of how it could help to tackle some of the area's issues.

BWA organised a series of community workshops; distributed 200 leaflets door-to-door; and set up a website to help engage local residents, local groups and representatives from local service providers.

By far the most popular session, however, was the local walkabout which energised people into thinking about what they like, what they dislike, and what could be improved or worked on in the area. The walkabout resulted in a smaller area being considered for the neighbourhood plan rather than the Great Bridge ward as was originally envisaged but residents felt that the 'Jubilee Park' area required the greatest investment.



“Where you live...even the buildings, the houses, it all impacts on people’s lives and how they get out of poverty and getting jobs, and that’s why we thought this would be a good idea...and it will give people a sense of ownership and pride about the area” **PARTICIPANT, BWA**

Their aspiration is to create a neighbourhood where there is:

- affordable and attractive premises for local businesses, and convenient local shops
- greater mix of housing (including social housing) that maintains a mixed community
- green spaces protected for community use
- increased facilities – including safe pathways on green space
- better parking
- more scrutiny of licensing

## Next steps - making a plan

BWA are now working with local residents and partners to actively develop a neighbourhood forum, which can lead the process of developing a neighbourhood plan. Another round of local walkabouts is planned, together with more local consultation activities. In keeping with their assets based approach that recognizes the value of different skills, experience and perspectives, BWA are trying to recruit people that can make the forum effective, as well as reflective of the local area. They are looking for people that have:

**Influence and authority** - such as community activists, local authority and public service officers, politicians

**Insight (into local need)** – such as residents, and frontline community workers and service providers

**Resources** – such as asset managers (the park, community centre, faith buildings), resident volunteers and fund raisers

**Expertise** – such as specialists in planning and development

**Information** – such as community activists, local residents, local workers and local services

## Top tips

BWA’s top tips for anyone who is thinking about getting started:

- 1. Links between social and planning issues are not always immediately obvious, but can be made.** Focus on understanding the neighbourhood story first, and then explore how neighbourhood planning can help to achieve your vision for your area
- 2. Strong locally based organisations with good networks and links can be effective connectors and mobilisers.** Work with existing groups. They can help involve others, as well as bring valuable experience of their own!
- 3. Diversity is about being effective, as well as reflective.** Think about the different kinds of skills, knowledge, influence, perspective and experience that you might need, and identify all the different people who can bring them to the group.
- 4. There is room for everyone,** and neighbourhood planning can provide space for different people to contribute their ideas. Be open, and share information as widely as possible – for example, set up a website so people can find out more
- 5. Use your existing networks,** but also build new ones!



**Watch** Anom Choudhury of Tipton Development Group, Cllr Syeda Khatun MBE and Harjinder Ganger of BWA and Santokh Singh of Sandwell MBC discuss their hopes for Tipton

