

Policy Spring 2010 into Practice

Making The Connections

Community Led Planning – An introduction

About this guide

This paper is intended as an introduction to Community Led Planning and is primarily for use by local community groups, but may also be of interest to local authority councillors and officers, local service providers, and others, wishing to find out more about the process.

It details the two main approaches to Community Led Planning, but explores the need to develop streamlined techniques and the benefits that this would bring to parish, towns and city neighbourhoods.

Throughout the document, Community Led Planning will be referred to as CLP.



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Introduction to Community Led Planning

What is Community Led Planning?

CLP is a step-by-step structured process, used by local community groups, activists and volunteers to work with local residents and businesses to create both a vision for the community and an action plan to achieve it. The process uses a mix of evidence collection and different types of consultation and debate within the community. It ensures the links are made with external service providers and local government officers and members that may be needed to bring the action plan to fruition.

CLP is designed to be a process in which all citizens can participate and evidence shows that, if they are done well, it generates very high levels of participation and a renewed local interest in the future of the community. The resulting vision covers local social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. It also encompasses such issues as transport and access to and within a community. An action plan is produced which identifies the priority projects and issues to be addressed to revitalise a town, village or neighbourhood and the role of the community, groups and volunteers in bringing that about.

CLP is not about creating a wish list which has no realistic potential for implementation. Good communication between the community, local agencies and local authority members and officers avoids later problems with implementation. It brings on board those external partners on whom the community may well rely to help turn many aspirations into a reality.

Nor is CLP concerned with single issues. The holistic approach to exploring and tackling the needs and potential of the community means discussion and debate take place in a way that local people understand and helps make the most of local facilities and resources and resulting action plan.

According to ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), over 4,000 communities across England have so far engaged in some form of CLP. A conservative estimate of the number of people benefiting in some way from the use of all Community Led Plans is 7.2 million.

Why undertake Community Led Planning?

CLP is not a new concept, but the opportunity to undertake it, and in a way that is successful, has never been greater.

Local authorities, through their Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and Local Area Agreements, are already engaging more fully with their local people. In addition, over the last few years, central Government has introduced further legislation to support the involvement of local people in both local decision-making and shaping the way that services are provided and delivered in their own areas.

The opportunity exists for communities to lead from the 'bottom-up', creating their own vision for their own communities. The key challenge will be getting their voices heard so that plans can be effectively linked in to statutory plans, funding can be sought, and plans can be delivered.

The benefits of CLP for the community

- CLP enables communities to unite behind a common vision which can help them **to strengthen their influence over decisions** that will shape their future.
- Having, and promoting, a shared plan can enable a community **to draw down resources**, that would be otherwise unavailable, for community projects such as transport facilities, town centre regeneration and local services.
- CLP can be **a catalyst for community action**, bringing together people from the community whose passion, skills, knowledge and expertise is stimulated by the community planning process. These energised people working together can drive the community forward.

The benefits of CLP for the public sector

- In April 2009, a new **'Duty to Involve'** came into force whereby all best value organisations, such as local authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities, were given a duty to inform, consult and involve the people they serve. By working in partnership with communities who have undertaken CLP, authorities can fulfill this duty.
- Authorities engaging effectively with their communities have found that it enables them to understand better the needs, problems and aspirations of their community. This in turn often leads to higher satisfaction rates and greater trust and can therefore have a **positive impact on local authority performance measures**.
- Effective CLP can **provide authorities with valuable information** at the community level that would be otherwise hard to obtain.
- CLP has also been shown to **stimulate local democracy and voter turnout**, where communities are giving local elected representatives greater credibility. Local authorities are then better able to fulfil their duty to promote democracy.
- Better value and greater efficiencies from public spending can be achieved as communities respond by contributing their own efforts to delivering local services.

Undertaking Community Led Planning

There is a lot of advice available to those wishing to pursue CLP. Here we examine some of the most important points that should be considered before embarking on the process.

