

Inspire East

Helping to build sustainable communities for the East of England

Summary

EEDA set up Inspire East in 2005 to advise planners, architects, engineers and other professionals who are working to create and manage sustainable communities in the East of England. The service supports these people, and the organisations they work for, by providing advice, information, and networking events, and by highlighting successful examples of sustainable regeneration.

Counties:	Region-wide
EEDA theme:	Sustainable economy
Date:	July 2007

Main messages

- EEDA-funded Inspire East is a “facilitator” for regeneration in the region
- Championing the creation of high-quality places to live, work and visit
- Spreading awareness of high-quality regeneration projects
- Promoting tools and techniques for community engagement.

Case study

Events to inspire

Lisa Jefferys is leisure development officer at Rochford District Council in Essex. An important part of her job is looking out for successful developments in other parts of the country, with a view to applying what she learns in Rochford. With this in mind, she attended a “winter school” run by EEDA-funded Inspire East in Basildon, Essex. “I wanted to see how other agencies rated the importance of sport when it came to regeneration,” she said.

The Winter School focused on the example of Basildon's £35 million Sporting Village project, which when completed will provide a new athletics stadium and a network of other sporting and leisure amenities. Billed as a facility for both the community and elite athletes, the Sporting Village is clearly an example of ongoing urban regeneration well worth studying.

Lisa's group at the Inspire East Winter School included a Sport England East investment manager, a Government Office of the East senior planner and a local authority policy advisor. Over the course of three days, the group learned about the principles of regeneration and then developed presentations on the Sporting Village. "Working on a current project that is going to have a positive impact on Essex was a real plus," said Lisa. "The knowledge that our thoughts would be considered, and possibly used on the project, was also highly motivating."

The Inspire East-led event lived up to its name and provided real inspiration for Lisa and her fellow participants – so much so that they agreed to meet again. "We want to get back together at some point in the future, when the Sporting Village is further down the line, to see if there is still scope to contribute," said Lisa, who now regards her fellow course members as valuable professional contacts.

Speakers at the Winter School included a representative from Greenwich Council, who described plans to capitalise on facilities left by the 2012 Olympics, and the chief executive of a private leisure company. "They helped confirm for me that leisure has a very important role in regeneration," said Lisa. "Sometimes that has been overlooked, so it was good to hear the message that sport can play a part in raising educational attainment and opening up employment opportunities for people who haven't worked for a while."

Since the Winter School, Basildon District Council have been successful in securing additional resources for the Sporting Village project.

A commitment to tomorrow

EEDA set up Inspire East in 2005 as the regional centre of excellence for sustainable communities in the East of England. EEDA is the accountable authority for Inspire East and provides most of its funding, people and resources. Inspire East supports anyone involved in the planning, delivery and management of sustainable communities in the East of England.

For Jen Wingate, community manager at Inspire East, the winter school attended by Lisa Jefferys is the sort of initiative crucial to creating an understanding between the professionals

and organisations involved in regeneration. “It’s accepted that people who are well trained in their own areas of expertise can sometimes find it difficult to work across professional boundaries,” said Jen. “Although it’s early days in terms of what Inspire East wants to achieve, I think we’re already having an impact on how people do their jobs. Practices are changing due to things started by us.”

Inspire East’s aim is to give individuals the skills and support they need to create a high-quality environment for the future. Jen and her team work to increase collaboration between key professionals, such as planners and highway engineers, or local authority workers and community development specialists. They also help people improve their skills within all the different disciplines involved in regeneration.

An example of this kind of work was a recent a joint initiative with Regional Cities East (RCE), which is an EEDA-backed collaboration between six urban centres in the East of England. Inspire East worked with RCE to identify gaps in the skills of RCE staff and agree the best ways to fill them.

Another example involved co-operation with the national Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC), which led to a learning laboratory project focused on the regeneration of the Craylands and Fryerns housing estate in Basildon. Part of Inspire East’s Craylands work provided community engagement courses so that local people could take part in decision-making that affected their communities.

Conclusion

By funding and supporting Inspire East, EEDA is contributing to improvements in the quality of new and expanding communities in the East of England. It is also helping people and groups involved in regeneration to collaborate more effectively, to improve their skills and to aim for excellent results.

Financial facts and figures

- The 2007/08 the amount was £884,000, with over £300,000 additional funding from other sources being secured.
- In 2007/08 Inspire East delivered over 1400 training places (over 6 hours) and over 300 businesses supported.

Extra quotes

Bala Mahendran, chief executive, Basildon District Council

“Inspire East’s Winter School proved helpful to our thinking around some regeneration themes. It was good to have a number of colleagues from other authorities and agencies share their ideas and visions in relation to our vision at Basildon. There was an opportunity to learn from others and share our learning with them. As we are on the verge of major regeneration within the Basildon District, I welcomed an event which drew together the nuts and bolts of what is a successful scheme and how such a scheme can be evolved. For us, it was like a free consultancy, so Basildon residents will ultimately benefit. I would welcome more events like it.”

Nick Boulter, investment manager, Sport England East

“Working with a real-life project made the winter school a positive experience. There was something substantial to focus my energy and time on. I’ve told a couple of my colleagues they should go on any similar events. I felt I definitely got a lot out of it.”

Additional information

Inspire East runs free design review and enabling services offering direct expert advice to all those building sustainable communities in the East of England.

Inspire East is the lead organisation for the Regional Empowerment Partnership.

The Excellence Framework for sustainable communities has been developed by Inspire East, and is now being used on all EEDA funded projects.

The 2007 Evaluation of Inspire East identified that the perceptions of key stakeholders and regional bodies is that Inspire East is professional, and “people we want to work with”.

For more information about Inspire East, please visit www.inspire-east.org.uk

Contact details

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