

Community Led Planning National Overview

A Report for the Regional Empowerment Partnership in the East of England



	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1 INTRODUCTION	4
2 METHODOLOGY	4
3 ATTRIBUTES OF COMMUNITY LED PLANNING	5
3.1 Parish Plans (PP)	5
3.2 A Village Design Statement (VDS)	6
3.3 Neighbourhood Planning (NHP)	6
3.4 Planning for Real	6
3.5 Market Town Healthchecks (MTHC)	7
4 NATIONAL OVERVIEW	7
4.1 Links to Local Government	8
4.1.1 Integration of Parish Plans into the wider systems of Local Government, July 2007	8
4.1.2 Pathways to Influence, Community Led Planning - Why It Matters, March 2008	9
4.1.3 Empowerment through Community-led Planning	10
4.1.4 Public officials and community involvement in local services, November 2008	10
4.1.5 Oxford City Council & Oxfordshire County Council - Improving Council Services Through Community Engagement, November 2008	11
4.2 The CLP Process and Community Experience	11
4.2.1 An evaluation of Parish Planning in West Berkshire, November 2006	11
4.2.2 An evaluation of Parish and Town Plans in Broadland, Winter 2008	12
4.2.3 Empowering Communities in South Somerset	13
4.2.4 Neighbourhood Planning - Lessons Learnt	13
4.2.5 Three market town healthcheck stories	14
4.2.6 Community-Led plans in the South West: Towards a regional framework	14
4.3 Impact of Community Led Planning	14
4.3.1 An exciting Future for Community Plans, July 2006	14
4.3.2 Evaluation of Community Planning in North Dorset, August 2007	15
4.3.3 Empowerment in Action	16
4.3.4 ACRE Report of Community Led Planning in England, 2008	16
4.3.5 Parish and community-led planning, local empowerment and local evidence bases, An examination of 'good practice' in West Berkshire, 2008	16
4.4 Action and Issues from Community Led Plans	17
4.4.1 Evaluation report - Messages from Parish Plans and Market Town Healthchecks	17
5 SUMMARY	18
6 BIBLIOGRAPHY	20

Executive Summary

Community Led Planning is a step-by-step structured process of creating a vision for a community or neighbourhood. The vision covers social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the community and all those who live and work there.

Community Led Planning has the potential to act as a powerful demonstration of community needs, opinions and involvement. It can also energise and mobilize people to get involved within their community and with their local authority. The plan and its actions can support discussion with councils and service providers and link community actions to local and regional community plans and strategies.

Various forms of CLP are defined and their processes described; most experience relates to rural communities but increasingly CLP is being applied to urban locations. This report identifies and provides a brief overview on existing research into Community Led Planning both within the region and nationally with a summary of each report's findings.

The results of the various research reports are grouped into sections on Links to Local Government; the Process and Community Experience; Impacts of Community Led Planning; and Actions and Issues arising. Within each section, the objectives and findings of the research are summarised.

Within the wide range of research reports and their findings, some common recurring conclusions can be discerned.

Community-Led Planning:

- Offers benefits to local government and service providers by linking community aspirations to formal policy, planning and service delivery systems
- To be of value, Plans must be of acceptable quality regarding inclusivity, robustness of process and accuracy of findings and recommended actions
- Production of reliable high quality plans require external support to communities and early and effective involvement of local authority officers and elected members
- The process and results of CLP has to be linked to the processes and procedures of local authorities and service providers if they are to have any impact and influence
- Is relevant and potentially beneficial to achievement of NI 4 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area) targets but
 - Needs to show statistically significant positive change, and
 - No consistent evidence has (as of yet) been produced to measure and record the impact on NI4.

Within the East of England:

- There is significant variation between local authorities regarding their understanding of and support for CLP
- Even where the CLP process is supported, the use of its results and action plan to inform Sustainable Community Strategies is inconsistent.

The research has been undertaken by Rural Action East on behalf of the Regional Empowerment Partnership. Findings from this report will be used by the Partnership to inform its future actions and activities.

1 Introduction

The Regional Empowerment Partnership (REP) for the East of England is an independent strategic body, supported by public, private and the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The partnership, set up in 2007 aims to improve the quality, coordination and evidence of empowerment within the region, with a greater focus on providing evidence on National Indicators (NI) in particular NI4 (percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area).