The key elements of Community Led Planning

The Vision and action plan - It is vital that a vision for the future of the settlement is developed through the CLP process. This must be initiated and led by the community as it the community who will take ownership of it. From the vision, an action plan will be developed, with clear, smart objectives. As some of the initial ideas are explored further, some of the projects and actions originally envisaged may become inappropriate or unfeasible, but a clear vision will inform the way ahead, both for the community and the public sector partners. Visions need to be grounded and must relate to existing opportunities and context; however they should not shy away from ambition. They need to fit the people and place. A strong vision needs strong champions to promote its realisation.

A strong evidence base – The more a community plan demonstrates that it is based on the views of the people, which are grounded in evidence of real problems, the more it will be able to influence local authority departments and other partners. It is important, however, for the community to form links with the local authority at an early stage to make sure that any data and evidence collected is done so in a format that will compliment the procedures used by wider partners such as the local authority. It is the responsibility of the community to establish these links, although many local authorities now have officers who have a responsibility to seek out community activism.

Strong Leadership – There should be strong leadership for the process from within the community by a group that has credibility with different sections of the community. Too close a connection with, or dominance by, existing structures can sometimes deter wider sections of the community from coming forward, so the formation of a wide-ranging steering group is essential. At the same time, however, it is important that a CLP partnership, and especially a steering group, balances the interests of all stakeholders, so that it cannot be hi-jacked by a special interest group, such as an extremist political party or religious group.

External Support – Experience shows that the most successful Community Led Plans are those where there is a degree of external facilitation, for example by an experienced CLP advisor. The facilitator should act as an independent broker in securing external agency involvement in the plan development, but should also be a challenge agent where intervention is needed to produce inclusive consultation and activity. This can be useful especially when ensuring that all voices of the community are heard, and avoiding agendas being hi-jacked by more vocal groups. In some cases, local authorities may have in place local arrangements for funding this support; in other cases funding for the production of the plan and for external facilitation must be sought elsewhere. Appendix 1 offers some ideas on how to find an external facilitator and also how to access funding.

Making the links to the wider strategic partners and plans – Often referred to as ‘bridging’, this essential part of the CLP process requires the Community Led Plan to link into the plans of other strategic partners operating within, or having influence on, the settlement. Examples include local authority plans such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework. Another key example may be to link with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), to enable CLP groups to have early warning of developments that may impact upon the community, and to have a voice in the decision making related to those developments. Creating and sustaining effective working relationships from the beginning with council officers and representatives from other public and private sector organisations is extremely valuable and can make the difference between success and failure. Finding ways to involve these stakeholders in all stages of the CLP process will help to build a more effective network between the community and others. It is a team game and these links will help to transfer information into the project and create effective plans to influence the necessary organisations.

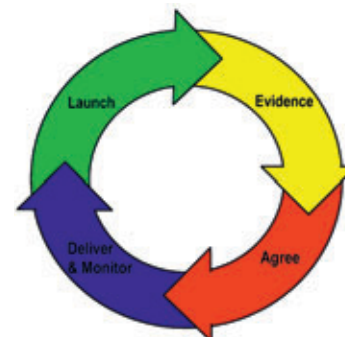
A separate Jargon Buster has been developed to help unpick the hierarchy of government and local authority plans and how community plans can link to them. Visit the following website to access it:

<http://towns.org.uk/files/090929-jargon-buster.doc>

Appendix 1 contains details of useful resources on CLP and Appendix 4 contains some best practice case studies

LEAD – An overarching framework for CLP

LEAD is a framework that has been developed jointly by AMT and ACRE to illustrate, at the simplest level, the key steps that underpin any Community Led Plan. It refers to a logical sequence of activities that community groups are expected to undertake, to produce plans that achieve high rates of participation, are linked in with local service providers and result in well-researched actions that can be implemented to meet local need.



