

## **Community/Parish Plans**

### **Background**

Rural White Paper (2000) stated that 'Rural communities should play a much bigger part in running their own affairs and influencing and shaping future development'

Many of you will already know what needs to be done to improve life in your village or parish. The solution to local problems may seem perfectly obvious to you and to your neighbours.

It is not always easy or possible to make the changes or do the things that need to be done. Potential barriers include:

### **Barriers**

- Conflicting priorities – relative merit of projects/schemes
- You may not know how to get things done or what support is available.
- There may be a number of different ways to tackle the same issue.
- Solutions to local issues may not be so obvious to the organisations and agencies responsible for many services.

Or,

- The solution is obvious but there is no evidence.

### **Why have a plan?**

A Community Plan will help to provide evidence of support for actions and projects to improve the parish. This evidence will help to obtain the support of external agencies and local authorities and will help to secure funding for projects from a range of sources. The final document should capture the existing situation, identify local strengths and encourage local solutions and action to address local issues.

### **Different motivations for producing a plan**

Provide a mandate for Parish Council – Parish Plan could be used to inform decisions and spend of Parish Council

Identify and contribute towards the desired future development (Vision) of the Parish

Deal with potential change/threat to parish with clear evidence of the majority view

Encourage more participation – Steering group involvement has led to increased participation in Parish Council, Neighbourhood Watch, Village Hall committee activity.

### **What is involved**

The process of producing a Parish plan usually takes between 12 -18 months and can involve the following stages.

**Parish Council can begin the process** – The Parish Council effectively commissions the plan. Parish Council support is essential as it is often the custodian of a wealth of local information, able to receive funding to produce the plan and solutions will often require some local funds. The Council will need to adopt the plan agreeing the actions recommended in the final report.

**Forming a steering group** – Between 3 and 10 people. This shouldn't be dominated by Parish Councillors but the Parish Council should be represented and informed at every stage of the process.

**Apply for funding to produce plan** – SSDC can give a grant of up to 50% of the total project cost of producing a community plan. A Parish Council contribution is necessary.

Costs – Depends on the quality/quantity of the final report which is often the main cost. Range between £600 with a lot given 'in kind' to £1500.

**Agree themes** – Themes may be different for every Parish but some common themes seem to be developing e.g. Transport, Community Safety, and Environment etc. Informal consultation (Wishing Well, Washing Line etc) can be used to develop themes. The agreed themes should be presented/communicated to the Parish. This should help to identify individuals with particular interests or skills. Audit existing data about the parish.

**Detailed Consultation** – This may include a household questionnaire, workshops with local groups etc. Different approaches should be used to engage with 'harder to reach' groups or to make the process accessible and attractive to all. Good response rates have been achieved through incentives and hard work.

**Get people together** - The results of the consultation should be fed back to everyone through open meeting. This can be used to start to generate ideas for projects/solutions. It might be a good idea to present a draft of the plan in a similar way.

**Reports** – One detailed report of evidence gathered and proposed actions. One summary document to go to all households. The detailed report and action plan is adopted by Parish Council and endorsed by District Council.

**Implement Action Plan** – This is not just the Parish Council's responsibility. The actions identified will often require local volunteers to take them forward. The support of other agencies and authorities will be needed and the Community Plan should provide the evidence to make this easier.

### **Benefits**

- A clearer understanding of the whole communities' views and aspirations.
- Evidence of need and support for projects.
- A reason to get-together.

### **Support**

**Advice and guidance** – attendance at steering group meetings, contacts/links to other officers, services and agencies.

**Practical support** includes start up funding; materials and equipment for consultation events; photocopying/printing and training.

**Funding** –Grants available from **SSDC (Area East)**

Other support is available from Community Council for Somerset. **Tel. 01823 331222** for more information.