

strengthening community engagement

GET INVOLVED AND MAKE YOURSELF HEARD

Community engagement is the heart and soul of the West Durham Rural Pathfinder initiative. Here, those tasked with delivery of aspects of the four case studies located in the Teesdale and Wear Valley districts highlight the role played by community engagement in helping to achieve their objectives.

ASSET MAPPING



Rationale

The 'Talking and Listening Space' attempts to establish an effective method for community engagement within the wider context of the Government's agenda to give citizens a meaningful say in matters affecting their lives.

Asset mapping was identified as offering considerable benefits to this end, with three main objectives

- To complement the statistical profile of the area by introducing local feedback
- To identify economic, cultural, social, environmental and democratic assets
- To support the community xchange, a European Citizens Panel related initiative being run in County Durham and Cumbria

Activities

Invites were sent out to community members in Stanhope and Middleton, asking them to attend a series of four workshops to be held within each community over a three month period. The design of the meetings was centred on the format of 'conversation around a meal', using a combination of informal discussion and facilitator led activities. Ideally, participants would include a diversity of age, gender and social class.

The Process

The process of asset mapping turns conventional thinking on its head. Rather than taking a needs-based approach which tends to concentrate on the negatives, asset mapping looks to the positives. It is seeking to ascertain what assets a community possesses, be they social, economic,

environmental, cultural or democratic. Once identified, participants were asked to link perceived needs with these assets, and to develop asset based solutions. In the first session statistical information relating to key messages was discussed. In the second, the concept of the asset based approach was introduced, then linked to the problems and issues identified during the first session, and an asset map was produced. Thirdly, the issues were prioritised and finally, ideas developed for using the identified assets to build solutions.

Achievements and Recommendations

- A final report 'The Talking and Listening Space' was produced and circulated to local key decision makers but is still awaiting response
- Identified priorities for action included affordable housing, local employment opportunities, the under-use of communal facilities, further education provision, the out of hours doctors' service in Middleton and the local post office
- Methods used provide a model for the devolution of service provision
- The informal nature of the event proved conducive to information sharing and the positive approach of the technique effective
- Some participants went on to join the community xchange

For more information on asset mapping, please contact Liz Charles on 01207 529 621 email liz.charles@durhamrcc.org.uk.

PARISH PLANNING A voice for the community

Rationale

Parish planning provides a voice for those living in isolated rural communities where it can be difficult for service providers to access local opinion and vice versa, hence the title 'Quiet Voice – Big Noise'. The object was therefore to create an effective model through which local views can be heard, actions taken, and feedback provided.

Activities

The project, a partnership between Durham Rural Community Council 2D and Durham County Council, runs until March 2008. Parish planning in at least four communities will be combined with research to identify improved mechanisms for securing and sustaining community engagement. To date, activities have centred on attracting those who might otherwise not get involved. In Staindrop, an exhibition was timed to coincide with the village carnival as a means of raising awareness of the project. A 'how well do you know Staindrop' photographic competition also helped to stimulate local community interest.

Next steps:

- Building on previous experiences working with communities in mid and upper Teesdale on parish plans, the project aims to encourage inter-parish collaboration
- The team is working to develop and launch parish plans in four further communities by 2008
- The project aims to use information gathered whilst compiling the parish plans to provide an evidence base on common issues such as transport, affordable housing and local services
- Identify community links within Teesdale by which these issues, backed by community based facts and figures, can be forwarded to the relevant organisations and responses can be gathered

For more information on parish planning and community networks, please contact Russell Hayward on 01207 529 621 or email russell.hayward@durhamrcc.org.uk.

CONSULTATION IN TEESDALE



Background

Established in July 2001, the Teesdale Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) recently announced plans for the revision of its Community Strategy. Representatives from Teesdale Council, Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary and the Durham Dales Primary Care Trust, together with those from the voluntary and business sectors are contributing. The strategy centres on thematic groups covering:

- Economic development and tourism
- Community safety
- Lifelong learning
- Housing
- Environment and transport standardisation
- Health & social care
- Children & young people
- Leisure & culture

Each thematic group has been tasked with devising a five year plan detailing clear objectives and actions for their implementation. A reporting and accountability procedure must also be detailed.