The following table outlines the 4 keys steps that constitute LEAD:

Launch the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Attracting community interest in the plan ■ Establishing a leadership structure ■ Planning the work ahead
Evidence local need and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gathering factual data about the area ■ Consulting members of the community to find out how they view the local area considering their needs and aspirations
Agree and prioritise actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Making sense of the evidence collected ■ Drafting actions that could be taken to improve the community ■ Agreeing and prioritising actions ■ Producing a document that includes a detailed action plan outlining the work that can be done to improve the wellbeing of the community
Deliver and monitor actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Working with external organisations where needed, bidding for funding, implementing and monitoring the actions specified in the plan ■ Reviewing the plan when it needs updating

The two most frequently used CLP methodologies are **Town Action Planning** (formerly the Market Town Healthcheck) and **Parish and Community Planning**. Information on each of these can be found in Appendices 2 and 3 including how they work, their key strengths and actual case studies. Both are equally valid approaches to CLP which have simply evolved from differing origins and with slightly different audiences in mind. Community groups thinking about undertaking Community Led Plans are advised to think carefully about which type of methodology they think would be most suitable for their area based on the local context.

The purpose of the LEAD framework is to better align the two methodologies so that all Community Led Plans are informed by a standardised process that will encourage greater consistency and quality of outcomes. It also aims to make it easier for outside agencies to understand, contribute to and respond to CLP initiatives and outcomes.

In addition to the joint work on the LEAD framework, AMT and ACRE are working with a range of other organisations to maximise the usage of Community Led Planning in England. These include NALC (National Association of Local Councils), Urban Forum and Carnegie UK. Together the organisations work together on issues such as:

- **Advocacy** – promoting the benefits of CLP, disseminating good practice to the grassroots level and offering advice to government and other agencies.
- **Bridging** – understanding how CLP can be better mainstreamed into public sector documents and culture, and lobbying for this.
- **Technical improvements** – reviewing and refining both the Parish Planning and Town Action Planning, and making the two compatible in terms of, for example, data collection.
- **Support and sharing of good practice** – making information and training on CLP more accessible.

Further information on this work can be found in AMT's Campaign plan for CLP.

Empowering the community – using CLP to influence

Vital to achieving successful CLP is ensuring that the voice of the community is both valid and valued – that is, it is representative and grounded in facts, and does actually get taken into account in the wider context.

Valid

To achieve this is not simply a matter of leadership because that could imply that the leader's view is imposed on the outcome and if the leader is, for example a particularly vocal sector of the community, then that would mean that that sector's views are taken more greatly into account. What it does mean is that ways have to be found to ensure that the community's voice is directed by all community sectors and this is an important principle of 'empowering the community'. A mentor is invaluable for this as is contact with a network of others, such as other CLP groups, who can share experience. Also important is active intervention to train those coming forward from the community, in ways of presenting and emphasising the views of the community, but this raises issues of funding.

There is of course the problem that those coming forward to partake in CLP may in fact be unrepresentative of the community. The elected representatives of the community – councillors, MPs – might, in turn, claim that they are the rightful voice of the community. So a balance has to be found between these various interests, perhaps by adopting a stakeholder approach to identifying the range of interests and interest groups that may participate in or contribute to a CLP group.

A strong and knowledgeable group is vital, with members who are able to look beyond perceived wisdoms, or ideas of "those who know" and figure out the way forward from the ground up. There is a risk of a lack of momentum if too few people try to do too much.

The Community Led Plan must be grounded in facts – qualitative and quantitative – and these must be readable against local public sector documents.

Valued

Experience gained from the former market town healthcheck process shows that often it was the local authority which was the prime mover to initiate a healthcheck. Where CLP was successful, however, they then stood back to let the community lead, although staying involved throughout. The attraction for many volunteers in engaging in CLP is the genuine opportunity to influence, rather than be consulted at best and told at worst.

Tensions do exist between local authorities and local partnerships. What is important, however, is to ensure a dialogue takes place and a balanced and evidence-based view emerges. Visions do not always come at the front; they often emerge with knowledge, unless there is a very strong and visible threat.

A recent study¹ on behalf of South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) and sponsored by the South East Regional Empowerment Partnership explored the contribution that CLP can make to National Indicator 4 (NI4) and the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process. Positively it found that the value of CLP has been recognised by the Network of Empowering Authorities and features within the framework for an 'ideal authority' and that the significant contribution that CLP makes to the Duty to Involve is recognised and mentioned within new guidance published by the Community Development Foundation.