Rural Action East has been contracted by the REP to review various Community Led Planning (CLP) reports, evaluations and policy papers that have been produced by both consultants and practitioners delivering and supporting community groups in developing their plans.

Rural Action East (RAE) works for rural regeneration within the East of England and has three major objectives:

- **Advocacy** - To proactively influence regional strategies, policies and decision making on issues affecting the quality of life for rural communities.
- **Programme Delivery** - To manage and deliver regional contracts and projects for the benefit of rural communities.
- **Performance Improvement** - To build capacity within the regional Rural Community Council network through effective collaboration and promotion of improvements in quality and productivity.

In this report we will continue our activities and expand upon the knowledge already gathered on Community Led Planning. To date we have contributed to the development of parish planning as a form of community led planning. With colleagues across the country developed a Parish and Community Planning 'Toolkit' and are currently active across the regional in the practical application to rural parishes. On our website we have dedicated web pages on Parish Plans, with downloadable documents. We have also developed a pilot Parish Plans database and are contributing to the development of a national database.

Our experience also extends to the Market Town Initiative (MTI), where RAE was a member to the regional Advisory Group.

2 Methodology

Information for this report, and the picture of activity within the East of England was gathered from a variety of sources, including:

- Internet research
- Regional meeting with Rural Community Council Officers
- Attendance and participation in 'Empowerment in Action' conference
- Telephone interviews.

Due to the short timeframe for research and evidence gathering, it was decided to concentrate on existing key reports.

3 Attributes of Community Led Planning

Community Led Planning is a step-by-step structured process of creating a vision for a community or neighbourhood. The vision covers social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the community and all those who live and work there¹.

Community Led Planning results in three types of outcomes²:

- Initiatives that local people and groups can do for themselves
- Actions that can be done by local groups, but which need some external resources
- Priority issues on which to influence public authorities and service providers.

Community Led Plans, often known as Parish Plans, have played an important role in rural communities during the past ten years. In this time they have evolved as a result of changing communities and government policy of wanting to empower local communities to influence decisions and take responsibility for tackling local problems. Community Led Planning now encompasses, Village Design Statements, Neighbourhood Planning, Planning For Real and Market Town Healthchecks. To understand the difference between each of these various approaches to Community Led Planning, a brief explanation is included below.

The results of any type of Community Led Planning activity have the potential to make significant impacts to communities, and act as a powerful demonstration of community needs, opinions and involvement. It can also energise and mobilize people to get involved with their community. The plan and its actions can support discussion with councils and service providers and link community actions to local and regional community plans and strategies.

Monitoring of action plans and their implementation will often rely on community groups, unless it is an activity adopted by the local authority and it has allocated the necessary resource to support this activity.

3.1 Parish Plans (PP)

Externally facilitated mainly by Rural Community Councils (RCCs) they take place within rural communities with typically less than 3,000 residents. The plan tends to take 12 - 18 months to complete and up to 5 years to undertake and achieve actions. The plan will result in detailed actions and priorities for the local community and should:

- Consider all aspects of local life including social, economic, environmental and cultural
- Involve the whole community
- Gather evidence from community participation
- Involve local authorities
- Create an action plan, considering who, what, why and how.

Parish Plans originate from Community Action Plans and Village Appraisals. However with the Countryside Agency's introduction of the 'Vital Villages' programme in 2000, the plans became known as Parish Plans. The Vital Villages programme ended in March 2006 and was succeeded by Defra's Rural Social and Community Programme (RSCP), which funded activities and posts for two years. Since April 2008 support and funding towards Parish Planning activities has become dependent on Local Authorities. As a result of budget pressures and reliance on local funding, there is a varied level of RCC support available within the East of England which has also resulted in a loss of some RCC officer posts.

¹ Empowerment in Action Resource Pack - West Berkshire Council

² Empowerment through Community-led Planning - NALC, ACRE, Urban Forum and Action for Market Towns

3.2 A Village Design Statement (VDS)

Sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in a village, based on its character. It is an advisory document produced by the village community. VDS are intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system, so that new development is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the immediate environment.