Rationale

Community engagement is seen as a vital part of the development process for these plans. Hence the key objectives identified are currently out for consultation within the community in a variety of guises.

Activities

Activities to date have centred on promotion of the response methods within the local community. Market stalls have been taken supplying information, exhibitions held and web sites used. Responses are being gathered in a variety of ways from focus and discussion groups to written and online questionnaires.

Next steps:

- Analysis of the responses and amendment of the action plans as required
- Finalise a 10-year Sustainable Community Strategy in autumn 2007.

For more information on the Sustainable Communities Strategy, please contact Colin Carter on 01833 696 301 or email C.Carter@teesdale.gov.uk.

SOUTH WEST DURHAM HERITAGE CORRIDOR



Background

In 2006, plans were developed to create a landscape-scale partnership project centred on the development of a Railway Path linking West Auckland to Barnard Castle. Following the route of the Bishop Auckland, Haggerleases and Barnard Castle Branch Railway line, the project anticipated submitting a bid for Heritage Lottery money. Funding difficulties over the long-term maintenance costs of the Railway Path have put the Lottery bid on hold. However, plans to progress the project with a larger number of smaller projects are currently being devised.

Rationale

The South West Durham Heritage Corridor Project (SWDHCP) seeks to incorporate numerous community-led initiatives associated with the area. These include archaeology, biodiversity, community-led heritage projects, volunteering activities, tourism initiatives, education and training and improvements to the villages of West Auckland, Evenwood, Ramshaw and Cockfield.

Within the project brief, funding from the Pathfinder initiative was designated in four main areas:

- Promoting outdoor learning
- Developing a volunteering strategy for the project
- Evolving a tourism strategy for the project
- Involving the public in smaller-scale community-led projects

Activities

Community engagement through consultation and discussion has been at the centre of this project from the very beginning. In getting to where it is now, the views of communities the length of the proposed route have been sought through numerous means including door to door leaflet drops, community days, presentations and web sites.

Next steps:

A plan of action, which goes to Durham County Council this autumn, suggests the following as a means to progress the project:

- Working the bid into a landscape-scale plan for the area to enable a number of smaller projects to achieve the same outcome
- Purchasing key lengths of the Railway Path should they become available
- Continuing with planned streetscape improvements to West Auckland and Evenwood
- Continuing to support the five community-led projects seeking funding under the 'Your Heritage' initiative

Several small-scale projects associated with the scheme are already underway. These include three community heritage projects approved for grant funding with the help of Groundwork West Durham and Darlington. They include:

- 'Memories of Stainton Grove Military Camp', which aims to create an exhibition commemorating the World War II military camp
- 'See more in Cockfield', an educational project about the village, involving participation from the local school and the setting up of a searchable database of local history
- 'Gaunless Valley History Trust Website', a project to make use of the History Trust's extensive archive of photographs documenting the social and cultural heritage of the valley

Two further projects are currently seeking funding under the same scheme. They are Barnard Castle Rickshaws, which plans to use rickshaws to encourage visitors to explore the further limits of the town and a project based around the local paper, the Teesdale Mercury.

Also underway, following grant aid awarded to a number of premises in West Auckland via the Historic Buildings and Shop fronts Grant Scheme, is the improvement of some shop fronts. In addition, the church at St Paul's Evenwood has new floodlighting, and environmental improvements to the village of Evenwood are in hand.

For more information on the South West Durham Heritage Corridor Project, please contact Tony Devos on 0191 229 3332 or email tony.devos@naturalengland.org.uk.

For more information on the Pathfinder and further case studies, please contact Bryan Rees, Chair of the West Durham Rural Pathfinder management advisory group, on 0191 202 3669, email bryan.rees@gone.gsi.gov.uk or visit the Pathfinder website at www.westdurhampathfinder.com.



strengthening community engagement
GET INVOLVED AND MAKE YOURSELF HEARD