¹ Community Led Planning- Links to National Indicator 4 and the Comprehensive Area Assessment, Claire Carter and Sarah Fishbourne, March 2009

² Making the Connections – How Communities Can Achieve Influence Through Community Led Planning – An Introduction, Camilla Govan, September 2009

In addition work undertaken by Carnegie UK², in conjunction with AMT, Integreat Yorkshire, Yorkshire Forward and Planning Aid explored how the gap between CLP and public sector plans can be more effectively bridged. It concluded that key to the process was effective planning and early engagement with the public sector partners, developing ongoing communications with those partners, and understanding the public sector landscape within which any Community Led Plans must fit within.

Conclusion

The current political landscape for CLP is one of support as Government promotes greater devolution of decision making to local government and local communities. The two key approaches to CLP are useful and based on tried and tested methods. There is a need however to look to streamline the processes further, to ensure that the CLP process is simplified and made as accessible and viable an option as possible for all communities. This should also explore how best to transfer lessons to the more urban/ neighbourhood environment.

Clearly the issue of empowering the community to undertake CLP and use it to effect change at the local level requires more in-depth research to identify the key enablers, and the processes whereby they can be successful. This need can usefully be addressed in the joint campaign plan.

AMT looks forward to playing a full part in this development, working with other key players such as ACRE, so that the benefits of CLP can be extended to the widest range of communities.

APPENDIX 1

- Useful resources for Community Led Planning

- **Action for Market Towns (AMT)** supports market town partnerships and can provide practical support and advice to towns wishing to undertake clp and in particular Town Action Planning. The charity's commercial arm, amt-i also offers a range of services that compliment this including town benchmarking, audits and surveys.

For more information visit: www.towns.org.uk or call 0845 644 6202 or email info@towns.org.uk

- **ACRE** is the national umbrella body for the Rural Community Action Network and works to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector. The network provides local CLP support for communities, and draws on strong existing relationships and links with local agencies and authorities. For more information visit: www.acre.org.uk/index.html or email acre@acre.org.uk. You can visit their dedicated CLP page at: www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_index.html

To find out more about ACRE's Community Development Workers visit:

www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_whofacilitates.html

where you will find links to the Rural Community Action Network nearest to you.

- **Grassroots Grants** is a key element of the Government's strategy for building stronger and more active communities in England and is funded by the Office of the Third Sector and delivered by Community Development Foundation. Grants of between £250 and £5000 are available until March 2011. For more information visit: <http://www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/grassroots-grants>
- **Awards for All, England** offers grants of between £300 and £10,000 for projects that improve communities, and the lives of people within them. It is for voluntary and community groups, schools and health organisations, Parish and Town Councils. For more information visit: www.awardsforall.org.uk/england/index.html
- **Planning Aid** provides free and independent professional advice on town and country planning issues to community groups and individuals who cannot afford to pay professional fees. Planning Aid services can also deliver training on their planning system, and assist communities in disadvantaged areas to develop their own local area plans. For more information visit www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk or contact the National Planning Aid Unit on 0121 214 2900.
- **The Community Planning Wesbite** is an online resource that sets out clear advice on how to achieve greater community involvement in the planning process. Aimed primarily at the public sector, it contains information that is directly applicable to the CLP process. For more information visit: www.communityplanning.net/index.php
- **Jargon Buster** – A Jargon buster has been created to help unpick the hierarchy of government and local authority plans and how clp can link to them. Visit the following website to access it: <http://towns.org.uk/files/090929-jargon-buster.doc>

APPENDIX 2

– Focus on Town Action Planning

Action for Market Towns (AMT) supports partnerships at the small town level, and in conjunction with the Rural White Paper 2000, promoted the 'Market Towns Healthcheck' as one approach to CLP. The Healthcheck brought together community groups and volunteers to produce an action plan for their local area, with an emphasis on gathering information and evidence through consultation. The process is currently being updated and will be known as Town Action Planning. Essentially the new model will simplify the Healthcheck process and speed up the gathering of evidence-based information.