Some Local Authorities will accept VDS as supplementary documentation for planning guidance within its Local Development Framework. In most Local Authorities, Parish Plans have never been accepted or deemed relevant to the formal planning system.

3.3 Neighbourhood Planning (NHP)

In urban areas, CLP is used to look at a specific neighbourhood, often those involved in regeneration programmes or a particular community issue. Principally it involves:

- Participation of residents in the planning process
- A process which covers all aspects of a thriving community for the future, not just housing proposals
- Inclusion of any private sector development partners in the process as early as possible to get to know the neighbourhood and its residents and have full participation in any consultation initiatives.

3.4 Planning for Real³

This is a nationally recognised process of community consultation trade marked by The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, and involves:

- Contacting the local community networks
- Reaching a conclusion with the formation of an Action Plan for taking forward the decisions made during the process
- Taking community advice on matters of importance to them such as which venues would work for consultation
- Looking at option cards with communities on issues specific to the neighbourhood
- Model-making with a large scale map (usually around 1:300), a three-dimensional model is built to help the local "ownership"
- Prioritising options placed on the model into HIGH, MEDIUM, or LOW, again using visual hands-on techniques
- Developing an Action Plan looking at stakeholder involvement, actions and opportunities for progression.

3.5 Market Town Healthchecks (MTHC)

The Market Town Initiative (MTI) was the result of the 2000 Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside: the future - A fair deal for rural England'. The paper acknowledged 'market towns play a critical role in helping rural communities to thrive'. The MTHC was developed to help and support towns to sustain and regenerate themselves, as part of the Market Towns Initiative. The key activities included:

- A steering group formed of Local Authorities, voluntary groups, residents and other partners
- Appointment of suitably qualified project officers
- Intensive and systematic consultation communities
- Statistical evidence about the local area
- Proposals for change based on evidence from findings
- Feedback and agreed actions developed
- Further activities undertaken to implement the actions.

A MTHC would generally take six months to complete, including production of a vision and development of a business plan, it could then take up to 10 years to deliver the actions.

Within the East of England, activity took place between 2002 - 2004, initially only for those towns in or surrounding rural priority areas, in Defra's 'under-performing rural districts' with funding available from EEDA, the Countryside Agency and through the English Heritage's Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS). It was later expanded to include more towns across the region but with less funding available.

4 National Overview

Numerous reports on Community Led Planning have been published in recent years, within this report they have been grouped into:

- Links to Local Government
- The Community Led Planning Process and Community Experience
- The Impact of Community Led Planning
- Actions and Issues from Community Led Planning.

In many of the reports recommendations are put forward to communities involved with the CLP process, Local Authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and Local Area Agreements (LAA) for adopting or using the evidence from the plans.

4.1 Links to Local Government

4.1.1 Integration of Parish Plans into the wider systems of Local Government, July 2007

This report was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and carried out by independent consultants SQW Consulting.

Objective: The report looks at Parish Plan development and the extent to which they are integrated into local government, along with factors enabling this to happen and barriers preventing integration of the plans.

Findings: Recommendations were put forward for government, local authorities and mainstream providers and parishes:

For government:

- Defra and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to issue a joint statement outlining the utility of community and parish plans in tailoring services to local needs
- Guidance should be provided by government for local authorities and main stream services to stress the utility and importance of integrating parish plan objectives into their agendas. The guidance should reflect changes in the planning system and the implications of the Local Government White Paper for parish plans
- Government should work with national, regional and local stakeholders to identify the most appropriate way to ensure any new plans have the resources required for their development and support is available for quality documents.

For local authorities and main stream providers:

- Need to work with the parish plan process rather than see it as a challenge to their authority
- Local authorities should maintain a database of all plans and their priorities for parishes and mainstream providers to identify common concerns
- Local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) should establish a single point of contact to liaise with parish groups and advise mainstream service providers how to work with parish and community plans
- Local authorities and LSP should consider making resource available to support the development and integration of parish plans, this could include:
 - Establish a community development team
 - Maintenance of a database
 - Allocation of some money to locally elected members to fund local priorities
- Local authorities and LSPs should consider merits of 'clusters' of parishes and/or joint meetings of parishes and service providers
- Local authorities should identify how parishes can be engaged in both setting Local Area Agreements (LAA) and delivering on the priorities set out in them.

