

VOICES

FROM EXPERIENCE

Community responses to economic development

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

These two contrasting case studies from the Jet Coast near Scarborough and Crowle in North Lincolnshire vividly highlight the importance of a 'bottom up' approach to community economic regeneration.

They demonstrate that involving those directly affected, and bringing together local people and government bodies to work together for change, can result in empowerment rather than marginalisation for poorer communities.

It is important to ensure that all relevant local authority officers and consultants have the skills and willingness to work with local people

- Supporting people to get involved in identifying needs, and then making changes themselves is more likely to bring about lasting change
- People need to be given accurate information and supported in their legitimate rights to gather information, to share relevant information and organise to protest
- There is a need to recognise the time and resources it takes to achieve results - the formation of the Development Trust, led by local volunteers, was the culmination of four years effective community development work
- The value of a community development approach which facilitates and guides rather than leading is critical. It can develop teamwork and feelings of mutual trust, and provide positive encouragement to achieve community objectives
- The most important commodity in any area is the, often untapped, resource of local people themselves. Inspiring and unleashing the "can do" attitude within a community through appropriate development work will create boundless possibilities for change, improvement and more importantly, empowerment.
- People from the area have talked and learnt to listen to each other; young people and others have shared their interests and differences and have gained skills and knowledge from working with each other. The effect of top down proposals brought together some unlikely allies who acknowledged that they would achieve more by working together respecting each other's differences
- There is a need to take risks with local involvement; JCDT took the gamble and it has paid off due to the work and energy of the unpaid directors supported by the staff. Additional support from Local Authorities, other statutory bodies and funders can make a huge difference.
- Initial actions can lead to longer term projects: from the small grants programme to the JCDT; from the action group bringing town councillors and young people together which led to joint preparation of the parish plan consultation

Community responses to economic development

Crowle Residents Action Group – a response to rural renaissance initiatives.

The Renaissance Market Towns Initiative planned to regenerate the 'service centres' of rural areas in the Isle of Axholme in North Lincolnshire; an area in need of economic revival.

Proposals focused on two towns with many social, economic and historic differences, separated by a motorway with few public transport links between the two. One area rates highly in the Index of Multiple Deprivation and show visible signs of rural economic decline, the other is a more affluent area with a higher level of available services.

A Town Team was formed and a firm of planning consultants appointed to develop proposals to regenerate these two towns. There were a number of difficulties: consultation exercises and public meetings attracted small numbers of local people, poor use was made of existing community newsletters and publicity routes. Residents and businesses in the more affluent town registered their disapproval of the plans and decided they weren't interested in the initiative.

The poorer of the areas wanted the Renaissance but a different approach and process. The Crowle Residents' Action Group (CRAG) was formed to try to tackle some of the barriers encountered in the process to date e.g.

- the local butcher's petition with hundreds of signatures about proposals for the market place, was deemed not valid;
- a petition about the re-routing of traffic and handed to the local authority was 'lost';
- a lack of publicly available information left people with no clear idea what was being proposed;
- local church members and the vicar received a letter stating a proposal to use part of the vicarage garden for the development.

The action group were dismayed to discover that the plans for Crowle had been drawn up by people largely living outside their town.

CRAG called a public meeting which attracted many people, some fearful that any development would be blocked, others seeking clarity about what was possible and the resources available. Yorkshire Forward offered to fund a further public meeting in larger premises so that more could participate including the scheme consultants. In preparation, the action group:

- devised and circulated a survey form to every household to gather ideas on the development
- delivered a newsletter to every household with the survey results seeking comments on two proposed options.

These alternative proposals were presented to the public meeting.

The Town Team was replaced with a Partnership Group to explore development across the Isle and places were offered to members of CRAG. A Delivery Group of district councillors, the local Regeneration Group, members of CRAG, and the Town Council, met with officers from the local authority and Yorkshire Forward to plan the redevelopment of the market place. The group elected a Town Council member as chair. Its meetings are largely open to the public with scope for people to comment and ask questions at the end.

It hasn't been all plain sailing - the process is excruciatingly slow with few tangible results, and some members have questioned partnership processes and withdrawn. However, on the whole taking action has meant that people felt better informed and more in control.

Jet Coast Development

The Jet Coast is on the north east coast in the Scarborough area. Recognised as a deprived rural area with poor access to services it was eligible for European Objective 2 and Single Regeneration Budget funding. The story starts in the parish of Hinderwell and surrounding areas in 2002 when Community Development Workers employed by the council supported local activists to set up a Local Development & Employment Partnership (PACT Group) with Parish/Borough Councillors, National Park, local schools, and businesses.

PACT oversaw the small grant programmes which were targeted at small /new community groups for start up funding & small projects to encourage local people to do activities that could make a real difference to the community, encourage partnership working and build confidence. This initial round of grants was followed by a larger grant scheme to help the groups carry out larger projects.

PACT aims were

- For the community to identify their own needs and take a lead in developing projects to address local issues
- To develop projects to create jobs and enterprises for local residents

By 2004 local residents made up 90% of the Pact Group and they prioritised, developed and made funding decisions on capital projects that created the most community benefit such as improvements to existing and provision of new community buildings, highway and lighting improvements, local harbour schemes, new mains gas supply, environmental improvements.

300 residents attended training courses and funded projects created 10 new jobs

At the end of the Objective 2 Programme residents were keen to continue their work and set up the Jet Coast Development Trust (JCDDT) which covers a wider area – as a 'not for private profit' company limited by guarantee, and manages the Gateway Centre in Staithes – on behalf of Scarborough Borough Council.

The centre provides workspaces, meeting and conference rooms; business start up and advice; training; tourist information point; collection point for Whitby & District Credit Union; IT drop in sessions; learning Development Worker

JCDDT is accepted as the organisation leading the renaissance of the area, it is run by a group of local volunteers and currently employs five local people.

Community Development Workers;

- Increased community capacity and confidence through helping to solve problems; enabling local voluntary groups to become employers
- Developed stronger local leadership - self-representation, and the promotion of collective action
- Brought a community's preferences to the attention of political decision-makers
- Undertook research and surveys on Community Health Audit, Village Appraisal, Pact Action Plans, Quality of Life
- Contributed to increased community activity
- Increased community cohesion – residents from all five villages in the parish work together
- Enabled and supported networking locally and with organisations outside the area
- Enabled JCDDT to access funding from ERDF, Lottery and DEFRA

This study has been written and compiled by the regional community development network for the National Empowerment Partnership in Yorkshire and the Humber. For further information about the network contact Val Harris on valharris@phonecoop.coop
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