Aimed primarily at small towns and medium-sized towns, the Town Action Planning process is suitable for settlements with a population of from 2000 to 50,000 and is generally applied to a single town, a town and surrounding village hinterland or a set of towns having common interests. The main thrust of the process is about undertaking consultation about local issues and needs in conjunction with gathering hard facts to build a comprehensive picture. As with the Parish and Community Planning, the process is best undertaken with the support of an external facilitator. It comprises 7 key stages, which are explained fully in the Town Planning booklet, and are summarised here:

STAGE 1 – Setting up a town partnership

Sometimes an existing leadership group will already exist, or become part of an expanded partnership. A necessary first step is to identify a group of individuals, who will take on the CLP exercise. The group needs to be representative of the interests of the town and surrounding area and requires someone to act as overall co-ordinator.

STAGE 2 – Gaining community commitment

The town partnership then map out the issues of key concern to the community, possibly through a community event, and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town.

STAGE 3 – Completing a facts and feedback process

At an early stage a factual 'snapshot' of the town, in terms of environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility is created to aid further consultations. Then a more detailed evidence base for the town is created, along with widespread consultation on local issues and needs. The community uses this, and their own experiences, to explore what the priorities for the town are.

STAGE 4 – Creating a vision

Using the evidence and experience base, a community event is held to pinpoint an overarching vision for the town with some practical objectives to achieve it.

STAGE 5 – Preparing an action plan

An action plan is created which details how the objectives in the vision document are to be achieved. This sets out resources (people, time, funding), priorities and timings, and sets out how the objectives will be monitored.

STAGE 6 – Putting the plan into action

Undertaking the agreed actions to achieve the objectives, and then ensuring an effective monitoring and evaluation programme is in place.

STAGE 7 – Sustaining the partnership

Ensuring the sustainability of the partnership is key to the continuing success of the CLP process and means that legalities should be explored, as well as longer term funding opportunities.

Strengths of the Town Action Planning Approach

- **The Town Action Planning is a simplified version of the highly successful healthcheck.**
- **A good town action plan can provide the town with a way forward and unite it around a common vision.**
- **In a town, the complexity of the situation means that more evidence analysis is vital to ground the action plan.**
- **Designed to be community led, as for parish plans it is manageable for small town voluntary-led groups.**
- **The evidence base enables the plans to go deeper and be more effectively linked to plans of partners.**
- **As with parish plans, town action plans can be very effective documents unlocking positive change, providing a catalyst for community action and unlocking effective engagement with partner organisations including the local authority.**

A successful Town Action Plan, together with its active partnership, adds a funding capability to a town that does not exist via Local Authority roles alone, as it is more likely to have achieved necessary buy-in at community level and an evidence-base to support it.

Town Action Planning is a balanced and evidence based way of undertaking CLP. As an aid to the process, the Town Action Planning booklet being developed includes a range of worksheets that are ready for completion by local partnerships. It also provides details of good practice case studies to help partnerships better understand the process and to offer examples of how to do things and what can be achieved.

A key strength of the new framework is the strong evidence base that is built up. In particular, a facility called Town Watch has been developed to assist in this data collection process. Its purpose is to provide key facts from publicly available databases that are selected for individual towns. The goal is to provide those facts that are part of the “Snapshot” to help partnerships get off to a fast start, with relevant facts for their town. As some of the data can be tracked from month to month, or quarter to quarter, such as employment information and benefits, it will also provide a capability to monitor some key trends afterwards. In essence the goal is to provide a ‘real-time’ dimension to the data collection process.

The Town Action Plan in practice

Caterham, Surrey, the local authority Tandridge District Council, seconded an officer to provide part time administrative support to the community partnership – providing both the service and the link

A Better Caterham (ABC) created a town partnership from scratch to undertake a healthcheck.

It identified the key issues through a series of surveys, events and consultation involving an empty high street shop.

The partnership kept the public informed through a number of channels including an online blog, local newspapers, frequent reports and briefings.

Situated within a three tier local authority model, it successfully recruited stakeholders from the county council, district council and two parishes as partners.

The partnership co-ordinated activity by employing some part-time help and also was able to utilise officer time at the district council level.