For parishes:

- Parishes must ensure contact is made with local authorities, LSP and mainstream providers requesting engagement from the outset
- Should parishes want to include a planning dimension, they should seek involvement from planning officers at the outset
- Parishes groups considering development of a plan should use ACRE guidance, 'Parish and Community Planning Toolkit'
- Parish councils may need to use their own precepting powers or revenue to help develop plans
- The process for producing a plan should be robust and engage all parts of the community to ensure the plan is given due consideration by local authorities and other agencies

- Where planning issues are addressed they should be based on guidance from planners and treated separately
- Parish plans should be inspirational, but also require 'actionable first steps' to build momentum and confidence
- To generate sufficient lobbying capacity, parishes should consider the option of forming a cluster or working in partnership with neighbouring parishes, which may make it easier to deal with main stream providers
- A dedicated action/ implementation group should be formed to take forward the objectives of the plan
- Once a plan is completed, the parish plan group should seek its formal adoption by the parish council
- When developing plans, groups should consider the requirements of the implementation process and identify people to lead on taking the plan forward.

Finally, for multiple partners, to minimise the disruption associated with local political rivalry, partners should seek to build local consensus on the issues being addressed and the ways to address them.

4.1.2 Pathways to Influence, Community Led Planning - Why It Matters, March 2008

This is a report on a project undertaken by North West Rural Community Councils and Government Office for the North West and Rural Innovation, funded by Carnegie UK Trust as part of its Rural Action Research Programme.

Objective: The project's aim was to increase recognition amongst policy makers and service deliverers on the role community planning can play in place shaping, and to offer improved understanding to communities of what is required of them. The project engaged a range of people and organisations involved with community planning. Three Action Learning Groups were established in Cheshire, Cumbria and Lancashire and were tasked with considering the purpose and use of community plans from the perspectives below:

- assessing the value of planning to communities
- the role community plans can play in influencing planning decisions and policy
- requirements of statutory agencies
- the contribution of community planning to a sustainable community strategy
- the value of community planning from a regional perspective.

Findings: Feedback from the three Action Learning Groups:

- The activity of community planning develops community capacity and cohesion
- Failure to achieve satisfactory influence from community planning frustrates participants and acts as a disincentive to engage with statutory agencies and service deliverers in the future
- Councils and service providers find it challenging to respond effectively to many community plans
- To be effective and worthwhile a Community Plan must offer quality, credibility and sound evidence base
- Facilitation by neutral third parties helps communities through the process and gives principal authorities and service deliverers confidence in the outcome
- Community planning groups which engage early with town and parish councils and local authorities tend to be more successful in securing both support and influence
- Involvement of Councillors is critical

- Engagement of leaders within Local Authorities and from service delivery organisations is crucial.
- Size does matter - the ability of small communities to work together increases their access to the necessary skills and resources to develop an effective community plan and increases the likelihood that a statutory organisation will be able to respond
- Work within the system not against it - make sure that community planning groups align to the prevailing neighbourhood engagement structures.

The report finishes with a set of standard questions from Lancashire which support the LAA and also good practice guide for Community Planning from Cheshire Action Learning Set.

4.1.3 Empowerment through Community-Led Planning

This was a paper produced by National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Urban Forum and Action for Market Towns, supporting a number of initiatives in response to 'Unlocking the Talents' consultation which preceded the drafting of the Community Empowerment White Paper 'Communities in Control - Real People Real Power'. It described and explained the benefits and importance of CLP to:

- Neighbourhood Charters
- Participatory budgeting, community kitties and devolution of budgets
- Community Anchors
- Councillor call for action
- Skills and training for elected members
- Power of well-being for parish and town councils - revisions to the quality parish scheme
- Comprehensive Area Assessments
- Good practice guidance via IDeA
- Delivering behaviour change
- Investing further in development and delivery of community-led planning scheme.

4.1.4 Public officials and community involvement in local services, November 2008

Published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Objective: The report was the result of a study examining community involvement in local services with an emphasis on public officials and managers employed by public bodies.

