

VOICES

FROM EXPERIENCE

Identifying Needs through Parish Plans

One of three studies in a series illustrating the contribution that community development can make to community empowerment

- 1. Identifying needs through Parish Plans**
- 2. From small scale actions to wider decision making**
- 3. Community responses to economic development**

This study highlights examples of two communities; Airmyn in East Yorkshire and Stainforth in North Yorkshire where a process of people working together to involve the wider community in dialogue about the parish plan has resulted in positive outcomes.

Two further studies look at the impact on economic development, and how small scale actions can lead to involvement in wider decision making processes.

- Participatory approaches to parish and village plans contribute to building social cohesion in rural communities, through the process itself and in the ensuing activities
- Participatory approaches effectively utilise the contributions of children and young people in identifying the issues and in encouraging wider community involvement
- Utilising participative events at the start of the process enables effective and relevant questionnaires to be designed
- Utilising a variety of creative and visual methods is key to engaging community members
- Using a variety of community venues at different times enables people to be involved
- Direct communication with people in remote communities is essential
- The importance of the role of Parish Council and Parish Councillors in initiating the processes and following through on actions within their remit; having the support and the mandate from local people to start new services and facilities gave them confidence that they were meeting real needs
- The importance of collecting data which local people can then use to lobby the parish councils, district council and other statutory bodies
- The importance of quality community development work support throughout the process, which enables a group to come to their own decisions, to gain in knowledge, experience and skills. This gives them the confidence to pursue a range of actions to get their needs addressed.

Airmyn parish plan

Airmyn lies beside the River Ouse in East Yorkshire, close to the motorway system, with an increasing number of commuters moving in alongside the existing working farms. There is a primary school, a large modern village hall, a pub and a McDonalds but no post office or shop.

In 2005, the parish council set up a working group to carry out a parish plan consultation to engage people with different skills, interests and perspectives. To ensure the widest participation possible the group:

- Encouraged children in the primary school to make a model of the village showing important landmarks such as the river, clock tower, pub
- Took the model to evening and weekend events in the village hall, inviting local people to design the survey form by highlighting their concerns
- Took the model to the village gala to encourage others, specifically children, to add in their ideas
- Designed a quality questionnaire, based on peoples concerns; distributing it to all households
- Ensuring the survey was received on the outlying farms and settlements; collecting the forms back personally.

The Parish Plan grant paid for the data processing of the substantial response and for high quality presentation materials. Using the media skills of people in the village to draw out the key themes in the data and present them professionally. The local pub hosted the public launch of the report and display.

Outcomes

The issues raised fell into two categories.

1. Those that local people action themselves by working together;

- services and activities for young people
- new groups / activities in the village hall
- environmental projects on the river bank and a disused tip.

2. Those matters that were the responsibility of the parish council and the local authority.

The group raised these with the appropriate bodies -

- the councils
- the police
- the primary care trust

There was one issue where the group had to admit defeat and were left feeling dis-empowered. The post office closed; although they spent time researching ways to retain it open they faced obstacles from the Post Office. Although help was offered to establish a community shop the group members declined as they were strong enough to know their own limits.

The community development worker was active at each stage working with the group

- to think of ways of involving as many people as possible and hearing as many voices as possible
- to use the information given during the consultation exercises to inform their survey forms
- to find appropriate resources
- to identify specific skills and knowledge within the group to take the process forward and use them to enhance the exercise and produce a really professional result
- at ways they could use the results and identify and implement action and influence decision making.

Stainforth Village Plan.

Stainforth is small community in North Yorkshire. The Rural Community Council provided funding and worker time to support the Parish Council in creating a plan which would focus on the actions needed to improve their community.

A steering group was set up, of mainly Parish Councillors, who initiated 2 community events 'we are fishing for your ideas'... From these a core group was set up to develop the parish plan. They gave out cameras and asked young people to record 'things you love & hate about the village' and for '3 things you would like to see improved'.

The results were presented at three events and garffitti walls to used to gather more ideas the main issues for the plan to address – traffic, transport; environment; social services, housing and waste services..

18 people then volunteered to take these results and design the questionnaires, which were delivered by hand and collected back through collection points and by visiting remoter communities on advertised days.

Outcomes

The process has promoted social cohesion as sub groups have been set up to deal with issues highlighted in the draft plan before the formal plan was agreed. This was to keep the momentum and to show that action is possible.

It has enhanced community capacity building and entrepreneurial capability as the community works together to shape its own future.

The Stainforth Community Action Group was formally constituted on March 5th 2008 and will apply for source funding for the project sub-groups in their area.

The use of email to communicate enabled the group to work quickly and effectively and to involve a wider body of people who will help when asked, but don't want to formally commit.

Publicity for events was key; posters went up in the village on the morning of an event to remind people. Individual flyers were posted through every door. Free food and a drink attracted people to the events in the Hall and Pub on different days and times..

The Parish Councillors brought a wealth of expertise to the steering group and the Parish Council support gave the new action group confidence. The name was changed to village plan to show that the plan is wider than the Parish Council, who are taking forward those Actions within their remit.

The plan is being fed upward gradually into transport consultations and youth consultations taking place at higher governance tiers.

The community development worker's roles

- To facilitate steering group meetings and help them to design the process,
- Sharing their experience, making links with other villages undertaking parish planning
- Assisting the group to keep going to the end of the Parish Plan process.
- Compiling multi-media presentations for use at the open days which show-cased primary school photographs and contributions to the event
- Providing templates, information on writing bids and sample constitutions to the group.

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More VOICES are available on the regional empowerment website www.yhep.org.uk