Projects identified through the process have included:

- **Street regeneration in two parts of the town**
- **First town festival**
- **Local Shopping Loyalty scheme**
- **Business to Business exhibition (now in its 3rd year)**
- **Youth facility provision in progress**

For other case studies please visit:

<http://premium.towns.org.uk/good-practice/case-studies-2/>

For more information about Town Action Planning please contact:

Action for Market Towns – www.towns.org.uk or info@towns.org.uk or 0845 644 6202.

APPENDIX 3

– Focus on Parish and Community Plans – The 9 step process

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) has long promoted the idea and benefits of CLP and, through their Rural Community Action Network, delivered the local facilitation within communities for their production. Specifically they have produced a **Parish and Community Planning Toolkit**, through which their network practitioners encourage communities to implement a 9 step process when producing the plan.

Traditionally, the parish plan approach has been used in smaller, more rural ‘parishes’, but the Rural Community Action Network is now successfully extending its use into larger communities and more urban neighbourhoods. The 9 step approach places strong emphasis on building high levels of participation, building the community’s internal capacity and strengthening links with external agencies and local authority officers and members. It is therefore particularly relevant to communities where local community action is weaker and where positive and inclusive dialogue with public agencies is needed. The process can take up to 18 months to complete.

Although it must be initiated, prepared and undertaken by the community, the key to success is the availability of independent external support and facilitation for the process which can successfully broker the debate with external partners. This brokering role happens both during the development of the vision and action plan, and in helping with implementation and monitoring by both local groups and elected members after the plan is produced.

Through ACRE’s Rural Community Action Network, dedicated Community Development Workers exist at local level who specialise in providing impartial, practical support to groups undertaking a Community Led Plan and brokerage with the relevant local authorities. They have a wealth of experience that they share with communities to enable them to produce high-quality plans.

Figure 1 illustrates the 9 Step Process. For more detailed information on each step, visit their website.

Figure 1: The 9 Step Process to Parish and Community Planning (ACRE):

STEP 1 - Getting Started
<p>Community Steps – To start the process you need to get people interested with publicity and hold an open event to gather support to undertake the process.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Make contact with your Rural Community Council and Local Authority to inform them of your intention to produce a Parish or Community Plan and ask for their support. Invite your Councillors to early meetings and events to engage with the community.</p>
STEP 2 - Establishing The Steering Group
<p>Community Steps – Set up a steering group with wide representation from the community.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Nominate a steering group member to act as the main point of contact with the Local Authority officers.</p>
STEP 3 - Developing A Project Plan
<p>Community Steps – During the course of a series of meetings put together a strategy, budget and programme to show how you are going to undertake the plan, ensuring you consult with everyone in the community.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Include in your programme the key milestone at which you wish to involve local authorities, although it is best to engage with them, right from the beginning of your plan.</p>
STEP 4 - Community Consultation
<p>Community Steps – This is a time to undertake a variety of interesting and fun consultation exercises involving as many people as possible both in taking part and in expressing their views.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Consult with the LSP and LDF officers about the linkages between the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework; how they are relevant to your community and what questions can usefully be asked.</p>
STEP 5 - Prioritising And Planning Action
<p>Community Steps – Sort and prioritise the issues and begin to form focus groups to take forward actions.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Liaise with the LSP and LDF coordinators and any other agencies that have been identified in an action, to agree that what is being proposed is feasible and can be delivered. This does not mean you cannot have aspirations for future actions which are not possible at present.</p>
STEP 6 - Drafting The Plan
<p>Community Steps – Put together the first draft to share with the community and partner organisations.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Make your plan more accessible to outside agencies by using the Model Action Plan as a template. Show a draft plan to all relevant stakeholders.</p>
STEP 7 - Finalising The Plan
<p>Community Steps – Consult with the community and partner organisations and produce the final document.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Categorise your actions under community, service providers and strategic. At this point celebrate with your community but keep the momentum going to implement what you have decided.</p>
STEP 8 - Implementing The Plan
<p>Community Steps – Consolidate any actions started and begin to implement others.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Feed into the Sustainable Community Strategy or the Local Development Framework, for longer term implementation.</p>
STEP 9 - Monitor And Review
<p>Community Steps – Once you have completed a plan a regular review and update will ensure continuous progress on the needs and requirements of your community Consolidate any actions started and begin to implement others.</p> <p>Bridging with Local Authority – Keep your service providers and local authorities (such as your Local Strategic Partnership, Local Area Committee and Planning Department) informed of your progress. Successes and challenges should be fed back.</p>