Findings: Key points to come out of the report include:

- Public officials holding positive views and feelings on engagement
- It was mostly felt community engagement was valuable in principle, but uncertainty lay as to how to put it into practice
- The officials' ability to undertake engagement and act on its outcomes was shaped by the organisational context
- Informal processes used by officials were important in facilitating engagement
- Diverse engagement practices helped to suit different purposes and communities
- Officials did see some types of engagement as particularly effective.

4.1.5 Oxford City Council & Oxfordshire County Council - Improving Council Services Through Community Engagement, November 2008

Objective: The report reviews a pilot urban community engagement project which took place in 2007/08 within Oxford City. The project's aim was to develop a model of community participation in community action planning. Three separate geographical areas of the city were chosen.

Findings: The report breaks the general learning from steering groups:

Geographical:

- Administrative boundaries may differ from local definitions of community, thus the importance to take local perspectives into account
- Two areas chosen were too small to gain meaningful statistical data
- The boundaries of the areas fitted the Area Committee and Neighbourhood Policing, therefore valuable data was gathered and people identified with an area.

Community:

- The difficulty in navigating existing community groups and structures, their work and interaction without Area Co-ordinators
- Elected member involvement varied throughout the project, there is the need to take into account the community development role of councillors and their own political interests
- Two of the three steering groups looked at 'big picture' issues rather than day-to-day issues
- Key achievement recognised by local people was to bring together steering groups made up of representatives from a wide range of local organisations and groups.

Project Progress:

- Short time frame to develop a plan was daunting for officers and steering group, experience and understanding of Area Co-ordinator's was crucial
- Issue noted on finding people to take on responsibility within project groups, those engaged were already busy
- The project was very officer driven; which was perhaps necessary given it was a pilot and the short time frame.

4.2 The CLP Process and Community Experience

4.2.1 An evaluation of Parish Planning in West Berkshire, November 2006

A report published by the Centre for Planning Studies for the West Berkshire Partnership, consisting of West Berkshire Council, Community Council for Berkshire and Community Action West Berkshire.

Objectives: The report concentrated on a variety of issues relating to a) Parishes that participated in Parish Planning and b) Parishes who did not participate in Parish Planning.

Findings: The evaluation relates particularly to Parish Planning process and implementation, briefly they include:

- **A supportive environment** - West Berkshire has developed infrastructure and learning to 'mainstream' community planning
- **Governance and Citizenship** - Evidence of good local engagement and networking
- **Funding** - There were issues for groups around conditions of awards, control of monies, focus of resourcing, overall spread of funding and the timing and release of funds
- **Pre-requisite information** - Providing background parish information early in the process, is helpful in preparations to carry out a plan
- **Timing/Schedule** - Whilst some funding streams, needed plans to be completed within 12 months, in reality they often took 18 months, although the shorter deadline acted as a useful motivator
- **Benchmarking** - Suggestion of developing benchmarks for completed projects to gauge robustness or reliability of plans⁴
- **Process management** - The featured toolkits (West Berkshire and South East Rural Community Council) provide an opportunity for parish planning to use 'stepped' progression to ensure a robust and inclusive plan however other methods such as milestones may be appropriate
- **Methods** - The range of research skills/expertise within each parish varied and with time pressure, methods and processes were affected
- **Inclusivity** - Was questionable in many of the surveys carried out, with 'hard to reach' embracing many categories and 'pockets of deprivation' harder to identify in the parish
- **Expertise** - With many parishes having a range of relevant volunteer skills, there was still the need for more training, support and identification of needs in terms of technical and methodological know-how
- **Modulation** - relates to the interaction between the local authority and the final content of the plan, often occurred in the form of surgeries, with attendance variable from parish to parish
- **Standardisation** - Regularly debated, rather than standardise the questionnaire, the suggestion is to standardise the Action Plan format
- **Support/guidance** - Need clarity on the role of and better resourced development workers to support the parish plan process
- **Area Forum Function** - Specific to West Berkshire and a way of presenting the final plan, although not necessarily adopting the plan.

4.2.2 An evaluation of Parish and Town Plans in Broadland, Winter 2008

The research was undertaken by Broadland District Council (BDC) and Norfolk Rural Community Council (NRCC).

Objective: The report concentrates specifically on a) the Parish and Town Plans Process, such as the steering group, funding and external support and the action plan and b) Outcomes from the Parish and Town Plans such as implementation, impact on community life and wider influence.

