



How Sustainable Eastside Served its Community

This case study highlights the impact of the Eastside Sustainability Advisory Group (ESAG) in making sustainability a key part of the decision making process in Birmingham Eastside's regeneration. ESAG succeeded in raising the profile of the sustainability agenda by working closely with the 'Sustainable Eastside' research team based at the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City University, and the sustainability officers placed in the Eastside regeneration team at Birmingham City Council. ESAG's influence continues to have a widespread and lasting impact on sustainable development in Eastside and Birmingham as a whole.



SUE SUCCESS STORY

In March 2002, 18 non-governmental organisations with a breadth of knowledge and experience in delivering sustainability came together to write a 'vision' for Eastside's development, which resulted in the establishment of the Eastside Sustainability Advisory Group (ESAG). ESAG's aim was to provide advice on sustainable development best practise throughout the development of the area.

The 'Sustainable Eastside' research team, formed of researchers based at the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City University, was a member of ESAG from 2002. Researchers regularly attended meetings and gave ESAG access to the research, knowledge and expertise of the academic team.

'It was a combination of the Sustainable Eastside research team, the sustainability officers and ESAG that ensured sustainability issues were considered so important by developers'

> **Keith Budden, ESAG (2010)**

'Links with the academics not only gave us access to their knowledge and expertise, but gave ESAG's arguments an extra dimension and weight in the eyes of the Council and developers'

> **Karen Leach, ESAG (2010)**

> Sustainable Eastside

Eastside is the site of a major redevelopment project in Birmingham city centre. In the late 1990s, plans for the regeneration of the area were first aired to the public, followed by a masterplan and commitment to transform the area by Birmingham City Council in 2002.

The Sustainable Eastside research project, supported by EPSRC's SUE Plus fund and active from May 2003 through to June 2008 aimed to explore how sustainability is addressed in the regeneration decision-making process.

As a result of proposals set out by ESAG, Birmingham City Council (BCC) took the innovative step of co-locating sustainability advisors from the Eastside team at Birmingham City Council. The advisors were tasked with providing the technical skills required to put the Eastside Sustainability vision into practice and to secure further resources to enable sustainable solutions to be implemented.

The secondment of the two sustainability advisors was one of the most effective actions of ESAG and strengthened the case for sustainability in Eastside's regeneration process. Significantly, the two sustainability officers worked in the BCC Eastside team rather than being physically and ideologically separated by their focus on sustainability.



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This gave them direct and regular contact with decision makers, developers and council employees, embedding sustainability *inside* the decision making process and proving the business case to developers in considering sustainability issues in the early stages of their developments.

These actions succeeded in promoting the sustainability agenda to individuals and organisations and have gone on to have a widespread and lasting impact on sustainable development in Eastside and Birmingham as a whole. Indeed Birmingham City Council's emerging Core Strategy now contains draft sustainable development policies which have been strongly influenced by ESAG's work.

Practical impacts have also started to materialise throughout the area. Some notable examples include the successful implementation of the residential combined heat and power scheme in Masshouse and the prominence of the new Birmingham City Council buildings in a recent BREEAM assessment. ESAG also formed the basis for the Environment Partnership's climate change partnership and thus paved the way for the Audit Commission Green Flag being awarded to Birmingham in 2010.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Attempts to incorporate sustainability into decision making often fail because of a perceived lack of credibility and a failure to integrate sustainability experts and key decision makers. The key to the success of this collaboration lay in ensuring the sustainability officers worked alongside the BCC Eastside team, giving them direct and regular contact with decision makers, developers and council employees, thus embedding sustainability *inside* the decision making process.

By joining ESAG and allowing access to their knowledge and expertise, the 'Sustainable Eastside' academic team gave ESAG, and in turn, the sustainability officers' agenda an extra dimension and weight in the eyes of the council and developers, contributing to the success and lasting impact of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

> **Involvement paves the way to influence**

Taking the time to be involved in an advisory or expert group can pave the way to influencing decision makers, and is often a vital prerequisite to any advocacy.

> **Be patient and tenacious**

Such involvement takes time – be tenacious and recognize the impact on the outside world that your commitment and involvement will generate

> **Find a messenger or advocate to carry your knowledge into decision making circles**

Identify a credible advocate who is interested in your research knowledge and who has the legitimacy to take it into the heart of decision-making circles