Traditionally, Parish Plans were best suited to more rural communities of a population of 3000 or less, however ACRE's 9 Step approach is applicable to any size of community or urban neighbourhood, and takes on average between 12 and 18 months to complete.

ACRE recommends employing an external co-ordinator to help support the CLP process. Through their regional network, dedicated Community Development Workers exist who specialise in providing impartial, practical support to groups undertaking a Community Led Plan. They have a wealth of experience that they share with communities to enable them to produce high-quality plans. To find out more about how to take advantage of this, visit http://www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_whofacilitates.html where you will find links to the Rural Community Action Network nearest to you.

Strengths of the 9 point parish and community planning:

- **CLP in the form of parish plans has a long history of success and has led to protocols being developed with local authorities to support development. Implementation and monitoring of the action plans.**
- **The 9 step process is particularly useful where community capacity is needed to create a more vibrant community, or where local people and groups feel isolated from main centres of influence.**
- **Well-developed Parish Plans adopt quality criteria which can enhance the credibility of resulting action plans and secure better dialogue with external agencies to improve implementation and monitoring.**
- **Good parish plan documents should provide a Parish or Town Council with a strategic plan for their work, strengthening local democratic representation and stimulating both voter turnout and candidates for election.**
- **Parish plans are now being used to underpin the development of new urban parish councils.**
- **Parish plans can be the stimulus for major activity and transformation of communities, leveraging in resources and influence over local services.**

Parish and Community Planning in practice

Parish Planning in the East of England

Over 7 years in the East of England region, 231 communities created Parish Plans that contained over 9,000 individual actions to improve their locality, covering social, environmental and economic objectives. 47% of the actions were able to be taken on by the community themselves without any external support. Of the remainder, 34% required negotiation with public service providers to bring them to fruition

Local authority use of CLP: West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council has gained Beacon status in recognition for its pioneering work in community engagement through Community Led Planning (see <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4143>). By January 2007, around two-thirds of parishes in West Berkshire were engaged in, or had completed a Parish Plan. The evidence generated by these Parish Plans has fed directly into the area's Sustainable Community Strategy. Success has depended on a number of factors. Firstly, West Berkshire Council worked closely with Community Action West Berkshire to provide dedicated support to community groups undertaking their plans. Through the use of outreach work, Parish Planning surgeries and a system of endorsement, communities have been supported to produce high quality plans that are inclusive and well researched. Secondly, the use of an internal database has been used to assign specific actions proposed in Parish Plans to relevant officers, which has increased the support provided to community groups who are at the stage of implementation.

Innovative local solutions: Kington St Michael Parish Plan

A Community Led Plan produced by a community in Kington St Michael, North Wiltshire included a focus on creating a better trading environment for local businesses. Six monthly 'business breakfasts' were set up for local businessmen to be able to network, make use of each other's services and collaborate on joint issues of concern. A particular outcome was the re-opening of a previously closed Post Office which is now owned and run by the community themselves.

Additional funding drawn into communities: Ollerton with Martball parish plan

In Ollerton with Martball, Cheshire, the community used the evidence documented within their Community Led Plan to successfully bid for an initial Big Lottery grant of £20,000 for planning and design, and then a further £326,000 to build a new 'eco' Village Hall valued at around £400,000. The community has almost raised the balance, of which £50,000 has been secured from Waste Recycling Environmental Limited (WREN).

For other case studies of Parish Plans, please visit:

http://www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_casestudies.html

For more information on Parish and Community Plans please contact:

ACRE – www.acre.org.uk or acre@acre.org.uk or 01285 653477.