Findings: A number of recommendations were put forward for steering groups and service providers.

⁴ South East Rural Community Councils are currently undertaking research for the Beacon Project on benchmarking, by developing best practice on 'Quality' Planning, producing clear national standards to reassure stakeholders that community plans can be relied upon when determining local actions, priorities, agreements and funding.

For steering groups:

- Explore ways of involving young people in the management of the process
- Publicity and marketing of the parish plan exercise needs to be a main priority of the steering group
- Steering groups should make early contact with service providers
- In addition to above, early contact should be made with ward elected members
- Awareness within the steering group that developing a questionnaire (if being used) is a demanding skill and key principles need to be taken on board
- A range of consultation techniques should be used to ensure high response rates
- Interactive consultation events can help recruit more volunteers and start creating networks
- Action plans should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, ensuring that they are SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)
- Sharing experiences between parishes has proved a valuable way of learning for communities.

For service providers and other agencies:

- The need for a dedicated grant scheme to fund parish plan work given on average groups spend £2,000 on parish plans
- Links between parish plans and Local Strategic Partnerships should be explored, to help define local priorities
- External service providers to work with parish plan groups at an early stage to look for opportunities to include particular themes in the community consultation
- Partnership working between Broadland District Council and Norfolk Rural Community Council in promoting parish plans and providing support to steering groups is a very successful approach
- The need to explore developing some simple, bespoke parish plan software that can assist groups to plan and develop questionnaires, enter and analyse response data.

4.2.3 Empowering Communities in South Somerset⁵

Objective: The report provides a useful overview of activities, involvement, problems, outcomes and impacts within the county.

Findings:

- Know your community
- Be clear about the level of empowerment on offer - manage expectations
- Be prepared on the day
- Close the loop - ensure outcomes actions from the event are followed through and communicated.

4.2.4 Neighbourhood Planning - Lessons Learnt

Produced by Solihull Council, Regeneration and Community Safety Scrutiny Board, 5/1/06⁶.

Objective: is an insight into experiences in preparing neighbourhood plans for two distinct neighbourhoods.

Findings: Some of the recommendations (specific to the area) from the report include:

- Ensuring the Neighbourhood planning process is clearly mapped and that plan preparation follows the process
- Commission the production of a constraints plan prior to beginning preparation of the plan
- Continue to build the role and effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan Development Team.

⁵ www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8341306

⁶ <https://www.solihull.gov.uk>

4.2.5 Three market town healthcheck stories

Research notes produced by the Countryside Agency, May 2004.

Objective: The research notes examined how health checks were carried out and implemented in three market towns within the South East.

Findings: Some of the recommendations (specific to the area) from the report include:

- Partnerships need not be created at the beginning of the process, but preferably before the action plan is formalised. Also if the process is delayed there may be a loss of momentum and credibility
- Gaining background information early in the process can be crucial
- It can sometimes be difficult to establish the town's surrounding communities, rural hinterland. Various approaches can be undertaken to define these surrounding communities
- A clear vision can set the whole agenda for the development of a market town, and should set out clearly what the community wants, based on results from the healthcheck
- Involving the community lies at the heart of the healthcheck process, with community events to engage and involve all residents but adapted according to the town's particular circumstances.

4.2.6 Community-Led Plans in the South West: Towards a regional framework

Objective: : A discussion paper, on the adoption of Community-Led Plans within the South West. The paper discusses who should be involved, how the regional framework is structured and the role of plans, essentially what makes a good Parish or Town Plan.

Findings: If plans meet certain quality criteria, the framework would endorse them contributing to:

- Regional spatial and service delivery strategies and policies
- Sustainable Community Strategies for county, unitary and appropriate districts and boroughs
- Policy decisions and the planning and delivery of services
- Allocation of resources
- The statutory land use planning system.

4.3 Impact of Community Led Planning

4.3.1 An exciting Future for Community Plans, July 2006

Published by Market and Coastal Towns Association and South West ACRE Network of Rural Community Councils.

Objective: : The report covers a research project which looked at the regional position regarding current relationships between the statutory planning services and initiatives such as parish planning and the Market Coastal Towns Association.