Appendix 4

– Community Led Planning in Practice – some case studies

Here are a few examples of Community Led Planning in practice. For more information on these and other case studies, please visit the AMT website at: <http://premium.towns.org.uk/good-practice/case-studies-2/> (Please note that you will need to be logged in as a member to access these pages).

Case Study 1: Using Community Street Surveys to inform change – Driffield Partnership, East Riding

Winner of the 2009 Yorkshire & Humber Market Town Awards - Social and Community category

Driffield Partnership undertook a Community Street Survey to assess the streetscape of Driffield, identifying where improvements could be made. The results were presented to the district council with a series of recommendations. This prompted over £100,000 of investment in Driffield town centre, including footpath improvements, the repainting of street furniture and increased access. The survey work has been held as a model of best practice where local people have been able to influence spending in their local area. As a result of the project, 6 other towns in East Riding will have undertaken Street Surveys by the end of 2009.

For more information visit: <http://premium.towns.org.uk/2009/10/08/driffield-community-street-survey/>

Case Study 2: Achieving through consultation, partnership working, and ambition – Sturminster Newton, Dorset

Winner of the 2009 South West Market Town Awards - Partnership and Strategic Working category

SturQuest (the Community Partnership for Sturminster Newton and surrounding communities) has been very successful at undertaking Community Led Planning, with three major achievements; the relocation of the Museum into the town centre, the award of Best Food Town in Dorset 2008 and the adoption of the Town Design Statement.

The community has been ambitious and keen to try new ways of achieving its goals. There has been a willingness to work closely with other agencies and to take advice wherever it is offered. Building capacity has been the main aim and the way that the various working groups and allied organisations have gained confidence to spin off and work on their own has been of enormous significance.

Consultation has been the key. Working under the banner of “What makes Stur so special?”, the community has initiated a variety of ways for people to get involved – open meetings, questionnaires, the community magazine and so on – and the response has been magnificent.

For more information visit: <http://premium.towns.org.uk/2009/10/09/what-makes-stur-so-special/>

Case Study 3: Bringing the community together with a shared passion – Incredible Edible Todmorden

Winner of the 2009 Yorkshire & Humber Market Town Awards – Environment and Culture category and Overall winner for the region

Incredible Edible Todmorden is a visionary project which aims to make the town self-sufficient in local food in ten years by re-skilling people in growing and cooking - from school through to apprenticeships, preserving and developing new food-related jobs, and reconnecting the town to its farmers through the regeneration of the local market.

The project operates across three groups - Community, Schools and Business (including farming) - in a language that all can understand, the language of food: growing, learning about, buying and selling. The aim is to create jobs, a sense of pride, wellbeing and community, by exciting people about the benefits that support for local food can bring.

In the year since its conception, two campaigns have been launched: 'Every Egg Matters' (February 2009) and 'Put Markets back into Market Towns' (March 2009) – working with the Council, local traders and farmers to revitalise the local market. In addition the town has planted orchards, vegetables and herbs in public places, gained the agreement of the local Council to release land for community growing and partnered the local Social Housing Management organisation in a 'Tenants Growing Scheme'.

For more information visit: <http://premium.towns.org.uk/2009/07/31/incredible-edible-todmorden/>

Case Study 4: Using seed money to lever in greater funds – Evesham's 'Healthy Future' Project

Winner of the 2009 West Midlands Market Town Awards - Social and Community category

Evesham Market Town Partnership's (MTP) 'Healthy Future' Project used the natural and built environment to address social, mental and physical health issues in Evesham and the rural hinterland. With forest schools, accessible footpaths, a walking group, fully accessible petanque courts and a cardiac rehabilitation centre, the project provides a holistic approach to social and health needs.

The MTP receives a grant from Wychavon District Council to deliver projects that support the Community Plan. It uses this money as seed funding to lever in larger grants which are turned into valuable assets and services for the community.

Community theme groups set out recommendations for delivering the projects for Healthy Future, ensuring that all activities were driven from the bottom-up, thus fully serving the needs of the end-user.

For more information visit: <http://premium.towns.org.uk/2009/10/01/a-healthy-future-evesham/>



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