Findings: Acknowledges that a number of initiatives are currently taking place to advance community planning activity. The recommendations put forward, suggest no changes to policy, general procedures or funding regimes, but practical measures such as:

For Community Plans and planning system:

- Clarification of planning procedures and requirements to explore all possible links, not just adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)
- Developing a 'community-friendly' approach to Sustainability Appraisal that can be done collaboratively with local planners
- Highlighting or developing afresh, creative approaches to community involvement
- Promotion of or support for some form of reasonably independent local 'enabler' to act as intermediary between community groups and the public sector
- Production of guidance materials - varied for different groups
- Awareness raising with different groups and organisations
- Ensuring planning schools teach about Community Plans and community involvement.

Wider future vision:

- Establish some form of 'protocols' signed by the local authority, local association of towns and parish councils and voluntary sector agencies to promote commitment and common approaches
- Wider and proactive promotion and detailed development of the basic idea
- The Community Plans approach needs to be seen to be valued by central government
- Local enablers are critical and there is a need to work with senior LSP Coordinators
- As with planning integration, guidance material, awareness raising and changes within initial and continuing education and training are needed - for all
- A single funding model probably linked to Local Strategic Partnerships and even Local Area Agreements will be needed.

4.3.2 Evaluation of Community Planning in North Dorset, August 2007

Published by Jeff Bishop of BDOR Limited, commissioned by Dorset Community Action on behalf of North Dorset District Council and the Community Planning Steering Group.

Objective: This particular report focussed on a) the effectiveness and impact of Community Partnerships, Community Development workers and b) whether it provided a good model for Community Planning and how to address any weaknesses identified.

Findings: Recommendations from the report include:

- Awareness to be raised with further debate and discussion held regarding what community partnerships can offer compared to what Town and Parish Councils should do
- Current 'Plans' need to be reviewed together
- Ways need to be developed to engage (some) Parish Councils in the community planning process
- There needs to be better communication with the public about community partnerships
- Effort is needed to ensure continuity of Community Development workers and their assistants
- There is the need to look at ways to sharpen practice of community planning, such as community engagement
- There is the need to look at aspects of the mechanisms involved, for instance, in taking community ideas to strategic levels
- The need to make a coherent link between top-down and bottom-up work
- Community Partnerships can play a significant role as intermediaries between Town and Parish Councils and the District Council.

4.3.3 Empowerment in Action

A recently published resource pack, by West Berkshire as part of the Beacon Project. A project to enable Beacon Authorities to identify, develop and spread best practice. There are four elements to the project a) Research on Mainstreaming Community Plans; b) Performance Management Made Easier, c) A Quality Bench Mark for Consultation and Engagement and d) Cultural Change.

The resource pack includes:

- A Case for Community Led Planning
- Mainstreaming Community Led planning
- A number of case studies identifying how Community Led Planning has enabled empowerment nationwide.

For further information please use the following link:

www.westberks.gov.uk/empowermentinaction

4.3.4 ACRE Report of Community Led Planning in England, 2008

Objective: The report provides an overview of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) support for Community Led Planning across England in 2008. The survey includes responses from 30 out of 38 Rural Community Councils.

Findings: Conclusions drawn from the report include:

- A variety of CLP methods are supported by RCAN and since 2000 37% of all parishes and wards have completed some type of CLP
- The ACRE Parish and Community Planning Toolkit has been widely used across the network
- Members of RCAN perceived 70% of local authorities they worked with, 'as supportive of CLP'
- 50% of RCAN respondents said their local authorities were a source of funding towards CLP but only 27% were using CLP to inform Local Strategic Planning such as the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4.3.5 Parish and community-led planning, local empowerment and local evidence bases, An examination of 'good practice' in West Berkshire, 2008

Objective: The report takes a critical look at the process and design of parish plans drawing on evidence from parishes and other stakeholders in West Berkshire. It discusses how plans have evolved and assesses the process of assembling the plans.

Findings: Conclusions drawn from the report include:

- Parish plans and their related action plans in West Berkshire are seen by some service providers as the best available local evidence
- If community-led efforts in both rural and urban areas are extended, without further support and adequate resources they could falter because of the lack of community energy and the quality of the process
- Issues identified in the research include questions of inclusivity and robustness of plans
- Efforts to deliver consistent advice and support were noted as good but limited

- Funding available to ensure that the plans performed across the criteria was not sufficient as time went on
- Parish planning has not been well integrated with other community development efforts, local policy development and plans and the wider identification of local need
- Government needs to look at how parish planning and wider community and neighbourhood planning approaches will be supported and carried through in partnership with local and regional actors
- There are issues to be addressed about the way planning processes tie in with other structures and how the plans sit among the knowledge and understanding of rural issues and needs
- Wider and complementary issues considered by local authorities are often absent from parish plans
- If community-led planning is to be successfully implemented in urban areas a modified and well-supported approach is essential.

4.4 Action and Issues from Community Led Plans

4.4.1 Evaluation report - Messages from Parish Plans and Market Town Healthchecks

This report was produced by the University of Gloucestershire on behalf of the Countryside Agency.

Objectives: Provides a summary of 120 published reports from across rural England providing a summary of the key issues identified in the plans/healthcheck.

Findings: (Issues ranked according to importance):

ISSUES ARISING FROM PARISH PLANS	ISSUES ARISING FORM MARKET TOWN HEALTHCHECKS
Road Traffic	Road traffic
Housing	Deficiencies of the town environment
Inadequacy of facilities for young people	Inadequacies of public transport
Law and order/policing	Inadequacy of facilities for young people
Inadequacy of public transport	Inadequacy of leisure and recreation facilities
Minor environmental concerns	Poor range and quality of local shops
Inadequacy of specific villages services	Neglect of the town's tourism potential
Car parking issues	Insufficient facilities and support for local businesses
Environmental protection	Affordable housing
Village hall matters	Health and health care issues

Conclusions of the report:

- Individual concerns vary between Towns and Parishes
- One major concern throughout was the issue of road traffic
- No convincing evidence of significant region-to-region differences in concerns (although it was acknowledged this was a small sample size).

5 Summary

Findings on Local Government

- Recognition that the integration of Parish Planning into the wider systems of local government would be of benefit.
- Partnership with external facilitators, such as the Rural Community Council network, is essential to ensure comprehensive consultation.
- There is no current formal process in many Local Authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements to adopt and integrate Community Led Plans.

Findings from the Parish Plan Process and Community Experience

- The need to involve Local Authorities and service providers at an early stage of the process.
- Incorporating questions about targets e.g. NI4 or Health Care into the consultation stage will provide evidence for Local Authorities and service providers, making the plan valuable to them and consequently encouraging funding and support of Community Led Planning.
- Process needs to be flexible but use recommendations from previous studies to ensure comprehensive planning, research and delivery of Community Led Planning.
- There is a recognised need for external facilitators to support and guide community groups throughout the process.

Impact of Community Led Planning

- Awareness of local level issues at a detailed level that can be different from general surveys at a Super Output Area.
- There are a number of best practice case studies demonstrating the empowerment enabled by Community Led Planning.
- Research for this report has shown a gap in statistical evidence measuring the influence and benefits of Community Led Planning.

East of England

- Significant variation in the ways that different local authorities support production of plans and use the results in budgeting service provision
- Variation in the use of plans, the issues raised and actions identified to inform local strategic priorities by LSPs and LAAs
- There is the need for further research into the measureable impacts of Community Led Planning and its effects on communities.
- Opportunities for some Local Authorities to learn from others, about the benefits of using the outputs from Community Led Plans (e.g. through a regional working group).

In conclusion given the geographical diversity of the reports it can be challenging to draw practical general recommendations from the information and researched gathered. Some common points are:

- There are many schemes but no specific linking up to provide a consistent approach in delivering support and facilitating the Community Led Planning approach
- Although many plans have been completed, there is little evidence to demonstrate the longer term benefits for the community and Local Authorities. This may arise from a lack of integration of the results into the formal policy drafting and planning systems
- There is an opportunity to apply the existing skills and experience gained from rural Parish Planning to urban based Community Led Planning
- Little evidence is available at present linking the influence of Community Led Planning to delivery of NI4.

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The research was commissioned by the East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership and was undertaken by Rural Action East.

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What is the Regional Empowerment Partnership?

The partnership has been created to improve the quality and co-ordination of empowerment in the region. It achieves this through training, sharing practice and evidence.

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